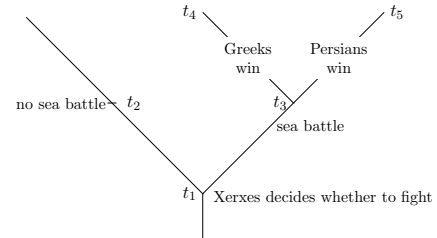


Many Faces of the Open Future

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The project I intend to pursue revolves around the notion of the open future. This is the idea that there are many possible ways in which the future may unfold, while what has happened is “set in stone” and irreversible. I will assume that the asymmetry between the future and the past is well captured by a so-called branching model like the one on the right which depicts possible courses of the Battle of Salamis.



The tree-like structure has been mathematically defined and used to analyze languages that combine temporal (like “in the future”) and modal (like “possibly”) expressions. For this reason, it can be used to address philosophical issues connected to the idea of the open future with an elevated level of precision. This is what I intend to do within the scope of this project: I plan to investigate chosen logical, metaphysical, and epistemological (that is, connected to knowledge) issues related to the idea of the open future within the framework of the branching model.

In the field of logic, I will investigate whether it is reasonable to say that a statement that talks about what will happen in the (open) future can be said to be initially untrue, but *become true*, when the issue at stake is settled by the flow of time. It turns out that this idea is as natural, as it is difficult to correctly spell out. I will try to capture the reasons why it is so hard to precisely capture this conception.

In the field of metaphysics, I plan to carefully distinguish the facts located in the open future from the facts which are located in the settled past. In most cases, this is not difficult, but some examples are challenging. Consider the fact that Monika has just smoked her last cigarette or that Jan is on his way to Paris. Also, consider the fact that God knew at the beginning of time what you will do tomorrow. Are these seemingly past facts “really” about the settled past? I intend to explore the idea that a fact is “open” if it occurs in some, but not all possible futures (regardless if it is a past, present, or the future fact). My plan is to investigate the consequences of applying this criterion to a family of controversial cases considered in the modern metaphysical debate.

Lastly, in the field of epistemology, I intend to develop models which permit knowledge concerning future contingent events – both current (I know that my kids will come home hungry) and past (I knew that they would not eat the school lunch today). There are important reasons to question the possibility of such knowledge, but I will argue, by exploring some existing models, that the idea of a future-oriented knowledge is not inconsistent. More controversially (and slightly more abstractly) I intend to investigate whether we can gain some knowledge about the contingent future through intellectual contemplation alone. For example, it seems that I know, by sheer reflection, that it will be sunny only if it is actually sunny. This seems like a trivial logical truth, but many logical models dictate that it is a contingent proposition. What is worse, this observation was used to argue that the world is deterministic and that the future is as fixed as the past. I plan to use the resources of the branching model to undermine this argument.

The debate around the open future has always been present in European philosophy. Partly because it concerns some central philosophical question, like whether nature is deterministic and whether people are free actors, and partly because it is positioned at the intersection of many traditional philosophical disciplines, like logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, or philosophy of religion. My project aims to address the issue of the open future in a way that incorporates many such perspectives while using fairly advanced technical tools and engaging with the most recent theories. My hope is that this project will advance our understanding of the open future and how we should conceptualize it in relation to other key notions such as truth, fact, or knowledge.