DAVID VANDER LAAN

A REGRESS ARGUMENT FOR RESTRICTIVE INCOMPATIBILISM

(Received 10 January 2000)

INTRODUCTION

Let us call the following principle 'ARD,' for 'action requires desire.'

ARD: No agent ever performs an action unless, shortly beforehand, the agent has some desire to perform that action.

The principle is plausible; those events which occur without an agent's desire (hiccups, e.g.) do not seem to be *actions* of that agent. Stronger principles may also be plausible. It may be, for example, that one never acts without a desire of a certain strength (relative to one's other desires). However, ARD itself will serve our purposes here.

One of Peter van Inwagen's claims in a recent debate among incompatibilists has been that if we never perform actions we have no desire to do, then we are rarely free. (Call the conclusion that we are rarely free 'restrictivism' or 'restrictive incompatibilism'.) The reason is that in most cases we have no desire to do anything other than what we in fact do, and lacking such a desire we lack a necessary condition of doing other than what we in fact do.[1] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza have denied that restrictivism follows from ARD. Their chief idea is that though at a given moment one may have no desire to perform the action in question, one may yet be free to develop a desire to perform it and so still be free to perform it.[2] In reply, van Inwagen says that when one has no desire to perform an action, rarely is there a potential desire to perform it, and even less often is there a desire one is able to acquire.[3] In their turn, Fischer and Ravizza contend that one may frequently be able to acquire such desires, whether or not one has these desires in "nearby" possible worlds.[4]

Philosophical Studies **103:** 201–215, 2001.

I think the question about one's desires in nearby possible worlds can be sidestepped, and the main issue can be resolved in favor of the restrictivist: if ARD and incompatibilism are true, then we are rarely free. I do not want to assert that we are free as rarely as van Inwagen thinks we are free. He has estimated (though not in print, as far as I know) that most of us are free approximately three times a week. If it turned out that the average figure were closer to, say, thirty two times a day, for a period of less than a minute in each instance, we would still be free during less than four percent of our waking hours. This we may fairly call 'rare', especially in comparison to the more or less continuous freedom some authors seem to assume.

First we will look quickly at the state of the debate, and at a short version of the regress argument. Then we will examine the argument more carefully, making sure we have not overlooked some common scenario in which an agent might be free. We will conclude that Fischer and Ravizza's attempt to avoid the restrictivist conclusion fails, and then we will ask what other incompatibilist attempts to avoid restrictivism look most promising.

Throughout we will assume that to refrain from an action is to perform a certain sort of action. Thus to die in an attempt to complete a marathon is not to refrain from completing a marathon. It is merely to fail to complete a marathon. It is a corollary of ARD that one never refrains from an action one has no desire to refrain from. (This is not to say, though, that in such cases one always construes one's refraining as refraining. An agent refraining from turning right may desire to turn left without ever thinking about a right turn. Still, this agent may be said to have a desire to refrain from turning right, since to turn left *is* to refrain from turning right.)

I. THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

The disagreement between the Fischer-Ravizza team and van Inwagen has reached a clash of intuitions – or if not of intuitions precisely, then of claims for which no explicit argument has been given. Discussing the case of an action A he finds morally repugnant, van Inwagen says,

> It is only in cases in which such potential motives for performing A exist and I can reach them from the starting point "I regard A as reprehensible and I have

no desire to perform A" that I have the power or ability to proceed from that starting point to a performance of A. As I have said, I am convinced, on the basis of an examination of my own biography and my modal and counterfactual judgments about the existence of "nearby" potential motives, that cases in which such potential motives so much as exist are very rare. (And it may well be that only a small proportion of the cases in which the potential motives exist are cases in which I have a choice about whether they are to become my actual motives.)[5]

There are two points here: one about the existence of nearby potential motives, another regarding whether the agent has a choice about making them actual.

Fischer and Ravizza's response addresses the first of these points. It is, they say, irrelevant whether there are *nearby* possible motives of the sort described. "Far away" motives – motives which are not at all close to the agent's mind, motives the agent does not almost consider – may yet be motives the agent is able to summon. If it is within the agent's power to summon motives to do something other than the obvious act, then the agent is free to do something other than what is obvious.

