

THE CONSEQUENCE ARGUMENT

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Introduction

The phrase ‘consequence argument’ was first used by Peter van Inwagen as the name for the following informal line of reasoning:

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us.

(van Inwagen 1983: 16; see also Fischer and Pendergraft [2013: 575]; [Tognazzini and Fischer \[forthcoming\]](#))

The *classical convention* is that the consequence argument is an argument for *classical incompatibilism*: if determinism is true, then no one is or ever was able to do otherwise. The classical convention is controversial since van Inwagen’s informal argument is about what is or is not *up to us*, which is perhaps a different concept than the *ability to do otherwise* (cf. Carroll and Markosian 2010: Ch. 3). Nonetheless, I adopt the classical convention in this essay, for it simplifies an already complex discussion.

Given the classical convention, the consequence argument is distinguished from other important arguments, such as the direct argument (van Inwagen 1980, 1983), the ultimacy argument (Strawson 2010: Ch. 2), the manipulation argument (Pereboom 2001; Mele 2006), the control argument (Carroll and Markosian 2010: 63–4), and the new argument against compatibilism (Mumford and Anjum 2014). These arguments offer conclusions that are broader, narrower, or otherwise different from classical incompatibilism and they are not discussed further in this essay.

This article covers contemporary versions of the consequence argument. Important examples include: Carl Ginet (1966, 1980, 1983, 1990), David Wiggins (1973), van Inwagen (1975, 1983, 1989, 2000), James Lamb (1977), John Martin Fischer (1983, 1994), D. M. L. Nathan (1984), David Widerker (1987), Timothy O’Connor (1993, 2000), Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield (1998), Michael Huemer (2000), Warfield (2000), John Carroll and Ned Markosian (2010), Andrew Bailey (2012), Finch (2013), and Alexander Pruss (2013). There is not enough space to talk about all of the above. Instead, I divide versions of the consequence argument into two types: transfer versions

and extension versions (cf. Widerker 2014). I discuss representative examples of each type, respectively, below.

Contemporary formulations of the consequence argument hit their stride with the publication of van Inwagen's *An Essay on Free Will* (1983: Ch. III), where he presents three formal versions of the argument. Two of van Inwagen's arguments—the first (or main) argument (1975, 1983: 68–78) and the third argument (1983: 93–104; 1989: 404, 405)—are transfer versions of the consequence argument and are discussed shortly. The second argument (1974, 1983: 78–93) and other extension versions are examined later. At the end of the essay, we consider the relationship between the two versions and whether they “stand or fall together” (Fischer and Ravizza 1996: 216).

Transfer Versions of the Consequence Argument

The First Argument

Transfer versions of the consequence argument incorporate grounding propositions and modal transfer principles, specifically no-choice transfer rules, in order to prove incompatibilism (cf. Campbell 2008, 2010, 2011). *Grounding propositions* are propositions that are claimed to be fixed, or *practically necessary*. A proposition is practically necessary provided that no human being has or ever had a choice about whether it is true (van Inwagen 1983; Kapitan 2002). In the context of transfer versions of the consequence argument, such propositions serve to ground our lack of choice. The past and the laws are fixed in the sense that they are beyond our control, things about which we have no choice.

Transfer versions of the consequence argument attempt to transfer the practical necessity of propositions about the past and the laws onto other propositions through the use of *no-choice transfer rules*. Here is a particular instance of a no-choice transfer rule: if we have no choice about propositions about the past or the laws and they entail propositions about the future, then we have no choice about propositions about the future. In order to appreciate the intuitive plausibility of no-choice transfer rules consider the thesis of *determinism*: “given the past and the laws of nature there is only one possible future” (van Inwagen 1983: 65). Supposing determinism, there is a transfer of *truth*: the truth of propositions about the past transfers onto propositions about the future via the laws of nature. It is reasonable to think that the practical necessity of the past and the laws might similarly transfer.

Transfer versions of the consequence argument take the form of a conditional proof and they have distinguishable parts, for example:

- The assumption of determinism
- Grounding propositions about the fixity of the past and the laws
- A no-choice transfer rule

The assumption of determinism cannot be denied since it is not an explicit premise of the consequence argument but an assumption for purposes of conditional proof. Thus, there are four types of reply to transfer versions of the consequence argument.

