Against The *Mind* Argument

The *Mind* Argument is an argument for the incompatibility of indeterminism and anyone's having a choice about anything that happens. Peter van Inwagen rejects the *Mind* Argument not because he is able to point out the flaw in it, but because he accepts both that determinism is incompatible with anyone's having a choice about anything that happens and that it is possible for someone to have a choice about something that happens. In this paper I first diagnose and clear up a confusion in recent discussions of the *Mind* Argument and then go on to show why it is a bad argument.

Peter van Inwagen has offered an argument—the Consequence Argument—for the claim that if determinism is true, no one has, or ever had, a choice about anything that happens. He has also offered an argument—the *Mind* Argument—for the claim that if determinism is false, no one has, or ever had, a choice about anything that happens. As van Inwagen is someone who holds that there are some things that happen that people sometimes do have a choice about, he is in a bit of a pickle. Of his two arguments, he is more sure of the Consequence Argument and so he has unhappily concluded that, though he cannot discern the problem with it, the *Mind* Argument is unsound. In this paper, I will try to point out what, in particular, is wrong with the *Mind* Argument. First, I will present both the Consequence Argument and the *Mind* Argument, and describe the back and forth of a recent discussion of their interrelation. Then, I will show how this discussion has been plagued by a confusion due to van Inwagen's original presentation of the *Mind* Argument. Finally, after exposing and clearing up this confusion, I will explain why the *Mind* Argument is a bad argument.

1. The Consequence Argument and the *Mind* Argument

The Consequence Argument employs the following two rules of inference:

α: $\Box p \vdash \mathrm{N}p$
β: $\mathrm{N}p, \mathrm{N}(p \supset q) \vdash \mathrm{N}q$

where '$\supset$' is the material conditional, '$\Box p$' is understood as 'it is metaphysically necessary that *p*', and 'N' is an operator defined as follows:

> For any sentence *p*, the result of prefixing *p* with 'N' may be regarded as an abbreviation for the result of flanking 'and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether' with occurrences of *p*. (van Inwagen 1983, 93)

Van Inwagen understands this "has a choice about whether" locution as follows: to have a choice about whether *p* is to be such that one can do something such that were one to do it, it would be the case that ~*p*. Thus, 'N*p*', as van Inwagen understands it, also means '*p* and no one can do, or ever could have done, something such that were she to do it, or had she done it, it would be, or would have been, the case that ~*p*'.[1] Henceforth, this is how I shall understand both 'N*p*' and '*p* and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *p*'. The Consequence Argument proceeds as follows (where P = the total description of the world at the beginning of time,[2] L = the conjunction of all the laws of nature, and Q = any proposition describing the state of the world at any time after the initial state):

1.	$\Box((P \& L) \supset Q)$	Follows from the assumption of determinism
2.	$\Box(P \supset (L \supset Q))$	1 Logic
3.	$N(P \supset (L \supset Q))$	2 α
4.	N(P)	Premise
5.	$N(L \supset Q)$	3,4 β
6.	N(L)	Premise
7.	N(Q)	5,6 β

If premises 4 and 6 are true and α and β are valid, then the argument soundly establishes that if determinism is true, no one has a choice about anything that happens.

Van Inwagen sums up the *Mind* Argument—so dubbed by him because "it has appeared so often in the pages of that journal" (van Inwagen 1983, 16)[3]—as follows: "a free act is an act one has a choice about; but no one has any choice about that which is undetermined" (van Inwagen 1983, 142). The argument begins with the following story:

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[1] Though van Inwagen does not explicitly state that this is how he understands the "has a choice about whether" locution in *An Essay on Free Will*, it is clear from the fact that he accepts McKay and Johnson's counterexample to β in their paper "A Reconsideration of an Argument Against Compatibilism" (1996)—a counterexample that presupposes this interpretation of that locution—that he understands it in this way. Van Inwagen explicitly accepts this counterexample in his paper "Free Will Remains a Mystery" (2000).

[2] The Consequence Argument doesn't really require that there be a first moment of time. All that is required is that there be a time prior to the existence of the first person. For ease of exposition, however, I assume that there is a first moment in time. Nothing of importance in this paper hangs upon this assumption.

[3] The papers in question being Hobart (1934), Nowell-Smith (1948), and Smart (1961). Van Inwagen also notes that the arguments he considers in connection with the *Mind* Argument also appear in Nowell-Smith (1957) and Ayer (1954). In this paper I address only the *Mind* Argument as van Inwagen presents it. I will address neither the arguments in these other papers nor the question whether van Inwagen's *Mind* Argument is an accurate recapitulation of an argument that appears in any, let alone all, of them.

> Let us consider the case of a hardened thief who, as our story begins, is in the act of lifting the lid of the poor-box in a little country church. He sneers and curses when he sees what a pathetically small sum it contains. Still, business is business: he reaches for the money. Suddenly there flashes before his mind's eye a picture of the face of his dying mother and he remembers the promise he made to her by her deathbed always to be honest and upright. This is not the first occasion on which he has had such a vision while performing some mean act of theft, but he has always disregarded it. This time, however, he does *not* disregard it. Instead, he thinks the matter over carefully and decides not to take the money. Acting on this decision, he leaves the church empty-handed. (van Inwagen 1983, 127-8)

For the purposes of the *Mind* Argument, van Inwagen adopts a Davidsonian account of action according to which an event counts as an action just in case it is caused in the right way by an agent's desires and beliefs.[4] Thus, the thief's "refraining from robbing the poor-box (R) was caused but not necessitated by his desire to keep the promise he made to his dying mother coupled with his belief that the best way to do this would be to refrain from robbing the poor-box (DB). Let us suppose that the [Davidsonian] model is correct: R was caused by DB and DB did not *have* to cause R; it just *did*." (van Inwagen 1983, 140-1)[5]

Let DB = at $t_{\otimes}$ the thief has both a desire to keep the promise he made to his dying mother and a belief that the best way to do this would be to refrain from robbing the poor-box, and let R = at $t_{\oplus}$ the thief refrains from robbing the poor-box. Because it is undetermined whether the thief's refraining from taking the money follows the particular desire and belief of his that in fact cause it, van Inwagen claims both that the thief does not have, and never had, any choice about whether his refraining follows his having that desire and belief and that, on account of this, N(DB ⊃ R) is true. As whether he has that particular desire-belief pair is not something about which the thief has, or ever had, a choice, N(DB) is also true. These two premises, along with β, yield the following argument for the claim that the thief has no choice, and never had a choice, about whether he refrains from taking the money:

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[4] This account is sketched in "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" (Davidson 1963).

[5] One interesting difference between the Consequence Argument and the *Mind* Argument is that, because it presupposes a Davidsonian account of action, the *Mind* Argument, unlike the Consequence Argument, is inconsistent with (most) agent-causal theories of action. According to (most) agent-causal theories of action, actions are not caused by mental events, such as desires and beliefs, but, rather, by substances, in particular, agents. I say "most" agent-causal theories of action, because at least one, that floated by Clarke (2003), has it that for an event to be an action it must be caused both by an agent and by mental events. Unlike the *Mind* Argument, the Consequence Argument is neutral as between agent-causal and event-causal theories of action. I thank an anonymous referee for suggesting that I point out this potentially significant difference between the Consequence Argument and the *Mind* Argument.

