# BAILEY ON INCOMPATIBILISM
# AND THE "NO PAST OBJECTION"

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ABSTRACT: In "Incompatibilism and the Past," Andrew Bailey engages in a thorough investigation of what he calls the "No Past Objection" to arguments for incompatibilism. This is an objection that stems from the work of Joseph Keim Campbell and that has generated an Interesting literature. Bailey ends by offering his own answer to the No Past Objection by giving his own argument for incompatibilism, an argument that he claims to be immune to the objection. We have some observations to make regarding what we take to be Bailey's answer to the objection (all of whose details are left to the reader – we attempt to fill this lacuna).

KEYWORDS: incompatibilism, consequence argument, Joseph Keim Campbell's "No Past" objection, Andrew Bailey

In "Incompatibilism and the Past," Andrew Bailey engages in a thorough investigation of what he calls the "No Past Objection" (hereafter NPO) to arguments for incompatibilism (hereafter INC).[1] This is an objection that stems from the work of Joseph Keim Campbell and that has generated a literature on the objection.[2] Bailey ends by offering his own answer to the objection by giving his own allegedly NPO-immune argument for INC. We have some observations to make regarding what we take to be Bailey's answer to NPO, *all* of whose details are left to the reader.

Here is Bailey's statement of NPO: "The premises of … [vanInwagen's] Consequence Argument [as well as those of all the other prominent arguments for INC] are not necessary truths because there needn't be a past." This objection is based on Campbell's example of Adam, who comes into existence at the first moment of time t, and at t Adam, let us suppose, reaches for the famous apple, performing a seemingly free action.

Our take on NPO is as follows. Assume that each of the extant arguments for INC (all canvassed by Bailey) can 'take care of' each allegedly free action relative to which there is a past, showing that on the assumption of determinism, each such act is *not* free. Still, none of the extant arguments for INC can 'take care

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of' Adam's seemingly free reaching for the apple at t, for there is no past relative to t. Each of the extant arguments requires, for one reason or another, that there be a past relative to the time of a targeted allegedly free action, in order to show that on the assumption of determinism, the targeted action is not free.

Bailey rejects ways of responding to NPO that lay down a requirement that S performs a freely only if "some *historical* condition is satisfied (a condition that entails that S existed prior to her performing a)." One example: S's having deliberated whether to perform a.[3] Bailey rejects each variant on this strategy, claiming that each "takes on rather special metaphysical commitments." We will return to this objection below.

Bailey formulates what he calls "Another Argument" for INC as a response to NPO. Not only does this argument take care of all the allegedly free acts relative to which there is a past, but, further, it takes care of Adam's reaching for the apple. Another Argument is centered around a proposed necessary condition for S's being 'free with respect to a truth' ('s(t)' stands for a proposition expressing the total state of the universe at time t):

> (NC) If S is free with respect to p, then there is some time t such that the conjunction of s(t) and the laws is compossible with not-p.

> Another Argument runs as follows:

> P1. Necessarily, for any subject S, and any truth p, if S is ever free with respect to p, then there is some time t such that the conjunction of s(t) and the laws is compossible with not-p. (premise [using NC])

> P2. Necessarily, if determinism is true, then for any time t and truth p, the conjunction of s(t) and the laws entails p. (definition of determinism)

> P3. Therefore: necessarily, if determinism is true, then for any time t and truth p, the conjunction of s(t) and the laws is not compossible with not-p. (from P2)

> P4. Therefore: necessarily, if determinism is true, for any subject S, and any truth p, S is not ever free with respect to p. (from P1 and P3).

Bailey declares that Another Argument is 'immune to' NPO, but, surprisingly, he does not give a word of explanation as to why. To answer NPO, Bailey's argument must take care of Adam's reaching for the apple at the first moment of time t. The only clue as to how this is supposed to work is given in his setting up of NC:

> Worlds x and y *share a time* just in the case that the complete state of the world at some time … in x is an intrinsic duplicate of the complete state of the world at

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[3] See Anthony Brueckner, "Retooling the Consequence Argument," *Analysis* 68 (2008): 10-12.

some time in y. … if determinism is true, a world sharing *any* time with the actual world (and sharing the actual world's laws) shares all times and all truths with the actual world.

This shows that Bailey (though he does not explicitly say so) is working with vanInwagen's 'backward-forward' formulation of determinism:

(VI) If p and q are any propositions that express the state of the world at some instants, then the conjunction of p with the laws of nature entails q.[4]

Since VI leaves it open as to temporal ordering of the instants, VI says both that (1) the past plus the laws determine a unique future, and that (2) the future plus the laws determine a unique past. So on VI, if world W and @ share a time t and share @'s laws, then not only do they share all times subsequent to t ('forward determinism'), but, further, they share all times prior to t ('backward determinism').

