

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 .

P₃ and P₄ seem to follow from the fact that I can't control things that were determined before my birth.

Why think C₂ follows from C₁? Try denying C₂ and affirming C₁.

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 P₂ looks questionable.

If we understand 'can X' as meaning it's consistent with my physiology and psychology to X, then P₃ and P₄ 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.