

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

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**Class #23**  
**Hume on the Self and Free Will**

# Mindreading Video



## Two Humes



- The skeptical Hume argues that we have no knowledge of the future or unobserved.
- The naturalist Hume presumes our beliefs in universal scientific laws, and explains them in terms of our natural psychological capacities.
- But to explain is not to justify and the problem of induction persists.
- Our next two topics, the self and free will, will start from naturalist assumptions.

# Topics in Hume

- ✓1. Causation and Induction
- ☛2. **The Bundle Theory of the Self**
- 3. Free Will and Compatibilism

# Locke and Berkeley on the Self

- Locke argued that we identify with our conscious experience, linked by memory.
  - ▶ The prince and the cobbler
  - ▶ The day/night man
- Hume worries that the common notion of self outruns our memories.
  - ▶ Memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. It will be incumbent on those who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 530b).
- Berkeley worried that given Locke's constraints on our capacities to acquire beliefs, we have no sense of self.
  - ▶ "There can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert... they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts... The words *will*, *soul*, *spirit* do not stand for different ideas or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which, being an agent, cannot be like or represented by any idea whatsoever - though it must be admitted at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of those words" (Berkeley, *Principles* §27, AW 452b).
- Berkeley abandoned his strict policy of never admitting an object that was not first in the senses to posit the self in order to unify our experiences.

# Hume Stands His Ground

- Since we have no idea of the self, we have no reason to believe in any such thing.
  - “If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions or from any other that the idea of self is derived, and, consequently, there is no such idea” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).
- There is no underlying, unifying object which we can call the self.
- There are just perceptions.
  - “When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).
- Again, a positive account would be useful.

# A Functional View

- Hume's claim that there is no self relies on his premise that a self should be precisely identical over time.
  - Too strong
  - As we age and acquire more experiences, we have different properties.
  - Certain experiences are cathartic, change us.
  - Metaphoric?
- A biological theory of the self can accommodate these changes without giving up on an enduring self by relying on the functional organization of the body as a criterion for identity over time.
- The self as a collection of loosely-related individual instances of bodies, each just a moment of time wide
  - Related biological entities
- Hume's account of our ordinary conception of self is similar to this functional view.

# Loose Connections of Experiences

- Hume argues that we never perceive a self.
- But we do have experiences.
- So whatever we call ourselves must be related to our series of experiences.
- Our experiences are joined by a variety of psychological connections among our ideas.
  - resemblance, contiguity, cause and effect
- These psychological connections govern all of our thoughts.
- They do not connect our ideas in some underlying substance.
- They conjoin our experiences over time.
- Memory too demonstrates mere conjunctions.



# The Diverse Self

- Instead of being a paradigm of unity, Hume thus argues that the self is an exemplar of diversity.
- Just as Berkeley argues that the apple is merely a bundle of independent sense experiences, its taste independent from its roundness and its crunch, we are just a collection of various, separate experiences.
- As far as we know, even the world itself is just a loose collection of events unconnected by causal laws.
- Everything is particular and all the particulars are independent.
  - “Every distinct perception which enters into the composition of the mind is a distinct existence and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive” (AW 529b).
- The self is dissolved.
  - “When we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confined to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions. What will suffice to prove this hypothesis to the satisfaction of every fair enquirer, is to show from daily experience and observation, that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are supposed to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation...” (AW 527b).

# The No-Self Theory and the Bundle Theory

## Two ways to view Hume's theory of the self

- It is a no-self theory because he denies any experience of a self.
- We can call it the bundle theory of self for his claim about our loose connections.
  - A bit misleading
  - It might wrongly be interpreted as claiming that there is a self which unites the bundle.
- We have a practical interest in maintaining a notion of the self over time.
- But the claim that there is a self underlying the experiences, some haecceity, is, strictly speaking, false.
- There is no I, beyond the experiences.
  - Buddhist view
  - Descartes's claim that the cogito yields the existence of a thinker is too strong.
  - We can not claim that a self exists.
  - We are just thought.
- Or anyway we can have no knowledge of any self.