- Deny the fixity of past
- Deny the fixity of the laws

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- Deny the validity of a no-choice transfer rule
- Deny the validity of the consequence argument

We begin with van Inwagen's first argument. Then we explore examples of each of these four responses to the argument.

The first argument requires a setup. Suppose there is a judge, J, who needs to raise his hand at some time, T, to prevent an execution. Suppose also that J refrains from raising his hand at T. You may add whatever additional factors you deem important to J's free will: J is not bounded, injured, or suffering from paralysis; he is calm and takes the time to make a rational, deliberative choice; he is not under the influence of hypnosis, drugs, etc. In all respects, J is normal and his decision is rational (van Inwagen 1975: 190, 191).

Let 'J' denote the judge, 'T' denote the time that he should have raised his hand, ' T_0 ' denote an instant prior to J's birth, ' P_0 ' denote the proposition that expresses the state of the world at T_0 , 'P' denote the proposition that expresses the state of the world at T, and 'L' denote the conjunction of the laws. Here is the first argument:

- (1) If determinism is true, then the conjunction of P_0 and L entails P.
- (2) If J had raised his hand at T, then P would be false.
- (3) If (2), then if J could have raised his hand at T, J could have rendered P false.
- (4) If J could have rendered P false, and if the conjunction of P_0 and L entails P, then J could have rendered the conjunction of P_0 and L false.
- (5) If J could have rendered the conjunction of P_0 and L false, then J could have rendered L false.
- (6) J could not have rendered L false.
- (7) If determinism is true, J could not have raised his hand at T (1975: 191).

That is the first argument. Since there is nothing particular about the Judge's action, the argument can be generalized and classical incompatibilism appears to follow.

Let us consider versions of the different responses noted above. First, if time travel is possible, we can question the fixity of the past. Consider James Cole (Bruce Willis) in the film *Twelve Monkeys*. James is sent back to collect information about a previous biological catastrophe. Once there, he wants to alter history. Despite his efforts nothing ever changes, and that is what makes his story so tragic. James' actions seem fated, beyond his control. Conversely, why think that James can't do otherwise just because we know he won't do otherwise? James, presumably, cannot lose those capacities salient to free will merely by traveling in time. He was able to do otherwise prior to time traveling. Ergo, why suppose he does not retain those abilities while time traveling? The possibility of time travel gives us a reason to reject premise (5) since that premise assumes that our inability to change the past rests on our ability to do otherwise.

One way to make this view more plausible is to claim that the truth-conditions for sentences with terms such as 'can' and 'able' are relative to context (Lewis 1976; Campbell 2005). At one point in the film, James is convinced that he is not a time traveler. It is plausible to suggest that, in this context, utterances of the phrase "James could have done A," where A is some particular action that James does not perform, are true since James has what it takes and is not restricted in any obvious way. On the other hand, if we look at the situation from a God's-eye perspective, knowing that James does not do

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A, we might be inclined to judge differently. In this way, contextualism helps to provide a classical compatibilist solution to the consequence argument, since it is possible that one is able to do otherwise even if determinism is true. The fact that in some contexts James cannot do otherwise does not diminish the fact that in other contexts—even deterministic contexts—he can do otherwise.

A second approach comes from adopting *Humeanism*, aka a *weak view* of laws of nature (Beebe and Mele 2002; Perry 2004). Just as the proponent of time travel questions the fixity of the past, the Humean questions the fixity of the laws. According to Humeanism, laws are true *because* of the events that occur. If things had gone differently, then the laws would have been different. This is contrasted with a *strong view* of laws, where “the truth of laws [is] established by something else, so that events *conform* to them because they are laws” and not vice versa (Perry 2004: 237). Proponents of Humeanism reject premise (6) of the first argument. The laws are what they are in part *because* I do what I do. If I had done otherwise, then the laws would have been different (Westphal 2003). Hence, the laws cannot ground my inability to do otherwise. Adopting Humeanism or the possibility of time travel is often met with an incredulous stare. Let us explore other options.

According to van Inwagen, premise (4) is supported by a more general rule:

(S) If S can render R false, and if Q entails R, then S can render Q false (1975, 192).