If by " 'nearby' potential motive" van Inwagen means something other than a potential motive the agent is able to summon (as he clearly does), then Fischer and Ravizza are right to say that the existence of nearby possible motives is irrelevant. The crucial issue is van Inwagen's second point, viz., whether any motive to do what one initially has no desire to do can be summoned by the agent. Van Inwagen thinks this is (or may be) rarely so; Fischer and Ravizza think it is frequently so; neither party offers an explicit argument at this point. (Fischer and Ravizza simply claim that "it is extremely implausible to suppose that agents quite generally lack the *power* to generate the relevant sorts of desires"[6] [emphasis in original].) However, I believe an argument for restrictivism which settles the disputed point can easily be constructed. I propose we call it 'the regress argument'.

II. THE REGRESS ARGUMENT IN BRIEF

Consider some variations of an example from van Inwagen. Suppose an agent – call him 'Peter' – is alone at his desk when the phone rings. In almost every case of this sort, Peter has no desire to refrain

from answering the phone before it stops ringing. In each of these cases, Peter is either free to generate a desire to refrain in the relevant temporal interval, or he is not. If he is not, then he is not free to refrain from answering, since he is not free to produce what is needed (by ARD) for him to refrain.[7] If he is free to generate a desire to refrain in the relevant temporal interval, then either he has a desire to generate a desire to refrain, or he is free to generate such a desire. The former case is quite rare. The latter case has two sub-cases: (a) Peter *has some desire* to generate a desire to generate a desire to refrain from answering the phone, and (b) Peter *is free to generate a desire* to generate a desire to generate a desire to refrain from answering. Sub-case (a) is extremely rare. Sub-case (b) itself has two sub-cases. . . .

The regress is clear. There is only one kind of case which hasn't been shown to occur rarely or to be a case in which Peter is not free. This is the case in which Peter is free to generate an infinite number of desires, viz.,

> a desire to refrain from answering,
> a desire to generate a desire to refrain from answering,
> a desire to generate a desire to generate a desire to refrain from answering, etc.,

though Peter actually *has* none of the desires on this list. But this case seems impossible, since many of these desires are beyond human capacities. Peter is not free to have most of these desires, so the only kinds of cases in which Peter might be free to refrain from answering the phone occur infrequently.

This phone-ringing episode is typical of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In particular, most of the time it is quite clear what to do, and we do not have any desire to do anything other than that. So it seems that we are free in at most a few relatively infrequent situations.

III. THE ARGUMENT IN DETAIL

Now let's back up a bit. We want to be sure we have considered each possible scenario. The figure on the next page is an attempt to give an exhaustive breakdown of the possible situations in which Peter's

