1. The Master Argument

I will discuss the so-called “Master Argument” attributed to Diodorus Cronos in the light of some contemporary speculations on indexicals. In one version, this argument goes as follows:

Premise 1. The past, relative to any time t, is necessary.

Premise 2. The impossible cannot follow from the possible.

Therefore,

Conclusion. The possible is that which either is or will be (thus, what will not be is impossible).

It is widely recognized that something else is required to deduce the conclusion from the two premises. There are a variety of proposals, but the underlying idea seems to be that the past in some way determines the present and future, that is,

Premise 3. Whatever is or will be follows from what is past.

Accordingly, if what is or will be follows from the past, then, by Premise 1, it follows from what is necessary. Then, by premise 2, it must itself be necessary. Since a proposition, state-of-affairs, or, as I shall speak, a situation, is necessary only if its opposite is impossible, then nothing other than what does happen or will happen can happen. Nothing depends on the use of tense in Premise 3 and the conclusion of this argument. Both can easily be recast tenselessly in terms of a generalization over any time t. That is, Premise 3 is: whatever exists at a time t or comes after t follows from what comes before t. The conclusion is: the possible is that which either obtains (is true) at t or obtains (is true) after t (thus, what does not obtain at t or after t is impossible).
Concerns about this argument stem from different sources. First, there is the obvious question about Premise 3 or any analogue that could generate the conclusion from the first two premises. One might justify it by appeal to causal determinism or theological determinism, or, attempt to secure it on the cheap through some variety of so-called “logical” determinism. The latter argue that if versions of this argument attempt to secure Premise 3 on the cheap, by arguing that if Q is some future truth or future fact then there is some past truth or past fact to the effect that Q will be. Presentists who hesitate about acknowledging such forward looking facts—some of which, on the surface, contain some non-present reality—could appeal to some abstract representation of Q that does not depend for its existence upon future individuals, times, or facts, but, instead, contains only abstract modes that will be satisfied by such entities, e.g., the 57th president of the USA will be in New York on exactly 76 years from now or, tenselessly, the 57th president of the USA is in New York on exactly 76 years from March 23, 2006. The core of Premise 3 is the claim that for any concrete situation P that obtains, there is some past facts or truths Q that entail P, and the task is to motivate the existence of some such past fact or past truth.

Second, the type of necessity spoken of in Premise 1, has been the subject of some concern. Suffice it to say that to say that a situation P—say, Geo. Washington’s being in New York on a certain past day, say, March 23, 1789—is necessary relative to a given time t, e.g., today, is to say that the facts at t entail P. Once again, the question arises which facts existing at t entail prior facts. The most immediate type of fact existing at t that would yield this result would be one of the form “P was the case” or “P obtains at some time prior to t” or simply what is expressed through a past-tensed variant of the sentence “P,” e.g., Geo. Washington was in NY exactly 217 years ago. Obviously, P “must” obtain relative to such a fact. Again, to avoid the appearance of the present
containing past realities, an abstract representation of P is the proper component of the present fact, e.g., the first president of the USA was in New York exactly 217 years ago.

Third, assuming we have secured the necessity of a past fact that entails a future fact, then Premise 2, or the following analogue,

**Necessity Transfer:** If P is necessary relative to t, and P entails Q, then Q is necessary relative to t.

is required to project that necessity into the future. Accordingly, treating this principle as an inferene-validating law, then the Master Argument implies that for any future fact Q there is some past fact(s) such that the following reasoning is valid:

**Argument Form 1.**

P is necessary relative to t

P entails Q

Therefore

Q is necessary relative to t

Fourth, what is the significance of the Master Argument? We don’t have to look far. It amounts to a fatalistic threat to our presumed practical freedom to do otherwise than we do. How so? On the basis of yet a further principle linking possibility to a practical modality, viz, ability:

**Ability Implies Possibility.** If an agent S is able at time t1 to do action A at t2 then it is possible at t1 that S does A.

