

# Philosophy 101

## Frankfurt on Alternate Possibilities & Freedom

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Frankfurt on  
Alternate  
Possibilities &  
Freedom

## Review

Frankfurt on  
Alternate  
Possibilities

Free Will &  
Determinism

# Review

# Freedom

**Freedom of Will:** [1] a capacity of an agent to [2] choose according to her preferences [3] from amongst a set of relevant alternatives such that [4] she is responsible for that choice or action

# Kinds of Freedom

- Freedom from coercion (mental or physical)
- Freedom from manipulation

# Incompatibilism

- An agent who is coerced or manipulated is (typically) not morally responsible for her actions
- Moral responsibility and coercion/manipulation are *'incompatible'*
  - Why?

# Alternate Possibilities

The Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP): a person is morally responsible for what s/he has done only if s/he could have done otherwise (or chosen otherwise)

# Alternate Possibilities

- What explains why an agent is not morally responsible in cases of coercion/manipulation?
  - Proposal: PAP is violated – The agent could not have done otherwise

## Frankfurt on Alternate Possibilities



## 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

- Jones<sub>1</sub>: Always does what he decides to do; the threat plays no role
  - responsible for acting
- Jones<sub>2</sub>: The threat totally overpowers Jones; he does what the threat says, no matter what he decided earlier
  - not responsible for acting
- Jones<sub>3</sub>: Weighs decision and threat evenly, but ultimately acts on his original reasons rather than the threat
  - responsible for acting

## Responsibility & PAP

- Claim: Jones<sub>1-3</sub> 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
  - Jones<sub>1</sub> and Jones<sub>3</sub> 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 Jones<sub>2</sub> is a case of genuine coercion

## Objection

- Is the case of Jones<sub>3</sub> a clear counterexample to the claim that coercion/manipulation excuses?
  - The presence of the threat in the Jones<sub>3</sub> case does not meant that he *could not* have done otherwise

## Objection

*His knowledge that he stands to suffer an intolerably harsh penalty does not mean that Jones<sub>3</sub>, strictly speaking, cannot perform any action but the one he does perform. After all it is still open to him, and this is crucial, to defy the threat if he wishes to do so and to accept the penalty his action would bring down upon him. In the sense in which the principle of alternate possibilities employs the concept of "could have done otherwise," Jones<sub>3</sub>'s inability to resist the threat does not mean that he cannot do otherwise than perform the action he performs. Hence the case of Jones<sub>3</sub> does not constitute an instance contrary to the principle. (Frankfurt, 834)*

## Response – Jones<sub>4</sub>

*Suppose someone-Black, let us say-wants Jones<sub>4</sub> to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So he waits until Jones<sub>4</sub> is about to make up his mind what to do, and he does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of such things) that Jones<sub>4</sub> is going to decide to do something other than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones<sub>4</sub> is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones<sub>4</sub> decides to do, and that he does do, what he wants him to do. Whatever Jones<sub>4</sub>'s initial preferences and inclinations, then, Black will have his way. (Frankfurt, 835)*



## Response – Jones<sub>4</sub>

*suppose that Black never has to show his hand because Jones<sub>4</sub>, for reasons of his own, decides to perform and does perform the very action Black wants him to perform. In that case, it seems clear, Jones<sub>4</sub> will bear precisely the same moral responsibility for what he does as he would have borne if Black had not been ready to take steps to ensure that he do it. (Frankfurt, 836)*

## 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

## Free Will & Determinism

# 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.

# Determinism

- 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

# Do We Have Free Will?

- What about the factual question of whether we have free will?
  - Yes: Libertarianism
  - No: Hard Incompatibilism

# There is Free Will

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



# There is No Free Will – Hard Incompatibilism

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

## Key Concepts

- Conception of Free Will
- Principle of Alternate Possibilities
- Compatibilism & Incompatibilism
- Determinism
- Libertarianism
- Hard Incompatibilism

## Questions

- Is free will necessary for moral responsibility?
- Is free will compatible with determinism?
- Is moral responsibility compatible with determinism?