

0 Free will and responsibility

Chisholm's overall argument for his view: Attributing responsibility for action A to person S is incompatible with both determinism and indeterminism.

"... if a man is responsible for a certain event or a certain state of affairs ... then that event or state or affairs was brought about by some act of his, and the act was something that was in his power either to perform or not to perform." (Chisholm, 441)

The indeterministic case: If A is uncaused, then clearly neither S nor anyone else is responsible for A.

The deterministic (compatibilist) case:

"And precisely the same thing is true, I think, if instead of referring to a second man who compelled the first one, we speak instead of the *desires* and *beliefs* which the first man happens to have had. For if what we say he did was really something that was brought about by his own beliefs and desires, if these beliefs and desires in the particular situation in which he happened to have found himself caused him to do just what it was that we say he did do, then since *they* caused it, *he* was unable to do anything other than just what it was that he did do. It makes no difference whether the cause of the deed was internal or external; if the cause was some state or event for which the man himself was not responsible, then he was not responsible for what we have been mistakenly calling his act." (Chisholm, 442)

Consider this characterization of free action: Person S is free in performing act A iff S has the power to do A and the power to do not-A (and S does A).

- On Hobart's view, the "power to do not-A" involves conditional laws of the form "If S had willed not-A, then not-A would have followed."
- Chisholm: The conditional law could be true even if S did not have the power to do not-A.
 - We can conceive of a situation in which S does not have the power to will not-A.
 - So for S to be free to do not-A in such a situation, S must have the power to will not-A.

2 Agent causation

Chisholm thinks there's a third way out: Free action, and hence responsibility, involves causation by an agent rather than by an event.

- This view is not indeterministic because actions *do* have causes.
- This view is not deterministic because actions aren't necessitated by their causes.
 - Normally, causation is understood as a relation between events.

- Chisholm introduces the idea that an agent – not his desires, motives, character, etc. – can be the cause of an action.
- “No set of statements about a man’s desires, beliefs, and stimulus situation at any time implies any statement telling us what the man will try, set out, or undertake to do at that time.” (Chisholm, 448)

Elaboration: Suppose a man moves a stone with the staff in his hand. “If the man was responsible, then we have in this illustration a number of instances of causation – most of them [event] but at least one of them [agent]. What the staff did to the stone was an instance of [event] causation ... And similarly for what the hand did to the staff: “the motion of the hand caused the motion of the staff.” And, as we know from physiology, there are still other events which caused the motion of the hand. Hence we need not introduce the agent at this particular point, as Aristotle does – we *need* not, though we *may*. We *may* say that the hand was moved by the man, but we may *also* say that the motion of the muscles was caused by certain events that took place within the brain. But some event, and presumably one of those that took place within the brain, was caused by the agent and no by any other events.” (Chisholm, 445)

Is agent causation coherent?

- First objection: The hand’s movement was caused by the brain movement, but the man cannot cause the brain movement, as the man doesn’t do anything to his brain. So the man does not move the stone.
 - Chisholm’s reply: The man *does* something with his hand to move the staff, and this is why he is the cause of the stone’s movement. This doing makes brain movement happen, which is the event cause of the hand’s movement, and so on.
- Second objection: There’s no difference between a supposed case of agent causation, and a very similar case in which there is only event causation – that is, where the event just happens. Agent causation does no explanatory work and so is a false posit.
 - Chisholm’s reply: The difference is that in the first, the event is caused by the agent. If this seems unsatisfactory, notice that (1) explaining the difference between a case of event causation and a case of mere constant conjunction fares no better, and (2) the agent causation case actually fares better, as we understand causation from our own experience of being agent causes. (Reid)

3 No responsibility?

Notice that this whole discussion goes like this: *If* we may attribute responsibility for actions to persons, *then* ... but at the end of the day, one may deny that we can attribute responsibility for actions to persons. Is this a viable alternative?