

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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van Inwagen, Chapter 3, §3.6–3.11

3.6

- In the Second Argument, van Inwagen replaces talk of propositions with talk of *possible worlds*. He makes various claims about possible worlds in this section to help clarify his use. But, we needn't worry about the details much.

3.7

- The Second Argument makes use of 4 non-logical constants, which are introduced, with suggested English readings, on p. 83. The first 3 of these are explained on pp. 83–86.

3.8

- This section explains the “has access to” relation. This is van Inwagen's vocabulary for talking about the abilities of agents. See, for example, the translations at the top of p. 87.

- Why is van Inwagen messing with this “has access to” talk, instead of just talking about abilities? Well, here is a good explanation:

...if we are to investigate the conceptual relations between free will and determinism, it is hardly to be supposed that we shall succeed if the vocabulary we use to state the thesis of determinism and the vocabulary we use to state the thesis of free will have no elements in common. Therefore, if determinism is formulated as a thesis about possible worlds (or propositions) the best plan would seem to be to try to formulate the free-will thesis as a thesis about possible worlds (or propositions). (87)

- Good metaphor: the branching corridors, with some of them barred off. (88–89)

3.9

- The Second Argument is presented in this section. The conclusion of this argument is that the minimal free-will thesis (MFT) is false. MFT is a very weak claim about free will; so, this conclusion is very strong. The Second Argument has 3 premises: DA, MAA, and MAB. DA is the claim that the

actual world is deterministic. (Recall the use of ‘D’ and ‘A’ introduced on p. 83.) MAA and MAB state, in effect, that no one can change the past and that no one can change the laws of nature. (92) On p. 93, van Inwagen explains how the denial of MFT follows from these 3 premises.

3.10

- This section presents the Third Argument. The new terminology used here is the modal operator ‘N’.

For any sentence p , the result of prefixing p with ‘N’ may be regarded as an abbreviation for the result of flanking ‘and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether’ with occurrences of p . (93)

- 2 inference rules involving N, α and β , are introduced at the top of p. 94.

- The Third Argument is presented, in a formal manner, on pp. 94–95. Pay careful attention to this argument, and be sure that you understand each premise and inference. Also note the 5 ways of (rationally) denying the conclusion, given on the bottom of p. 95.

- Another example: socio-biology (99–101). Here is one very good quotation about this example:

The point of this discussion may be summed up in a question: Why is none of the participants in the debates about biological determinism a compatibilist? Perhaps the answer is that the participants in these debates take the idea of biological determinism much more seriously than philosophers are accustomed to take the idea of “universal” or “Laplacian” determinism, and that compatibilism with respect to a given type of determinism is possible only for people who do not take that type of determinism very seriously. (101)