

PHILOSOPHY A294/H295:

FREE WILL IN THOUGHT AND ACTION

Day 10–11: Strawson's Reactive Attitudes
Compatibilism

DR. BEN BAYER

PRELIMINARY QUIZ

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

(1) Which of the following is not an example of the "reactive attitudes" Strawson thinks we have towards the will of other people?

(A) Gratitude
(B) Resentment
(C) Fear
(D) Moral indignation

- *Today:*
 - review of compatibilism vs. incompatibilism
 - how *reactive attitudes* relate to the question
- *Next time:*
 - how this supports a new kind of compatibilism


"OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS"

iClicker Q: If it's undesirable to think we have no moral responsibility, which view is more "optimistic" if we think determinism is a serious possibility?

(A) Compatibilism
(B) Incompatibilism

- Recall our definitions:
 - def **Compatibilism** is the thesis that acts can be free even if determinism is true.
 - def **Incompatibilism** is the thesis that acts *cannot* be free if determinism is true.
- compatibilism is: it allows for freedom even if determinism is true
 - (but that's only *if* it's determinism a serious possibility)

"OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS"



- *Strawson describes a debate between optimists and pessimists...*
- P.F. Strawson (1919–2006)
 - British philosopher at Oxford
 - involved in "ordinary language philosophy"
 - stresses importance of *common sense distinctions*
 - similar to Reid...
 - unlike Reid, favors the "optimistic" compatibilist side (with reservations)....

"OPTIMISTS AND PESSIMISTS"

- **Q:** Why be pessimistic about the worth of *punishment* if determinism is true?
 - *determined* criminals don't *deserve* punishment
- **Q:** How could an optimist justify punishment?
 - punishment *determines* better behavior
 - criminals who *act on their desires* (vs. compulsion) are most in need of punishment
- *Pessimists:* "*something is still missing*"

THE REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- *These are what is missing*

iClicker Q: Which does one feel most immediately about someone who has stolen one's goods?

(A) Gratitude (B) Resentment (C) Fear (D) Moral indignation

iClicker Q: Which feeling makes us want to reward someone who returns the stolen goods and punishes the criminal?

(A) Gratitude (B) Resentment (C) Fear (D) Moral indignation

iClicker Q: Which feeling *most* makes us want to punish a person who has stolen someone else's goods?

(A) Gratitude (B) Resentment (C) Fear (D) Moral indignation

- (A), (B), and (D) are all express a belief in *moral responsibility* for crime/punishment

THE REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- “Reactive attitudes” are feelings we feel about the good or ill will of others

ex. We *resent* the ill-will of the criminal.
We are *grateful* for the good will of the rescuer of our goods/punisher of the criminal.
We are *morally indignant* at the ill-will of the criminal who victimized a friend.

- Q: Why isn't *fear* this kind of attitude?
 - we can fear non-human beings, e.g., animals
- Q: What more does resentment express?
 - we want to feel *respected* by those who *know* us
 - animals don't know us, their behavior matters less

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- The conditions under which we *stop* feeling these attitudes are instructive
- *Condition 1*: We learn mitigating circumstances of the action

ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
But he actually thought I was giving him some for free. (*No resentment*)

iClicker Q: Does determinism imply that nobody knows what he is doing?

(A) Yes (B) No

- Strawson: this is exceptional, so determinism doesn't threaten universal non-resentment
- if it did, no one would bear us ill will!

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- The conditions under which we *stop* feeling these attitudes are instructive
- *Condition 2*: We learn mitigating facts about the *agent's* situation

ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
But he was hypnotized when he did it. (*No resentment*)

iClicker Q: Does determinism imply that everybody is hypnotized?

(A) Yes (B) No

- Strawson: also exceptional, so determinism doesn't threaten universal non-resentment

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- The conditions under which we *stop* feeling these attitudes are instructive
- *Condition 3*: We learn mitigating facts about the *agent as a whole*

ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
But he is a hopeless schizophrenic. (*No resentment*)

- unlike previous cases, this demands that we think of the agent as an *object* to be managed
- occasions dropping reactive attitudes for “objective attitudes”

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- *Condition 3*: We learn mitigating facts about the *agent as a whole*
- Q: Will Strawson think determinism threatens that this condition be universal?