However, if nothing other than what does happen or will happen can happen, then no one is able to do other than what one in fact does or will do
Now, understanding fatalism to be not merely the claim that whatever happens or obtains is necessitated by the past—that’s just determinism—but the thesis that whatever obtains is rendered unavoidable by the past—where P is unavoidable just in case P and no one is able to prevent P—then the Master Argument sanctions the fatalistic conclusion. (I note that A. N. Prior interpreted the necessity in Premise 1 of the Master Argument in terms of a practical modality, viz., as “what no one can falsify.”) Consequently, the Master Argument implies that for any future fact Q there is some past fact(s) such that the following reasoning is valid:

**Argument Form 2.**

\[
\begin{align*}
P & \text{ is unavoidable at } t \\
P & \text{ entails } Q \\
\text{Therefore,} \\
Q & \text{ is unavoidable at } t
\end{align*}
\]

(Those familiar with the contemporary free will debate will recognize this to be the form of what Peter van Inwagen has called the Consequence Argument.)

An analogue of the Transfer of Necessity principle underlies this reasoning, namely,

**Unavoidability Transfer:** If P is unavoidable at t, and P entails Q, then Q is unavoidable at t.

Note that both this principle and Argument Form 2 can be further refined by including an agental parameter so that the unavoidablity is indexed to an agent at the time. **Unavoidability Transfer** can be argued for as follows. Suppose P is some past fact. Then, by Premise 1, P is necessary relative to t. By the **Ability Implies Possibility** principle, if P were not unavoidable at t, then someone is able at t to bring about not-P. But someone is able to do this only if not-P is possible at t,
and this cannot be given that \( P \) is necessary at \( t \). Given that \( P \) entails \( Q \), then, by the Transfer of Necessity principle, \( Q \) is necessary at \( t \). By the same reasoning, \( Q \) is unavoidable at \( t \).

My concern is this: if we acknowledge some type of determinism whereby the past entails the future, are we committed to fatalism? I will argue that the answer to this question is negative and that, therefore, the foregoing reasoning breaks down.

2. Practical Reality

For at least for a significant type of moral responsibility, an agent’s moral responsibility for a situation \( P \) depends upon a variety of factors, chiefly, obligations (regarding performing or refraining some action), agency (performance or omission of some action), and relevant attitudes (towards an action). Among the most important attitudes are an agent’s towards some action \( A \) that the agent understands would result in producing, sustaining, or preventing \( P \), namely,

(1) intentions to do some action \( A \);

(2) commitments about one’s moral obligations concerning \( A \);

(3) presumption or sense of one’s own freedom regarding \( A \).

Notice that, from the agent’s point of view, the contents of each of these attitudes are canonically expressible in the first-person. I intend myself to do \( A \), I believe that \( I \) am obliged to do \( A \), I take it for granted that \( I \) am free to do \( A \) or refrain from doing \( A \). In the case of the sense of freedom, the attitude is nothing more than a tacit presumption that a particular course of action is an open alternative for one. This presumption, in turn, has two components:

(1) a sense of efficacy, namely, that one would perform the act were one to undertake it, and

(2) a sense of contingency, namely, that it is as yet contingent what one will undertake.
where ‘undertake’ is blanket term for any sort of intentional commitment to the action, including choosing and trying. Both contents are first-personal, that is, to take one’s A-ing to be open is to one tacitly accept propositions of the form:

**Efficacy**: I will A if I undertake to A

**Contingency**: It is yet contingent whether I will undertake A

Speaking retrospectively, an agent’s responsibility for P requires not only *having* had such attitudes regarding some action A, but that their first-person contents are *satisfied*, that is, that the beliefs and presumptions spoken of were true, and that the intention was fulfilled. This means that the following principles are true.

**Responsibility implies First-person Obligation.** S is morally responsible for a situation P only if there is some action A and previous times t1 and t2 such that S’s first-person proposition, *at t1, I ought to A (omit A)* at t2 is true.

**Ought implies First-Person Ability.** If S’s first-person proposition *at t1, I ought to A (omit A-ing)* at t2 is true then so is S’s first-person proposition *I am able at t1 to A (omit A-ing)* at t2.

**Ability implies First-Person Possibility**. If S’s first-person proposition *I am able at t1 to A (omit A-ing)* at t2 then so is S’s first-person proposition *It is possible at t1 that I A (omit A-ing)* at t2.

I note that the schemata leave it open how S represents the relevant times to himself/herself. It is not necessary that S actually think the indicated first-person propositions for these principles to apply,
but only that such propositions would be true or would be were they actually entertained by S. Note however, that the attitudinal requirements on responsibility—viz., the agent’s commitments, perhaps tacit, to his or her own obligation and ability concerning the action suggests that the first-propositions are readily accessible to the agent (though cashing this out in any precise way is a difficult matter).