(S) is equivalent to the following no-choice transfer rule:

- If S cannot render Q false, and if Q entails R, then S cannot render R false.

Consider a slightly amended version of Perry’s (2004, 247) counterexample to the validity of the principle directly above. Let R be the proposition *that Joe raises his hand at t*, where *t* is some future time. Let Q be a conjunction: *that Joe raises his hand at t and that Joe’s mother ate a cookie in 1950*. Note that Q includes R as one of its conjuncts. Thus, Q entails R. Suppose also that Joe’s mother did *not* eat a cookie in 1950. Presumably, Joe can render R false by not raising his hand at *t*. Q entails R but Joe cannot render Q false since Q was rendered false by his mother in 1950. Unfortunately, van Inwagen restricts (S) so that it only ranges over true propositions (1983, 68). Hence, Perry’s example is not really a counterexample to (S).

David Hume (Russell 2014) and David Lewis (1986: ix) are classical compatibilists and Humeanists about laws of nature, though both offer responses to the consequence argument that do not directly depend on Humeanism. According to Lewis, for instance, the expression ‘render a proposition false’ is ambiguous. Intuitively, I am able to raise my hand, thereby rendering it true that my hand is raised; or I can leave my hand by my side, thereby rendering it false that my hand is raised. Lewis holds that I was able to render a proposition false in the *strong sense* if I was able to do something such that the proposition would have been falsified by my action or a consequence of my action; whereas, I was able to render a proposition false in the *weak sense* if “I was able to do something such that, if I did it, the proposition would have been falsified (though not necessarily either by my act, or by any event caused by my act)” (1981: 120). Given the weak sense of ‘render false,’ which Lewis favors, one should deny premise (6) but given the strong sense of ‘render false’ one should deny premise (5) (1981: 120). This response need not assume Humeanism about laws.

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To drive that last point home, consider Keith Lehrer's comments on the consequence argument (Lehrer 1980; Suster 2012). Let S be a person, A an action, and t a time. Lehrer writes:

"If S had done A at t , then, of course, either the laws of nature would have been different or the state of the universe would have been different. But that is not to say that the person could have brought about these conditions."

(1980: 199)

Lehrer's response is not committed to Humeanism since it is a response that applies as much to the past as it does to the laws. The *Lehrer/Lewis view* recognizes that, given determinism, my actions are the consequence of the past and the laws. Nonetheless, I can do otherwise and my ability to do otherwise does not require the ability to render propositions about the past or the laws false *in the strong sense*. The weak sense of rendering a proposition false is not a causal power, so it is not the power to change the past or the laws, which would be miraculous (Holliday 2012, 186). The Lehrer/Lewis view is no more committed to Humeanism than it is to time travel. Lewis denies the validity of the first argument because it commits the fallacy of ambiguity. Therefore, even if the consequence argument is formally valid, it is still possible for the argument to be invalid do to linguistic maladies such as ambiguity.

The Third Argument

In the third argument, van Inwagen employs an N-operator, where 'Np' stands for "p and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p" (1989: 404). (If one likes, she may substitute 'no human being' for 'no one,' though I don't think that is necessary). Given the classical convention, 'no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p' means 'no one is able to act so as to ensure that $\sim p$ ' (van Inwagen 1983: 67–8, fn. 31, 233–4; Finch and Warfield 1998; Crisp and Warfield 2000: 174, 181, 182).

van Inwagen claims that according to the logic of the N-operator the following two inference rules are valid:

(α) $\Box p \vdash Np$;

(β) $Np, N(p \supset q) \vdash Nq$,

where ' \vdash ' represents the entailment relation, ' $\Box p$ ' stands for 'p is logically necessary' and ' \supset ' designates the material implication relation (1983: 94, 1989: 227). Roughly, a proposition is *logically necessary* if and only if it is true in all logically possible worlds. According to principle (α), if something is logically necessary it follows that it is true and no one has or ever had a choice about whether it is true (cf. Kearns 2011 for possible counterexamples). For instance, given that it is logically necessary that it is raining or not it follows that it is true and no one has or ever had a choice about whether it is raining or not.

