



## Essential Philosophy with Dr. David Schenk

### Lesson 20: Roderick Chisholm's Theory of Agency

#### **Outline:**

##### Roderick Chisholm's Theory of Agency

- According to Chisholm, there needs to be two phenomena in human life that needs to be explained by theory of action to be intellectually satisfying.
  - Deliberation, reflecting on prospects and consequences of actions
  - Feeling in control of your thoughts and actions
- Competing theories
  - Hard determinism: We are all organic toasters, governed by biological composition and environmental stimuli.
  - Simple indeterminism: There is no explanation of intentionality behind our actions.
  - Soft determinism: We act based on our desires, without the imposition of external factors, but this is an exercise of free will, being able to do what we want.

##### Flaws in other theories

- Hard Determinism tells us that feeling in control is a delusion, yet no one can ever shake this delusion, which is a strange delusion to naturally have.
- If Simple Indeterminism were true, then the feeling of being in control would also be a delusion, because our thinking has no role in what we end up doing. Deliberating would make no sense.

##### Principles of alternative possibilities

- Given all facts about everything everywhere, the person is really capable of choosing A, but also capable of choosing B.
- Soft Determinism fails to capture real free will because it fails to satisfy Principles of alternative possibility.
- Any creature can act on its desire; it's almost guaranteed because most creatures are governed by pure instinct. When someone has genuine free will, their actions must not just be connected with impulse but with intelligence.
- A person who can govern his or her desires (i.e. choose which wants to act on, and sometimes refusing to act on them) via self-reflection is exercising genuine free will.