3. First-Person Reality

I assume the irreducibility of first-person propositions, or, more generally, of indexical propositions of which first-person propositions are a species, and I refer the listener to arguments by Castaneda and others to this effect. Once we admit that members of a certain category of propositions are true then we immediately face questions about the truth-conditions.

It is my conviction that indexicality is not merely a matter of how a proposition is apprehended, but that indexicality enters into the truth-conditions of indexically-expressed propositions, contrary to the standard “direct reference” picture of indexicals. One reason for rejecting the standard view is that it entails that indexicals are modally inert, that is, contribute nothing to the modal status of propositions expressed by their means. This cannot be correct. Consider; if indexicality were modally inert, then it would be as irrelevant to the dyadic modalities as it is to the monadic. If so, then indexical meanings and modes would have no bearing upon the entailment relations among these statements. But as I speak, it is true that,

(1) Today is March 23, 2006.

from which it follows that,
(2) Tomorrow is March 24, 2006. However, (2) is not entailed by,
(3) Martin’s birthday is March 23, 2006.

even though Martin’s birthday is today. Accordingly, the expressions ‘Today’ and ‘Tomorrow’
contribute more than just referents to the relevant truth-conditional content, otherwise there would
not be this disparity. Indexical meaning is integral to what is said. But then, the particular
properties of being today and being tomorrow are part of the truth-conditions. There is such a thing
as tensed reality even though it has no existence outside the perspectives of thinkers and experiences.

To be sure, the inference from (1) to (2) is not logical entailment here, but there many plausible
inferences are not sanctioned by laws of logic but are dependent upon the content rather than the
pure logical form of the involved propositions.

Take a first person case. If a man, Henry, sincerely utters the words ‘I am in the pub’ and employs
these words in a standard way in phoning his friend Adrian, then he makes a first-person statement,
(4) I’m down at the pub.

Hearing his words, Adrian, reports,
(5) Henry is down at the pub.

If both names and indexicals are directly referential, then Adrian and Henry have said the same
thing. But consider; we can infer from what Henry said that,
(6) Some person is in the pub.
This partly depends on the semantics of ‘person’, but if we suppose that a person is anything capable of conscious agency, hence, capable of first-person thoughts, then (6) is a consequence of (4). In this respect, (4) is unlike,

(7) Henry’s briefcase is down at the pub.

suggesting that ‘I’ carries the implication of personhood which ‘Henry’s briefcase does not.

If part of the semantic significance associated with ‘Henry’ includes the property of being a person, then (6) also follows from Adrian’s statement (5), and in this respect (4) and (5) do not differ. But notice that if what Henry said with (4) is true, then so is,

(8) A self-conscious being is down at the pub.

Why so? Because, one cannot be identified through ‘I’—one cannot be an I—without being self-conscious, a fact anchored within the very meaning of ‘I’ and, hence, in the I mode Henry used to identify himself. By contrast, (8) is not implied by what Adrian said with (7). After all, Henry might be down at the pub, enjoying his drinks, without being self-conscious at all, so that, relative to that circumstance, what Adrian said with (5) would have been true without a corresponding first-person proposition being true.

Notice the relevance of tense to this inference. If Henry had said,

(9) I was down at the pub.

it would not follow that

(10) A self-conscious being was down at the pub.
That is, Henry might not have been self-conscious when he was in the pub. His use of ‘I’ reflects his present self-awareness, showing that it is not merely the presence of the first-person element in (4) that generates the inference to (8), but also the tense conveyed through the verb.

I take these examples to give some reason to think that indexical factors enter into the truth-conditions of indexically expressed propositions. If that is correct, then the truth-conditions for (4) cannot be given in the following terms:

TC1. An utterance of ‘I am F’ by S at time t is true iff S is F at t.

for this would not discriminate between (4) and (5) insofar as both would then have the same truth-conditions. Instead, we need something on the order of,

TC2. An utterance of ‘I am F’ by S in a context c is true iff at t, S both satisfies the first-person mode associated with ‘I’ at c and is F.