Rule (β) is a no-choice transfer rule, a kind of modal modus ponens. Rule (β) transfers the inability to ensure that a proposition is false onto other true propositions. If you have no choice about whether a proposition is true and you have no choice whether the proposition is true only if some other proposition is true, then you have no choice about

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whether the other proposition is true. Suppose that under the right conditions the sun always shines on the roof of your house. You have no choice about whether the conditions are right, and you have no choice about the connection between the right conditions and where the sun shines, so you have no choice about whether the sun shines on the roof of your house. Rule (β) has some intuitive pull.

Principles (α) and (β), together with reasonable assumptions about the past and the laws, suggest that if determinism is true, no one is or ever was able to ensure that any true proposition is false. Let P_0 be any true proposition about the remote past, a time “before there were any human beings” (van Inwagen 1989: 224; see Finch and Warfield 1998). L and P are the same as in the first argument, and ‘&’ stands for the conjunction relation. Here is the third argument (1983: 93–104, 1989: 404, 405).

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) $\Box((P_0 \& L) \supset P)$ | assumption of determinism |
| (2) $\Box(P_0 \supset (L \supset P))$ | (1) by exportation |
| (3) $N(P_0 \supset (L \supset P))$ | (2) by (α) |
| (4) NP_0 | fixity of the past |
| (5) $N(L \supset P)$ | (3), (4) by (β) |
| (6) NL | fixity of the laws |
| (7) NP | (5), (6) by (β) |

One might wonder about principle (β). In fact, decisive counterexamples to principle (β) have been offered (Widerker 1987; McKay and Johnson 1996).

In reply, McKay and Johnson suggest replacing the N-operator with a weaker operator (1996; cf. Huemer 2000; van Inwagen 2000). Another response is to replace rule (β) with a stronger principle (Widerker 1987; Finch and Warfield 1998; Huemer 2000):

$$(\beta^*) Np, p \text{ entails } q \vdash Nq.$$

According to principle (β^*), the N-operator is *closed under entailment*. Thus, if no one has a choice whether a proposition is true, and that proposition entails another proposition, then no one has a choice whether the other proposition is true. There are no known counterexamples to principle (β^*). Perry’s counterexample to rule (S) will not work since it rests on a false proposition.

Given the responses in the previous section, one might question the fixity of past, premise (4) of the third argument. There are two arguments for premise (4) (Campbell 2007).

- (a) NP_0 because “no one can change the past” (van Inwagen 1983: 92);
- (b) NP_0 because P_0 is a true proposition about the remote past, a time “before there were any human beings” (van Inwagen 1989: 224).

Argument (a) depends on the fixity of the past alone whereas argument (b) depends on the fixity of the remote past.

Most defenses of NP_0 start with argument (a): no one can change the past, therefore NP_0 . One might argue: P_0 is true and no one has a choice about whether P_0 because

there is nothing anyone can do to make P_0 false (cf. Pruss 2013: 431). Yet if P_0 serves to ground our lack of freedom, this argument is problematic. Let p be the proposition that Joe's mother did not eat a cookie in 1950. Joe's mother *has* no choice about whether p since there is nothing that she can do about it *now*. Yet it does not follow that Joe's mother never *had* a choice about whether p . Given that she was alive in 1950, there is no reason to think that she was unable to eat a cookie in 1950 (cf. Pruss 2013: 430).

Alexander Pruss defends a stronger claim, equivalent to $N(P_0 \& L)$: "it is implausible that there is something we can do such that were we to do it, the conjunction of laws and pre-human past wouldn't hold" (2013: 433). Like the first and third arguments, Pruss' argument requires "a statement of the complete state of the world in the pre-human past" (2013: 430) not just a statement about the past. As Jiji Zhang puts it: "In general, the nomological necessitation of a state by another stands against one's freedom with respect to the former only if the later is not under one's control" (2013: 349). Thus, the need for argument (b).

In argument (b), it is essential that P_0 describe the state of the world at a time prior to the existence of human beings. The central claim is that no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether P_0 , that is, about whether some proposition about the remote past is true. This is not a claim about the past in general. No one was around at T_0 to have had a choice about whether P_0 . In argument (b), it is not the *pastness* of the past that gives it its necessity. Rather it is the *remoteness* of past events, the fact that the past continues back to a time prior to human existence. As Carolina Sartorio (2015) expresses it, the real threat to our free will is about "factors beyond our causal reach." Leigh Vicens writes, in ~~a different~~ context, that the consequence argument hinges on the claim that "an action ultimately determined by factors outside of the actor's control is not free" (2012: 145; see also Pereboom 2014: fn. 1).