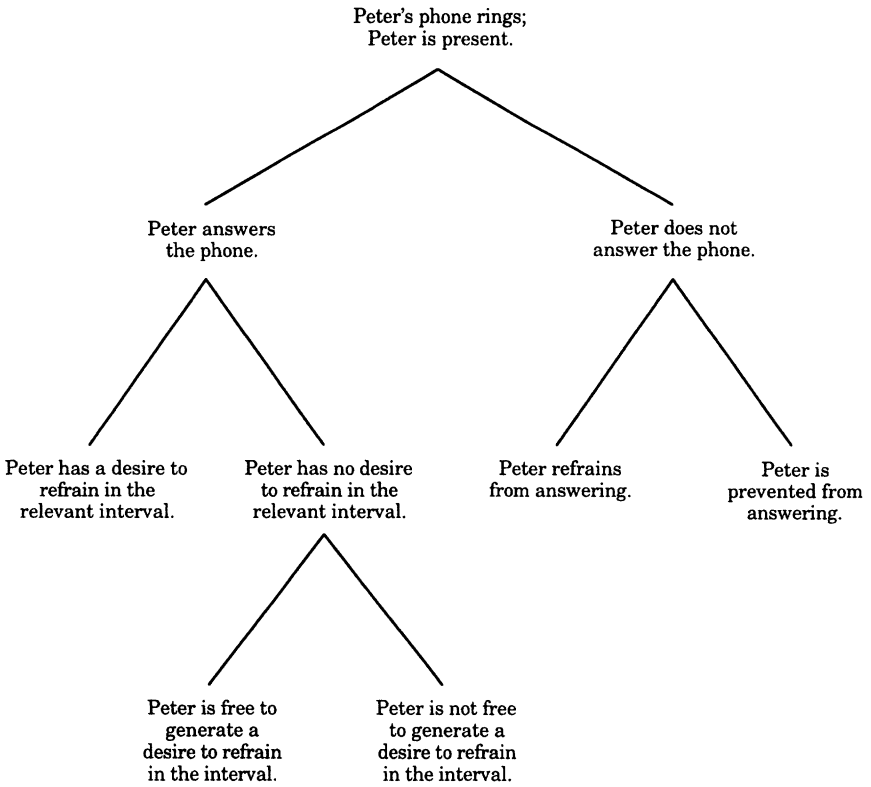

Figure 1.

office phone rings and Peter is present. We want to know whether, as such situations recur, Peter is often free to refrain from answering the phone at some moment after it rings.

Clearly in each such situation either Peter answers the phone or he does not. If he does not, then either he refrains from answering or he is prevented from answering by some impediment, whether external (the phone explodes, say) or internal (he has a heart attack, say). Cases in which Peter refrains are infrequent. Rarely does Peter refrain from answering his phone when it rings and he is present; *a fortiori* rarely does Peter freely refrain from answering his phone when it rings and he is present. The same can be said of cases in which Peter is prevented from answering, though here we can point out in addition that in nearly all these cases Peter has no desire to refrain from answering the phone. By ARD, then, Peter's failure to answer the phone is not one of his actions, and *a fortiori* is not one of his free actions. (I take it this is why van Inwagen says, "We may

even, if you like, suppose that at the moment the telephone rings it is causally determined that I shall not go berserk or be struck dead.")[8]

So if Peter is *frequently* free to refrain from answering, it is because he is frequently free in cases where he answers the phone. (We assume here, as below, that the infrequent cases are so infrequent that rarely do *any* of them obtain. We will reconsider this assumption later.)

We divide cases in which Peter does answer the phone into two further cases: those in which Peter has a desire to refrain from answering sometime in the relevant temporal interval, and those in which he does not. (Again, these cases are clearly exhaustive.)

The restrictivist claim is that the former case occurs infrequently. Van Inwagen imagines a scene in which, as he reaches to answer the phone, he remembers that a man said he would call today to discuss the implications for the mind/body problem of his trip, by astral projection, to Mercury. Van Inwagen acquires a desire not to answer the phone. (Such cases occur, no doubt. In part this is due to bookstores which mistakenly shelve van Inwagen's books next to books on astral projection. In part it is due to those who, quite deliberately, take van Inwagen's books out of place and put them next to books on astral projection.) Although situations like this one occur, they do not occur very frequently – at any rate, not frequently enough for us to think restrictivism false. This point relies on the empirical claim that a desire to refrain from what one had an unopposed desire to do a moment ago is relatively rare, as are pairs of desires opposed from the outset. The normal case is more like the one in which no desire to refrain from answering the phone comes up.

Fischer and Ravizza hope to show that the restrictivist's argument is unsound even if this empirical claim is true. Their idea is not that we are usually free because countervailing desires are popping up almost all the time. They are concerned with cases in which one is *able* to seek additional reasons for acting otherwise, even though no such reason actually occurs to the agent in question. We may therefore take it for granted at present that countervailing desires are rare.

So far we have concluded that cases in which Peter does not answer the phone and cases in which Peter answers but has some desire not to answer the phone are relatively rare. The non-

restrictivist must therefore hold that we are often free to refrain from actions though our desire to do them remains unopposed, and – what amounts to the same thing – free to perform actions we *never* have any positive desire to do. This leaves two kinds of cases: those in which Peter is free to generate a desire not to answer the phone within the relevant temporal interval (the cases Fischer and Ravizza have in mind), and those in which Peter is not free to generate such a desire within the relevant temporal interval.

