THE L-T FATALISTIC PARADOX

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Paradoxes are seemingly contradictory statements which nevertheless may be true. Philosophers grapple with these puzzles in order to unravel their mystery. The purpose of this paper is to disentangle the snarl of a recent puzzle known as the Lehrer-Taylor (L-T) fatalistic paradox.

According to Tomberlin,[1] the L-T fatalistic puzzle argues that if premises (1) "If Smith does not leave at 3:30, then he cannot arrive at (his scheduled destination at) 4:00"; (2) "If Smith does leave at 3:30, then he will arrive at 4:00"; (3) "Smith can leave at 3:30"; and (4) Smith does not leave at 3:30" are all true, then (2) and (3) entail (5) "Smith can arrive at 4:00," and (1) and (4) entail (6) "Smith cannot arrive at 4:00." Since (5) and (6) are mutually incompatible, then we have the L-T paradox.

The solution I want to propose consists in the rejection of (2) and (3) entailing (5) in that it is apparent there is no logical connection between (2) and (3). In order to derive (5) from (2) the logical connecting premise is not (3) but (3a) "Smith does leave at 3:30." Even if "Smith can leave at 3:30" is true, it does not logically follow that Smith leaves (or does leave) at 3:30. "Can" here may be interpreted as a possibility or an opportunity for one to follow a course of action. Smith *can* indeed leave at 3:30 in the sense that he is not threatened or compelled to stay at home, he has the money and time, his plane has arrived on time, etc. But the "can" of opportunity and the "can" of possibility[2] do not imply that one is barred from changing his mind. What, for example, if Smith visits his sweetheart at 4:00 instead of attending his scheduled, say, meeting? "Can leave" (3) in other words does not necessarily entail "does leave" (3a).

Premises (1) and (2) assume that all the necessary conditions for the non-arrival or arrival of Smith at his scheduled meeting at 4:00 obtain, i.e., for (1) that Smith does not intend to attend the meeting, that he wants to visit someone else, and so on, and for (2) that Smith does not change his mind, that his plane does not crash, and so on. Given (1) and (4) conclusion (6) necessarily follows, but given (2) and (3) no conclusion can be derived.

It is, however, possible to argue in the reverse direction, that is to say, that although "can leave" does not mean "does leave," there is at least one instance in which "does leave" (3a) can mean "can leave" (3) —that instance in which it is not possible for Smith to leave unless it is given that he *can* (has the possibility or opportunity to) leave. And if we assume that all the conditions for Smith's successful leaving at 3:30 obtain, more specifically, that he does not change his mind, then if Smith *does leave* at 3:30, it follows that he *can leave* at 3:30. But again we might be stalled here because even if Smith can leave at 3:30, it does not necessarily mean that he does leave at 3:30, unless we grant or it is likewise given that in at least one instance Smith does leave at 3:30 *if and only if* he can leave at 3:30. And since we have a material equivalence,[3] then (3) can mean "Smith does leave at 3:30." However, it becomes apparent that (3) and (4) are mutually inconsistent.

The L-T fatalistic paradox arises because less or no attention is given to the meaning of "can leave."

NOTES

[1] James E. Tomberlin, "A Fatalistic Paradox Examined," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XXXIX, 4 (June, 1979), 589.

[2] Bruce Aune, "Can," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (1967), pp. 18-19.

[3] Two Statements are said to be materially equivalent if they materially imply each other. See Irving M. Copy, *Introduction to Logic*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), p. 302.