(1†) N(DB) Premise
(2†) N(DB ⊃ R) Premise
(3†) N(R) 1†,2† β

As a similar argument could be run for any indeterministic choice, if this argument is sound, it follows that if determinism is false, no one has, or ever had, a choice about anything that happens.

As he cannot reject β without abandoning the Consequence Argument, van Inwagen notes that he must reject (2†). He says:

> I must reject the following proposition:
>
> > If an agent's act was caused but not determined by his prior inner state, and if nothing besides that inner state was causally relevant to that agent's act, then that agent had no choice about whether that inner state was followed by that act.
>
> I must admit that I find it puzzling that this proposition should be false. (van Inwagen 1983, 149)

So, for van Inwagen, the only way out of the conundrum is to deny that N(DB ⊃ R) is true even though he is mystified as to how it could be false.

In presenting the *Mind* Argument as employing β, van Inwagen raises the stakes for the Libertarian proponent of the Consequence Argument, i.e., the proponent of the Consequence Argument who holds that there are some things that happen that people do sometimes have a choice about. The Libertarian proponent of the Consequence Argument must endorse β and so cannot respond to the *Mind* Argument by rejecting β. This leaves her in the awkward position of having to reject one of the *Mind* Argument's premises and the only one it seems she can reject is (2†). But if she rejects (2†), she must explain how that premise could be false.

2. A Counterexample to β

Thomas McKay and David Johnson (1996) have established that β is invalid. First they show that α and β together entail the following rule of inference:

γ: N*p*, N*q* ├ N(*p* & *q*)[6]

[6] Here is the derivation:

1. N*p* Premise
2. N*q* Premise
3. □(*p* ⊃ (*q* ⊃ (*p* & *q*))) Logical Truth
4. N(*p* ⊃ (*q* ⊃ (*p* & *q*))) 3 α

They then offer the following counterexample to γ. Suppose that a person does not toss a coin, but could have. Both N(the coin does not land heads) and N(the coin does not land tails) are true, but, as she could have tossed the coin, she did have a choice about whether (either the coin lands heads or the coin lands tails), and so N(the coin does not land heads & the coin does not land tails) is false. So γ is invalid. As α is unquestionably valid, conclude McKay and Johnson, β must be invalid.[7]

3. Finch and Warfield's Improved Consequence Argument

Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield (1998) accept McKay and Johnson's argument. They go on, however, to offer an Improved Consequence Argument that relies neither on α nor on β, but on:

β*: N*p*, □(*p* ⊃ *q*) ⊦ N*q*

Here is their Improved Consequence Argument:

(1*)	□((P & L) ⊃ Q)	Follows from the assumption of determinism
(2*)	N(P & L)	Premise
(3*)	N(Q)	1*,2* β*[8]

If, as Finch and Warfield claim, the reasons for accepting the two premises of the original Consequence Argument equally well support the premise of the Improved Consequence Argument and β* is valid, the friend of the Consequence Argument needn't dismay at the invalidity of β. The Improved Consequence Argument establishes the incompatibility of determinism and anyone's having a choice about anything that happens without relying on the troublesome β. What's more, an important side benefit of the Improved Consequence Argument is that it does not employ a rule of inference that licenses the transition in the *Mind* Argument licensed by β. The only way to derive the conclusion of the *Mind* Argument from the premise N(DB) via β* would be to add the premise □(DB ⊃ R). But □(DB ⊃ R) is clearly false in the

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5. N(*q* ⊃ (*p* & *q*)) 1,4 β
6. N(*p* & *q*) 2,5 β

[7] Widerker (1987) and Huemer (2000) each avoid a discussion of γ and instead simply present counterexamples directly to β; that is, they each present situations in which it is intuitively clear that N*p* and N(*p* ⊃ *q*) are both true but N*q* is false.

[8] Widerker (1987) also suggests that an argument structurally similar to Finch and Warfield's Improved Consequence Argument, employing β*, is a better argument for the incompatibility of determinism and anyone's having a choice about anything that happens than is van Inwagen's original Consequence Argument.

thief scenario. Thus, an Improved *Mind* Argument does not seem to be in the offing. Finch and Warfield conclude:

> It appears, then, that libertarians can avoid the charge that free will is incompatible with indeterminism by denying the soundness of the *Mind* argument. Libertarians can do this without abandoning the powerful Consequence style argument leading to the conclusion that free will and determinism are incompatible because libertarians can appeal to the improved Consequence argument [with β*] in arguing for this incompatibility. Because [β*] cannot be used to revive the discredited *Mind* argument this maneuver seems to place the libertarian on much stronger footing than did van Inwagen's more tentative reaction to the *Mind* argument. (Finch and Warfield, 522-3)

If Finch and Warfield have it right, Libertarians can have their cake and eat it too. They can accept the Improved Consequence Argument without having to worry about the *Mind* Argument. And as it does not seem that β* can be used to resuscitate the *Mind* Argument, the Libertarian proponent of the Improved Consequence Argument can rest easy.

4. Nelkin's Reply to Finch and Warfield

In response to Finch and Warfield, Dana Nelkin (2001) has argued that β* just as much allows an Improved *Mind* Argument as it does an Improved Consequence Argument.[9] Here is her Improved *Mind* Argument:

(1#)	$\Box((DB \,\&\, (DB \supset R)) \supset R)$	Logical Truth
(2#)	$N(DB \,\&\, (DB \supset R))$	Premise
(3#)	$N(R)$	1#,2# β*

Nelkin asserts that if one accepts that N(DB) and N(DB ⊃ R) are true, one can have no reason to doubt N(DB & (DB ⊃ R)) that would not equally well be a reason to doubt the crucial premise of Finch and Warfield's Improved Consequence Argument—namely, N(P & L). The Libertarian proponent of the Improved Consequence Argument, then, is in just as much trouble as is the Libertarian proponent of the Consequence Argument: he is committed, via his acceptance of the Improved Consequence Argument, to a rule of inference, β*, that allows for an Improved *Mind* Argument. As he cannot reject β*, he must reject the Improved *Mind* Argument's premise. And,

[9] Nelkin does not endorse the Improved Consequence Argument. Her purpose is merely to show that dropping the Consequence Argument in favor of the Improved Consequence Argument does not get around the challenge of the *Mind* Argument. This is because, she argues, her Improved *Mind* Argument poses just as much a problem for the proponent of the Improved Consequence Argument as the *Mind* Argument poses for the proponent of the Consequence Argument.

once again, he must give a rationale for this rejection, one that, if van Inwagen is right, it would seem very hard to give.

