

The Remaining Threat from Determinism in P. F. Strawson's Account

**Il-Hwan Yu
(University of Nebraska-Lincoln)**

Abstract

- Hard determinists' argument :

H1: If determinism is true, then all people do not enjoy free will.

H2: Moral responsibility requires free will.

H3: If determinism is true, then all people are exempted from moral responsibility.

Abstract

- P.F. Strawson's refutation to the hard determinists' claim:

S1: Determinism is already true.

S2: Reactive attitudes are based on the natural facts of human society.

S3: Moral responsibility requires reactive attitudes.

S4: The truth of determinism cannot suspend reactive attitudes.

S5: Even if determinism is true, all people cannot be exempted from moral responsibility.

Abstract

- My argument against Strawson's claim :
 1. If Strawson want to show the plausibility of his claim, then he should persuade hard determinists to agree with his claim.
 2. Reactive attitudes can serve as a basis of moral responsibility only if an agent is the source of his action, which requires that the agent be free.
 3. On hard determinism's view, if determinism is true, then sourcehood is impossible, and thus reactive attitudes cannot serve as a basis of moral responsibility.
 4. Strawson's theory of moral responsibility is still vulnerable against a hard determinist's claim.

Strawson's Notion of Free Will

- Reactive attitudes:
 - Reactive attitudes serve a basis for moral responsibility in our actual lives.
 - Reactive attitudes are natural facts of human society
- The suspension of reactive attitudes
 - (1) Excusing conditions → Free will
 - (2) Exempting conditions → Moral capacity:

An agent is capable of the commitment to interpersonal relationship

Strawson's Notion of Free Will

- Excusing conditions:

Excusing conditions involve the possibility of an agent being in an unavoidable circumstance where he has no control over his action which harms us.

Strawson's Notion of Free Will

- Excusing conditions

→ An agent can be excused from moral responsibility for their harmful actions if we learn that they were acting under unavoidable circumstances.

- If the agent satisfies excusing conditions, then we suspend or modify reactive attitudes for their actions and exculpate them for moral responsibility

the SNM thesis

P1: For any agent S and an action A of S, if S was not the source of A, then S's circumstance satisfies excusing conditions.

P2: For any agent S and an action A of S, if S is not the source of A, then reactive attitudes in response to A could not serve as the basis of moral responsibility.

C1: For any agent S and an action A of S, reactive attitudes in response to A can serve as the basis of moral responsibility only if S is the source of A.

the SNM thesis

P3: On hard determinism's view, for any agent S and an action A of S, if determinism is true, then it is impossible for S to be the source of A.

C2: On hard determinism's view, if determinism is true, then all reactive attitudes cannot serve as the basis of moral responsibility.

Objections and Replies

- Objection 3: Denying P3—Higher-order Desires Theory

P3 can be problematic.

If determinism is true, first order desires are necessitated by antecedent causal conditions; however, second order desires can be free. This is because, according to Frankfurt, our own self's being the source of our actions is not necessitated by the causal link. If this is right, determinism cannot threaten an agent being the source of his action; thus, in Frankfurt's view, P3 cannot be plausible.

Objections and Replies

- Objection 3: Denying P3—Higher-order Desires Theory

Refutation to the objection 3

→ Frankfurt's claim is based on soft determinism. However, in P3, I defined the content of determinism as hard determinism. Thus, the attempt to undermine the plausibility of P3 by applying soft determinism to P3.