Similarly, the truth-conditions for an utterance of (1) would be this:

TC3. An utterance of ‘Today is March 23, 2006’ in context C is true iff the day that uniquely satisfies the ‘today’ mode in C is identical with March 23, 2006.

Talk of such indexical modes or properities must be supplemented by an account of indexical reference and thought is required at this point. I have provided such an account elsewhere, but let me here sketch the highlights.
There is a difference between a speaker’s or thinker’s indexical identification of items within his or her experience and an interpreter’s identification of what a speaker is talking about with indexicals. The interpreter employs the familiar utterance-reflexive or token-reflexive modes of presentation, e.g., *the speaker of the context of such and such utterance* in interpreting a given token of ‘I’. But this is not the speaker’s mode of self-identification. Indexical tokens are the product of a speaker’s identifications, not conversely. Instead, the speaker’s identification are *executive* pre-utterance events, consisting of his or her identifying items by using concepts associated with indexical types to articulate the contents within one’s field of awareness—a *perspective*, that is, a spatial and or temporal structuring of items that depend upon the agent’s own spatial and temporal positions—during the interval of an experiencing. Contextual factors are as relevant here as they are in interpreting someone’s indexical utterenace, thought these are not facts about the environs of the utterance as much as facts about the perspectival status of the identified item, that is, its positions vis-à-vis the idenfier and, perhaps, some immediately perceived data to which the identified item is related.

The indexical concepts impose some limitations on where an indexically-identified item can be located vis-a-vis the thinker’s standpoint. Contrast my,

(11) You should be prepared; it will be hot here today

When I am addressed Henry on July 4, 2005 in Chicago. If, instead I had thought of Henry, Chicago, July 4, 2005 in this fashion,

(12) He should be prepared; it will be hot there then.
then the constraints imposed by the executive meanings of ‘He’, ‘there’ and ‘then’ would differ from those associated with ‘You’, ‘here’ and ‘today’, prohibiting my use of the latter on July 4, 2005 in Chicago to say what I did with the former. The constraints are vague for deictic uses of the pronouns like he, she, or it and the demonstratives that, those, beyond, etc. Perhaps nothing more than location distinct from the point of origin is imposed, though the this/that and the these/those contrasts make relative proximity a factor. Similarly, in the case of I, what is identified is located within a four dimensional array of space-time positions that includes the point of origin of the perspective. The indexical you, on the other hand, restricts the temporal location of the identified item to times that are simultaneous with or subsequent to the identifier’s temporal locus. In this way, indexical identifications are always autobiographical. The indexical status of the identified item is always relational and is possessed only in relation to an act of executive identification with indexical concepts.

Returning to (4), the third-person mode, being the speaker of u is not how Henry identified himself in order to say what he did. Such a mode is relevant only to the interpretation of Henry’s utterance, and is operative only if the interpreter has first perceived the utterance. But Henry’s self-identification was not a post-utterance process, for he did not employ an utterance-reflexive mode of presentation in identifying himself as he did. Nor was it a post-thought procedure, that is, Henry did not identify himself by first reflecting on what he was thinking and then determine that he uniquely satisfied the mode being the thinker of that thought. His self-identification is constitutive of the thought or, at least, integral in its genesis. Tokens must be produced before they can be interpreted, and assuming that indexical meaning is as operative in producing an utterance or thought as it is for interpreting an utterance or a thought, then there must be an executive meaning of ‘I’ that Henry
employed in identifying himself. Its use within a given context $c$ in which the thought (4) occurred, yields a first-person mode, \emph{being I in c}, uniquely satisfied by Henry. By TC2, (4) is true because Henry satisfies the mode of \emph{being I in c} and is in the cellar.

The precise nature of the generic I-concept is another matter, and perhaps it cannot be analyzed. Elsewhere I have suggested that whatever satisfies it is, at least, the subject of a perspective or, perhaps, the unification of a complex of vectors from a standpoint—a “prehensive unity” to use Whitehead’s language. Yet \emph{being an I}, like any indexical status, e.g., \emph{being a you}, \emph{being a this}, \emph{being now}, etc., is always a relational property that an item has in virtue of being perspectivally identified.