5. A Confusion In the Discussion of the *Mind* Argument

This whole discussion of the *Mind* Argument is confused. All of the participants take it that the claim that no one has a choice about whether R follows DB is the claim N(DB ⊃ R). Recall that what van Inwagen thinks he must reject in rejecting N(DB ⊃ R) is:

> If an agent's act was caused but not determined by his prior inner state, and if nothing besides that inner state was causally relevant to that agent's act, then that agent had no choice about whether that inner state was *followed* by that act. (van Inwagen 1983, 149, my emphasis)

Here is Finch and Warfield:

> Once DB occurs, given indeterminism, perhaps R will follow and perhaps it will not but since once DB occurs everything relevant to R's occurrence has taken place it seems clear that no one has a choice about R's *following* DB. That is, it appears to follow that
> N(DB ⊃ R). (Finch and Warfield, 518, my emphasis)

And here is Nelkin:

> Now, since R is an indeterministic consequence of DB, it seems that no one has a choice about whether or not R *follows* DB. That is,
> N(DB ⊃ R). (Nelkin, 109, my emphasis)

N(DB ⊃ R), however, is *not* the claim that no one has a choice about whether R follows DB. First, a small problem. Recall that van Inwagen defines 'N*p*' as '*p* and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *p*'. *If* (DB ⊃ R) were the claim that R follows DB, then N(DB ⊃ R) would not be the claim merely that no one has a choice about whether R follows DB; rather, it would be the conjunction:

> (&) *R follows DB and* no one has, *or ever had*, a choice about whether R follows DB.

This is not such a big problem, however, because given what they have written, van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin would all agree that this conjunction is true in the thief scenario, and so, I am sure, they would gladly interpret N(DB ⊃ R) as a symbolization of (&) instead of the claim merely that no one has a choice about whether R follows DB. The big problem, however, is that (&) is not correctly symbolized as N(DB ⊃ R). Given that 'N*p*' is defined as an abbreviation for the result of flanking ‘and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether’ with occurrences of *p*, if (&) is to be correctly symbolized using the ‘N’ operator, it must be symbolized as N(R follows DB). That being the case, N(DB ⊃ R) is a correct symbolization of (&) only if N(DB ⊃ R) is equivalent to N(R follows DB). And that’s true only if the claim that R follows DB is equivalent to (DB ⊃ R). But the claim that R follows DB is *not* equivalent to the material conditional (DB ⊃ R). And so, (&) is not correctly symbolized as N(DB ⊃ R). Why is the claim that R follows DB not equivalent to the material conditional (DB ⊃ R)? Though the claim that R follows DB entails (DB ⊃ R), it is much stronger than (DB ⊃ R); it entails both DB and R, neither of which is entailed by (DB ⊃ R). To say that R follows DB is to say that R occurs after DB.[10] The claim that R follows DB, then, is ((DB & F) & R), where F = $t_{\oplus}$ is later than $t_{\otimes}$.[11] And so the correct symbolization of (&) is N((DB & F) & R).

Now, if (&), i.e., N((DB & F) & R), were a premise of the *Mind* Argument, then that argument wouldn’t need to employ β. It could go through with the following rule of inference

δ: N(*p* & *q*) ⊢ N*q*

in just one step:

(1′)	N((DB & F) & R)	Premise
(2′)	N(R)	1′ δ[12]

δ, what’s more, is weaker than α and β together; δ is entailed by α and β together, but entails neither of them (alone, or in conjunction with the other).[13] So, *if* (&) is a premise of the *Mind* Argument, then β is not essential to that argument at all.[14]

But this really can’t be the argument that van Inwagen had in mind when he initially presented the *Mind* Argument. For to be justified in accepting N((DB & F) & R) one would have to be antecedently justified in accepting the conclusion of the argument, namely, N(R).

[10] It certainly isn’t to say that R follows logically from DB or that R follows logically from DB and the laws of nature because, by stipulation, in the thief scenario R is only an indeterministic causal consequence of DB.
[11] Recall that in the thief scenario at $t_{\otimes}$ the thief has both a desire to keep the promise he made to his dying mother and a belief that the best way to do this would be to refrain from robbing the poor-box and at $t_{\oplus}$ he refrains from robbing the poor box.
[12] Note that if this is the argument, then the independent premise N(DB) is unnecessary.
[13] δ is also weaker than β*.
[14] If the claim that R follows DB and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R follows DB, i.e., (&), were symbolizable as [N(DB ⊃ R) & F] instead of N((DB & F) & R), as was suggested by an anonymous referee, then the *Mind* Argument would not go through simply with δ and might still need β. But [N(DB ⊃ R) & F] is not an adequate symbolization of (&), for (&) entails both DB and R, neither of which is entailed by [N(DB ⊃ R) & F].

Therefore, if the *Mind* Argument really took (&) as a premise, it would be blatantly question-begging. And so, though the correct symbolization of (&) with the 'N' operator is N((DB & F) & R), that can't really be a premise of the *Mind* Argument as van Inwagen originally intended it.[15]

Why this intense scrutiny of the presentation of the second premise of the *Mind* Argument? Sure, you might think, van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all carelessly trade back and forth between talk of R's following DB and the material conditional, (DB ⊃ R), but that needn't be a problem for the *Mind* Argument. Why, you might ask, couldn't van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all have just dispensed with talk of R's following DB and presented the *Mind* Argument exclusively in terms of the material conditional? Here's why. The *Mind* Argument's premises are offered as intuitively obvious. No arguments are offered in their support. The thief scenario is presented and it is simply asserted that it is obvious from the situation presented that the two premises are true. Given that this is how the premises are supported, it makes all the difference in the world what we take the ordinary language formulation of those premises to be because it is only in their ordinary language formulations that we can at all claim them to be intuitively obvious. The first premise, N(DB) is not a problem here; that the thief has the desires and beliefs that he has and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether he has those desires and beliefs is something that it is plausible to suppose is intuitively obvious given the setup of the case. The second premise, N(DB ⊃ R), however, is another story altogether. The material conditional is not a bit of ordinary language; it is a notoriously slippery truth-functional connective routinely confused with and for inequivalent expressions in ordinary language. Because of this, we need an intuitive gloss of the second premise; simply asserting that N(DB ⊃ R) is intuitively obvious in the thief scenario just won't do.

[15] A similar line of reasoning to that presented in the past three paragraphs could be given in response to the suggestion that what van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all mean for the second premise of the *Mind* Argument to be is

(^) R is caused by DB and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R is caused by DB.

The symbolization of (^) with the 'N' operator would have to be N(R is caused by DB), and as the claim that R is caused by DB entails R and DB, neither of which is entailed by (DB ⊃ R), N(R is caused by DB) is certainly not correctly symbolized as N(DB ⊃ R). And so (^) is not correctly symbolized as N(DB ⊃ R). The correct symbolization of (^) is N((DB & C) & R) where C = the thief's desire and belief cause his refraining from robbing the poor-box. But, if N((DB & C) & R) were the second premise of the *Mind* Argument, then, just as with N((DB & F) & R), the *Mind* Argument wouldn't need to employ β because it could go through just with δ. However, again like in the case of N((DB & F) & R), N((DB & C) & R) can't really be a premise of the *Mind* Argument as van Inwagen originally intended it because to be justified in accepting N((DB & C) & R) one would have to be antecedently justified in accepting N(R), in which case the *Mind* Argument would be blatantly question-begging.

