

Journal - Day 15 - 04/29/2003



<http://www.dfamily.com/philosophy/teach/hswtl/journal.html>

[Explanations of Free, Determinism, empiricism (*memory theory*), existentialism, communitarianism, Morality, Utilitarianism, Egoism - Psychology of Philosophy]
Modernism

Psychology

Part 3: Philosophy of human psychology

<http://www.stenmorten.com/English/php/php.htm>

This trail follows the general outline of the course PHI11PHP offered at [La Trobe University](#), Melbourne, Australia. See [sources](#) (<http://www.stenmorten.com/kilder.htm#php>). Free Will and Determinism, The Self and Morality: [Oakley \(2001\)](#). The Problem of the Self: [Vassilacopoulos \(2001\)](#)

3.1 Free will (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06259a.htm>) and **Determinism** (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04756c.htm>)

Do we really choose our actions? What if you have been hypnotized, or you are a brain in a jar (e.g., [The Matrix](#)), or if your biology has been influenced to such a degree by evolution that you only act in concordance with **your inherited traits**; is it all just **brain-chemistry, governed by physical laws**; what when you discover, in retrospect, that the actions you thought were free at the time you enacted them, were really **controlled by your upbringing, your life-situation** and so on. Is there an **interventionist God**? Has Fate spun her web? Can the **human sciences explain** our actions, and hence **show that they were not free?** (*Can human behavior be free and still predictable, somewhat in the same way that some mathematical functions are deterministic, yet unpredictable?*) Is the brain a special kind of **computer**, in which mentality and **intentionality** are implemented?

[**Intentionality:**

The state of having or being formed by an intention.

Philosophy. The property of being about or directed toward a subject, as inherent in conscious states, beliefs, or creations of the mind, such as sentences or books.

Respond to each point given, as best you can so far.]

All these questions pose serious threats to the notion of free will. But there is one more question, one that is far more serious, and which presumably has graver consequences than many of them: that of determinism.

"Determinism is the view that, for everything that happens, there is a condition or set of conditions which are causally sufficient for that thing happening." -[Oakley \(2001\)](#).

[How would you describe that element beyond 'cause' behind your choice?]

Determinism applies even if there is a "mind-substance", different from the physical stuff of our brain (and everything else). It seems to imply that there is no freedom for human beings (or for anything else, for that matter). The consequences of determinism seems grave. If no-one chooses freely, how can we blame, praise, or punish? How would you look upon another, who acted friendly towards you, if you knew that the person had no choice in the matter? And wouldn't you yourself feel trapped, knowing you could not control your actions (even though you had the feeling you could control your actions)?

[How can we blame, praise, or punish if all is determined?

How about setting up the framework for that determination. Training. :)

Feel trapped? Only if I was conditioned to -- determined to.]

Some people believe determinism is compatible with free will. Compatibilism says that "if determinism is true, then we still can have free will". It does not commit itself to any of these views ("determinism is true", or "we have free will"), it only states that they are compatible.

The view that both statements are true is called "*soft determinism*". The *incompatibilist view is that both statements cannot be true*; hence an incompatibilist would either be a *hard determinist* or a *libertarian*. *Hard determinism is the view that determinism is true and that we do not have free will*. The *libertarian view is that we have free will, and as such, determinism must be false*. Libertarians basically think we can tell that we have free will, just by introspecting at the time we make choices. There seems to be a private sphere in our introspection, in which we cannot make mistakes. For example, you cannot be wrong about the fact that you are in pain when you actually are in pain. Who can tell but you? Yet, we might lack the ability to introspect as to the causes of our sensation as they appear in our brains. If you are a smoker, you know that taking a cigarette gives you a kick, a pleasurable feeling, and no one can tell you that you do not. But can you tell that this pleasurable feeling is mediated by dopamine release in the nucleus accumbens? You certainly cannot.

[Initially, are you a compatibilist or an incompatibilist?

If incompatibilist, are you a hard determinist or a libertarian?]