Consider first the cases in which Peter is not free to generate a desire not to answer the phone. If Peter now has no choice about whether he will have a desire to refrain from answering, and if refraining requires such a desire, he now has no choice about refraining from answering. Van Inwagen makes this point:

> If I now have a choice about whether I am going to do [action] A a moment from now, then there must be some coherently describable path through logical space from my present condition to my doing A a moment from now, and I must now be *able* to follow this path, must be able to negotiate every twist and turn in it. [emphasis in original][9]

The contrary view implies that one's being free now to perform an action in a moment is compatible with being completely causally determined now. But incompatibilists, of course, will say that being causally determined now rules out being free now. So if action requires desire as per ARD, the case in which Peter is not free to generate desires not to answer the phone is not the kind of case in which he is free to refrain from answering at all, not even rarely.

The remaining case is the sort to which Fischer and Ravizza appeal when they argue that even if ARD is true we may be frequently free. In this case, Peter at no time desires to refrain from answering the phone, but he is free to generate such a desire. If Peter is frequently in this situation when the phone rings, then it seems there is little reason to doubt that he is frequently free when the phone rings. And if, as the restrictivist claims, Peter's circumstances relevantly resemble the sorts of circumstances in which we often find ourselves, there is little reason to suppose restrictivism is true.[10]

However, by ARD, the generation of a given desire itself requires a desire to generate that desire, if the generation is an action. And although desires may sometimes pop up by spontaneous generation, so to speak, to generate a desire *freely* is to act. So to be free to

generate the desire to refrain from answering the phone, Peter must either *have some desire* to generate that desire or else *be free to develop a desire* to develop that desire. The (second-order) desire to form a desire to refrain from answering is extremely rare, presumably about as rare as Peter's thought that he might presently generate such a desire. So if Peter is frequently free in this kind of situation, it must be because he is frequently *free* to form a desire to form a desire to refrain. When is Peter free to do this? Only when either (1) Peter *has some desire* to form a desire to form a desire to refrain, or else (2) Peter *is free to form a desire* to form a desire to form a desire to refrain.

And so on. These increasingly complex desires will be increasingly rare, and that Peter is frequently free to form such desires will quickly be implausible, if only because of the limits of his conceptual abilities. Peter does not have the ability to form nth-order desires for every natural number n.

In fact, for three reasons Peter is not free to form at once this series of desires:

> the desire to refrain from answering the phone,
> the desire to form a desire to refrain,
> the desire to form a desire to form a desire to refrain,
> the desire to form a desire to form a desire to form a desire to refrain, etc.

First, as we just noted, this would involve forming desires so complex that they are beyond Peter's abilities, and Peter is not free to do what is beyond his abilities. Second, forming this series at once would involve having an infinite number of desires, and this, too, is beyond Peter's abilities. Third, according to ARD, each action is preceded by a desire to perform that action. So the desires Peter forms must come successively, starting with the higher-order desires. If there is a minimum amount of time needed for Peter to translate his desire into action, then an infinite amount of time is needed for him to act on an infinite number of desires. Of course, an infinite amount of time is not generally available.

This is the last case, so there is no frequently-arising case in which Peter might be free.

It does not help to collapse the regress by claiming that the nth-order desire is just the same thing as the $(n - 1)$th-order desire,

because then the desire to form a desire to refrain from answering just *is* a desire to refrain from answering, which by hypothesis Peter lacks.

And, of course, the Peter of our story is typical of humans beings in the respect that he does not often have the sorts of countervailing desires or meta-desires needed for freedom, and in the respect that he has a finite desire-holding capacity. The scenario in which Peter's phone rings is also typical of the scenarios in which we humans find ourselves. Some scenarios do occasion countervailing desires and meta-desires more often than the phone scenario. For some people, occasions on which a cigarette is offered may prompt, with some frequency, both the desire for a cigarette and a meta-desire to want to avoid cigarettes. But much more often our desires are unopposed, as in the phone scenario – if indeed we think about what to do at all. Thus we may generalize the lesson of Peter's phone call: we humans are not free in any case which arises relatively often.

We have supplied what Fischer and Ravizza found lacking, viz., a plausible reason "to suppose that agents quite generally lack the *power* to generate the relevant sorts of desires." So Fischer and Ravizza's main strategy for resisting restrictivism fails. Once ARD is granted, then – given the empirical fact that we rarely have the requisite desires or meta-desires – restrictivism follows.