It is true that the material conditional, (DB ⊃ R), is equivalent to the disjunction, (~DB v R), but it isn't credible that so articulated, the second premise of the *Mind* Argument is at all intuitively obvious. Treated explicitly as a disjunction, N(DB ⊃ R) would be the claim that in the thief scenario it is the case that either the thief does not have the particular desires and beliefs that he does have or (inclusively understood) he refrains from robbing the poor-box and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether either he does not have those desires and beliefs or (again, inclusively understood) he does refrain from robbing the poor-box. It would strain credulity to assert that *that* is intuitively obvious merely from the description of the thief scenario. It also certainly wouldn't do to claim that it is obvious that no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether either the thief does not have the desires and beliefs that he has or he refrains from robbing the poor-box on the grounds that though it is clear that the thief does have a choice about whether he does not have those beliefs and desires (as he does in fact have those beliefs and desires, he obviously can do something—whatever he in fact does, for instance—such that were he to do it it would not be the case that he does not have those desires and beliefs) he does not have a choice about whether he refrains from robbing the poor-box. That the thief has no choice about whether he refrains from robbing the poor-box is the conclusion of the *Mind* Argument. It can't, therefore, be part of the intuitive thought behind the second premise of that argument.

That van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all talk about the second premise using the "following" locution indicates that they conceive of the second premise in ordinary language as involving something like an 'if…then…' claim, one they take to be representable by the material conditional. But, again, as most ordinary language 'if…then…' claims are inequivalent to the material conditional, we have to iron out what that ordinary language claim is and determine whether it is appropriately symbolizable as N(DB ⊃ R) before we can even begin to evaluate the argument. As I have already argued, the claim that R follows DB really can't be what van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin have in mind. I will now go on to suggest another possibility, the only other possibility that I can think of, and show why it is not adequately symbolizable in a way that would make the *Mind* Argument have a form requiring β.[16]

[16] These remarks apply equally well to Nelkin's Improved *Mind* Argument. Even though her argument does not rely on the invalid rule β, but on β*, recall that Nelkin's understanding of and justification for the crucial premise of her

Perhaps what van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all have in mind when they say that in the thief scenario no one has a choice about whether R follows DB is not strictly speaking that no one has a choice about whether the one follows the other, but rather that in the thief scenario the following is true:

(*) *conditional upon N(DB)*, no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R.[17,18]

As accepting (*) doesn't require an antecedent acceptance of N(R), an argument for N(R) employing (*) would not be straightforwardly question-begging. What's more, you might think that, though it isn't strictly speaking a correct symbolization of the claim that R follows DB and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R follows DB, N(DB ⊃ R) might very well be a correct symbolization either of (*) or of something equivalent to it. After all, just like N(DB ⊃ R) neither DB nor R follows from (*).

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argument N(DB & (DB ⊃ R)) is parasitic upon the understanding of and justification for the second premise of the *Mind* Argument, namely, N(DB ⊃ R). My arguments in the remainder of this section could, with only slight modifications, be tailored to respond to the Improved *Mind* Argument.

[17] I suggest (*) instead of

(=) conditional upon DB, no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R

because (=) is clearly false in the story. If the thief did have the particular desire and belief and did in fact refrain from robbing the poor-box on account of them, it could still be the case that he (or someone else) had a choice about whether R, if he (or someone else) had, at some point, had a choice about whether DB. If the thief had, at some point, had a choice about whether DB—that is, if, at some point, he could have done something such that had he done it, he would not have had the desire and belief that in fact rationalize his refraining from robbing the poor-box—, then he could have done something, viz., whatever he could have done to prevent his having that desire and belief, such that had he done it he would not have refrained from robbing the poor-box. So, if the thief had a choice about whether DB, he could have done something such that had he done it it would have been the case that ~R. So, in other words, if the thief had had a choice about whether DB, then he would have had a choice about whether R. And so it follows that (=) is false because it could be the case both that DB and that someone nonetheless had a choice about whether R, in particular, in the case in which the thief had at some point had a choice about whether DB.

[18] My arguments in this section would all go through equally well if we supposed, alternatively, that van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all meant

(!) *conditional upon N(DB)*, N(R).

instead of (*) by their claim that in the thief scenario no one has a choice about whether R follows DB. (!) is decidedly inferior to (*), however, because, unlike (*), it entails that conditional upon N(DB), R obtains, which is false in the thief scenario.

Better than (!) and *perhaps* even better than (*) might be

(+) *conditional upon N(DB) and R*, no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R.

Because of the special definition of "having a choice about whether"—one has a choice about whether *p*, recall, just in case one can do something such that were one to do it, it would be the case that ~*p*—one might think that even (*) is false in the thief scenario. This is because conditional upon N(DB), it might be that ~R, and if it were true that ~R, then it would not be the case that no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether R (because if it is the case that ~R, of course, someone can do something such that had she done it, it would have been the case that ~R, for she can do whatever she in fact does). For this reason one might find (+) preferable to (*). This is not a problem, however, because the arguments I go on to offer in this section against the thesis that (*) can be adequately symbolized either as N(DB ⊃ R) or as N(DB □→ R) work just as well, in the exact same fashion, and with equal force against the thesis that (+) can be adequately symbolized either as N(DB ⊃ R) or as N(DB □→ R).

But N(DB ⊃ R) can't be a correct symbolization of (*). At least it can't if α and β were to have had any hope of being valid. Here's why. Consider the following scenario:

> AVALANCHE: Up until some time, t_1, no one has ever had a choice about anything that has happened. At t_1 there will occur either an avalanche or an earthquake. If the earthquake happens, then, though it won't be physically determined that he will die a short time later, at t_2, there is nothing that anyone can do to prevent Bloggs from dying at t_2. What's more, if the earthquake happens, no one will have a choice about anything that happens during and after its occurrence. But if the avalanche occurs at t_1, then Jones can do something, namely put up a shield, such that if he does so, Bloggs will not be crushed by the avalanche and, thus, will not die at t_2. What's more, the physical facts are such that, if the avalanche does occur at t_1, the only way for Bloggs to die at t_2 is by being crushed by the avalanche in the event that Jones does not put up the shield to protect him (i.e., Bloggs won't have a heart attack, he won't spontaneously combust, etc.). Suppose that, in fact, the earthquake, and not the avalanche, occurs and Bloggs does, in fact, die at t_2.