Now if this is so, then there are first-person modes, viz, relational properties, that need to be satisfied by an entity in order for a first-person proposition about it to be true. Such facts are \emph{first-person facts}, and the totality of such facts is \emph{first-person reality} (to use an expression of Kit Fine’s). First-person reality is a species of indexical reality, having no existence apart from the executive identifications of experiencers. Like all indexical reality, first-person reality is subjective and ephemereral, confined to a determining perspective and, hence, to conscious agents. When the experience is over, the perspective goes out of existence, and so do the indexical modes and indexical facts that depend upon this perspective. Even the “I” is short-lived as the contrast of (4) with (9) displays so vividly.
4. A Challenge to Determinism?

If first-person reality is subjective, perspective-bound, and ephemeral, then can it be determined by the past? Can it be necessary relative to the past? Can perspective-bound first-person facts be rendered unavoidable by past realities?

Obviously, there cannot be determination by way of some non-metaphorical “containment” of the future in the past. Still, there is room for determination of first-person reality by the past.

Without fussing about the abstract/concrete distinction for present purposes, let us say that a concrete situation is any situation with a concretum among its constituents. A purely abstract situation contains no concrete components (viz., is any situation that is not concrete). Among the concrete situations are those that are concrete modulo time $t$ insofar as all their concrete components exist at $t$. A situation is abstract modulo $t$ if it contains no concrete components existing at $t$ but contains modes of presentation that are uniquely satisfied by concreta existing at $t$.

Simultaneous entailments are entailments among simultaneously existing situations. Cross-temporal entailments are entailments among situations existing at distinct times.

The fatalist who is an eternalist concerning time can easily withstand the perspective bound character of first-person situations. Thus, past facts can stand in relations of cross-temporal entailments to first person facts in their future, e.g., it may well be that the fact that I am in Portland today is entailed by certain conglomerate of facts in place exactly seven months ago, including decisions made by me. Experiencing subjects with their indexical contents are part of the physical
world; indexical reality is not outside nature in the least. So, on the assumption of some form of determinism, not only do past facts determine that there will be a such and such experiencing subject, thinking all sorts of indexical thoughts I now do, but that among those indexical thoughts that are true, past facts determine that they are true.

Even a presentist can account for the ways in which the past determines the indexical future. Thus, assuming determinism to be true, that a certain sort of future will be after such and such lapse of time is a fact about the present. Concrete facts at any time entail situations that are abstract modulo future times insofar as the past causes the future at all. For example, while it might not be that the facts obtaining exactly seven months ago simultaneously entail the first-person fact that I am in Portland today, those facts did simultaneously entail certain situations that are abstract modulo today, that is, those facts entailed that after a seven month interval there is a person uniquely fitting such and such description who is then in Portland. That is what determination of the future by the past comes to for the presentist. Though a first-person fact had no being prior to the emergence of its home perspective, when it comes to be it does so necessarily relative to what has been.

Note that the even if the presentist balks at cross-temporal entailments, or cross-temporal relationships of any sort—and, admittedly, this accommodating causation is problematic for presentism—deterministic relations can be cashed out in terms of simultaneous entailments at time t involving concrete situations and situations that are abstract modulo succeeding times. It may be that among such entailments are those that take place between situations that exist within different temporal regions of a temporally thick present. I see no reason why presentism must insist that the
present is only an instant, and not an interval with some temporal extent. Such thickness of the present might be the only means of accommodating causation.

Thus, the fact that practical reality is first-personal affords no refuge from fatalism for either presentist or eternalist

5. Responding to the Fatalistic Challenge

How, then, do we respond to the fatalistic challenge if we acknowledge some form of determinism? I think the solution lies in the correct assessment of what responsibility entailing avoidability—that is, ability to do otherwise—involves. Let me here sketch a notion of avoidability that is immune from the fatalistic implications of the Master argument.

