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## van Inwagen, AN ESSAY ON FREE WILL

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criticisms of Pannenberg will, to philosophers, perhaps seem to rest too often on slogans ("reason is not autonomous") and conflation of normative and psychological issues; but they nevertheless do manage to identify some very important issues at the interface of theology and philosophy, firmly linking Holwerda's essay with the rest of this volume.

*An Essay on Free Will*, by **Peter van Inwagen**. The Clarendon Press, 1983. Pp. vi, 248. \$29.95.

Reviewed by ROBERT AUDI, The University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

This book is a detailed and rigorous study of the relation between freedom and determinism. It provides a conception of what constitutes freedom, and it carefully characterizes determinism. It critically assesses fatalism, proceeds to develop and defend three arguments for incompatibilism (the view that freedom and determinism are incompatible), and then sets out and assesses three arguments for compatibilism. Next, van Inwagen considers what it would be like if determinism should be true and we did not have free will; and he concludes with a number of general points about the traditional problem of free will and determinism. In what follows I shall first briefly indicate some of his main theses and arguments and then comment on a few controversial points. The book offers many important conceptions, distinctions, arguments, and ideas. I shall thus have to be highly selective in describing its content and mainly suggestive in assessing its case for incompatibilism.

The first chapter introduces the main issues and provides useful definitions. For instance, determinism, the view that "the past *determines* a unique future," is distinguished from the Principle of Universal Causation, the claim that "every event (or fact, change, or state of affairs) has a cause (2-3); and soft determinism is distinguished clearly from compatibilism: it is determinism conjoined with compatibilism (and hence does not entail that there *is* free will—a point often missed in discussions of the issue). We are also given a sense of how freedom is to be conceived and of why one might regard it as incompatible with determinism.

Chapter II assesses some significant arguments for fatalism, which claims that no one is able to act otherwise than he in fact does. Here van Inwagen usefully distinguishes (as treatments of fatalism have not generally done) what is strongly inevitable, i.e., such that it would happen no matter what one did (25) from what is weakly inevitable, i.e., not strongly inevitable, but such that if one tried to prevent it one would take the wrong measures, and it is strongly inevitable

that one be ignorant of the right ones (25). The chapter also discusses the distinction between propositions and sentences and, in relation to that, the law of the excluded middle, which van Inwagen argues one need not deny in order to refute the case for fatalism.

In Chapter III, the arguments for incompatibilism are set out. Just one will be specified, but it should be a key to understanding the others: van Inwagen himself says that he might have called the chapter “One Argument for Incompatibilism Done Three Ways” (56). Let  $P_o$  be a proposition expressing the state of the world (roughly, all the truths about it) at an arbitrarily chosen time before the birth of J (our representative agent); let P be a proposition expressing the state of the world at T (a later time, in J’s life); and let L be the conjunction of the laws of nature. Now suppose that, at T, J did not raise his hand. Here is van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument to show that, if determinism is true, he could not have raised it (70):

- (1) If determinism is true, then the conjunction of  $P_o$  and L entails P
- (2) It is not possible that J have raised his hand at T and P be true
- (3) If (2) is true, then if J could have raised his hand at T, J could have rendered P false
- (4) If J could have rendered P false, and if the conjunction of  $P_o$  and L entails P, then J could have rendered the conjunction of  $P_o$  and L false
- (5) If J could have rendered the conjunction of  $P_o$  and L false, then J could have rendered L false
- (6) J could not have rendered L false [hence]
- (7) If determinism is true, J could not have raised his hand at T.

The argument cannot be fully understood without one further explanation. What is it to render a proposition false? Where  $s$  is a person,  $s$  can render a proposition,  $p$ , false if and only if “It is within  $s$ ’s power to arrange or modify the concrete objects that constitute his environment in some way such that it is not possible in the broadly logical sense that he arrange or modify those objects in that way and the past have been exactly as it in fact was and  $p$  be true” (68); roughly, he can so alter his environment that, if he does so, it follows that either the past was different from what it was or  $p$  is false. Now surely, if determinism is true, J could not have rendered it false that he did not raise his hand, unless he could have rendered either the laws of nature or  $P_o$ , which is a description of the past, false. And from here van Inwagen proceeds towards the incompatibilist conclusion, i.e., (7).