[T]he participant attitude, and the personal reactive attitudes in general, tend to give place, and, it is judged to be civilized, should give place, to objective attitudes, just in so far as the agent is seen as excluded from ordinary human relationships by deep-rooted psychological abnormality—or simply by being a child. *But it cannot be a consequence of any thesis which is not itself self-contradictory that abnormality is the universal condition.* — Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” pg. 157.

this is an *ordinary contrast* he thinks we can't abolish by theory

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- *Condition 3*: We learn mitigating facts about the *agent as a whole*
- BUT: we *can* come to see people as objects without thinking of them as damaged

ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
His hand only moved because of a signal from his brain. (*No resentment*)

- we may do this to get comfort from distance
- or we may do it just out of curiosity to think about how the person works

INHIBITION OF REACTIVE ATTITUDES

- *Condition 3*: We learn mitigating facts about the *agent as a whole*
 - BUT: we *can* come to see people as objects without thinking of them as damaged
 - *Can determinism use this "resource" to threaten moral responsibility generally???*

STAY TUNED...

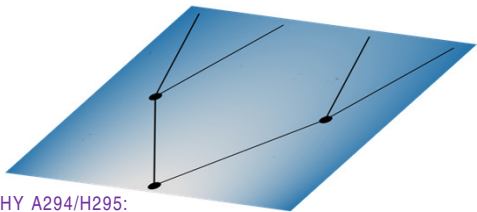


PHILOSOPHY A294/H295:

FREE WILL IN THOUGHT AND ACTION

DR. BEN BAYER

Day 11:
Strawson's
Reactive Attitudes
Compatibilism



REACTIVE ATTITUDES: A REVIEW

- We surveyed conditions under which people inhibit their reactive attitudes:

- ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
1. *Inhibition by considering mitigating circumstances of action:*
But he actually thought I was giving him some for free. (*No resentment*)
 2. *Inhibition by considering mitigating circumstances of agent:*
But he was hypnotized when he did it. (*No resentment*)
 3. *Inhibition by considering agent as a whole:*
But he is a hopeless schizophrenic. (*No resentment*)

- **Q:** Why did Strawson deny determinism would encourage these inhibitions?
 - all are exceptional abnormalities
 - no theory can imply that *everything is abnormal*

REACTIVE ATTITUDES: A REVIEW

- But one kind of inhibition remains:

- ex. He stole some bread from me! (*Resentment*)
3. *Inhibition by considering agent as a whole:*
 - a) But he is a hopeless schizophrenic. (*No resentment*)
 - b) But his hand only moved because of a signal from his brain. (*No resentment*)

- we have the resource of taking the objective attitude towards normal people, so as to:

- gain comfort from distance
- pursue scientific curiosity
- *would determinism encourage this kind of inhibition?*



DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

- **Q:** How does Strawson evaluate this argument?

- arg.
1. We adopt the objective attitude toward normal people if we have sufficient reason to.
 2. We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
 3. ~~Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.~~
 4. So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.
 5. ~~If determinism is true, all normal people's attitudes are determined.~~
 6. So, if determinism is true, we will adopt the objective attitude toward all normal people.

- **Strawson's objection:** (4) is not supported
 - (1) through (3) are all true
 - but (4) does not follow from (1)–(3)
 - so (4) cannot justify (6)



DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

Q: What does Strawson think *is* the reason for reacting to abnormal people?

- arg- 1. We adopt the objective attitude toward normal people if we have sufficient reason to.
 2. We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
 3. Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.
 4. So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.
 5. If determinism is true, all normal people's attitudes are determined.
 6. So, if determinism is true, we will adopt the objective attitude toward all normal people.

- **Strawson's objection** : (4) is not supported
 - we adopt the attitude because they're *incapacitated* for interpersonal relationships

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

Why the failure of (4) means support for optimistic compatibilism

- arg- 1. We adopt the objective attitude toward normal people if we have sufficient reason to.
 2. We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
 3. Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.
 4. So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.
 5. If determinism is true, all normal people's attitudes are determined.
 6. So, if determinism is true, we will adopt the objective attitude toward all normal people.

