

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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van Inwagen, Chapter 3, §3.1–3.5

3.1–3.2

- In this chapter van Inwagen presents three versions of the Consequence Argument.

3.3

- In this section he defines ‘determinism’ in terms of: *proposition*, *state of the world at an instant*, and *laws of nature*.

◦ I won’t say anything about his characterizations of propositions and states of the world. About laws of nature, van Inwagen says that we cannot falsify them and that they limit what we can do. (61–62) This coheres with ordinary usage. But, he does go further and simply defines ‘law of nature’ so as to exclude *psychological* laws of nature. He also stipulates that the logical consequences of laws of nature are also laws of nature. (63–64)

◦ Then, determinism is defined as the conjunction of two theses, using this terminology:

For every instant of time, there is a proposition that expresses the state of the world at that instant;

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 . (65)

Note that the word ‘causation’ does *not* appear in this definition.

3.4

- I don’t have any comments on his discussion of ‘can render false’.

3.5

- The First Argument is presented in this section. He presents a particular example to make it more vivid and understandable: the judge and the execution. (68–69) A formal statement of the argument is presented on p. 70. Be sure that you understand each premise of the argument. The argument

is valid. So, if one is going to deny the conclusion, they are rationally committed to denying one of the premises. Premises (4) and (5) are the most likely candidates for the objector to deny.

- Another example: not visiting Arcturus:

Here we have a case in which the proposition that I *did not* do a certain thing is deducible from the state of the world before I was born taken together with a law of nature. And it certainly *seems* to follow from the fact that this deduction is possible that I *could not* have done this thing. It is at any rate *true* that I could not have done this thing (could not have visited Arcturus one half hour ago). Is there some further fact, beyond the fact of the deducibility of my non-visit to Arcturus from the state of the world before I was born and the laws of nature, to which we should need to refer to justify our belief that I couldn't have visited Arcturus one half hour ago? I don't see what this further fact could be. (76)

View van Inwagen's question as a challenge, and see if you can come up with any such further fact.

- One *might* object to the following line of reasoning:

Suppose I could have rendered P false, that is, could so have arranged things that I have visited Arcturus at T. If P₀ and L entail that I did *not* visit Arcturus at T, then I could so have arranged things that the conjunction of these two propositions is false: my so arranging things as to visit Arcturus at T is logically sufficient for the falsity of this conjunction. (77–78)