

Questions on Peter van Inwagen, 'Fatalism'

PHIL 1480 Metaphysics

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1. Expose the sophistry in the arguments on p. 28.
2. Is it true that 'anyone who accepts fatalism must regard all ascriptions of moral responsibility as incorrect, and must, on pain of self-contradiction, refrain from deliberating about future courses of action' (p. 30)? And is it really 'incoherent to suppose that any thesis could be true that has the consequence of rendering conceptually defective sentences so utterly *basic* to human life as the sentences about blame and deliberation mentioned above' (p. 30)?
3. 'It is thus uncontroversial that there are propositions' (p. 31) Never mind whether it is or not—ought it be, in the light of the remarks in the preceding paragraph?
4. How successful is van Inwagen's argument for the claim—denied by most A-theorists—that if I say 'I am tired' on two different occasions, I express two different propositions? How would it affect van Inwagen's argument if we followed A-theorists in allowing that some propositions can change in truth-value?
5. Is 'The number twelve is even in Tibet' really meaningless, or is it just so obviously true that it would be pointless to assert? How does this bear on '*x* is true at *t*'?
6. Suppose no propositions are expressed prior to 10,000,000 B.C. What should we say, if we follow van Inwagen's usage, about the question whether the proposition that no propositions are expressed prior to 10,000,000 B.C. was true at times before 10,000,000 B.C.? Is this a problem for van Inwagen, or for his opponents?
7. On the first half of p. 40, van Inwagen is rejecting a certain fallacious argument from the premise that 'someone said yesterday (Thursday) that I should shave on Sturday morning, and that what he said on Thursday is true' to the conclusion that I can't not shave on Saturday. What would be a superficially somewhat plausible statement of this argument?
8. Does Aristotle give this bad argument? If not, how does he actually argue, and what his attitude to the bad argument?