1. The Sense of Openness

No one deliberates or intends a course of action from a zero point of view, that is, without antecedent information, information shaped not only by our own present observations and standing beliefs, but also by our current commitments. One isolates and evaluates options by recourse to background circumstances and standing commitments one takes to be relevant. For example, in considering to attend the APA in Portland, I assumed that the requisite means and opportunities would be in place should I so decide. This background includes information about past, present and future circumstances and commitments, and this information, whether accurate or misleading, is laden with indexical characterizations of past, present, and future realities.
As such, the background at any time is at once indexically textured or *perspectival*, and *doxastic*, since it is constituted by information that the agent accepts—where *acceptance* is any affirmative attitude towards a content, ranging from unqualified belief to low degrees of tentative affirmation. Much of what is accepted belongs to the remembered past, yet some belongs to an envisioned future, often characterized as merely probable. I intend to take a canoe trip in Canada next summer, and on the basis of that I plan what supplies to buy. Do I *believe* that I will take that canoe trip? Well, certainly I do not believe that I will *not* take it. Whether I *believe* it; I am not sure. But since I intend to canoe in Canada next summer, then I in some sense *accept* the correlated claim that I will be canoeing in Canada next summer and use it as a basis for planning, even though I recognize that it is more fluid and, thereby, do not accept it with the same conviction through which I believe that Earth will still be revolving about the Sun will next summer. My willingness to plan on its basis is enough to place it in the envisioned future.

Call this background the agent’s *doxastic perspective* at the time.

These things are true of it.

*First*, it is stratified with respect to relevance rankings, probability assessments, and salience. Also, it can be altered during the course of practical thinking with the addition of new information about circumstances and intentions, bringing some factors to the forefront and diminishing others.

*Secondly*, it is but a *partial* representation of both past and future, not exhaustive. For this reason, at any point, the envisioned future is seen as radically underdetermined by the remembered past.
Third, in placing oneself within it, one invariably identifies oneself in the first person. I might be the very next person who breaks his leg in this county today, but I might still deliberate whether I should basketball this evening. In so doing, I do not think of myself through that third person description even though I satisfy it. Only if that property enters into my self-profile will I abandon such deliberations.

Fourth, one refers generally to the background in considering an action as an open alternative. It would not be enough were the agent to presume that a course of action is open relative to this situation and to that commitment without also viewing it as open altogether. The presumption of openness, thereby, is global in character since it involves the agent measuring a course of action against everything within his or her doxastic perspective at the time, this quantifier being embedded within attitudinal scope. Thus, when we have a sense that both I can do A and I can refrain from doing A I implicitly index the implied possibility to this presumed background and, thus, to an implicit “as far as I can tell.”

This being said, recall the two ingredients of the sense of freedom mentioned above, namely, the agent’s sense of efficacy and the sense of contingency. I propose the following as a sense of presumed openness:

**Presumption of Openness.** At t1, S takes his A-ing at t2 to be open for him if and only if at t1, S presumes that relative to his doxastic perspective (that is, to what he then accepts),

(1) it is more likely than not that he would A at t2 were he to undertake A-ing at t2; and
(2) it is more likely than not he would refrain from A-ing at t2 were he to undertake refraining from A-ing at t2 than otherwise; and

(3) his undertaking to A at t2 is, as yet, contingent.

Each of (1)-(3) is embedded not only within attitudinal scope, but also within ‘relative to his doxastic perspective’. To this we can add that a set of courses of action constitutes a range of presumed open alternatives just in case the agent takes each to be open for him and presumes that they are not all conjointly realizable. A minimal range is a course of action and its complement, in which case one who takes A-ing to be open also takes not A-ing to be open. An agent’s sense of freedom with respect to action A is nothing more than this presumption of openness.

2. Strict Ability

A tentative analysis of an agent S's specific ability to intentionally A at t goes something like this: S's skill at A-ing + opportunity at t. This sort of formula is usually understood to involve a link between the agent’s undertaking (the attempt, the expenditure of effort) with his or her successful performance, a formula that will henceforth be called an efficacy conditional. The precise form of this conditional is a matter of some delicacy, but here's one approximation.

**Ability Implies Efficacy.** If S is able at t1 to A intentionally at t2 then at t1 S possesses a reliable strategy R for A-ing such that for some intervening time t3, were S to undertake at t3 to do A at t2 in accord with R then it is more probable than not that S would A at t2.
Roughly, to have a **reliable strategy** for producing a certain result is to have a plan whose implementation would regularly produce results of that sort. t,

But this conditional is not enough for to yield necessary and sufficient conditions for a specific ability. Like any proposed conditional analysis there is still the problem of making sure that the antecedent is possible. That is, we still require that S *can*, at t3, undertake A-ing at t2.

