Introduction to Philosophy (PHIL104)

Handout 1
Freedom: van Inwagen

FREE CHOICE. Van Inwagen begins with the idea of time conceived by analogy to the garden of forking paths (branching time). We imagine that time splits into branches, so that the (actual) present only sits on one of the branches.

Definition 1. One *has free will* if sometimes more than one possible future is 'open' to one. One *lacks free will* if on every occasion of decision only one possible future is 'open' to one.

Example 2. A prisoner, though able to contemplate different courses of action, has no free will: he has only one possible future (staying in prison).

Free choice is important for morality. This is shown by a series of implications. Here is their abbreviated form:

> [The judgement that you shouldn't have done X] $\Rightarrow$ [you were able to do something else] $\Rightarrow$ [you have free will].

DETERMINISM. We now move on to examine the relationship between free will and determinism.

Definition 3. The universe is *deterministic* if and only if only one continuation of the state of things at a given moment is consistent with the laws of nature.

Of course the universe could *appear* to us not deterministic even if in reality it is. We think we have a choice of what to do (more than one future is open to us), but, unbeknownst to us, events in our biography and facts of our environment conspire to determine just one possible outcome.

CLASSICAL COMPATIBILISM. We are coming to a major philosophical junction. It seems to every unprejudiced eye that free will is incompatible with determinism. But many philosophers (St Augustine, Hobbes, Hume) were *compatibilists* claiming that determinism is in fact compatible with free will.

Quotation 1

We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it.

It does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions; and He who foreknew all the causes of things would certainly among those causes not have been ignorant of our wills. (Augustine, *The City of God* V.9)

Quotation 2

Liberty, or freedom, signifieth properly the absence of opposition (by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion); and may be applied no less to irrational and inanimate creatures than to rational. For whatsoever is so tied, or environed, as it cannot move but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some external body, we say it hath not liberty to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained with walls or chains; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks or vessels that otherwise would spread itself into a larger space; we use to say they are not at liberty to move in such manner as without those external impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion is in the constitution of the thing itself, we use not to say it wants the liberty, but the power, to move; as when a stone lieth still, or a man is fastened to his bed by sickness.

And according to this proper and generally received meaning of the word, a freeman is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to.

Liberty and necessity are consistent: as in the water that hath not only liberty, but a necessity of descending by the channel; so, likewise in the actions which men voluntarily do, which, because they proceed their will, proceed from liberty, and yet because every act of man's will and every desire and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that from another cause, in a continual chain (whose first link is in the hand of God, the first of all causes), proceed from necessity. (Hobbes, *Leviathan* XXI)

Quotation 3

The intention of the law is not to grieve the delinquent for that which is past and not to be undone, but to make him and others just that else would not be so; and respects not the evil act past but the good to come, insomuch as without this good intention of the future, no past act of a delinquent could justify his killing in the sight of God. (Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity* §14)

Quotation 4

The nature of sin consists in this, that the action done proceed from our will and be against the law. A judge in judging whether it be sin or not, which is done against the law, looks at no higher cause of the action than the will of the doer. Now when I say the action was necessary, I do not say it was done against the will of the doer, but with his will, and so necessarily, because man's will, and every volition or act of the will and purpose of man, had a sufficient and therefore a necessary cause; and consequently every voluntary action was necessitated. An action therefore may be voluntary and a sin and nevertheless be necessary; and because God may afflict by a right derived from his omnipotence, though sin were not, and that the example of punishment on voluntary sinners is the cause that produces justice and makes sin less frequent, for God to punish such sinners, as I have said before, is no injustice. (Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity* §17)

MODERN RENDERING. We distinguish between the futures that are open to us, the futures that are physically possible, and the futures that are internally physically possible.

Definition 4. The future is internally physically possible iff this future, when taken in isolation, does not violate the laws of nature.

Definition 5. The future is physically possible iff it is internally physically possible and can be connected to the present without violating the laws of nature.

Determinism claims that there is only one physically possible future, but it does not have to deny that there is more than one internally physically possible future.

Definition 6. The future is open to the agent X iff were X actually to choose that future, it would have come to pass.

It follows that, even according to determinism, there is more than one internally possible future open to an agent.

Example 7. It is open to me to leave the room. It is, however, not open to me to climb the walls like a Spider-Man. Hence, I can say that I am freely choosing to stay in the room (but not that I am freely choosing not to climb the walls).

As shown already in the Quotation 3, compatibilists claim that the purpose of law is to modify people's choices and their behaviour. Such purpose can only be served on the assumption of multiple open futures. And, compatibilists argue, the fact that a choice could not actually occur would not detract from the usefulness of assigning responsibility and subsequent punishment.

But the following question should be asked: in what way, and how, can one's behaviour be modified if determinism is true? And in what way can one then be responsible for one's behaviour? Van Inwagen refines and develops this concern.

UNTOUCHABLE STATES. There are states of affairs I can or could (presumably) bring about or change in some way. Other states of affairs I cannot and could not. Call the first kind 'untouchable' states. The rest are 'touchable'.

Example 8. The states [2 + 2 = 4] and [Julius Caesar was assassinated] are untouchable. [I win the New Year lottery] and [I am appointed Apple CEO] are touchable.

Question 9. Explain why the last two states are touchable.

Now we can also endorse the following principle:

Untouchability closure. If P is untouchable, and $P \to Q$ is untouchable, then Q is untouchable.

Example 10. Suppose it is untouchable that Caesar was murdered long before I was born. And suppose it is untouchable that, if Caesar was murdered long before I was born, then I have never seen Caesar. Then it is also untouchable that I have never seen Caesar.

Question 11. Explain why the conditional of the Example 10 is untouchable.