This is significant in part because, whether or not restrictivism ultimately wins the day, nearly-continuous incompatibilist freedom with respect to an infinite variety of possible actions is untenable.

IV. OTHER STRATEGIES

The non-restrictivist's best hope, then, is to deny either the relevant empirical claims or ARD. Below are a few possible approaches. Though the restrictivist position looks promising to me, I briefly raise these objections not so much to rule them out as to facilitate further discussion.

The sorites strategy. We are free only in certain relatively rare (kinds of) situations, I have argued, but of course it does not follow from this that freedom is rare. A number of small numbers may add up to a large number. The sorites strategy contends that although each

freedom-permitting situation (i.e., having a conflict between *n*th-order desires, for some *n*) is relatively rare, we are quite often in one of these situations or another. If freedom is quite common in these situations, then we may yet be frequently free.

It is difficult to settle empirical questions (such as how often we find ourselves with a desire to refrain from the "obvious" course of action) here, but in my judgment the freedom-permitting situations are not even frequent enough to be collectively frequent. More particularly, it seems that a large majority of cases resemble the case in which Peter has no desire to refrain from answering the phone. Further, this case's infinite series of freedom-permitting subcases does not make the sorites strategy especially promising. Second-order desires, such as the desire to form a desire to refrain from answering the phone, seem to be rarer than first-order desires by at least an order of magnitude, and third-order desires seem to be another order of magnitude rarer. It is doubtful whether anyone has *ever* had, say, a fifth-order desire. So we need not worry, I think, that collectively the cases involving these desires are common.

The phonophobia strategy. Some people say they almost always have a desire not to answer the phone when it rings. If they are right about this, then it is difficult for the restrictivist to show that they are rarely free to refrain from answering the phone. If, in addition, phone-ringing episodes are typical of their circumstances, it is difficult to show that they are rarely free on the whole. This strategy is, in effect, a simple denial of the restrictivist's empirical claims.

It may be that for some people a better example is needed to make the restrictivist's point. Van Inwagen mentions the case of pressing the gas pedal when the traffic light turns green.[11] Probably rather few people even consider remaining stationary when they see the light turn green. The question then becomes whether enough of life resembles the green light situation. Again, it is difficult to settle empirical questions here, but, at the least, most of us do face a great many trivial tasks throughout the day that typically occasion very little thought of any kind, much less a conflict of desires. Pressing the gas when the light turns green, traveling along the usual route to work, parking the car upon arrival, removing the key from the

ignition once parked, exiting the car, etc. often occur without the slightest desire to do anything else.

Perhaps precisely *where* to park isn't initially obvious, but it is also far from clear that the task regularly occasions any conflict of desire. It may be that, given one's preferences, the criteria for choosing a parking space are perfectly obvious, and it may be that given the criteria and the available spaces, it is obvious which space to take. In such an instance, a certain amount of observation and calculation may occur, but at no point need there be a resolution of a conflict between desires. So even when it isn't immediately obvious what to do, there may be little reason to suppose that we are free.

The weak desires strategy. A more nuanced way of denying the restrictivist's empirical claims is as follows. Though it may often be obvious what to do, we very frequently have at least *some* weak countervailing desire. This desire may be so weak as to go unnoticed on many occasions, and it may even be "irrational" in some sense (as when someone avoids the 13th floor despite her avowed rejection of superstition), but such a desire is often present. And such desires open the door to freedom, since we may be able to strengthen these desires, even to the point of making them determinants of action.

One restrictivist reply to this strategy alleges that it falls to a revised version of the regress argument. As long as one's countervailing desire is very weak, the argument goes, it is still perfectly obvious what to do, and one will not act on the countervailing desire but on the stronger desire it opposes.

This argument presupposes something like this revised version of ARD.

ARD* No agent ever performs an action unless, shortly beforehand, the agent has some desire to perform the action, and that desire is stronger than any desire the agent has to do what the agent thinks would prevent the action.