# Topics in Hume

- ✓1. Causation and Induction
- ✓2. The Bundle Theory of the Self
- ☛3. **Free Will and Compatibilism**

# Three Positions on Free Will

1. Libertarianism: Our will is free
  - ▶ We have reasons to believe that we are free: our conscious experience feels free.
2. Determinism: Our will is not free, but determined
  - ▶ We have reasons to believe that we are determined.
  - ▶ Theistic determinism
  - ▶ Laplacean determinism
  - ▶ Libertarianism and determinism are both incompatibilist positions.
3. Compatibilism: We are both free and determined

# Libertarian Freedom

- Descartes attributed our ability to err to our freedom.
- The libertarian believes that the future is not fixed.
- Phenomenology of human action
  - We don't feel the causal pressure of the past.
- Indeterminacy of quantum physics?
  - Quantum indeterminacy does not seem to rise to the observable level.
  - Random indeterminacies
- Our freedom does not seem to consist of random moments inconsistent with the laws.
- Our freedom is rooted in our ability to choose among various options.

# The Deterministic Response

- To avoid libertarianism, the determinist tries to show that our feeling of free will is illusory.
- Appearances of free will might, say, be attributed to a lack of understanding of the laws and the initial conditions.
- Or, they can be attributed to the inability of a finite mind to comprehend the infinitude of God.

# Problems with Determinism

- The thought that I don't have the freedom I appear to have is unpleasant.
- Determinism seems to undermine our ordinary notions of moral responsibility.
  - ▶ Ordinarily, we think that we are morally responsible only for behavior that we could have avoided.
  - ▶ We are not responsible when we have no ability to do otherwise.
  - ▶ I am not personally responsible for stopping climate change, tidying the surface of Jupiter, or preventing the great Chicago fire of 1871.
  - ▶ In contrast, since I can contribute to the reduction of carbon in our atmosphere, I may be responsible for doing so.
- If determinism is true, and if it entails that I can never do otherwise than what I do, it seems that I can never be morally responsible for any of my actions.
- Intuitively, we do think people are morally responsible for some of their actions.
- So, determinism clashes with these intuitions.

# Compatibilism

- Compatibilism: determinism is not opposed to free will.
- Leibniz defended determinacy with contingency
  - Caesar example
  - implausible
- Hume: an act is free if it is done in accordance with our will, even if the act is also determined.
  - It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it (*Enquiry*, §VIII.1, AW 565b).
- People do not generally surprise us with their actions.
  - When they do, it is due to our ignorance rather than any unpredictability in their behavior.
  - “The philosopher, if he is consistent, must apply the same reasoning to the actions and volitions of intelligent agents. The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for by those who know every particular circumstance of their character and situation” (§VIII.1, 568a).
- The dispute between libertarians and determinists is mainly verbal.
  - The freedom that we really care about is not opposed to determinism.



# 'Freedom' and Necessity

- Hume's claim is that 'freedom' is ambiguous.
- In the libertarian sense, 'freedom' is opposed to 'determinism', or 'necessity'.
- But freedom in that sense is not even desirable.
- Libertarian free acts are uncaused, without reasons.
  - Random and chaotic
- Worse, since libertarian free actions are not determined by our will, we seem to be blameless.
  - We do not hold the lion morally culpable for killing the wildebeest.

# How Libertarian Freedom Prevents Moral Responsibility

- “The actions themselves may be blamable; they may be contrary to all the rules of morality and religion. But the person is not answerable for them and, as they proceeded from nothing in him that is durable and constant and leave nothing of that nature behind them, it is impossible he can, upon their account, become the object of punishment or vengeance. According to the principle, therefore, which denies necessity, and consequently causes, a man is as pure and untainted after having committed the most horrid crime as at the first moment of his birth, nor is his character any way concerned in his actions, since they are not derived from it, and the wickedness of the one can never be used as a proof of the depravity of the other” (§VIII.2, 572b).
- Hume has turned the table on the determinist.
- We were worried that determinism prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.
- Hume argues that free will, in the sense opposed to determinism, also prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.

# 'Freedom' and Constraint

- Hume claims that an action is done freely, properly understood, when it is done without external constraint.
- I act compatibilist freely if I am not dragged, pushed, or held at gunpoint to perform an action.
- “For what is meant by liberty when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connection with motives, inclinations, and circumstances that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will* -that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner and in chains” (§VIII.1, AW 571a).