Here’s a hint of how to secure this. Immediately after presenting a conditional analysis of an ability to choose in his book *Ethics*, G. E. Moore wrote the following:

> And besides this, there is another sense in which, whenever we have several different courses of action in view, it is *possible* for us to choose any one of them; and a sense which is certainly of some practical importance, even if it goes no way to justify us in saying that we have Free Will. This sense arises from the fact that in such cases we can hardly ever *know for certain* beforehand, which choice we actually shall make; and one of the commonest senses of the world ‘possible’ is that in which we call an event ‘possible’ when no man *can know for certain* that it will *not* happen. It follows that almost, if not quite always, when we make a choice, after considering alternatives, it *was* possible that we should have chosen one of these alternatives which we did not actually choose. (Ethics, 1912, p. 136)

Moore was claiming that a genuine possibility emerges from the experience of choice, in effect, a type of epistemic possibility. Generalizing to what an agent *accepts*, I propose that there is a sense of possibility in which it is possible at t1 for S agent to undertake at t3 A-ing at t2, namely, possibility
relative to S’s doxastic perspective at t1. What is this? Nothing other than the truth of what one presumes when one presumes A-ing at t2 to be an open alternative. Let us then say

Doxastic Alternative. If S's presumption at t1 that his A-ing at t2 is open for him is true, then his undertaking at t3 to do A at t2 is possible relative to S's doxastic perspective at t1. Call such an action a doxastic alternative for S.

There are many actions that are doxastic alternatives for an agent at a time. There are many doxastic first-person possibilities for an agent. Why so? Because first-person reality is radically undetermined by an agent's doxastic perspective. At most times in my life, relative to what I accept, I am able to do all sorts of things I never will do.

Now we have a notion of ability:

Strict Ability. S is strictly able at t1 to A intentionally at t2 iff (1) his A-ing at t2 is a doxastic alternative for S at t1, and (2) at t1 S possesses a reliable strategy R for A-ing at t2 such that for some time t3, t1 ≤ t3 ≤ t2, were S at t3 to undertake A-ing at t2 in accord with R then it is more probable than not that S would A at t2,

Clause (1) anchors a sense in which S is able to undertake A-ing at t2, while clause (2) ensures that the minimal amount of skill and opportunity are present.

This yields three ways in which S might fail to be strictly able to do A at T2: either by (i) ailing to view A-ing at t2 as open, of (ii) lacking a reliable strategy, or (iii) it being unlikely that implementing the strategy at that time would result in performing the action.
Exercising control over a situation $P$ can be described in terms of the locution of here is "seeing to it that," where seeing to it that $P$ at $t$ is understood in terms of the disjunction of either bringing about $P$ or sustaining $P$, and preventing $P$ at $t$ is a matter of seeing to it that not-$P$. Then in accord with (SA), we have the following:

**Control.** At $t_1$ $S$ has control over $P$ iff at $t_1$ $S$ is strictly able to see to it that $P$ and to see to it that not-$P$.

**Claim:** the type of control required for responsibility is strict ability.

### 3. Unavoidability

We can now define a notion of unavoidability in these terms:

$P$ is unavoidable for $S$ at $t$ just in case $S$ is strictly unable at $t$ to prevent $P$.

Now let’s return to an indexed form of the transfer of unavoidability principle.

**Indexed Unavoidability Transfer:** If $P$ is unavoidable for $S$ at $t$, and $P$ entails $Q$, then $Q$ is unavoidable for $S$ at $t$.

I claim that this principle is false. Right now it is time $t_1$. Suppose some remotely fact $P_0$ and the conjunction of the laws of nature $L$ entail that I now, at $t_2$, make the following assertion: *the invasion of Iraq was a mistake* (choose your favorite alternate for an assertion). The conjunction of
P0 and L is unavoidable for me at t1, for, lacking a reliable strategy, I was not then strictly able to prevent it. Yet, the following is still true:

At t1, TK was strictly able to prevent his asserting at t2 that the invasion of Iraq is a mistake.