Consider the example of *Oscillating Adam*, who lives in a deterministic world where time is circular. There is no beginning or end to Adam's existence. He is in the grips of an everlasting, eternal recurrence. Adam spends his time growing 'older' and getting 'younger.' He begins each cycle with powers comparable to the average 25-year-old and eventually develops powers comparable to the average 50-year-old. Then he slowly regresses back to the state at which he began, and the cycle starts all over again (Campbell 2010). There is little reason to think that Oscillating Adam is impossible but the third argument does not show that he is unable to do otherwise, given determinism, for Oscillating Adam has no remote past. This example equally questions the first argument.

There are other counterexamples of this kind, as well. *Original Adam* assumes that Adam is cotemporaneous with a physical world that was created *ex nihilo* (Campbell 2007; cf. Brueckner 2008; Loss 2009). *Infinite Adam* assumes that Adam is cotemporaneous with an eternal universe (Finch 2013). The point is similar in each case. Unless it can be shown that these Adams are impossible, transfer versions of the consequence argument are not arguments for *classical incompatibilism*. This is the *no past objection* (Bailey 2012; Zhang 2013; C. Franklin, manuscript, "In Defense of the Consequence Argument: Reply to Campbell").

Given the no past objection, the consequence argument does not establish classical incompatibilism. At most, it supports a weaker thesis: determinism *together with* a contingent proposition about the actual world (e.g., persons have a remote past) entail that no one has free will (Warfield 2000; Campbell 2007; Pereboom 2014; Sartorio 2015; C. Franklin, manuscript, "In Defense of the Consequence Argument: Reply to Campbell").

Call this view *weak incompatibilism*, or if you prefer *strong enough incompatibilism* (thanks to Dan Speak). Either way, it is not the thesis of classical incompatibilism.

Here is a synopsis of the main results so far. There are two types of principles used in transfer versions of the consequence argument: grounding propositions, claims about the practical necessity of the past and the laws, as well as no-choice transfer rules, which transfer that necessity onto all other true propositions. Forgetting time travel and Humeanism, it is easy to establish the needed grounding propositions, given a remote past. Yet having a remote past is not an essential feature of deterministic worlds. Nonetheless, we only need to tweak the definition of ‘incompatibilism’ in order to save the consequence argument. Fair enough, but other philosophers find this approach *ad hoc*.

Extension Versions

The Second Argument

Extension versions of the consequence argument do not explicitly endorse no-choice transfer rules, though they may make assumptions about the fixity of the past and the laws (Zhang 2013: 351). Extension versions get their name because they favor *extension principles* (Haji 2009: 53) over no-choice transfer rules when clarifying the consequence argument. van Inwagen writes: “it *seems* that our freedom can only be the freedom to add to the actual past; it *seems* that our freedom can only be the freedom to act in accordance with the laws of nature” (2000: 167). If determinism is true, then there can only be one “extension of the actual past, holding the laws fixed” (Fischer 1994: 88). Thus, no one can ever do otherwise.

In van Inwagen’s second argument, abilities to do otherwise are understood in terms of having ‘access’ to certain possible world (1983: 86). Thus, “an unexercised ability is treated as an ability to realize some unrealized possibility” (1983: 86; cf. Zhang 2013, 351). van Inwagen continues:

To say that a person can bring about an event satisfying a certain description is to say that he has access to at least one possible world in which an event satisfying that description happens.

(van Inwagen 1983: 88)

To convey this, van Inwagen introduces a “non-temporal relation between persons and possible worlds” (1983: 89). ‘Hxy’ stands for “x had, has, or will have access, at some point in his life, to y” (1983: 90). According to van Inwagen:

s has access to the set of worlds x =df. $(\exists y)$ (y is true in just exactly those worlds that belong to x and s can render the denial of y false) (cf. 1983: 90),

where x and y are variables ranging over possible worlds and propositions, respectively. This leads to *the minimal free will thesis* (MFT):

$(\exists x)(\exists y)(Hxy \ \& \ y \neq A)$ (91),

where A is the actual world. According to MFT, an agent is able to do otherwise if and only if there is a non-actual possible world to which she has access.