# Moral Responsibility in a Deterministic World

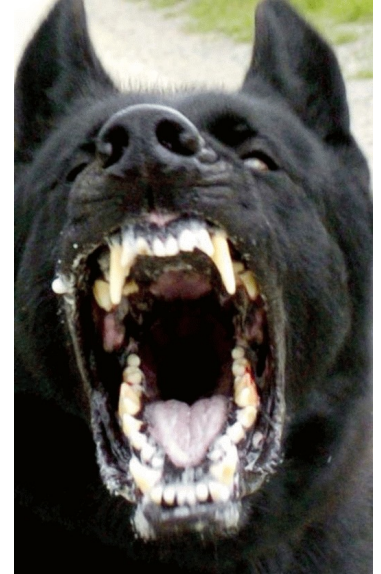
- If I do something only because I could not have done otherwise, I do not do it freely.
  - ▶ I do not return to the ground when I jump in the air of my free will.
  - ▶ If I pay my taxes because I am afraid of being fined or imprisoned, or if I refrain from cheating only out of fear of punishment, or if I am forced by threat to do any action I do not wish to perform, I do not act freely.
- If I want to pay taxes, since I approve of their uses in building and maintaining roads, schools and armed forces; or if I refrain from cheating because I believe it to be wrong, then I am acting in accordance with my will, freely.
- Consequently, we can hold people morally responsible for those acts they perform freely, in Hume's sense, and not for those they perform under constraint.

# The Compatibilist Wins!

- By focusing on a sense of 'freedom' that is not opposed to determinism, Hume makes free will compatible with determinism.
- He also makes both the acceptance of both free will and determinism compatible with ascriptions of moral responsibility.
- He allows us an account of moral responsibility which aligns with our belief that we are responsible only for that which we choose.
- Hume's definition is consistent with the doctrine that ought implies can, that our moral responsibilities do not exceed our powers.
- Everyone should be happy.

# Not So Fast!

- The reflective determinist will be unsatisfied with Hume's definition.
- The determinist can pursue the question of whether we are free or determined by asking whether we are free to choose what we choose, or whether we are constrained.
- If our thoughts are themselves the products of physical processes, mainly brain processes along with their inputs (from perception), then the same problem of determinism recurs with regard to our will.
- That is, we do seem to distinguish between cases in which our will is constrained and cases in which it is not.



The  
incompatibilist

# Freedom and Constraint of the Will

- If our wills are constrained, then there is a deep sense in which we are not free, even if we are not under external constraint.
- We excuse children from legal responsibility, because we think that they are not free to choose otherwise, even when they are not constrained by an external force.
- Mental disorders
  - The differences between adults, on the one hand, and children and people with dementia, on the other, may not be as significant as is ordinarily assumed.
  - More of our actions are seen as the result of mental predispositions than as the result of free choice.
  - DSM-V
- Neuroscientific progress and advances in genetics
  - Such scientific progress will include, eventually, substantial predictive power.
  - fMRI and mindreading
- Can we maintain, as the compatibilist does, that we are free, if a computer can predict our behavior?
  - The absence of free will implied by the predictability of our actions seems to excuse.
  - That is the essence of incompatibilism.

