

The Open Future

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There seems to be an objective asymmetry between the past and the future. The past has already happened, and is thus settled, determinate, and ‘closed’. Instead, the future is yet to happen, and appears thus to be unsettled, indeterminate, and ‘open’. This intuitive idea gives rise to two main philosophical questions. The first one concerns statements about aspects of the future that are presently unsettled (‘future-contingent statements’) and the issue about whether they are either true or false (see: [Bivalence](#)). The second question concerns the issue about whether the openness of the future consists in the fact that what exists is insufficient to determine the truth-value of future-contingent statements (for instance, because the future doesn’t exist or because many different futures exist) and, thus, whether the future’s being open is, at the bottom, a matter of [ontology](#). The two questions appear to be closely connected. In fact, the idea that future-contingent statements are neither true nor false seems to be motivated by the following line of reasoning:

- (i) the openness of the future is a matter of ontology, and so what exists is insufficient to determine the truth-value of future-contingent statements;
- (ii) if the openness of the future is a matter of ontology, then future-contingent statements are neither true nor false;
- (iii) therefore, future-contingent statements are neither true nor false.

Those who embrace an ‘Aristotelian’ approach to the open future and take future-contingent statements to lack a determinate truth-value (which is often claimed to be [Aristotle](#)’s position in *De Interpretatione*) can accept this argument as sound. Instead, ‘Ockhamists’ (after [William of Ockham](#)’s position in *Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*) reject premise (ii) and claim that future-contingent statements are bivalent even under an ontological account of the open future. Others (such as [David Lewis](#) 1979), reject (i) and give an alternative, non-ontological account of the open future.

1. Ontological accounts of the open future

2. The Aristotelian approach

3. The Ockhamist approach

4. Alternative accounts of the open future

References