After arguing for incompatibilism, van Inwagen quite properly turns to arguments for compatibilism. He sets out and attacks the three he finds most current. One is the Paradigm Case Argument (used, e.g., by Flew), according to which,

roughly speaking, there must be free acts in order for us to teach the correct application of 'free act,' which we do, and our successfully doing so is compatible with the truth of determinism. The second is the conditionalization argument, which rests on analyzing ability to do otherwise in terms of what *s* would have done *if* certain things had been the case. Proponents claim that such conditionals are compatible with determinism, hence ability to do otherwise is, too. The third argument van Inwagen calls the *Mind* Argument because of its frequent appearance in that journal. It seems to rest on the idea that if *s*'s action is to be free it must be non-randomly rooted in his character in a way that shows that indeterminism undermines freedom and that determinism is compatible with it. Against the Paradigm Case Argument, van Inwagen argues that teaching the relevant terms does not entail there being free actions. He also argues that no conditional analysis proposed or likely to be proposed is correct; and, against the *Mind* argument, he contends that neither randomness nor anything else that undermines free action is presupposed by incompatibilism, which, he points out, can even countenance a version of the view that reasons explanations of free actions are "causal."

Regarding the last two chapters, I shall be very brief. The fifth argues in detail that "to reject free will is to condemn oneself to a life or perpetual logical inconsistency. Anyone who rejects free will adopts a general theory about human beings that he contradicts with every deliberate word and act" (160), since deliberating entails believing that one is free to choose between (or among) alternatives. This chapter also defends the thesis that "moral responsibility requires free will" (180), and in doing so subjects Harry Frankfurt's well-known attack on a version of this view to intensive and (I think) ingenious criticism. The stage is now set for Chapter VI: incompatibilism has been defended and moral responsibility argued to depend on free will. What, then, are we to say of determinism? In brief, van Inwagen says "that there are no good arguments for determinism, and that there are some rather good arguments against it" (190). He discusses scientific considerations, among others; and though he concludes that determinism is false, he grants that science could give us "compelling arguments for believing in determinism" (223). Only then would he become a compatibilist.

By way of evaluation, let me first speak very generally. This book is written with unusual clarity; it is forcefully argued; and it makes a significant original contribution to the case for incompatibilism. There are insights and subtleties throughout; the scholarship is careful; and the argumentation is informed by logical and semantical sophistication without being needlessly technical. Explicitness is sought at every crucial point; and the standards of clarity of formulation and soundness of reasoning are high and are applied as firmly to van Inwagen's own views as to those of the opposition. The free will problem would not be so

long-lived, however, if there were not points at which one may wonder whether the case is fully successful. Let me indicate one such point.

When van Inwagen speaks of rendering a proposition false, a natural reaction is to take 'render' to be, as usual, a causal term. But van Inwagen warns us not to take him to imply "that human beings can somehow enter into *causal* relations with propositions...to be able to render a proposition false is to be able to modify...one's environment—shoes, ships, bits of sealing wax—in a way sufficient for the falsity of that proposition" (67). On the other hand, often he speaks as if he did think it possible that one cause, or at least bring about, in some broadly causal way, the falsity of a proposition. For instance, he calls "the intuitive notion of being able to render a proposition false" that of "'having control' over the truth value of a proposition" (67); and he even introduces the notion of rendering a proposition false as "a way to describe our powers to act—and, by acting, to modify the world—as powers over the truth values of propositions" (66; cp. pp 63 and 74). Having power over the truth value of a proposition certainly sounds like being able to *change* its truth value, or, say, to *make* it false (or true).

To focus the issue, let us consider a true proposition which van Inwagen believes can be rendered false: that no one has ever read all of Hume's *Enquiry* aloud (66). Unlike the proposition that, say, magnets attract iron (66), this proposition one "*can render, or once could have rendered, false*" (66). Note, however, that van Inwagen distinguishes sentences from propositions and says he does not understand locutions like 'became true' and 'remained true' (35). If, as he plausibly suggests, 'That was once true' (applied, e.g., to 'It is no longer true that the number of committee members is odd') means something like 'If you had used those words on a certain earlier occasion, you would have said something true' (36), why should we not treat rendering false similarly? Thus, 'I could have rendered it false that no one has read the *Enquiry* aloud' would be taken to mean something like: I could have done something such that, had I done it, that sentence would have expressed a false proposition instead of a true one.

Nothing I have said presupposes that the notion of rendering a proposition false *must* be understood causally in at least some premises of the Consequence Argument if the argument is to be plausible. But it seems likely that points quite parallel to those I suggest would be warranted even by a plausible non-causal (or *prima facie* non-causal) interpretation that is suggested by some of what van Inwagen says: namely, that if *s* can render a proposition false by A-ing, then his A-ing could *explain* why it is false. On this view, a proposition, e.g. that no one has read the whole *Enquiry* aloud, can be such that its falsity is explained by what an agent does, though not caused by that. In any case, it is difficult to see why we should not at least take the notion of rendering a proposition false

to entail a *change in the truth value* of some proposition; and the causal interpretation is at least *suggested* by van Inwagen's treatment of 'ability to render false' as a way of talking about our powers over the truth values of propositions. (Can one have power over something one cannot (causally) *affect*?) If a causal reading of a number of parts of the text is as natural as it seems, then it is not surprising that premises (3) and (4) look inimical to compatibilism. It is difficult not to think of them as attributing to J causal power over propositions; and even if one extricates oneself from the causal flavor of 'render false,' one still tends to conceive ability to render a proposition false as an ability to do something such that one's doing it explains the falsity of that proposition. One surely tends to read it, moreover, as designating ability to do something such that, if one does it, it follows that the truth value of a proposition changes.

