

# Philosophy 101

## Determinism & Moral Responsibility (I)

November 4, 2014

Philosophy 101

Determinism &  
Moral  
Responsibility  
(I)

Review

Control &  
Moral  
Responsibility

Strawson's  
'Basic  
Argument'

Review

# Determinism

**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.

- ① Is the truth of determinism compatible with free will?
  - Yes: Compatibilism
  - No: Incompatibilism
- ② Is determinism true?

# Is There Free Will?

- Yes: Libertarianism

**Libertarianism:** determinism is false and there is free will

- No: Hard Incompatibilism

**Hard Incompatibilism:** There is no free will of the kind necessary for moral responsibility and desert

# 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

Philosophy 101

Determinism &  
Moral  
Responsibility  
(I)

Review

Control &  
Moral  
Responsibility

Strawson's  
'Basic  
Argument'

## Control & Moral Responsibility

# Alternative Possibilities & Incompatibilism

- Frankfurt cases suggest that one might be morally responsible even if one couldn't have done otherwise
- According to Frankfurt in order for coercion to occur we must act *because* of the exerted coercive force
  - suggests that the attribution of responsibility depends on the source of the agent's reasons for acting

## Source of Agency

- The agent must have control over the production of her decision to act if she is to be morally responsible for it
- If an agent does have control over the production of her decision to act then she is not morally responsible for it
- Source: moral responsibility is incompatible with the fact that the agent was not the source of the relevant intention to act



## Source of Agency

*Jane is considering what to eat in the student union. She deliberates about her choices and decides that, of the options available, Subway's offerings most closely match what she desires, and so she decides to order a sub.*

- Did Jane play an appropriate role in the production of this decision?
- Is she responsible for the decision?

## Source of Agency

*Jane is considering what to eat in the student union. Unbeknownst to her, Subway is filling the air with a chemical that subliminally generates in subjects an intention to eat a sandwich. Jane forms the intention, and decides on Subway accordingly. She enjoys her sandwich.*

- Did Jane play an appropriate role in the production of this decision?
- Is she responsible for the decision?

## Source of Agency

**The Source Requirement:** If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has *control*, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decision if it is produced by a source over which she has no control

## Varieties of Incompatibilism

**Source Incompatibilism:** The truth of determinism is incompatible with an agent's having a causal history of a sort that allows the agent to be the source of her action, and thus have the action be under her control in the manner required for moral responsibility

## Source Incompatibilism

- A necessary condition of being morally responsible is that one have control over one's actions/intentions
- Control over one's actions requires that one be the ultimate causal *source* of the action/intention to act

## Free Will & Indeterminism

*perhaps [determinism] isn't true. Many scientists now believe that it isn't true for the basic particles of matter-that in a given situation, there's more than one thing that an electron may do. Perhaps if determinism isn't true for human actions, either, this leaves room for free will and responsibility. What if human actions, or at least some of them, are not determined in advance? (Nagel, 55)*

- If actions aren't determined 'in advance' then what determines them?

## Free Will & Indeterminism

*is even [indeterminism] enough for free will? Is this all you mean when you say, "I could have chosen fruit instead?"-that the choice wasn't determined in advance? No, you believe something more. You believe that you determined what you would do, by doing it. It wasn't determined in advance, but it didn't just happen, either. You did it, and you could have done the opposite. (Nagel, 53)*

# Free Will & Indeterminism

- Is indeterminism enough for freedom?
- No: Indeterminism is incompatible with the source requirement
  - source of intention must issue in the right way from the subject



Philosophy 101

Determinism &  
Moral  
Responsibility  
(I)

Review

Control &  
Moral  
Responsibility

Strawson's  
'Basic  
Argument'

## Strawson's 'Basic Argument'

## First Statement

- ① Nothing can be the cause of itself
- ② In order to be truly morally responsible for one's actions one would have to be the cause of oneself in some crucial respects
- ③  $\therefore$  No one can be truly morally responsible

# Questions About the Basic Argument

- Why does being morally responsible require being self-caused?
- What 'crucial respects' must be caused?
  - character
  - evaluative dispositions & preferences

## Strawson's Revision

- ① You do what you do because of the way you are.
  - ② To be morally responsible for what you do you must be truly morally responsible for the way you are – at least in certain crucial mental respects.
  - ③ To be truly responsible for the way you are, you must have intentionally brought it about that you are the way you are, and this is impossible.
  - ④  $\therefore$  You cannot be truly morally responsible for what you do, because you cannot be truly responsible for the way you are.
- Is the argument valid? Sound?

## Questions about Strawson's Revision

- Premise 2: Why does moral responsibility require that one be responsible for how one is 'in certain crucial mental respects'?
- Premise 3: Why is it impossible to have intentionally brought about how one is?
- Conclusion: Why think that if one cannot be morally responsible for the way one is, one cannot be morally responsible for what one does?