If, as the libertarian claims, our actions are not caused, then it might be argued that they are random. This brings us problems too. If *my actions are truly uncaused, if they are random, then how am I free?* If I just happen to kill you, then how can I be blamed? It was not caused by anything. The libertarian might answer that most events in the universe are probably determined, and some might be completely random. Still, some are neither, that is, *human choices are neither caused nor random*. There are causally necessary antecedents for these actions, but the sufficient *ingredient is a reason*, not a cause. (*Q: Are reasons not causes?*)

[Lots to consider already.

Is it logical to swing the pendulum from "all caused" to "nothing caused" (*random*)?

In what sense can we think of reason as being a cause?

Is it quite the same thing?

What if our reasoning is faulty?
Is how we reason determined?
Do emotions have anything to do with our reasoning?
Isn't that also a matter of chemistry?]

Compatibilism then, says that freedom and determinism can both be true. The crux is how we define 'freedom'. In any given situation, we *could have acted differently from what we did, if we had different desires, wishes*, and so on (*the Hume-Mills theory*). Our actions are caused, but are free in the sense that, if things had been different, our actions would be different. This is certainly not what we usually mean by freedom, at least not if the *desires and feelings are results of things that have happened to us (i.e., they are caused and determined)*.

[Are different desires, wishes, and so on just things which have already been preconditioned in us from past events and from our physical makeup?
This argument has trouble if "different desires" can be determined to be determined by outside factors.
What do you think?
Think hard. Although many philosophers have had many views on this, YOU might be just the person who is going to set the world straight concerning determinism. :)]

3.2 The problem of the Self

In psychology, one usually separates the *me* from the *I*. The 'me' is basically the *attributes and relations and abilities we ascribe to ourselves*; e.g., I am a boy, I am a student, I am a son, I am sometimes nice, I am good at programming computers. The 'I', on the other hand, is what brings it all together, it is the entity(?) that feels and has perceptions, which remembers, and which thinks about itself in all these ways. *It is the self. So what is this self?*

[The first thing you have to remember about this discussion is, there are a lot of great minds who have opinions on this, and, they don't all agree. Now, if they don't agree, then this means you can probably find some 'great mind' out there who agrees with YOU!
Also, you would be right to consider this as complex.
So, do we have an idea of what is "self"?]

3.2.1 The empiricist: [John Locke](#), a memory theory

A person is a thinking intelligent being, that has reasons and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.

We are *aware of being aware*, hence we are not absorbed by the object of our awareness; we are also *self-aware*. In addition to this self-awareness, we need *memory of our past*, so that we can *identify ourselves*. There are two issues:

- 1) what makes one a person, and
- 2) what makes one the same person over time ([Vassilacopoulos, 2001](#)).

[Do you understand what being self-aware is?
What is the significance of being self-aware?
What is not self-aware?

Any living examples?

[So the programs get better and computers start to act as if they are smart, but in reality they are still merely following preprogrammed instructions. Is it possible that one day the programs will become so complex that to all intents and purposes it will appear that computers are actually 'thinking' about decisions, know that they exist and aware of their surroundings and what is happening around them?]

Answer what makes a person.

Answer how you can be the same person today as you were when you were 2 years old.]

"Locke's approach is phenomenological -- it focuses on reflection on one's own consciousness or awareness of objects." -[Vassilacopoulos \(2001\)](#).

'Consciousness always accompanies thinking', this is what 'makes every one to be what he calls 'self''. For a self to exist, we need both thinking and consciousness. Thinking refers to intentional states of awareness, i.e., thinking is *about something*.

Memory ensures continuity. It is how we recognize ourselves.

Problems:

- 1 - does the theory allow for change?

[What sort of changes would you expect?]

- 2 - how are the memories synthesized in *meaningful* ways?
- 3 - can we distinguish between actual and false memories?
- 4 - Locke is supposing what he is defining: *my personal identity is based upon my memories of myself at earlier times*, but at these times I must already have been a person with an identity.