I have stressed the causal flavor that 'render false' often has in the text because I think that it is important to see how it can influence one's reading of the Consequence Argument. But it would be wrong to stop here. For van Inwagen not only disavows this reading, but gives us another. Suppose we stick to (what I find) the clearest reading of 'rendering false' that he gives us—roughly, doing something whose occurrence is sufficient for the falsity of the relevant proposition (67). This is a formulation he interprets by appeal to the notion of having control over the truth value of a proposition (67-68), but he does not disavow the formulation and it seems adequate to our purposes. If we use a neutral formulation like this, which seems appropriate in any event to help us avoid begging questions, then a compatibilist may say that one *can* render  $P_o$  false. For that is simply being able to do something such that if one does it,  $P_o$  *is* false. And why must determinism make that impossible?

The next step would be to question premise (5) along the following lines. Since ability to render a proposition about the past false, in the neutral sense of this phrase, does not entail ability to change the past (or even imply a change in the truth value of a proposition), we need not grant van Inwagen that if one can render the conjunction of  $P_o$  and L false, one can render L false. Consider his own example: regarding the conjunction of the propositions that the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1588, and that Peter van Inwagen never visits Alaska, he says: "If, for some reason, it is not within my power ever to visit Alaska, then I *cannot* render it (the conjunction) false. This is a quite trivial assertion, and the general principle of which it is an instance is hardly less trivial" (73). But while it is perhaps trivially true that he cannot *affect* the truth of the first conjunct, it is far from trivially true that he cannot do something such that his doing it is in some way sufficient for the falsity of that proposition. Surely the compatibilist might say that if van Inwagen had done something he did not do, say A, then, if determinism is true, the past would have been different, at least in the determinative chain leading to A. Is it not possible that this chain contained

actions, say, by illustrious ancestors of van Inwagen's, which would have caused the Armada to be delayed? *He* hasn't thereby affected the Armada; but the (or a) world in which he A-ed—a world systematically different from ours—contains some set of factors that did affect it and, in addition, was so connected with A that if he had A-ed, then that set of factors occurred and, presumably because of *it*, the Armada would not have been defeated in 1588. *One* way this possibility might be realized could be described as a case in which his A-ing and the delay of the Armada are both effects of the same cause(s). But it is not clear that the relevant possibility must involve causal concepts.

Neutrally conceived, rendering a proposition about the past false does not imply affecting the past; and if determinism is true, then if one can render *any* empirical proposition false—including one about the future—one can (a compatibilist might say) render propositions about the past false, in the sense that one can do something such that if one were to do it the past would have been different: under determinism, it would be impossible to have the same past and a different future. However obvious it is, then, that one could not have done something that would change the past or causally render a proposition about it false, it would seem to beg the question against compatibilism to assume that one could not have done something such that if one did do it, the past would have been different from what it was. (I do not say van Inwagen does simply assume this; but I also do not see where he has a cogent argument for it.)

It may help to consider a related point about what determinism allows. Whatever necessity the laws of nature impose on events is of this sort: they require that *if* the state of the world at one time is, say  $P_o$ , then at another time it will be precisely, say,  $P$ . But they do not *categorically* require the occurrence of either state, nor does determinism. As far as determinism is concerned, there are worlds where the laws of nature hold which have different events from those in this world; and to say that *s* could have done otherwise is (on one compatibilist view) to say that at least one of those in which he does do otherwise is accessible to *s*. Accessibility in the relevant sense will be a controversial notion, but the intuitive idea it expresses would be the absence of any bar (such as logical or causal impossibility) to the world in question having been actual. It is not obvious why such accessibility requires *s*'s being able to render any true proposition false in a sense fatal to compatibilism. But of course if determinism is true, then a world with our laws in which one did do otherwise would presumably differ from ours for each moment of time, e.g. in the cause(s) of *s*'s act, the cause(s) of that, and so on.

