

## Lecture 2: Compatibilism

Compatibilists believe that either free will or moral responsibility (or both) are compatible with determinism. Today's focus:

- 1) Harry Frankfurt's free will compatibilism.
  - 2) Peter Strawson's moral responsibility compatibilism.
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### 1) Frankfurt's Compatibilist Account of Free Will

- **Second order desire:** a desire for a desire.  
*E.g. I want to want to get up early.*  
Frankfurt: "No animal other than man... appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires."<sup>1</sup>
- **Effective desire:** a desire that moves you all the way to action.  
*E.g. If you get up early, your desire to get up early has proved 'effective'.*
- **Your 'will':** comprised of your effective desires.  
*E.g. your effective desire to get up early comprised your will – you willed getting up.*
- **Second order volition:** a desire about which desire will comprise my will.  
*E.g. I want my desire to get up early to prove effective – i.e. to comprise my will.*
- **Wanton vs. Unwilling addict.**  
Wanton - A creature with no second-order volitions.  
Contrast: 'Unwilling addict' - agent with a strong second order volition that his desire to abstain from drug proves effective, rather than his desire to take drug.
- A **free action** occurs when you did what you wanted to do.  
Free action is commonly *confused* with free will.
- **Free will:** Your will is free when your effective desires (desires that move you to action) conform to your second order volitions (your desires about which desires move you to action).

- Qs: 1) Why are second order volitions so significant?  
2) What of implanted second order volitions?

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<sup>1</sup> Frankfurt (1971) p.7.

## 2) Strawson's Compatibilist Account of Moral Responsibility

### ▪ **Reactive vs. objective stance.**

Reactive stance: comprised of attitudes such as resentment, anger, love & gratitude; tied up with the standards of good will & concern we expect from others and ourselves.

Objective stance: a perspective from which we view actions/agents impersonally & objectively. Here we hold ourselves removed from reactive attitudes.

### ▪ **Could truth of determinism lead us to give up on moral responsibility?**

Strawson: Inconceivable!

Practices of holding responsible → enmeshed in reactive stance.

Reactive stance → essential for human relationships & impossible to avoid for long.

∴ Holding each other morally responsible is hardwired into us.

### ▪ **But is this hardwiring *rational*?**

Truth of determinism is a theoretical conviction.

Rationality of moral responsibility practices is a practical matter.

∴ Truth of determinism has no bearing on practical rationality of giving up on moral responsibility & reactive stance.

### ▪ **Breaking out of the impasse**

Pessimists (responsibility incompatibilists) right to recoil from optimists' (responsibility compatibilists') justification of moral responsibility:

- Optimists neglect importance of the reactive stance.
- They see things only from the objective stance – too inhuman!

But once central importance of reactive stance understood, pessimists must give up theoretical worries about determinism.

- Such worries are out of place in practical assessment of moral responsibility.

### **Q: Can we separate theoretical from practical as neatly as Strawson suggests?**

*Suppose by their nature, humans tend to believe in god, and this belief allows societies and individuals to flourish. Can we not still sensibly challenge god's existence?*

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#### **References:**

- Frankfurt, Harry, 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *Journal of Philosophy*, 68 (1971).  
Strawson, P.F., 'Freedom and Resentment' in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, pp. 1-28.