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There are two main assumptions of the second argument.

MAA: $(x)(y) (Hxy \supset SyA)$.

MAB: $(x)(y) (Hxy \supset NyA)$ (92).

van Inwagen writes: “MAA asserts that every world to which any person has access must be indistinguishable from the actual world at some instant” and “may be regarded as a statement of the familiar principle that no one can change the past” (1983: 92). In addition:

MAB asserts that no person has access to any world in which the laws of nature are different from what they are in the actual world. This seems undeniable, for, as we have seen, no one can render a law of nature false. Moreover, it is clear that it is not up to anyone whether any given *true* proposition is a law of nature.
(van Inwagen 1983: 92)

According to van Inwagen, free will skepticism is “derivable from DA [determinism], MAA, and MAB” (1983: 93). The conclusion is: “if determinism is true, then no one has access to any non-actual world” (1983: 93), and classical incompatibilism follows.

Does the second argument, like transfer versions, depend on the contingent assumption of a remote past? That is a difficult question. On the one hand, van Inwagen claims that MAA “may be regarded as a statement of the familiar principle that no one can change the past” (1983: 92). On the other hand, the argument does not incorporate a proposition like P_0 grounding our lack of power or ability in some proposition about the remote past. The argument appears to show that any agent, maybe even Oscillating Adam, is unable to do otherwise, for ultimately only the actual world is accessible given determinism. Let us return to this issue later.

The Basic Argument and Other Extension Principles

The *basic argument* (Fischer 1994: Ch. 5) is another non-transfer version that incorporates an extension principle: “an agent can do X only if his doing X can be an extension of the actual past, holding the laws fixed” (Fischer 1994: 88; cf. Haji 2009: 53). Here is Ish Haji’s version of the basic argument:

Assume that determinism is true. Suppose Finn tosses a ball at t_2 . The state of the world at an earlier time, t_1 , and the laws entail that Finn tosses the ball at t_2 (assuming determinism). Holding fixed the laws, if determinism is true, there is only one extension of the past into the future, an extension that includes Finn’s tossing the ball at t_2 . The Extension Principle entails that an agent can do something only if his doing it could be an extension of the actual past (holding fixed the laws). Thus, holding the natural laws fixed (and assuming determinism), it is false that Finn’s refraining from tossing the ball at t_2 could be an extension of the actual past. It follows that Finn cannot refrain from tossing the ball at t_2 .
(Haji 2009: 54)

Like the second argument, the basic argument does not make an explicit claim about the remote past yet classical incompatibilism seems to follow.

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In Ginet's most recent version of the consequence argument, aka *Ginet's argument*, 'Oxy' means 'it is open to x to act in such a way that had x so acted, x would have made it the case that y'; b_t is "a true proposition entirely about what happened before t " (1990: 102); a_t is "a proposition (true or false) as to what happens at or after t " (1990: 102); 'Lp' means " p is entailed by the laws of nature" (1990: 105). There are two key assumptions.

- *The Principle of the Fixity of the Given Past* (PFGP): For all S, t , b_t , and p_t : $O_{S_t} p_t \rightarrow O_{S_t} (b_t \ \& \ p_t)$ (1990: 103).
- *The Principle of the Inescapability of the Laws* (PIL): Lp only if for all S and t : $\sim O_{S_t} \sim p$ (1990: 105).

Taken together, PFGP and PIL comprise Ginet's extension principle: "*freedom is freedom to add to the given past*" (1990: 102, 103), which includes both propositions about the past and the laws.

Similarly, Warfield offers an extension principle in his *new version* of the consequence argument:

$$\square \forall x \forall s (Fsx \supset \diamond (H \ \& \ x)),$$

where ' \forall ' represents the universal quantifier, 'Fsx' stands for 's is free to make it the case that x,' and 'H' represents a conjunction of the state of the world at some time in the remote past together with the laws. Intuitively, if someone is free to do something, then that something is an extension of the past and the laws. Recent arguments by Bailey (2012) and Finch (2013) have adopted similar extension principles.

