



# Essential Philosophy

with Dr. David Schenk

## Lesson 18: The Free Will Debate

### Outline:

#### Introduction to the Free Will Debate:

- Note: The Free will Debate is distinct from the Free Will Defense, a positive argument against the problem of evil.
- A debate about human nature, specifically human choice and action
- The question: Is free will possible? In other words, are we the ultimate source and owners of our actions, or are we instead programmed to do all of our actions by a source other than our own autonomous will?
- **Example:** Are we equivalent to the Cylon robots of the TV show Battlestar Gallactica? Are we merely biological machines whose actions are completely determined by the programming of our biological machinery?
- An Overview of Positions in the Free Will Debate (7:55; see blackboard)
  - **Hard Determinism (13:22):**
    - All human actions, choices, and thoughts are determined by external forces.
    - Therefore there is no free will and autonomy is an illusion.
      - *Note:* Hard Determinism is not equivalent with Predestination. John Calvin believed in Predestination, but not in Hard Determinism since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit of their own free choice by his account.
      - Hard Determinism is especially popular among materialists, those who believe physical matter is all that exists.
  - **Libertarianism (15:21, 18:53):**
    - Not all human actions, choices, and thoughts are determined by external forces.
    - Therefore there is free will. Free will is the only possible explanation for those actions that cannot be explained by external forces.
      - Most Libertarians are not materialists, and many Christians hold to some version of Libertarian free will. However this is not always the case.
  - **Theory of Agency (Roderick Chisholm):** a unique form of Libertarianism
  - **Compatibilist Theories:** those that affirm that free will and determinism are compatible with each other when properly defined.



- **Soft Determinism (David Hume)**
- **Harry Frankfurt's Compatibilism**

The Order of the Next Few Lessons:

- David Hume's Soft Determinism
- Roderick Chisholm's Theory of Agency
- Harry Frankfurt's Compatibilism