

PHILOSOPHY 101

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FRANKFURT ON ALTERNATE POSSIBILITIES

ALTERNATE POSSIBILITIES & DETERMINISM

- What explains why an agent is not morally responsible in cases of coercion/manipulation?
- a person is morally responsible for what they have done only if they could have done (or chosen) otherwise

Determinism:

For any state of the subject, that subject's states are necessitated by the condition of its previous states plus the laws of nature.

- The following are all compatible with determinism
 - choice
 - the causal efficacy of choice & effort
 - deliberation
 - unpredictability

- Is determinism compatible with free will?
 - Yes: 'Compatibilism'
 - No: 'Incompatibilism'
 - Incompatibilism says *why* determinism & freedom are incompatible, but not *whether we are in fact* free or determined

ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES & INCOMPATIBILISM

- Why might determinism & freedom be incompatible?
- Determinism deprives us of the *power or ability to do or choose otherwise*.

Leeway Incompatibilism:

The truth of determinism is incompatible with an agent's having the capacity to do otherwise than as she did

COERCION & PAP

When we excuse a person who has been coerced, we do not excuse him because he was unable to do otherwise. Even though a person is subject to a coercive force that precludes his performing any action but one, he may nonetheless bear full moral responsibility for performing that action. (Frankfurt, 834)

- Frankfurt denies that PAP is the relevant explanation of why in coercion (or manipulation) one is not morally responsible

THE CASE OF JONES

Jones decides for reasons of his own to do something, then someone threatens him with a very harsh penalty (so harsh that any reasonable person would submit to the threat) unless he does precisely that, and Jones does it. Will we hold Jones morally responsible for what he has done? I think this will depend on the roles we think were played, in leading him to act, by his original decision and by the threat. (Frankfurt, 831)

VERSIONS OF THE CASE

- Jones₁: Always does what he decides to do; the threat plays no role
 - responsible for acting
- Jones₂: The threat totally overpowers Jones; he does what the threat says, no matter what he decided earlier
 - not responsible for acting
- Jones₃: Weighs decision and threat evenly, but ultimately acts on his original reasons rather than the threat
 - responsible for acting

RESPONSIBILITY & PAP

- Claim: Jones₁₋₃ show that PAP plays no role in evaluation of moral responsibility
- Assignment of moral responsibility depends on evaluating *the reasons for which one acted*, not whether one could have done otherwise
 - Jones₁ and Jones₃ acted on the basis of bad motives, that is why they are responsible

COERCION WITH RESPONSIBILITY?

- The Jones case counts as coercion only if Jones acts *because of* the threat
- Coercion requires that the coerced subject act *because of* the coercive force exerted on her
 - Only the case of Jones₂ is a case of genuine coercion

OBJECTION

- Is the case of Jones3 a clear counterexample to the claim that coercion/manipulation excuses?
 - The presence of the threat in the Jones3 case does not meant that he *could not* have done otherwise

RESPONSE – JONES₄

- Jones₄: acts for his own reasons, but if there was any sign of his acting differently, would have been forced to carry out the act anyway

FRANKFURT'S CONCLUSION

- The relevant explanation of why someone is responsible concerns the reasons for which they act, not whether they could have done otherwise
 - In cases of coercion or manipulation, one is not responsible because of the relationship one has to the reasons for which one acts

LEEWAY INCOMPATIBILISM

- If Frankfurt is correct then Leeway Incompatibilism is false
- Might there be other ways in which determinism & freedom are incompatible?

