

14. Stump 1999, The flicker of freedom

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Don't worry about the "indeterminism" stuff—focus on PAP:

Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP): You are morally responsible for your action only if you could have done otherwise.

Last time, we were introduced to **Frankfurt-Style Cases (FSCs)**, which are intended to pose a counterexample to PAP, before we even start considering determinism. Example:

Plagiarism. It's late, and your paper is due soon. You have a copy of your friend's, who's in a different recitation with a different TA. Who would know...? You stare at the blank page. No words come. Dread grips you.

You submit your friend's paper.

Unbeknownst to you, your evil neuroscientist roommate was behind you with a dread laser the whole time, ready to press the button. If they had, you would've been overwhelmed by dread and have submitted your friend's paper anyways. But they never had to push the dreaded button.

Are you morally responsible for plagiarizing?

Yes, says Frankfurt.

Could you have done anything other than what you did (plagiarize)?

No, says Frankfurt.

Zoom out. We're interested in FSCs because determinism implies that *every* case is one where PAP applies.

So if PAP is true, you're never morally responsible.

Q: Do FSCs rule out the possibility of doing otherwise *in the same sense* as determinism would rule out the possibility of doing otherwise?

If not, FSCs may be irrelevant for assessing the version of PAP that's interesting in light of determinism.

The flicker of freedom defense:

In FSCs, one of *two* different things will happen:

You decide *on your own* to plagiarize (O_P).

You decide to plagiarize *because of the dread laser* (D_P).

Both O_P and D_P are (different) *ways* you could end up plagiarizing.

If you end up doing O_P , then you *did* have an alternative course of action open to you; you could've resisted the urge to plagiarize, and then gotten zapped by the dread laser and ended up doing D_P .

In contrast, if determinism is true and you steal a pen, there is literally no other way the scenario could play out.

No other sequence of (mental or physical) actions you could take.

So there are two distinct principles:

PAP-lax: You are morally responsible for your action only if you could have done something with a *different end result*.

E.g. you could have not plagiarized.

PAP-strict: You are morally responsible for your action only if you could have followed a *different course of action*.

E.g. you could have resisted, and then been zapped with dread.

FSCs show that PAP-lax is false.

But they *don't* show that PAP-strict is false, which is all that is needed for determinism to rule out the possibility of moral responsibility.

Stump's replies:

1) *PAP-strict over-generalizes "alternative possibilities"*

Let's grant that in cases in which you plagiarize on your own (O_P), you could've resisted and been forced to (D_P). That implies that if you are forced to (D_P), you had an alternative option—namely, O_P !

But, says Stump, that seems wrong! You're not blameworthy if you were dread-zapped—you could excuse yourself: "I had no alternative!"

Problem: If you're zapped so do D_P , what's true is that you did not have any other *acceptable/excusable* options. The other option (plagiarizing on your own, O_P) was a blameworthy, bad option.

So even though PAP-strict generates more "alternative possibilities", it's not clear that it *over-generates*, since it doesn't imply that you're blameworthy if you do D_P .

2) *We can make an FSC where you do O_P*

Deciding to plagiarize on your own is guaranteed by a certain neurological event, call it S .

So your neuroscientist friend can invent an S -laser, and zap you with it the day before. This induces S in you the following day, giving you no alternative but to decide to plagiarize "on your own", i.e. do O_P !

Problem: Is this really an FSC? Frankfurt-Style Cases are ones where (i) you have no alternatives, and yet (ii) you are intuitively morally responsible for your action.

But (ii) is false! If you're zapped by a dread-laser, you're *not* intuitively responsible for plagiarizing!

Compare: a psychopath threatens to blow up the world unless you pinch your neighbor. You pinch your neighbor, and then excuse yourself: "I had no alternative!"