

# Philosophy 101

## Determinism & Moral Responsibility (II)

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Philosophy 101

Determinism &  
Moral  
Responsibility  
(II)

The Basic  
Argument

Review  
Questions

# The Basic Argument

# The Argument

- 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

## What is 'True moral responsibility'?

*As I understand it, true moral responsibility is responsibility of such a kind that, if we have it, then it makes sense, at least, to suppose that it could be just to punish some of us with (eternal) torment in hell and reward others with (eternal) bliss in heaven...The story of heaven and hell is useful simply because it illustrates, in a particularly vivid way, the kind of absolute or ultimate accountability or responsibility that many have supposed themselves to have, and that many do still suppose themselves to have. (Strawson, 9-10)*

## What is 'True moral responsibility'?

**Basic Desert:** For an agent to be morally responsible for an action is for it to be hers in such a way that she would deserve to be the recipient of an expression of moral indignation if she understood that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve to be the recipient of an expression of praise if she understood that it was morally exemplary

# Questions About the Basic Argument

- Why does being morally responsible require being self-caused?
- What 'crucial respects' must be caused?
  - character
  - evaluative dispositions & preferences
- Why can't we be self-caused in these respects?

## 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?



## Defending Premise 2

- The choices over which we have control are partly a product of our character and evaluative dispositions
- We have to have control over our character and dispositions if we're to be ultimately morally responsible

## Defending the Conclusion

- We aren't responsible for those aspects of ourselves over which we have no control
  - hair color
  - skin color
  - social-economic class
- Our control over what decisions we make depends in part on our character and evaluative dispositions
- If we have no control over our character and evaluative dispositions then we have no ultimate control over the decisions we make which depend on them

## Premise 3: The Impossibility

- ① Suppose that you have somehow intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are, and that you have brought this about in such a way that you can now be said to be truly responsible for being the way you now are
- ② You must *already* have had a certain nature N in the light of which you intentionally brought it about that you are as you now are
- ③ For (2) to be true you must be truly responsible for having the nature N in virtue of which you intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are
- ④  $\therefore$  You must have intentionally brought about N, which requires that you have some further nature N1, in virtue of which you brought about your nature N... (infinite regress ensues)
- ⑤  $\therefore$  It is impossible for you to have intentionally brought it about that you are as you are now

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## Review Questions

## Question 1

The source requirement says that

- A. we have free will*
- B. moral responsibility depends on being able to do otherwise*
- C. control is irrelevant to moral responsibility*
- D. responsibility for a choice requires that one be the appropriate source of the choice*

## Question 2

Determinism says that:

- A. we cannot make any choices*
- B. our choices are not causally effective*
- C. the state of subject, plus the laws of nature, necessitate the future states of the subject*
- D. we are free*

## Question 3

If determinism is false then we have free will

- A. *True*
- B. *False*

## Question 4

You cannot be truly responsible for the way you are because

- A. you cannot do otherwise than you do*
- B. determinism is true*
- C. determinism is false*
- D. in certain crucial respects you cannot have intentionally brought it about that you are as you are now*