[Is this negate our having a soul?

We exist because we remember?

Does one with Alzheimers cease to exist?

Is our physical self negated by reducing ourselves to memories?

If my brain was placed in a jar with my memories and a mechanical brain was put in my head, where would I be @ ?]

- 5 - what if two people had the exact same memories -- would they be the same person; or if the memories of your sister suddenly turned up in a swan, would that swan be your sister?

When you come into the presence of an object you discover it, but when you are present to yourself you create the self in the act of self-presence. This view hinders the otherwise inevitable infinite regression with the self as both a subject and an object (*I*
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am aware of myself being aware of myself being aware of myself...)

[Chicken and the egg. Did you (*Self*) come into being because of self-awareness or are you self-aware because you (*self*) exist?]

The theory lacks an account of the future. We need to be able to imagine ourselves in the future.

[Question: On which side of the Water Shed Principle are we?]

3.2.2 The **existentialist**: Jean-Paul Sartre

That it is, how it is, what it is.

The that-ness is its *existence*, that something exist. How it is is its relationship to the what-ness. For natural things and human-made objects, essence precedes existence. The idea of a paper-cutter precedes the actualization of any paper-cutter. For man, **existence precedes essence**. *We are before we become something*. What we are is never static, but changes as we project ourselves into the future and makes choices. By making choices we attach value to our attitudes. The conscious subject is, in Sartre's terms, a being-for-itself. The unconscious object is a being-in-itself.

Being-for-itself

(conscious subject)

free

responsible for itself

without a determinate essence

not caused or determined

not fixed

incomplete

Being-in-itself

(non-conscious subject)

not free

not responsible

with an essence

caused

fixed

complete

Source: <http://www.stenmorten.com/kilder.htm#Vassilacopoulos1> , p. 41.

If one must choose ones essence (*freedom cannot be chosen, we must be free*), then if I have not yet chosen (*but I will, for I must*), then I am what I am not. And **if I have made my choice but not yet pursued it, then I am also what I am not**. This non-being pushes us towards the **future**. What defines the self is its **ability to choose, to open itself to the future**.

[Not too long ago, we were all determined, without a choice in the world. Now, we seem to be able to make a choice today which will change us now and in the future. :)]

For example, if I choose to get married in 3 months.

Am I married yet?

Am I changed as soon as I made the choice?

Will I be changed?]

By choosing freely you are responsible for your choices; you demonstrate the possibility of your choice by making it. Choices are about attitudes, and **attitudes are what gives the world value**, so when choosing you are responsible for the whole world. What would happen if everybody choose the way you do? Your choice is projected as a universal choice, you are a "law-maker". This should lead you to feel anguish.

[Is this statement true? Attitudes are what give the world value?]

Problems:

1. freedom in Sartre's terms is impossible (*i.e., we cannot realize that freedom*), **we cannot choose, but only throw ourselves into one of the possibilities**
2. even if choosing was possible it would be meaningless; committing yourself to a choice implies other choices, but each choice must be taken from zero.

[Determinism again. We THOUGHT we were making a choice, but our preconditioning only allowed for one REAL choice.
What do you think?]

3. do we need others to choose in the same way to recognize us as free beings?
Then exercising that freedom is impossible as people make different choices.
4. I other humans do not recognize my choices, I might see them as enemies

[Question: On which side of the Water Shed Principle are we?]

3.2.3 The **communitarian**: [Alasdair MacIntyre](#)

What makes life intelligible is being a character in a life story. The **story's plot gives life unity and coherence**.

Think about this: The **only thing that can happen in the world is movement of stuff**. You move yourself (*from home to university, for example*); to **talk you move your tongue** and the other parts of the speech-organs (*which move air to make sound, and sound is movement*); to kill someone is to move something into their system (*a knife, a poison*); to drink water is to move it into the body; even **thinking is movement of electrons and chemicals in the brain**. MacIntyre says that to **identify human behavior we need to take account of intentions, beliefs, and settings**. **Without these, everything is just physical movements without meaning**.

