

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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van Inwagen, Chapter 4, §4.4–4.5

4.4

- This section discusses the *Mind* Argument. Versions of this argument try to establish that indeterminism is incompatible with free will.

- All parties should agree that indeterminism is not sufficient for free will.

- To better understand the different versions of the argument, it will be helpful to have a concrete example before us: the thief and the poor-box. Now consider the 3 versions of the *Mind* Argument, and van Inwagen's replies.

- (i) An undetermined act would be *random*. But, a random act could not be free. (128)

Reply: Van Inwagen claims not to know what 'random' could mean here, as applied to a single event.

- (ii) The very idea of an undetermined act is contradictory. Acts must be produced by agents. But, agents are not responsible for undetermined effects.

Now if an event is *undetermined*, then it is just as true that the determinants of that event are not to be found within oneself as it would be if these determinants were to be found in the capricious acts of a demon, for if the determinants of one's act are not to be found, then, *a fortiori*, they are not to be found within *one*. If we are asking whether a certain event is a production of *mine*, then we must admit that there is no *philosophical* difference between this event's being undetermined by an external force, for each of these cases is quite simply a case of *interference* with my plans, desires, deliberations, and hopes. In the one case we have a causally explicable sort of interference. In both cases we have *some* sort of interference. (131)

An extended example: the freakish demon (131–135).

Reply: Van Inwagen responds by presenting 2 models of human action. He thinks that each model could be realized. And, on these models undetermined acts are possible. The first model is one in which acts are the product of *immanent, or agent, causation*. This type of causation supposedly allows for undetermined acts by denying that our acts are determined by prior *events* (see 136–137). The second model of human action is one in which our actions are caused by our beliefs and desires. Perhaps beliefs and desires can produce actions without determining them, just as a stone can break a window without determining that outcome (139–140). Further:

We can now see why the compatibilist’s move from ‘wire-shaped thing made of brain cells’ to ‘natural part’ was not so innocent as he alleged. A change in a natural part of one may well be identical with one’s coming to have a certain desire or with one’s acquiring a certain belief. But a change in something that is *not* a part of one — even if it is inside one’s head and made of brain cells — could not possibly be identical with either of these things. (141)

(iii) One does not have choice over an undetermined act, so it cannot be free.

Reply: Van Inwagen formalizes this argument on p. 147. Ironically, his formalization utilizes inference rule β , which van Inwagen used in his Third Argument for incompatibilism. So, van Inwagen is not going to reject β . Instead, he rejects premise 3.

More generally, I must reject the following proposition:

If an agent’s act was caused but not determined by his prior inner state, and if nothing besides that inner state was causally relevant to the agent’s act, then that agent had no choice about whether that inner state was followed by that act. (149)

Van Inwagen finds this commitment puzzling. But, he finds the compatibilist alternative inconceivable. He opts for the puzzling. (150)