Considerations of the sorts I have raised about the Consequence Argument can be applied, I think, to the other two arguments van Inwagen presents to support incompatibilism; in any case, I do not have space to discuss those. Nor can I pursue van Inwagen's critique of the three arguments for compatibilism

he considers. Indeed, I believe he is mainly correct in his criticisms of them and does a real service in exposing their weaknesses. I am not sure, however, that he considers all the important arguments to which compatibilists may appeal. At some points he seems to take the major versions of compatibilism to be committed to the view that 's could have done otherwise' may be conditionally analyzed (see, e.g., 114 and, especially, 124, where he speaks of "the compatibilist" as being in deep trouble if a certain conditional analysis fails). But he is aware that a compatibilist *need* not give a conditional analysis of this notion (236-37).

If compatibilists need not give a conditional analysis of 'could have done otherwise,' they might defend their view along the following lines. They might first give a non-conditional account of 'could have done otherwise' in the sense relevant to questions of moral responsibility. They might then argue that such an account is consistent with determinism. It is of course not easy to provide even a roughly correct account of 'could have done otherwise.' But one would not have to be right in every detail to have some basis for defending compatibilism. There is, furthermore, more than one kind of account to which compatibilists may appeal. Accessibility accounts have been mentioned; a compatibilist might also argue that *s* could have done otherwise, in the relevant sense, provided *s* was not, in a certain way, compelled to act. Moreover, though compatibilists have often given causal analyses of intentional action or conceived such actions as explainable by subsumption under laws of nature, they need not do so and may give causal or non-causal accounts of ability to do otherwise (for at least this reason they are not necessarily open to the objection that they must conceive divine agency as subject to the laws of nature).

Indeed, it is not altogether clear that compatibilists must provide any more than a good indication of the sorts of *criteria* appropriate for applying the key concepts. Consider van Inwagen's rule B, to which he rightly ascribes great significance. Letting 'Np' stand for 'p and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p,' it is to the effect that if  $N(p \supset q)$ , and  $Np$ , then  $Nq$ . Where *p* is about events before there were people on the earth,  $Np$  is doubtless true—at least if, naturally enough, we think of having a choice about whether something is so as entailing some kind of causal power over it. And if, by the laws of nature, *p* implies *q*, then if we conceive N on the model of logical (or nomic) necessity, the rule is highly plausible. I suspect that any compatibilist who does not feel a challenge here is simply shallow. Nevertheless, suppose we ask how, where moral responsibility is at stake, one appropriately decides whether *s* had a choice about, say, disclosing information which he has promised to keep confidential. Does properly deciding presuppose either determinism or indeterminism? It is arguable that what is crucial is whether *s* was compelled to disclose it. We will want to know, for instance, what *s* thought would be the bad conse-

quences for him if he withheld the information? It might also be relevant to ask what morally upright people are expected to do or have done when in similar circumstances. Must such an inquiry at least tacitly presuppose indeterminism? Compatibilists are likely to argue that here the relevant sense of 'have no choice about' is different from that applicable to events prior to people's appearance on earth, and that this weakens the apparent analogy between rule B and its logical counterparts. Certainly van Inwagen could argue forcefully against this line; his book contains some of the resources for doing so. His case against compatibilism could have been even stronger if he had explicitly brought them to bear here.

With van Inwagen's chapter on what it would mean for us not to have free will and with his points, in the final chapter, about determinism, I am largely in agreement. He argues plausibly that it is inconsistent for someone who deliberates (as every remotely normal person does) to hold that we do not have free will, e.g. because of the truth of hard determinism (determinism conjoined with incompatibilism). His discussion of how scientific progress might bear on the credibility of determinism is also valuable. If he does not establish incompatibilism, his book comes at least as close to doing so as any I know. Compatibilists must try to reckon with it; incompatibilists must master its arguments; and serious students of the free will problem, whatever their position on the issues, must welcome it.\*

\*For helpful comments on an earlier version of this review I am grateful to William P. Alston, Larry Hohm, Terance Horgan, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Michael Zimmerman.

*Evil and a Good God*, by **Bruce R. Reichenbach**. New York: Fordham University Press, 1982. Pp. ix and 198. \$9.00.

Reviewed by CLEMENT DORE, Vanderbilt University.

Chapters 1, 2 and 4 of Professor Reichenbach's book, which, with Chapter 5, contain Reichenbach's critique of the atheistic argument from evil, are best considered as a clear and helpful (though overly repetitive) introduction to recent literature on the problem of evil by, e.g., Plantinga, Rowe and Adams.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I shall discuss some problems which are raised by Chapters 2, 4 and 5.

Much of Reichenbach's Chapter 2, which is on the inductive form of the argument from evil, is summarized by Reichenbach as follows: "the atheologian's argument claims that instances of suffering which are seemingly or apparently pointless are in fact or likely pointless, for we do not know of any higher good to which they are a means. But this constitutes an appeal to ignorance; that we