

FREEDOM: Soft Determinism

Lecture 18

Phil 1000, Fall 2008
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Quick Review

- Why Think You Are Free?
 - Choice and deliberation feels free (Free Will)
 - Notions of moral responsibility
 - Spirituality
- Determinism
 - Universal causation
 - Continuity of nature
 - Illusion of freedom (Free Will)

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Dilemma

- P1:** Either determinism or indeterminism is true.
 - P2:** If determinism is true, then we are not free (or responsible.)
 - P3:** If indeterminism is true, then we are not free (or responsible).
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- C:** We are not free (or responsible).

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Soft Determinism

- Denies P2: Hold that determinism is true, but we can make sense of being free or responsible.
- Two versions:
 - Alternate Possibilities (Ayer)
 - Conceptual (Stace)

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Alternate Possibilities

- We are free in so far as we have alternative possibilities available to us:
 - A person in chains doesn't have the option to leave, and so is not free.
 - A person not in chains does have the option to leave, and so is free.
- Freedom = having the option open to do; not having certain constraints on our actions.

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Conceptual

- Looks at how we conceptualize (or define) whether an action is free or unfree; common usage of the terms "free" or "unfree." (verbal dispute)
- Free vs. Unfree Actions:
 - Soft determinists (Stace) hold that freedom doesn't mean that actions or choices are uncaused (not indeterminism)
 - Rather a free act and an unfree act have different causes. Depending on the cause an action is voluntary or involuntary.

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Examples

Free Acts

- Gandhi fasting because we wanted to free India
- Stealing bread because one is hungry
- Signing a confession because to tell truth
- Leaving the office because one wanted lunch

Unfree Acts

- Man fasting in the desert because there was no food
- Stealing because employer threatened to beat
- Signing a confession because police beat
- Leaving because forcibly removed.

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Internal vs. External

- “Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states in the agent. Acts not freely done are those whose immediate causes are states of affairs external to the agent.” (Stace, p. 423)
- Freedom = not forced, coerced, or limited in certain ways

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A Few Problems

1. Mentally Ill and Modified Minds

- Mentally ill people and people on drugs (etc.) act for their own (internal) reasons but we don't hold them responsible, or think they are free...
- Appeals to “normalcy” might help, but appear arbitrary and may even beg the question.

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A Few Problems

2. Internal vs. External

- If we consider how beliefs/desires/etc. are formed, the distinction between internal and external causes of behavior appears arbitrary
- Culture, environment, education, biology, unconscious motivations, etc. are all things that form our internal mental states but over which we have no control...

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A Few Problems

3. Fundamental Problem

- Soft determinism may account for how we might normally use language, but it doesn't solve the metaphysical problem of control over actions or thoughts.
- Two Problems:
 - **Problem of Responsibility**: how do/should we assign praise and blame?
 - **Problem of Freedom**: are we genuinely in control of our actions in a world of causes that are not under our control?

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Next Time

Libertarianism
(Chisholm)

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