# Frankfurt Cases

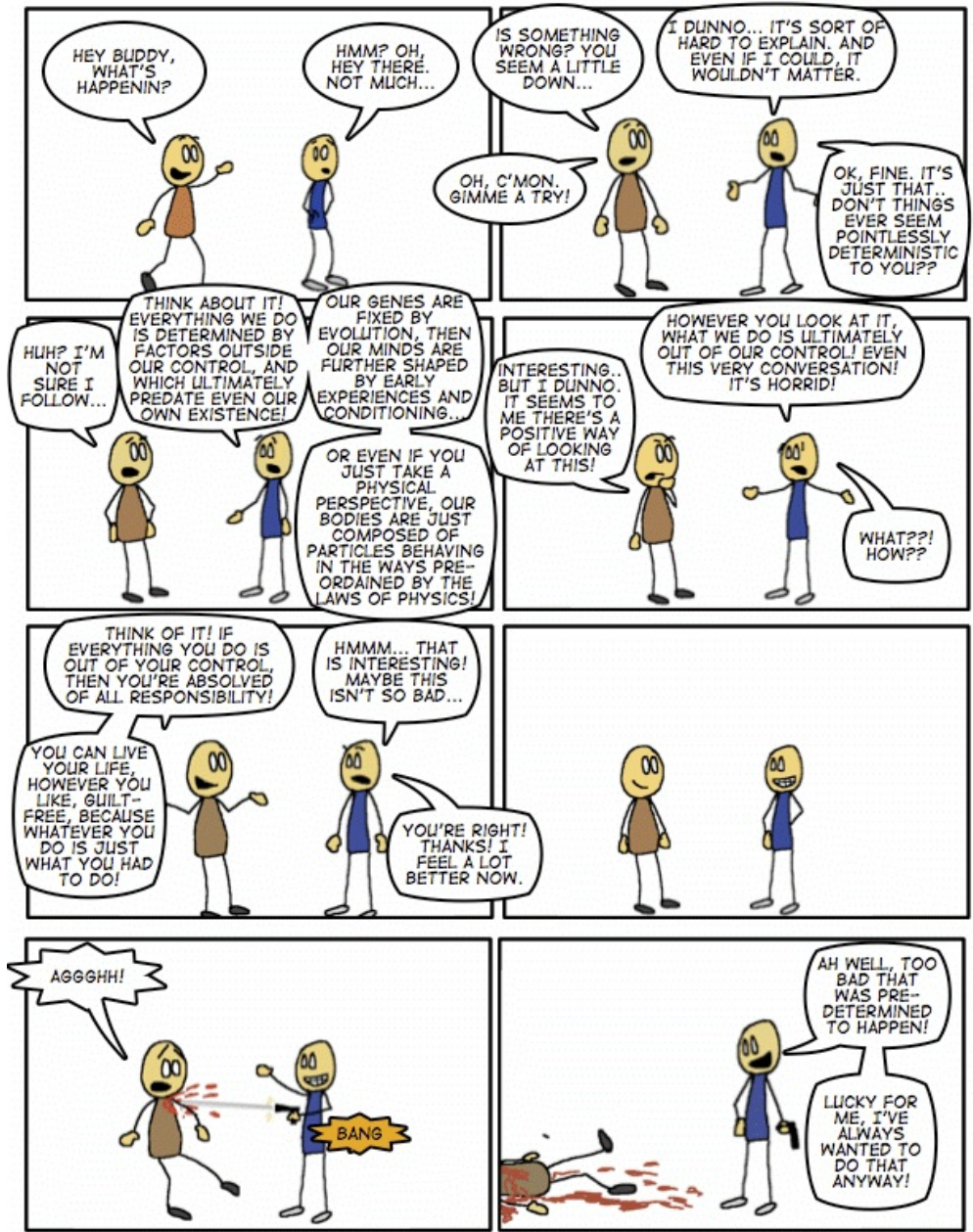
## Contemporary Version of Hume's Compatibilism

- One can be morally responsible even if one could not have done otherwise.
  - ▶ 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 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... Now 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. It would be quite unreasonable to excuse Jones<sub>4</sub> for his action...on the basis of the fact that he could not have done otherwise. This fact played no role at all in leading him to act as he did... Indeed, everything happened just as it would have happened without Black's presence in the situation and without his readiness to intrude into it (Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," 835-6).
- Jones<sub>4</sub> could not have done otherwise, since Black was prepared to force him to act.
- But Jones<sub>4</sub> still bears moral responsibility.
- Thus we have a case in which someone bears responsibility despite not being able to do otherwise, which PAP denies.



# Hume's Compatibilism

- Compatibilism: determinism is not opposed to free will.
  1. Libertarianism: Our will is free.
  2. Determinism: Our will is not free, but determined.
  3. Compatibilism: We are both free and determined.
- Hume: an act is free if it is done in accordance with our will, even if both the act and the will are also determined.
  - ▶ Freedom, in its important sense, is not opposed to determinism.
  - ▶ Freedom is opposed to external constraint.
- Moral responsibility is compatible with determinism.
  - ▶ That's useful for both the determinist and the compatibilist, both of whom accept that we can not do other than what we do.
  - ▶ it does not settle the question of whether we have free will, in the libertarian sense opposed to determinism.
  - ▶ The compatibilist recovers moral responsibility while avoiding the metaphysical question about freedom.



# Topics in Hume

- ✓1. Causation and Induction
- ✓2. The Bundle Theory of the Self
- ✓3. Free Will and Compatibilism

Presentations next week!