Since strong countervailing desires are rare (as are the meta-desires to produce strong countervailing desires, the meta-desires to strengthen weak desires, and the higher-level meta-desires), it looks as if a regress argument much like the original one rules out

our frequently being free by dint of being free to strengthen weak desires.

The non-restrictivist might reply that ARD* presumes an oversimplified view of desire's role in action. One might argue, for example, that sometimes one's desire to do one's duty is weak relative to one's other inclinations, but one acts dutifully anyway. The desire to act dutifully is not strengthened; one only focuses on the duty rather than on the inclination. The general idea is that action is not determined merely by the strengths of desires. Some other factor, such as the perceived importance of acting dutifully, must be taken into account. The success of the weak desires strategy (and, on the other side, of ARD*) thus depends on whether this other factor can be construed as not involving any strong desire or meta-desire to satisfy the weak desire.

The strategy of denying ARD. One might challenge ARD by appealing to examples like the green light case discussed above. It is not at all clear, one might say, that when the light turns green one has *any* desire to step on the gas pedal. One doesn't normally think about it *at all*. And so ARD is dubious.

This strategy does not look especially promising to me. My introspective powers tell me that I have *some* desire to step on the gas when the light turns green. To the extent that this is doubtful, it is doubtful that stepping on the gas is really an action, as opposed to a reflex. So we certainly do not have a clear counterexample to ARD. And if many of our alleged actions really are reflexes, restrictivism is again rather likely. In this case we do not ferquently act, much less act freely.

The non-occurrent desires strategy. A final non-restrictivist strategy grants the restrictivist's empirical claims but implicitly rejects ARD. This strategy alleges that we have *non-occurrent* desires. We want to say that Eric has a strong desire to go to Scotland, even though his thoughts at the moment are entirely occupied by an engineering project. So we say he has a "non-occurrent" desire to go to Scotland (whether this is ultimately to be understood in terms of what he would desire if the subject of travel were raised, or in terms of subconscious desire, or in some other way).

Now among our non-occurrent desires, says the objector, are meta-desires; in fact, for every desire (occurrent or otherwise) that we have, we also have some desire to have that desire. That is, every *n*th-order desire is accompanied by an $(n + 1)$th-order desire, and that by a $(n + 2)$th-order desire, and so on. (Of course, we may have conflicting $(n + 1)$th-order desires, so the fact that we sometimes have desires that conflict with lower-order desires – the desire to want not to smoke, say – does not show that the lower-order desires are not accompanied by the corresponding higher-order desires – in this example, the desire to want to smoke.) This is plausible, perhaps, if we understand non-occurrent desires dispositionally or counterfactually; we expect that an agent with a desire is in some way disposed or inclined to have that desire, and in this way has (at least) a non-occurent desire to have the desire.

The objector continues: this conception of non-occurrent desires escapes the regress argument because it shows how it is possible to have an infinite number of desires at once. Neither the number nor the "complexity" of these desires is an issue, since to have an infinite number of arbitrarily complex (non-occurrent) desires one has only to have some lower-order desire, and this is clearly possible.

I reply that the non-occurrent desires strategy, as presented here, does not respond to the claim that it is not possible to form an infinite series of desires at once because the higher-order desires must precede the lower-order desires. But even if there were a way around this difficulty, another difficulty would remain, viz., that ARD can plausibly be revised to require *occurrent* desire for action. How can an agent act without any occurrent desire to do so? The agent with only non-occurrent desires to perform some action seems no more able to do so than the agent with no desire to perform it. In neither case does the agent have the slightest passing thought of performing the action in question, and since an action is an event which flows from an agent's intentions, in neither case is the action in fact performed.

Such a revised version of ARD would also block the claim that restrictivism is false since, due to our non-occurrent desires, we unwittingly have desire-conflicts all the time. Non-occurrent desires, whatever other effects they would then have, would not bring about action unless they first became occurrent desires; nor

would non-occurrent desires make an agent free to act in a certain way unless the agent were free to make them occurrent. I leave it to the reader to construct the regress from here.