Let A = the avalanche occurs at t_1 and D = Bloggs dies at t_2. Because Jones can put up a shield and protect Bloggs in the event that the avalanche occurs at t_1, it is false that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether D. So, if we assume for *reductio* that N(*p* ⊃ *q*) captures the thought that conditional upon N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *q*, we will have to accept that in this scenario ~N(A ⊃ D) is true. As things turn out in AVALANCHE, Bloggs dies at t_2 and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2, and so N(D) is true. But (D ⊃ (A ⊃ D)) is a necessary truth, and so it follows from this and N(D) via α and β that N(A ⊃ D) is true, contradicting our assumption.

1.	□(D ⊃ (A ⊃ D))	Logical Truth
2.	N(D ⊃ (A ⊃ D))	1 α
3.	N(D)	Premise
4.	N(A ⊃ D)	2,3 β

Thus, if α and β were to have had any hope of being valid, the correct symbolization of (*) cannot be N(DB ⊃ R).[19,20]

Lest it be thought that my argument here involves a hidden and illicit equivocation, D, the proposition that Bloggs dies at t_2, must be distinguished both from D_A, the proposition that Bloggs dies at t_2 due to an avalanche, and from D_E, the proposition that Bloggs dies at t_2 due to

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[19] It is true that β is invalid. But here I am arguing that N(DB ⊃ R) can't be the correct symbolization of (*) if, as van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all contend, the *Mind* Argument relies on β.

[20] As N(A ⊃ D) follows directly from □(D ⊃ (A ⊃ D)) and N(D) via β*, AVALANCHE also shows that N(DB ⊃ R) cannot be the correct symbolization of (*) if β* is valid.

an earthquake. D, D_A, and D_E all express different propositions and have different truth conditions. My argument does not work if any of the 'D's employed in it are construed as meaning either D_A or D_E, but it does work if each of them refers simply to the proposition that Bloggs dies at t_2.[21] Not only is it true that Bloggs dies at t_2 due to an earthquake and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2 due to an earthquake, but it is also true, all simply, that Bloggs dies at t_2 and no one has or ever had a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2. From the setup of the case since no one has ever had a choice about anything that occurs prior to t_1 and if the earthquake happens no one has a choice about anything that occurs at and after t_1 because in AVALANCHE the earthquake does, in fact, happen, no one has, or ever had, a choice about anything that occurs and so, *a fortiori*, given that Bloggs does die at t_2 no one has a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2. So, not only is N(D_E) true in AVALANCHE, so too is N(D). What's more, because, as stipulated in the case, if the avalanche does occur at t_1 *the only way* for Bloggs to die at t_2 is by being crushed by the avalanche in the event that Jones does not put up the shield to protect him, in AVALANCHE, not only is it false that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2 due to an avalanche, it is also false, all simply, that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether Bloggs dies at t_2. So, as I have just shown, both N(D) and the claim that it is not the case that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether D are true in AVALANCHE. Thus my argument does not equivocate and it follows that if α and β were to have had a hope of being valid, the correct symbolization of (*) is not N(DB ⊃ R).

So, if, as we are supposing, (*) is the premise being appealed to in the *Mind* Argument and the *Mind* Argument does rely on β, then it is certainly not correct to symbolize (*) as N(DB ⊃ R). But, if N(DB ⊃ R) is not the correct symbolization of (*), then van Inwagen's, Finch and

[21] That my argument works only with D and not either with D_A or with D_E is not a problem. My argument aims to establish that if α and β were to have had any hope of being valid N(DB ⊃ R) can't be the correct symbolization of (*) by showing that, given that α and β are valid, N(*p* ⊃ *q*) does not, in general, capture the thought that conditional upon N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *q*. And to do this, all I need to do is come up with a consistent story and a pair of sentences *p* and *q* such that if α and β were valid and N(*p* ⊃ *q*) captured the thought that conditional upon N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *q* would yield a contradiction. AVALANCHE and A and D is such a story and pair of sentences. That some other pair of sentences does not yield a contradiction under those assumptions in no way threatens the cogency of my argument. It would threaten my argument only if there were some reason to think that N(DB ⊃ R) is a correct symbolization of (*) even though N(*p* ⊃ *q*) is not, in general, a correct symbolization of the claim that conditional upon N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *q*. But there is absolutely no reason to think this, and so my argument that N(DB ⊃ R) is not a correct symbolization of (*) stands.

Warfield's, and Nelkin's presentations of the *Mind* Argument are clearly incorrect. And if the correct symbolization of (*) is not N(DB ⊃ R), it is not clear how the argument does rely on β.

There is another way one might try symbolizing (*) such that if it were so symbolized and it were the second premise of the *Mind* Argument, then the *Mind* Argument would rely on β. If the correct symbolization of (*) were N(DB □→ R), where '□→' is the counterfactual conditional, then the *Mind* Argument could still be cast in a form employing α and β (though it would have a different structure than van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin all present it as having). The argument would go as follows:

1.	N(DB)	Premise
2.	N(DB □→ R)	Premise
3.	□((DB & (DB □→ R)) ⊃ R)	Necessary Truth
4.	□(DB ⊃ ((DB □→ R) ⊃ R))	3 Logic
5.	N(DB ⊃ ((DB □→ R) ⊃ R))	4 α
6.	N((DB □→ R) ⊃ R)	1,5 β
7.	N(R)	2,6 β

So, if (*) both were the second premise of the *Mind* Argument and were accurately symbolized as N(DB □→ R), then it could still be the case that the *Mind* Argument relies on β.

As with the attempt to symbolize (*) as N(DB ⊃ R), however, (*) cannot be symbolized as N(DB □→ R) if α and β were to have had any hope of being valid. To see why consider another scenario:

> AVALANCHE 2: Up until some time, t_1, no one has ever had a choice about anything. At t_1 an avalanche may or may not happen. If the avalanche occurs, it may or may not crush and kill Bloggs at t_2. Bloggs is isolated from everyone in such a way that no one can have any causal interaction with him and whatever affects him. In fact, the avalanche does not occur at t_1 and Bloggs does not die at t_2.

As before, let A = the avalanche occurs at t_1 and D = Bloggs dies at t_2. If we assume for *reductio* that N(*p* □→ *q*) captures the thought that conditional upon N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether *q*, then, because in AVALANCHE 2 it is true that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether D, we will have to accept that N(A □→ D) is true. As it is also true in AVALANCHE 2 that conditional upon N(A), no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether ~D, we will also have to accept that N(A □→ ~D) is true. As it is metaphysically possible that A is true, ◊A is also true in AVALANCHE 2. This is all we need for the *reductio* because, though ~A is true by stipulation in AVALANCHE 2, we can derive A from N(A □→ D), N(A □→ ~D), and ◊A using α and β:

1.	□((◊A & ((A □→ D) & (A □→ ~D))) ⊃ A)	Necessary Truth
2.	□(◊A ⊃ ((A □→ D) ⊃ ((A □→ ~D) ⊃ A)))	1 Logic
3.	N(◊A ⊃ ((A □→ D) ⊃ ((A □→ ~D) ⊃ A))))	2 α
4.	□(◊A ⊃ □◊A)	Necessary Truth
5.	◊A	Premise
6.	□◊A	4,5 Logic
7.	N(◊A)	6 α
8.	N((A □→ D) ⊃ ((A □→ ~D) ⊃ A)))	3,7 β
9.	N(A □→ D)	Premise
10.	N((A □→ ~D) ⊃ A))	8,9 β
11.	N(A □→ ~D)	Premise
12.	N(A)	10,11 β
13.	A	12 Factivity of 'N' operator

So, if α and β were to have had any hope of being valid, the correct symbolization of (*) cannot be N(DB □→ R).[22]

It is hard to see, then, what van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin might be meaning by N(DB ⊃ R) in their formalizations of the *Mind* Argument. Nor is it clear what they might have meant by N(DB □→ R) had they cast the second premise of the argument in that way. But as casting that premise either as N(DB ⊃ R) or as N(DB □→ R) is crucial to shoehorning the *Mind* Argument into a form requiring β, it is hard to see how it does depend on β.