- if (4) is false, (6) receives no support
- then determinism never supports *universal inhibition of resentment*

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

• *How do we decide our reason for adopting the objective attitude?*

- arg- 2. We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
 3. Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.
 4. So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude

- Why *incapacitation* might be the reason:
 - we inhibit resentment toward *everyone* who is incapacitated
 - we don't inhibit resentment to normal people who *might* be determined, for all we know

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

• *How do we decide our reason for adopting the objective attitude?*

- arg- 2. We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
 3. Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.
 4. So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.

- Why *determinism* might be the reason:
 - we inhibit resentment for everyone we *know* is determined
 - we don't inhibit for normal people because we don't know they're determined
 - and we think normal people *aren't* determined

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

• What is a *capacity for a normal relationship*?

• **Q:** Why can't it mean *ability to initiate or not initiate* such a relationship?

• a forking path is inconsistent with determinism

• **Q:** Why can't it mean *actually bringing about* such relationships?

• then people who don't are incapacitated
 • then people who are *bad* are never responsible

• **Objection:** Strawson needs a compatibilist analysis of *responsibility* to be an optimist
 • but he offers none: can he do it better than Ayer?

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

• Consider an experiment (Vohs and Schooler 2008)

- some subjects read passages promoting non-deterministic free will
- others read passages promoting determinism
- those who read about determinism are more likely to cheat on a math problem

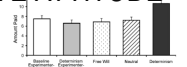


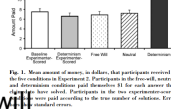
Fig. 1. Mean number of errors in addition that participants received in the three conditions in Experiment 2. Participants in the control, non-deterministic condition paid attention to the task more than participants in the two experimental conditions and accordingly to the lower number of addition errors.

iClicker Q: This research favors which interpretation of why we inhibit resentment :

- (A) We inhibit resentment because we believe someone's actions are determined.
 (B) We inhibit resentment because we believe someone is incapacitated for interpersonal relationships.

DETERMINISM & THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

- Consider an experiment (Vohs and Schooler 2008)
 - some subjects read passages promoting non-deterministic free will
 - others read passages promoting determinism
 - those who read about determinism are more likely to cheat on a math problem
- Q: Why might this support the idea that belief in determinism inhibits resentment?
 - subjects aren't led to believe they're incapacitated
 - still they stop resenting the action of cheating



OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS

Strawson has a way out even if (4) is true:

- We adopt the objective attitude toward normal people if we have sufficient reason to.
- We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
- Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.**
- So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.
- If determinism is true, all normal people's attitudes are determined.**
- So, if determinism is true, we will adopt the objective attitude toward all normal people.

• **Strawson's objection:** (6) *can't* be true

It does not seem to be self-contradictory to suppose that [the acceptance of determinism could lead to the decay or repudiation of participant reactive attitudes. . . . But I am strongly inclined to think that it is, for us as we are, practically inconceivable. The human commitment to participation in ordinary interpersonal relationships is, I think, too thoroughgoing and deeply rooted for us to take seriously the thought that a general theoretical conviction might so change our world that, in it, there were no longer any such things as inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them; and being involved in inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question -- Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," page 158

OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS

• Strawson has a way out even if (4) is true:

- We adopt the objective attitude toward normal people if we have sufficient reason to.
- We adopt the objective attitude towards mentally abnormal people.
- Mentally abnormal people's actions are determined.**
- So, people's actions' being determined is reason to adopt the objective attitude.
- If determinism is true, all normal people's attitudes are determined.**
- So, if determinism is true, we will adopt the objective attitude toward all normal people.

- **Strawson's objection:** (6) *can't* be true
 - we're *psychologically incapable* of inhibiting all reactive attitudes
 - only* exceptional conditions *can* inhibit them
 - so even if determinism can be a reason for inhibiting, it isn't always a *sufficient* reason

OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS

- **Objection:** this supports compatibilism only with a compatibilist analysis
 - without that analysis, we seem to feel reactive attitudes only about non-determined action
 - so if we can't help but feel reactive attitudes, we can't help believe determinism is false

WRAP-UP QUIZ

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

- | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (2) | Strawson thinks that we inhibit resentment towards mentally abnormal people because we believe they are determined.
(A) True (B) False |
| (3) | Strawson thinks it is logically self-contradictory for us to inhibit resentment towards all normal people all the time.
(A) True (B) False |
| (4) | Strawson thinks it is psychologically impossible for us to inhibit resentment towards all normal people all the time.
(A) True (B) False |