The weak desires strategy and this last version of the non-occurrent desires strategy are, to my mind, the most promising lines for the non-restrictive incompatibilist – certainly more promising than Fischer and Ravizza's approach. Should these fail, we may conclude the restrictivist position is in good shape.[12]

NOTES

[1] Van Inwagen says that restrictivism is true if the modal rule Beta is valid, and he uses something akin to ARD in the course of his argument. Since Fischer and Ravizza are willing to grant Beta's validity for the sake of argument, and since van Inwagen's argument can be presented without explicit reference to Beta, we will not address the question of its validity here.

[2] One might say that, in a sense, an agent cannot *now* be free to act at any time other than *now*. At this moment, there is no other time at which to act. But it is clear that Fischer and Ravizza are considering a different sense of 'free'. In this sense an agent is free to perform an action at a future time if there is a possible future in which the agent performs the action at that future time, and, throughout the relevant temporal interval, it will be up to the agent whether the next moment of that possible future occurs.

It is not always clear what is meant by "the relevant temporal interval", especially when the action in question is supposed not to occur. I propose we take it as follows. If the action is time-specific, as, e.g., turning on the TV at 8 o'clock, or taking the bread out of the oven twenty minutes from now, the relevant temporal interval is the interval from the time implicitly specified in the statement "the agent (now) has an unopposed desire to perform the action" to the time at which the action must occur if it occurs at all. We may then construe freedom to perform a time-inspecific action, such as finishing *Moby Dick*, as freedom to perform one of a collection of time-specific actions, such as finishing *Moby Dick* next Thursday evening.

[3] Peter van Inwagen, "When the Will Is Not Free," *Philosophical Studies*, 75 (1994), pp. 95–113.

[4] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, "Free Will and the Modal Principle," *Philosophical Studies*, 77 (1996), pp. 213–230.

[5] Van Inwagen, "When the Will Is Not Free," p. 106. The same points, *mutatis mutandis*, might be made in cases where A is not reprehensible but is for some other reason obviously not the thing to do.

It may not be clear whether motives are to be understood as desires or as desire-producing reasons or in some other way, but the argument will not be

affected so long as they are taken always to involve desires. Alternately, the claims van Inwagen makes about motives could be made directly for desires.

[6] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, "When the Will Is Free," in T. O'Connor, ed., *Agents, Causes, and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 250.

[7] If the argument is to be successful, Peter must not be able to make ARD false, since otherwise we would not be able to rule out Peter's being free to falsify ARD and then to refrain without any desire to refrain. But of course if ARD is true, then it is eminently plausible that this fact is not up to Peter.

[8] Van Inwagen, "When Is the Will Free?" in T. O'Connor, ed., *Agents, Causes, and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 231.

[9] Van Inwagen, "When the Will Is Not Free," p. 104.

[10] Indeed, it seems Fischer and Ravizza's view naturally leads us to the idea that we are continuously free during waking hours (at the least). They say there is no reason to think that we generally lack the power to generate desires to do otherwise. If the restrictivist's arguments provide no such reason, then what reasons are there to think we are not free at any particular moment? And if there are none, why not suppose we are free continuously, or nearly continuously?

Moreover, this view suggests that at a given moment we may be free to perform a spectacularly wide variety of actions, viz., any of those it is within our power to form a desire to do. One of the examples Fischer and Ravizza choose in their "Free Will and the Modal Principle" is taking up the bagpipes. Even on the assumption that "you are a singularly unmusical person with an aversion to Scottish music," they say, "it seems intuitively plausible to suppose that you do have the power to practice the bagpipes . . ." (225–6). Presumably they think we have this power at almost every time. Since the same is true of many other possible actions, we are (on this view) nearly always free to perform each of a great many actions.

In contrast, for the restrictivist who accepts the argument of this paper, we are free to do only what we have an occurrent desire or meta-desire to do. Since we do not have a great many occurrent desires at once, we are free with respect to only a small number of actions at a time.

[11] Van Inwagen, "When Is the Will Free?", p. 232.

[12] Many thanks to Gordon Pettit, whose work got me thinking about the issues discussed here. Thanks also to the many who commented on drafts, especially Ray Van Arragon and Dan and Frances Howard-Snyder.

Philosophy Department
Westmont College
Santa Barbara, CA 93108
USA