Let us return to Adam. By NC, for his reaching for the apple to be a free action, we must find a time t' such that the conjunction of s(t') and the laws is compossible with *not-(Adam reaches for the apple at t)* (hereafter *not-R*). On the assumption of VI, no time after t will fill the bill. Take any such time t''. By the 'backward' component of VI, the conjunction of s(t'') and the laws entails R. So no time after t can play the role of the desired t'. The only time left is t itself, the first moment of time. Since s(t) entails R, the conjunction of s(t) and the laws is, trivially, *not* compossible with not-R. So t cannot be the t' that we seek. Thus Adam is not free with respect to R, since NC is not satisfied. So Bailey *can* take care of Adam's allegedly free action at t – on the assumption of VI-style determinism, Adam does *not* freely reach for the apple.

We have several observations about our reconstructed Bailey-style answer to NPO.

1. We do not know whether this is *Bailey's* answer, since he says absolutely nothing about how his Another Argument provides an answer to the objection. But we can see no other way of answering the objection using the materials Bailey has provided.

2. The answer we have reconstructed requires the 'backward' component of VI. Bailey does not say so, but he is committed by his discussion of NC to this 'backward determinism' as well as to the standard 'forward determinism.'

3. In general, if S's action A at t satisfies NC (so that it can be true that S is 'free with respect to the proposition p' according to which S does A at t), then the time t' which is relevant to this satisfaction must be *different from* t. This is because t' must be such that the conjunction of s(t') and the laws is compossible with not-p

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[4] See Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 65.

(i.e., not-(S performs A at t) ). As noted in our reconstruction of Bailey's answer to NPO, it is trivial that s(t) is not compossible with not-p, and so the conjunction of s(t) and the laws is not compossible with not-p.

4. One consequence of observation (3) is that Bailey's judgement about one of his examples is inconsistent with his own NC. Consider a world W in which there is just one moment of time t, in which Adam reaches for the apple – no past relative to t, no future relative to t (this is like Bailey's 'Instantaneous Chooser' case). Bailey discusses a principle that Roberto Loss formulates in an argument for INC that is meant to avoid NPO.[5] According to 'the necessity of the present,' roughly: if p is true at t, then no one has any choice at t about p's being true at t. Bailey seems to miss the intuitive point behind this principle in the course of giving alleged counterexamples to it, one of which involves the world W just described. Loss's point in putting forward his principle was that once you begin to F, it is *too late* to have a choice about F'ing. So if it is true at t that you are F'ing, then you have no choice about its being true at t that you are F'ing. You are already F'ing! Bailey's alleged counterexamples to the necessity of the present all have the form: assume that in the following conditions S has a choice at t about F'ing at t. This seems to us to be question-begging. However, picking up the main thread of this observation, one of Bailey's alleged counterexamples to the necessity of the present involves W. Bailey maintains that there is no bar to holding that Adam's reaching for the apple at the unique moment of time t in W is freely done and, contra the necessity of the present, is an action that Adam has a choice about <u>at t</u>. But as noted in (3) above, Adam's act at t cannot be freely done (and thus presumably cannot be chosen at t by Adam) because NC is violated: since t is the only moment of time in W, there is no t' in W which is such that s(t') and the laws are compossible with not-(Adam reaches for the apple at t).

5. Observation (4) shows that Bailey's NC has the effect of committing him to a sort of historical condition on free action, a commitment, we noted earlier, that he holds to be a problematic cost for an answer to NPO. Bailey's historical condition is that if S does A freely at t (if S is 'free with respect to the proposition' that S does A at t), then either there is a past relative to t, or there is a future relative to t. If this condition is not satisfied, then it immediately follows that NC is not satisfied as well, as shown in (4). Thus S does not do A freely, given the non-satisfaction of the historical condition. If the historical condition *is* satisfied, then there will be a time, or times, which are at least candidates for allowing the satisfaction of NC, since the time, or times, will be distinct from t.

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[5] Roberto Loss, "Free Will and the Necessity of the Present," *Analysis* 69: 63-9 (2009).

6. Observation (5) brings out the following peculiarity of Bailey's NC. We say to Bailey: "Imagine a world that begins at t with Adam reaching for the apple at t. Does it make sense to suppose that Adam's action is free?" Bailey responds, "It all depends. Is there any future after t in this world? If no, then Adam's action is unfree, since NC will not be satisfied. If yes, then Adam's action is at least a candidate for being free (if, say, the world in question is indeterministic and NC is thus satisfied)."

We conclude that the answer to NPO that we have reconstructed from the materials provided by Bailey has problematic costs, just as do the other answers canvassed by Bailey in his paper.