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PHL 463

### Human Freedom and The Self

In the paper "Human Freedom and the Self", Roderick Chisholm writes about the free will and if the action's that one takes are in fact actually free. Chisholm is an incompatibilist but he argues for free will. He believes that in order for an agent's actions to be free those actions must be caused not by other events but by the agent himself. He differentiates cases in which an agent is the cause of their actions and which they are not by categorizing the causes as either "immanent causes" or "transeunt causes". He makes the case that to act on ones free will is to act on mere inclination as opposed to determinists, who makes the case that the action produced is caused by a prior event, perhaps an inclination, that lead to the current event's happening.

In determinism, every event is caused by a previous event that leads to the current event, even the will, so there would be no free will. The argument follows these premises: **(1)** All of our actions are ultimately caused by forces outside of our control. **(2)** If an action is ultimately caused by forces outside our control, then that action is not free. **(3)** So, none of our actions are free. Chisholm, who believes in free will, accepts premise two but denies premise one. He believes that this premise could be made false by Agent causation, which means some of our actions are ultimately caused by us. He does this by separating causes into two distinct categories, transeunt causation and immanent causation. A transeunt cause is an event that caused another event to happen, while an immanent cause is an agent that ultimately causes an event to happen, and this causation would be caused by free will. Using the example that he uses in the paper of picking up a staff in a field of grass, he claims that picking up the staff would be an immanent cause and free will, while transeunt causes of the picking up the staff would be moving air particles through space, or releasing the pressure felt by the grass due to

the staff. All of these would be events caused by the transeunt cause of picking up the staff, these events are not related to free will. I believe that the strongest objection that someone could raise against this is that “picking up the staff” is not an immanent event. Stated simplistically, one does simply pick up a staff, but in reality, there are many more transeunt events at the molecular level that eventually caused arm movement and the grasping of the staff, these are cerebral events. This would mean that every event is caused by a transeunt cause, a cerebral event. The way that Chisholm could best reply to this objection would be to say that a cerebral event is an immanent cause. He could say the thought and the neural impulses were controlled by the agent.

He speaks on this objection in the paper. Determinism states that every event is caused by a prior event leading the current situation. This would mean that every thought and impulse is a direct effect of events that occurred in the past leading up to this very event, such as desires or beliefs. Chisholm states that an agent with free will’s actions need not be caused by desires or beliefs instead they [desires and beliefs] are inclinations, and to act of one’s own free will is to act on those inclinations. Using bribery as an example, if there was a potential you could be bribed, your motives could incline you to either invite the bribery, not invite the bribery, decline the bribery or not decline the bribery. Chisholm would say that acting on your motives that incline you is free will, while a determinist would say all the events up to this point in your life inclined you to act on this motive.