I conclude that whatever the *Mind* Argument is, it does not have the structure that van Inwagen, Finch and Warfield, and Nelkin present it as having.

6. The *Mind* Argument Reconsidered

To uncover the structure of the *Mind* Argument, we need to take a step back and re-evaluate van Inwagen's original discussion of it. In first offering the *Mind* Argument, van Inwagen assimilated the thief scenario to the following scenario:

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[22] As N(*p* & *q*) can be true while it not be true that conditional on N(*p*), no one has, or ever had, a choice about *q*, it follows that N(DB □→ R) also cannot be the correct symbolization of (*) if β* is valid. This is because N(*p* □→ *q*) follows via β* from N(*p* & *q*) and □((*p* & *q*) ⊃ (*p* □→ *q*)).

> Let us imagine a mechanism the salient features of which are a [yellow] light, a green light, and a button. If one presses the button, we'll suppose, then exactly one of the two lights must flash, but it is causally undetermined *which*. (If currently accepted physical theory is correct, it would be easy to construct such a mechanism.) Now suppose that you must press the button on this mechanism. Have you any choice about which of the lights will flash? It seems obvious that you have no choice about this. (van Inwagen 1983, 142)

He then went on to suggest that the reasoning involved here is strictly analogous to the reasoning in the *Mind* Argument:

> Let us imagine that our [yellow]-green device is "hooked up" to our thief's brain in such a way that, if it flashes green he will steal the money and if it flashes [yellow] he will repent and depart; and we may suppose that his coming to be in a state of uncertainty about whether to steal or to repent has the effect of pressing the button. It should be clear that the thief has no choice about whether to steal or to repent (even supposing that the case we have imagined is consistent with the supposition that he *do* either of these things). We may now, by a sequence of minute alterations, turn the case into one in which the [yellow]-green device is replaced by a "functionally equivalent" natural part of the thief's brain. (van Inwagen 1983, 143)

If, as these excerpts indicate, van Inwagen views the situation of the thief as strictly analogous to the situation of the person pressing the button on the yellow-green device, then he must see the argument for the claim that no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether the thief refrains from robbing the poor-box as strictly analogous to the argument for the claim that for whichever light that in fact ends up flashing no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it flashes. In order to uncover the structure of the *Mind* Argument, then, we must first uncover the structure of the argument in the yellow-green device case (call this argument the Device Argument).

Note, first, that Van Inwagen thinks that the Device Argument is sound. He is surely right about this. Merely from the description of the device and the fact that the button is pressed and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed, we can soundly infer that whichever of the lights that does, in fact, flash no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it flashes. Whatever its structure, then, the Device Argument is valid. And if it is valid and the structure of the *Mind* Argument is strictly analogous to that of the Device Argument, then the *Mind* Argument as well must be valid. It is clear, then, that Finch and Warfield's diagnosis of the flaw in the *Mind* Argument is a non-starter for their diagnosis is that it employs an invalid rule of inference.

So what is the structure of the Device Argument? It clearly takes as a premise that the button of the device is pressed and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed.

So, if we let B = the button is pressed, one premise of the argument is N(B). Now recall van Inwagen's statement of the conclusion: "Have you any choice about which of the lights will flash? It seems obvious that you have no choice about this." So, if we let Y = the yellow light flashes and G = the green light flashes, the conclusion of the argument is clearly (either N(Y) or N(G)).[23,24] The crucial question, then, is what premise combined with N(B) yields this conclusion? Whatever that premise is, it is made true by the particular structure of the indeterministic device in the scenario. The device, given its construction, is such that once the button is pressed there is nothing else causally relevant to the flashing of the lights. So, once the button is pressed, one of the two lights will flash and there is nothing that can be done to influence which of the lights will flash. It seems to follow from this, then, that conditional upon its being the case that the button is pressed and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed, either the yellow light flashes and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it flashes or the green light flashes and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it flashes. The missing premise, then, seems to be:

(#) Conditional upon N(B), either N(Y) or N(G).[25]

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[23] The 'or' here is an exclusive 'or'. This is because, as van Inwagen describes the device in the device scenario, "[i]f one presses the button, we'll suppose, then *exactly one* of the two lights must flash". (van Inwagen 1983, 142, my emphasis)

[24] The conclusion of the Device Argument is not N(Y or G). The conclusion is not simply that no one has, or ever had, a choice merely about whether at least one of the two lights, no matter which, flashes (though that is true in the device scenario). Rather, it is that for whichever of the two lights that does, in fact, flash, no one has, or ever had, a choice about *its* flashing. As I have established, the *Mind* Argument, as presented by van Inwagen, is meant to parallel the Device Argument. There is, however, a significant difference between van Inwagen's presentation of the device scenario and his presentation of the thief scenario. Whereas in the thief scenario we are told what the outcome of the indeterministic causal process is—that the thief refrains from robbing the poor-box—, in the device scenario we are not. Van Inwagen neglects to say which of the two lights in the end flashes in the device scenario. This is significant because it means that though the ultimate conclusion of the *Mind* Argument can be presented as N(R), the conclusion of the Device Argument cannot be presented either as N(Y) or as N(G). But, as the Device Argument and the *Mind* Argument are supposed to be structurally parallel, the conclusion of the Device Argument must be such that with the added stipulation of what the outcome of the indeterministic causal process is—i.e., which of the two lights ends up flashing—either it will follow that N(Y) (if the added stipulation is Y) or it will follow that N(G) (if the added stipulation is G). But though N(Y) will not follow from N(Y or G) and Y, and N(G) will not follow from N(Y or G) and G, it is the case that both N(Y) will follow from (either N(Y) or N(G)) and Y, and N(G) will follow from (either N(Y) or N(G)) and G. So, the conclusion of the Device Argument, as van Inwagen clearly intended it, must be (either N(Y) or N(G)) and *not* N(Y or G). (As I will present the *Mind* Argument later in the text, its conclusion will be (either N(R) or N(~R)). It is only with the added stipulation that the thief does in fact, in the end, refrain from robbing the poor-box, that the conclusion of the *Mind* Argument as van Inwagen presents it, i.e., N(R), follows.)

