

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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10/5/06
van Inwagen, Chapter 5, §5.1–5.5

5.1

- An incompatibilist is rationally obligated to reject free will or determinism (or both). In this section van Inwagen considers the consequences, both practical and logical, of rejecting free will.

5.2

- Van Inwagen claims that we all believe in free will, even those who appear to deny it.
 - Van Inwagen's case for this rests on his views about deliberation.

Before considering this case, what should we make of the following passage?

But all philosophers who have thought about deliberation agree on one point: one cannot deliberate about whether to perform a certain act unless one believes it is possible for one to perform it. (Anyone who doubts that this is indeed the case may find it instructive to imagine that he is in a room with two doors and that he believes one of the doors to be unlocked and the other to be locked and impassable, though he has no idea which is which; let him then attempt to imagine himself deliberating about which door to leave by.) (154)

Van Inwagen argues that deliberation is a type of behavior. This behavior manifests the agent's belief that it is possible for her to perform the distinct acts under deliberation. Is this correct?

Someone's trying to decide which of two books to buy manifests a belief with respect to each of these books that it is possible for him to buy *it* just as surely as would his holding it aloft and crying, "I can buy this book". (155)

- Van Inwagen claims that Holbach deliberated. So, he must not have believed what he said or else he had inconsistent beliefs.

But, why not just deny that Holbach deliberated in van Inwagen's loaded sense of 'deliberation'?

○ Also, is van Inwagen correct in claiming that a life absent deliberation is one of complete randomness and/or catatonic withdrawal?

○ Summary:

Anyone who rejects free will adopts a general theory about human beings that he contradicts with every deliberate word and act. (160)

5.3

● Van Inwagen endorses the "ought implies can" principle — moral responsibility requires free will (the ability to do otherwise).

○ But Frankfurt cases are used to deny that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise (PAP). Van Inwagen presents his own version of a Frankfurt case, involving Gunnar, Ridley, and Cosser.

5.4

● Frankfurt shifts from PAP to PPA:

PPA A person is morally responsible for failing to perform a given act only if he could have performed that act. (165)

Van Inwagen claims that there aren't Frankfurt-style counter-examples to PPA. He uses the example in which he fails to call the police to illustrate this.

Q: Why shift from PAP to PPA? What is the relevant difference between the two principles?

5.5

● We are also morally responsible for the consequences of our actions. These consequences are events or states of affairs. Van Inwagen offers two principles covering our moral responsibility for events. One applies to event *particulars* (PPP1) and the other to event *universals* (PPP2). In this section he discusses PPP1.

○ Van Inwagen claims that an event's causes are essential to it. But since the actual and counterfactual deaths in his Gunnar example have distinct

causes, then they are distinct deaths. So, such examples are not counter-examples to PPP1 (for, Gunnar could have prevented the actual death).