If we make a sharp distinction between the subject and his/her roles (*like Sartre*), then the idea of the unity of human life becomes invisible. **To make a life meaningful, we have to consider the setting in which it is lived, and the person's relations to other people (*with other, interconnected stories*)**. The background concept, the story, provides the concept of a unity of character. By telling our stories we become self-interpreting. Our **actions are given meaning when told as a story**. By generating this meaning through our storytelling, we construct our identities. The **self is both a participant and an observer**. We are all co-authors of our own life story.

[Do you agree about the meaning of life given here?
If you accepted this meaning of life, would it change the choices you made in life?
Your world view?]

Others are important in our lives in two ways:

1) they impute on us **roles and relationships**, and

[We require a plot or background story to provide a relationship?
What overall story line is there going through all our lives?]

2) they can ask us to explain ourselves (*why did you do that?*) In the same way, you can **ask others for an account of why they behave as they do, and hence, be part of their stories.**

[Does this make sense or is it nonsense?]

Problems:

1. post-modernistic objection: we can be incoherent, non-rational, and the self might be fragmented.
2. Sartre: The **narrative can only be understood retrospectively.** Accidents and unforeseeable things happen.

[How would this change the plot or story?

If a tree falls in the forest and you are not aware of it, does it still fall? In the same sense, if Sartre is not knowledgeable of your storyline, does your story not exist anyway? (*There is a 3 letter word describing this attitude.*)]

3. it might be said that in the **Western world, we have lost the ability to generate collective stories, and we have lost the ones we had.**

[So?

Does only the Eastern World exist now?

What is his real point here.

hint: value]

[Question: On which side of the Water Shed Principle are we?]

3.3 Morality

3.3.1 Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill (1863), ch. 2, from (<http://www.utilitarianism.com>)
(<http://www.utilitarian.org>)

One should maximize happiness for the greatest number of people. (*This includes reducing unhappiness.*) This is the one and only principle. The only thing that is **intrinsically valuable is happiness.** Utilitarianism does **not say anything about what else is right or wrong**, it does
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not, for example, say that it is wrong to kill someone. It is **only wrong** if it decreases the total happiness in the world.

[Again, before going on, what do YOU think about this philosophy? Agree or disagree?
Would the world be a better place if we stuck to this philosophy?
Could the world be satisfied if we stuck to this philosophy?
Can there be problems btw short term and long term happiness?
Could you live this way?
Is this Biblically sound?
Die to self ...
Is that the same?]

An example that is sometimes used to show where utilitarianism runs into problems is "the spare-part human". If we **take one healthy human and kill him or her, and then gives the organs to people who need them, we will probably increase the "total amount of happiness".** Yet, most of us believe this is not something one should do.

Another problem for utilitarianism is "how do you measure pleasure and pain?". Some have tried to answer, see for example [Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain, how to be Measured](http://www.la.utexas.edu/labyrinth/ipml/ipml.c04.html) (<http://www.la.utexas.edu/labyrinth/ipml/ipml.c04.html>) and [Mathematics for Ethics](http://www.utilitarian.org/math.html) (<http://www.utilitarian.org/math.html>), based on the works by [Bentham](#).

[How would you measure pleasure or pain?
Can you remember the happiest moment of your life?
Can you remember your worse day?
How does that stack up against someone else's? Was theirs worse or better?
If your family has 5 people and another family, with a smaller house, has 10 people, should you change homes, so as to provide more happiness for more people? :)]

3.3.2 Psychological egoism

Psychological egoism is a theory about what *motivates us*; it is not a normative theory, it does not tell us what *we should do*. It states that everything we do *we do for our own good*. All benevolence is hypocrisy.

[Do we do everything for our own good?
For the "bestest" person in the whole world, is it still, for self, somewhere along the line? Perhaps to live up to your Mom's expectations even though your Mom's been dead for 20 years? Perhaps because you believe Hell is going to be too hot to stay in?
Can we ever, truly, die to self?]



