

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will  
Prof. Funkhouser  
9/7/06  
van Inwagen, Chapter 2

## 2.1

- Fatalism:

... the thesis that it is a logical or conceptual truth that no one is able to act otherwise than he in fact does; that the very idea of an agent to whom alternative courses of action are open is self-contradictory. (23)

## 2.2

Example: the witch who predicts the drowning.

- On p. 25 he distinguishes two different senses, a stronger and a weaker, of *inevitability*. It is highly implausible that *all* future events are either weakly or strongly inevitable for us, even assuming determinism.
- The fatalist needn't endorse either strong or weak inevitability.

## 2.3

- Van Inwagen claims that fatalism is incompatible with moral responsibility and rational deliberation.

But what should we make of his claim that:

I think it is incoherent to suppose that any thesis could be true that has the consequence of rendering conceptually defective sentences so utterly *basic* to human life as the sentences about blame and deliberation mentioned above. (30)

[Skip 2.4–2.5. But there is at least one important claim made in this section that you should know: Any proposition regarding the future is either always true or always false.]

## 2.6

- Example: The naval commander.

- Taylor invokes Principle (A) in his argument for fatalism. Van Inwagen argues that this principle is ambiguous. If it is interpreted one way, it is true but does not connect with Taylor's conclusion. If it is interpreted the other way, it is false.

- Note van Inwagen's disambiguations of (a), on p. 47. (a) is a special instance of (A). Van Inwagen argues that (c) is true, but (b) is false. But, (c) does not lead to the fatalist's conclusion. The point generalizes to other instances of (A). (Van Inwagen returns to the naval commander example to make this point.)

## 2.7

- The Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM). One may wonder whether LEM holds for propositions about the future. Van Inwagen thinks that it does, but that fatalism does not follow from this fact. (E.g., from the fact that some future proposition S is unchangeably true, it does not follow that I cannot render S false.)