FREEDOM:  
Challenge of Determinism  
Lecture 17

Phil 1000, Fall 2008  
Prof. Bryan Benham

Why Think You Are Free?

• Choice and Deliberation  
  – We feel as though we are in control of what we do, our deliberations,  
    our choice in action, etc.

• Moral Responsibility  
  – We hold people responsible for their actions, in part because we think  
    they are in control, free to choose, etc.

• Spirituality  
  – Some religious doctrines hold we are free because we are non-  
    material (souls or spirits), not subject to the material causes.

Determinism

Determinism is the view that contrary to what  
you might think, humans are not free. Why?

1. Universal Causation  
   – Every event has a cause; or every event has a prior  
     cause(s) that necessitates that event.

2. Continuity of Nature  
   Humans are complex creatures, but not  
   separate from nature or the causal structure  
   of the world  
   – Humans are predictable  
   – Subject to complex biological and physical causes  
   – Subject to environmental and cultural causes

3. Illusion of Freewill  
   – Thinking we are in control of our actions or  
     deliberations is a result of not recognizing (or  
     being ignorant of) all the prior causes.  
     • Ignore or are ignorant of prior environmental, cultural,  
       biological influence/causes.
   
   – We take this ignorance to be evidence of freewill  
     (Holbach).

Indeterminism  
(a.k.a., Libertarianism)

Denies universal causation:  
Although many events have causes, some events do not;  
some events are uncaused.

• Human action, choice, and deliberation are some of the  
  events that are uncaused.

• Thus, being free (freewill) amounts to being uncaused, or  
  having one’s actions uncaused.
Indeterminism

• If being free = being uncaused, then...
  – Problem 1: uncaused = random chance or arbitrary; but freedom doesn’t feel arbitrary, freewill implies some control over thoughts or actions.
  – Problem 2: uncaused = no causal connection to one’s thoughts or actions; If something just happens, we don’t hold people responsible; responsibility requires purpose/intent... a causal connection to one’s actions.

---

Answering the Dilemma

Dilemma

P1: Either determinism or indeterminism is true.

P2: If determinism is true, then we are not free (or responsible.)

P3: If indeterminism is true, then we are not free (or responsible).

C: We are not free (or responsible).

---

Options

• Deny P1: difficult to do; exhaustive options.
  – Deny P2: argue that determinism doesn’t mean we are not free
  – Soft determinism
  – Libertarianism
  – Suck it up! Accept the conclusion
  – Hard determinism

---

Question

The truth will set you free!

What if the truth is that you are not free?

---

Next Time

Soft Determinism
(Stace)