[25] The relevant premise is (#) and not

(%) conditional upon B, either N(Y) or N(G)

for reasons analogous to those laid out in footnote 17. Even if we suppose that the button were pressed, B, and the green light flashed, G, it could still be the case that someone had a choice about whether G if that person had a choice about whether B. For if she had a choice about whether B, she could have refrained from pressing the button, And so, I claim, the structure of the Device Argument is:

1. N(B)
2. Conditional upon N(B), either N(Y) or N(G)
3. Therefore, either N(Y) or N(G)

This argument does not rely on β. It is clearly valid and its premises are true. So it is sound.

(It would not do treat (#) as the material conditional (N(B) ⊃ (N(Y) v N(G))) because (#) can be false even when N(B) is false. It also does not seem correct to treat (#) as the strict implication □(N(B) ⊃ (N(Y) v N(G))). Though (#) is true in the device scenario, □(N(B) ⊃ (N(Y) v N(G))) is false because in some metaphysically possible worlds the construction of the device is different than it actually is in such a way that even after the button is pressed one can causally influence which of the lights flashes.[26] It might be that the correct way of formalizing (#) is as the counterfactual conditional (N(B) □→ (N(Y) v N(G))), in which case the Device Argument would have the following clearly valid form:

1.	N(B)	Premise
2.	N(B) □→ (N(Y) v N(G))	Premise
3.	N(Y) v N(G)	1,2 Modus Ponens for Counterfactuals

But as I have no argument for the claim that (#) should be understood as a counterfactual conditional, it is better to understand the Device Argument, as I have done, explicitly in terms of (#) as stated and simply appeal directly to the intuitive validity of the inference from N(B) and (#) to (either N(Y) or N(G)).[27])

If the *Mind* Argument is supposed to be structurally analogous to the Device Argument, as van Inwagen indicates that it is, then the *Mind* Argument, like the Device Argument, does not rely on β. Rather, it has the following structure:

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and had she refrained from pressing it, the green light would not have flashed. So, if she had a choice about whether B, she could have done something, viz., refrain from pressing the button, such that had she done it it would have been the case that ~G. In other words, if she had a choice about whether B, she would have had a choice about whether G. And so, it follows that (%) is false in the device scenario.

[26] Were it correct to treat (#) either as the material conditional or as the strict implication, the Device Argument (and the *Mind* Argument as well, given that it has the same structure as the Device Argument) would, of course, be obviously valid.

[27] This apparent resistance to symbolization with other recognized 'if'-symbols of the 'conditional upon *p*, *q*' locution is not unique to this issue. (I say 'apparent resistance' because I leave it open that the 'conditional upon *p*, *q*' locution may be adequately symbolized as a counterfactual.) See chapter 4 of Feldman (1986) for arguments that conditional moral obligation, the kind of moral obligation often expressed by statements of the form 'conditional upon *p*, *S* ought to *φ*' or 'given that *p*, *S* ought to *φ*', cannot be adequately symbolized as a material conditional, as a strict implication, or even as a counterfactual conditional.

1. N(DB)
2. Conditional upon N(DB), either N(R) or N(~R)
3. Therefore, either N(R) or N(~R)

Like the Device Argument, this argument is valid. The true challenge of the *Mind* Argument, then, is *not* that it relies on an inference rule integral to the Consequence Argument, but, rather, that it is an analogue of a clearly valid argument, namely, the Device Argument. And so, if it is unsound, it must be unsound in virtue of the falsity of one of its premises.

7. The *Mind* Argument Rejected

Though he misunderstood the structure of the *Mind* Argument, van Inwagen was right in claiming that the only way to resist it is to reject one of its premises. He was also right that the premise he needed to reject was the one other than N(DB). He was just wrong in thinking that that premise was N(DB ⊃ R). Rather, it is

($) Conditional upon N(DB), either N(R) or N(~R).

In evaluating the *Mind* Argument, then, we must see what reason we have for thinking that ($) is true. The only reason that van Inwagen offers for its being true is the analogy with the Device Argument. So, we have reason to accept ($) only if the reasons we have for accepting the corresponding premise in the Device Argument hold in the case of the *Mind* Argument. I shall now argue that they do not.

Consider once again the Device Argument. Why is the second premise of that argument, namely,

(#) Conditional upon N(B), either N(Y) or N(G)

true in the device scenario? Here is why. By stipulation, the pressing of the button is the only thing that is causally relevant to the flashing of the lights and so once the button is pressed, one of the lights will flash and there is nothing anyone can do that will have any influence on which of the two lights will flash. In other words, there is no other event such that had one a choice about whether it occurs, one might thereby be able to influence which of the two lights does not flash. This is true in virtue of the nature of the device in the scenario. But why should the lack of some other such event entail that no one has, or ever had, a choice about whichever of the lights that does, in fact, flash whether it flashes? It entails this because the only way one can have a choice about whether an event like the flashing of a light occurs is by having a choice about whether one performs an action such that were one to perform it one would thereby ensure that the light not flash. Some events are of a kind such that we can have a choice about whether they occur only by having a choice about the occurring of other distinct events the non-occurrence of which would ensure that they not occur, and the flashing of a light is an event of such a kind.

All that we ever have a choice about, in the first instance, are actions. Having a choice about whether a proposition, *p*, is true, recall, is a matter of being able to do something such that were one to do it, it would be the case that ~*p*.[28] So, for any proposition not involving an action, like G or Y, having a choice about it must be a matter of being able to perform an action such that had one performed it that proposition would not have been true. Corresponding to any action an agent might be said to perform there is both the proposition that the agent performs that action and the proposition that the agent does not perform that action. Call any such proposition an "action proposition". Every proposition that one has a choice about that is not an action proposition, then, is a proposition one has a choice about in virtue of having a choice about some action proposition. Now it is true that even some action propositions are propositions we have a choice about only in virtue of having a choice about some other distinct action proposition. But some action propositions are propositions we have a choice about not in virtue of having a choice about some other distinct action proposition. The point is a familiar one from the philosophy of action. Some actions we perform *by* performing yet other actions, as when I perform the action of turning on the light *by* flipping the switch. And I perform the action of flipping the switch *by* moving my finger in a certain way. But I do not perform the action of moving my finger in a certain way *by* performing some other action. I do it directly. All chains of action must terminate in some action that I perform not by performing some other distinct action. Actions that one performs directly, and not by performing some further action, are often referred to as "basic actions". Corresponding to any basic action an agent might be said to perform there is both the proposition that the agent performs that basic action and the proposition that the agent does not perform that basic action. Call any such proposition a "basic action proposition".

[28] Two points. First, though van Inwagen originally introduced the "having a choice about whether" locution in terms of sentences, I talk here of having a choice about whether certain propositions are true. Nothing of substance hangs on this difference. Second, in the text I sometimes talk of a person's having a choice about a proposition instead of a person's having a choice about whether that proposition is true. I do this only for ease of presentation; I mean for the two locutions to be equivalent.

