

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will  
Prof. Funkhouser  
9/5/06  
van Inwagen, Chapter 1

#### 1.1

- His main topic will be the (in)compatibility of free will and determinism, though van Inwagen will also address the problem of future contingencies (in Chapter II).

#### 1.2

- Van Inwagen distinguishes two problems of free will and determinism: the Compatibility Problem and the Traditional Problem. (2)

#### 1.3

- In this section he defines ‘determinism’:

*Determinism* may now be defined: it is the thesis that there is at any instant exactly one physically possible future. (3)

- The physical possibilities are established by the laws of nature and prior conditions of the world.
- Van Inwagen distinguishes determinism from the Principle of Universal Causation (3–5).
- He discusses the concept of a law of nature on pp. 5–8.

#### 1.4

- So, how does he understand ‘free will’?

When I say of a man that he “has free will” I mean that very often, if not always, when he has to choose between two or more mutually incompatible courses of action — that is, courses of action that it is impossible for him to carry out more than one of — each of these courses of action is such that he can, or is able to, or has it within his power to carry out. (8)

- Here, ‘can’ is understood as “the power or ability of an agent to act”. He goes on to contrast this concept with various other concepts with which it

has been confused (9–13).

1.5

- In Chapters III and IV, van Inwagen will argue for incompatibilism.

1.6

- His main argument for incompatibilism is the *Consequence Argument*, first stated on p. 16.

1.7

- Van Inwagen denies the charge that he is begging the question against the compatibilist.

1.8

- Van Inwagen will argue, in Chapter V, that the absence of free will means that deliberation is irrational and that there is no such thing as moral responsibility.
- Van Inwagen is an incompatibilist who denies determinism (both locally and globally). He will consider 2 arguments for determinism: scientific arguments and appeals to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.
- Interestingly, van Inwagen claims that there are no good introspective or empirical reasons for thinking that we have free will.