Hence, making that assertion was avoidable for me at t1. Accordingly, the principle of Indexed Unavoidability Transfer is false. If so, then the Unavoidability of Transfer is false. If so, argument form A2 is invalid. If so, the argument for fatalism collapses.
One way to derive the transfer principle it is to the appeal to the analogous transfer of ability principle, namely, that if S is able to see to it that P and P entails Q then S is able to see to it that Q. On the face of it, this principle fails. S might be strictly able to bring about P but have no idea that P entails Q. Hence, S has no reliable strategy for bringing about Q and, therefore, is strictly unable to bring about Q. Still, there is some truth to this general principle, but only when formulated in terms of the appropriate consequence relation suggested by ‘requires’. For example, the following principle is plausible:

C22. $A^s p,$

$q$ would be a reliable consequence of S's bringing about $p$

$\therefore A^s q$

where the tacit temporal parameter on the consequence relation is the same as that on the ability operator. Thus, suppose that at t S is strictly able to see to it that $p$, and that $q$ is a reliable consequence of his bringing about $p$. Then, if minimally rational, S correctly envisions both that $p$ would result from a considered action and that $q$ would result from $p$, and, hence, accurately anticipates that $q$ would be a result of his action. It is in this way that S’s ability to bring about $p$ implies an ability to bring about whatever is reliably “required” by S’s bringing about $p$. So, if Jenine is strictly able to enroll her son in the chosen college then she is strictly able to perform any act reliably required by so doing. As a refinement of C22 we have,

C23. $A^s \sim p$

if S were to see to it that $\sim p$ then, reliably, $\sim q$

$\therefore A^s \sim q$

and so,

C24. $\sim A^s \sim q$
if $S$ were to see to it that $\neg p$ then, reliably, $\neg q$
\[ \therefore \neg A^S \neg p \]

Hence, it follows that,

C25 \quad N^S q

if $S$ were to see to it that $\neg p$ then, reliably, $\neg q$
\[ \therefore \neg p \]

and similarly,

C26. $N^S \neg q$

if $S$ were to see to it that $p$ then, reliably, $q$
\[ \therefore N^S \neg p. \]

But neither C25 nor C26 can be applied to the premise,

(f) $N^S (P_0 \& L)$.

to yield,

(b) $N^S P$.

To illustrate, suppose, as before, that $P_0 \& L$ entails $P$ and we accept the counterfactual,

(m) If Margo were to bring about $\neg P$ then $\neg (P_0 \& L)$ would obtain,

as well as what the compatibilist insists upon, namely,

(n) Margo is strictly able to bring about $\neg P$.

If we had C20 then we could infer the implausible,

(o) Margo is strictly able to bring about $\neg (P_0 \& L)$,
and thereby reveal the implausibility of the compatibilist’s position. However, C20 is invalid.

Alternatively, one might try to infer the implausible \( o \) from \( n \) by means of the valid C23 if the following held:

\[
(p) \quad \text{If Margo were to see to it that } \sim P \text{ then, reliably, } \sim(P_0 \& L)
\]

Yet it is pretty certain that \( p \) fails. Even if a theory of causation allowed that \( \sim(P_0 \& L) \) would be a *causal* consequence of Margo’s bringing about \( \sim P \), it would be a *reliable* consequence only when Margo correctly envisions a route from her returning the book to Suzanne’s desk to \( \sim(P_0 \& L) \). But this sort of envisionment is clearly impossible for any finite agent like ourselves since \( \sim(P_0 \& L) \) is beyond our cognitive grasp.\(^{19}\) So, \( p \) is implausible as well.

While each of C23-C26 is valid, the following rule,

\[
\text{C27. } N^s p \\
\text{if } S \text{ were to see to it that } p \text{ then, reliably, } q \\
\therefore N^s q.
\]

is invalidated any time \( S \) possesses more than one way of reliably bringing about \( q \). Thus, suppose that because an automobile accident it is unavoidable for me that I express my opposition to the Dean’s proposal at tomorrow’s meeting \( p \), but, if I were to see to that I did express this opposition in that meeting then, reliably, the proposal would not pass \( q \). It does not follow that the proposals’s not passing is unavoidable for me. I might have already persuaded my colleagues to vote against it. To be sure, inability to prevent a situation from obtaining does transfer to any action which would reliably prevent it—that is the force of C26—but there is no automatic transfer from the unavoidability of a sufficient condition for an action to the action itself.
The upshot? The Diodoran strategy is of no more use in deriving a suitable closure rule for strict
unavoidability than it was for causal unavoidability, and the closure rules that are valid, namely,
C23-C26, are rules that the compatibilist can live with. To the extent that we have so far articulated
the practical modalities, the consequence argument has not succeeded.

In short, neither ability nor unavoidablity is closed under entailment.