As having a choice about a proposition, *p*, just is a matter of being able to perform an action such that were one to perform it, it would be the case that ~*p*, any non-action proposition, i.e., any proposition not about an action, is a proposition about which an agent can have a choice, if in fact she does have a choice about it, only in virtue of having a choice about some action proposition. As a non-basic action is an action that one performs only by performing some other distinct action, a non-basic action proposition is a proposition about which an agent can have a choice, if in fact she does have a choice about it, only in virtue of having a choice about some other distinct action proposition. And as a basic action is an action one performs not by performing some other distinct action, a basic action proposition is a proposition about which a person can have a choice, if in fact she does have a choice about it, not in virtue of having a choice about some other action proposition. It is clear, then, that if a person has a choice about whether a certain proposition, *p*, is true, either *p* is a basic action proposition, or there is a basic action proposition, *q*, such that she has a choice about *q*, and it is only in virtue of her having a choice about *q* that she has a choice about *p*.

In the device scenario, neither the proposition that the yellow light flashes, Y, nor the proposition that the green light flashes, G, is a basic action proposition. And so, if a person, Jones, say, is to have a choice either about G or about Y then there must be some basic action proposition, *x*, such that Jones has a choice about *x* and it is in virtue of Jones's having a choice about *x* that Jones has a choice either about G or about Y. As the pressing of the button is what sets the device in motion, having a choice about B would be one way for Jones to have a choice either about Y or about G. If, however, we suppose that the button is pressed and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed, then for Jones to have a choice either about G or about Y, there must be *some other* basic action proposition, other than one causally relevant to the obtaining of B, that Jones has a choice about which is such that it could be in virtue of having a choice about it that Jones has a choice either about G or about Y. But as G and Y are propositions about lights, not actions, and lights are the kinds of things the goings on of which we can have a say about only by interacting with them causally, for there to be a basic action proposition Jones has a choice about in virtue of which he has a choice either about G or about Y, there must be a basic action proposition (other than one causally relevant to the pressing of the button) Jones has a choice about that is causally relevant to the flashing of the lights. But given the structure of the device in the scenario, once the button is pressed, one of the lights will flash, and *there is nothing else* causally relevant to the flashing of either of the lights. And if, once the button is pressed, there is nothing else causally relevant to the flashing of either of the lights, then there is no basic action that could be performed that would be causally relevant to the flashing of either of the lights. So, *a fortiori*, given that the button is pressed, and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed, there is no basic action proposition that anyone could have a choice about the truth of which would be causally relevant to the flashing of the lights. Therefore, since one could have a choice either about G or about Y only if there were such a proposition, it follows from the nature of the device in question that conditional upon its being the case that the button is pressed and no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it is pressed, one of the lights will flash, and whichever one does, in fact, flash, no one has, or ever had, a choice about whether it flashes. And so (#) is true.

If the *Mind* Argument is structurally analogous to the Device Argument, then an analogous line of reasoning must be the support for the corresponding premise in the *Mind* Argument, namely,

($) Conditional upon N(DB), either N(R) or N(~R).

The analogous line of reasoning, however, *does not* support that premise. In the thief scenario it is true that if N(DB), then there are no basic action propositions distinct from R and ~R themselves that anyone has a choice about in virtue of which one might have a choice either about R or about ~R. But as R and ~R are themselves basic action propositions, one's having a choice about one of them does *not* require that there be some other distinct proposition one has a choice about in virtue of which one has that choice.[29] Basic action propositions are such that if one has a choice about them, one has a choice about them *directly* without having to have a choice about some distinct proposition. This must be the case. If even basic action propositions were such that to have a choice about them one would have to have a choice about some distinct proposition, then we would have an infinite regress argument, one independent of considerations concerning the truth or falsity of determinism, for the claim that no one has, or ever had, a choice

[29] If one disagrees with my claim that refraining from robbing the poor-box is a basic action, then one will be disinclined to regard R and ~R, as I do, as basic action propositions. No matter. For the purposes of the point I am trying to make we could treat R as the claim that the thief chooses to refrain from robbing the poor-box. If any actions deserve the mantle of basic action, choices do, and so, if any proposition counts as a basic action proposition, R and ~R, so recast, do. So recasting R, what's more, is not illicit. Van Inwagen's *Mind* Argument surely can't depend for its cogency on construing R in such a way that it is not a basic action proposition, for whatever action he chooses to focus on, there will be a basic action grounding it, and, if I am right in this section, the *Mind* Argument won't go through for that basic action.

about anything that happens.[30] As this is absurd, basic action propositions must be such that one can have a choice about them directly, and not in virtue of having a choice about some other distinct proposition.

It is now clear where the analogy between the device scenario and the thief scenario breaks down. Whereas we have excellent reason to think that (#) is true in the device scenario because neither G nor Y is a basic action proposition and having a choice about one of them requires having a choice about some other basic action proposition—one concerning an action that might be causally relevant to the flashing of the lights—of which, by stipulation, there are none in the device scenario, as R and ~R are themselves basic action propositions, in the thief scenario we do not have an analogous cogent line of reasoning in support of ($).

Recall that when confronted with the *Mind* Argument van Inwagen uncomfortably resigned himself to having to reject the following proposition:

> If an agent's act was caused but not determined by his prior inner state, and if nothing besides that inner state was causally relevant to that agent's act, then that agent had no choice about whether that inner state was followed by that act.

Setting aside my complaints with van Inwagen's characterizing this proposition in terms of the inner state's being followed by the act, my diagnosis of why van Inwagen found it so puzzling that this proposition could be false is that he was viewing the case of the thief as analogous to that of the person in the device scenario. As I have shown, however, the cases are crucially disanalogous and so, whereas we have excellent grounds for thinking the Device Argument is sound, we have no such grounds for thinking that the *Mind* Argument is.

We thus have a ready explanation both of why the Device Argument is sound and of the inadequacy of the *Mind* Argument. Though we have good reason to accept the second premise of the Device Argument, we have no good reason to accept the second premise of the *Mind* Argument. As I have shown, it cannot be supported by analogy with the Device Argument, and

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[30] Such an argument would be an argument not simply for the incompatibility of indeterminism and anyone's having a choice about anything that happens, but for Impossibilism, the thesis that it is metaphysically impossible for anyone to have a choice about anything that happens. As I indicate in the text, Impossibilism is an incredible thesis. The crucial point, however, is not that Impossibilism is an incredible thesis, but, rather, that if the *Mind* Argument depended for its cogency on the denial that basic action propositions are propositions that one can have a choice about directly, then the *Mind* Argument, as well as the Consequence Argument, for that matter, would be totally otiose. This is because the denial that one can have a choice about a basic action proposition directly is all that is needed for an argument, one that does not depend in any way on the supposition either of determinism or of indeterminism, for Impossibilism, a thesis which entails the conclusions of both the *Mind* Argument and the Consequence Argument.

there seem to be no other grounds, as far as I can see, for accepting it. In light of this, the *Mind* Argument should be a worry for no one.

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