

Conference:

50 Years of Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities

Humboldt-Universität Berlin

Sept. 12-13, 2019

Room 2249a

2019 marks the fiftieth anniversary of Harry Frankfurt's seminal paper "Moral responsibility without alternate possibilities". With his well-known thought experiment, Frankfurt launched a powerful attack on the principle of alternative possibilities, i.e., the view that an agent is morally responsible for his choice only if he could have chosen otherwise. Frankfurt's paper paved the way for a new kind of compatibilism, later dubbed "semi-compatibilism, the doctrine that causal determinism is compatible with moral responsibility quite apart from the issue of whether causal determinism rules out freedom to do otherwise" (J. M. Fischer).

Frankfurtian compatibilists hold that the mere presence of a counterfactual intervener does not absolve Jones from moral responsibility for his actual choice. While this conclusion has been widely accepted, the implications for the traditional *compatibilism* vs. *incompatibilism* debate have remained controversial. Incompatibilists have argued that on closer scrutiny, Jones's ability to choose is retained ('flicker of freedom argument'), or that Frankfurt's scenario is dialectically ineffective ('dilemma defense').

Recently, new developments in metaphysics and semantics have revived the old dispute: a renaissance of the metaphysics of powers and abilities and a new interest in the truth conditions of ability statements have led to new perspectives on what Jones could or could not have done. One of the main insights from recent work on abilities is that ability ascriptions are multiply ambiguous and very much in need of analysis. Against this background, a variety of new takes on Frankfurt's argument have emerged. More elaborate conditional analyses of abilities have led to a more fine-grained understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of abilities that underlie ascriptions of both moral responsibility and free will. An understanding of abilities as a subspecies of dispositions has resulted in the view that Black merely masks, but does not eliminate Jones's ability to act otherwise ('dispositional compatibilism'). 50 years after Frankfurt's seminal paper, the debate over its crucial argument is very much alive.

Organization:

Romy Jaster (romy.jaster@hu-berlin.de)

Geert Keil (geert.keil@hu-berlin.de)



Program

SEPT 12

- 02:00 - 02:15 Intro
- 02:15 - 03:30 **Barbara Vetter**
Alternate possibilities and the metaphysics of ability
- 03:30 - 03:45 Coffee
- 03:45 - 05:00 **Alex Kaiserman**
Frankfurt Cases, Reasons-Responsiveness, and the 'Goldilocks Standard'
- 05:00 - 05:15 Coffee
- 05:15 - 06:30 **Simon Kittle**
Abilities to choose and modality
- 07:00 Conference Dinner

SEPT 13

- 10:00 - 11:15 **Geert Keil**
All-in-can'ts. Did Frankfurt misconstrue the inability to do otherwise?
- 11:15 - 11:30 Coffee
- 11:30 - 12:45 **Nadine Elzein**
Alternative Possibilities: Moral, Causal, or Physical
- 12:45 - 02:00 Lunch
- 02:00 - 03:15 **Kadri Vihvelin**
Ability and Possibility: Impossible Attempts and Attempting the Impossible
- 03:15 - 03:30 Coffee
- 03:30 - 04:45 **Romy Jaster**
What Jones could and couldn't have done: Taking the context sensitivity of ability statements seriously