Not for distribution

Reply to Extension Versions

There are important differences between transfer and extension versions of the consequence argument, so how do criticisms of the former relate to the latter, supposing they do relate? One might say that all versions of the consequence argument use transfer principles but whether or not this is so is discussed in more detail below. In the meantime, we can note some provisional points.

Extension principles make claims about the fixity of the past and the laws; some are more explicit than others. For instance, responses from proponents of time travel and Humeanism work as well on extension versions as they do on transfer versions. Granted, extension versions make no appeal to a remote past. Still, they are not immune to the no-past objection. As Jiji Zhang (2012) notes, van Inwagen signals the need for the assumption of a remote past in his second argument:

Every world to which any person has access must be indistinguishable from the actual world at some instant. Or, alternatively, every world to which any person has access must share a slice with the actual world. For example, however many possible worlds I have access to, surely they must all be indistinguishable from the actual world at some time in the remote past – say, 10,000BC, or indeed, any time before I was born.

(van Inwagen 1983: 92; Zhang 2013: 351)

Bailey's argument and others are subject to this same critique (2012: 350, 351).

Meta-issues

* Elsewhere, he

What is the relationship between the transfer and extension versions of the consequence argument? Do all versions of the consequence argument “stand or fall together” (Fischer and Ravizza 1996: 216)?

One thing to keep in mind is that there are two transfer proposals. According to the *strong transfer proposal*, all versions of the consequence argument are transfer versions and assume some no-choice transfer rule. According to the *weak transfer proposal*, all versions of the consequence argument assume some transfer rule, though not necessarily a no-choice transfer rule. Widerker (2014), for instance, distinguishes between *unavoidability transfer principles*—which we have been calling ‘no-choice transfer rules’—and *avoidability transfer principles*. He claims that extension principles are avoidability transfer principles. Widerker accepts the weak transfer proposal but not the strong proposal.

van Inwagen goes further than Widerker: “all (logically adequate) arguments for incompatibilism must make some sort of implicit or hidden or covert appeal to Beta” (1994: 95; see also 96), a no-choice transfer rule. van Inwagen continues “there will be some premise or premises in any technically satisfactory argument for incompatibilism that the incompatibilist would have no reason to accept if he did not accept the validity of Beta” (1994: 98). This is an endorsement of the strong transfer proposal. He adds: “if there were some fundamental mistake *common* to all three arguments, it would be at least *likely* to reveal itself in one of them, however well hidden it was in the others” (1994: 57).

In reply, Fischer and Ravizza offer the *conditional version* of the consequence argument, which “does not explicitly or implicitly rely on principle Beta” (1996: 214). They write:

The Conditional Version of the argument for incompatibilism proceeds, very roughly, as follows. Suppose that causal determinism is true. It follows that a statement describing the universe in the past, together with the conjunction of the laws, entails that you behave as you are now. Now one of the following conditionals must be true. (1) If you were to do otherwise now, then the universe would have been different in the past than it actually was; (2) If you were to do otherwise now, then the natural laws would be different from what they actually are; or (3) If you were to do otherwise now, then either the universe would have been different in the past than it actually was or the natural laws would be different from what they actually are. But given the fixity of the past, it is plausible to say that (I) if (1) were true, then you cannot do otherwise now. And given the fixity of the natural laws, it is plausible to say that (II) if (2) were true, then you cannot do otherwise now. And given the above, it is plausible to say that (III) if (3) were true, then you cannot do otherwise now. So (IV) you cannot do otherwise now.

(Fischer and Ravizza 1996: 214, 215)

Does the conditional version of the consequence argument require a no-choice transfer principle? Does it require an extension principle? I leave to the reader the exercise of determining the **truth of** these questions as well as the task of deciding whether the consequence argument is sound.

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Further Reading

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- van Inwagen, P. (1983) *An Essay on Free Will*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (The best place to start is with van Inwagen's seminal book, which inspired most subsequent versions of the consequence argument.)

Proof

THE CONSEQUENCE ARGUMENT

Zhang, J. (2013) "Can the Incompatibilist Get Past the No Past Objection?" *dialectica* 67: 345–52. (Zhang extends my criticism of the first and third versions of the consequence argument onto the second version and, thus, Fischer's basic argument.)

Related Topics

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