

## 12. Van Inwagen 1975, Incompatibilism about free will

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Can we have free will in a deterministic world?

**Compatibilists:** yes.

**Incompatibilists:** no. (They are incompatible.)

Van Inwagen is an incompatibilist.

We need to get more precise. 'Free will'? 'Determinism'?

**Free will.** When you take an action—say, stealing a pen—we can ask:

Were you *morally responsible* for doing it? I.e. would praise/admiration (if it was good) or blame/resentment (if it was bad) be warranted?

Were you *able to do otherwise*? I.e. was there something else you could've done?

Did you do it *of your own free will*?

These are conceptually distinct, although they may be connected.

Van Inwagen assumes that if you couldn't do otherwise, then the action was not done of your own free will.

### Determinism.

*Determinate Future:* For any possible future event  $E$ , there is currently a fact of the matter about whether  $E$  will or won't happen.

*Deterministic Laws:* For any possible future event  $E$ , the initial state of the universe combined with the scientific laws either imply that  $E$  will happen or imply that  $E$  will not happen.

*Predictable Future:* For any possible future event  $E$ , it's in principle possible to predict whether  $E$  will occur.

Coin flip. Even if random, it *was* true that it *was going to* land heads.

These are distinct. In particular, Deterministic Laws does not entail Predictable Future.

Imagine a light that scans your brain at time  $t$ . If (at  $t$ ) you predict the light will be on at  $t^+$ , it'll be off; if you don't predict it'll be on at  $t^+$ , it'll be on.  
→ Unpredictable, but deterministic.

In this course "Determinism" will generally mean *Deterministic Laws*.

Van Inwagen's argument:

**P1** If Determinism is true, then the initial conditions of the universe plus the scientific laws implied that I would steal the pen.

**P2** If Determinism is true and yet I could've done otherwise, then either I could've made the initial conditions different, or I could've made the laws different.

**P3** I couldn't have made the initial conditions different.

**P4** I couldn't have made the scientific laws different.

**C1** Therefore, if Determinism is true, I couldn't have done otherwise.

**C2** Therefore, I did not steal the pen of my own free will.

So *not* stealing implies the initial conditions or laws must've been different.

What you *can* and *will* do are the same.

P1 looks true by definition.

P2 seems to follow the logic of what I "could" do.

If you can  $X$ , and  $X$  implies  $Y$ , then you can  $Y$ .

P<sub>3</sub> and P<sub>4</sub> seem to follow from the fact that I can't control things that were determined before my birth.

Why think C<sub>2</sub> follows from C<sub>1</sub>? Try denying C<sub>2</sub> and affirming C<sub>1</sub>.

*Objection:* 'can' and 'able' are context-sensitive terms.

Is 'I'm able to (can) speak another language' true?

→ If we're wondering whether I should take German classes, yes!

→ If we're looking for directions in Berlin, no!

If we understand 'can X' as meaning 'rational to treat as a live option', then P<sub>2</sub> looks questionable.

If we understand 'can X' as meaning it's consistent with my physiology and psychology to X, then P<sub>3</sub> and P<sub>4</sub> are not obvious.

?? "He stole it of his own free will, but he couldn't have done otherwise."

Just like Stine said 'know' is.

Physiological possibility.

Rational to treat as a live option.

I could have the same physiology/psychology even if the initial conditions/laws were different.