



Essential Philosophy with Dr. David Schenk

Lesson 21: Chisholm's Critique of Hume's Compatibilist Theory of Action

Outline:

David Hume's Soft Determinist Theory of Action and why Chisholm (Agency Theorist) like Chisholm doesn't agree with it

- What's missing in Hume's definition of free will is his real ability to do otherwise. Yes they are able to do what they want to do, but what they cannot do is go against that strongest desire in that moment. They are not really in charge of which of their desires is dominant.
- Real free will, according to Chisholm, requires that control.

FICTIONAL Story (No persons were harmed in reality)

- When Schenk was in grad school, he had no health care coverage or dental insurance. But now that he works for Messiah as a professor, he gets his insurance covered. One day, he sees a dental care center open, and decides to go for a checkup.
- The dentist, Dr Mike, notices a number of problems with Schenk's teeth and decides to give him an anesthetic that knocks him up. When Schenk wakes up, Dr. Mike checks out his insurance information while billing him out, and then he is free to go.
- On the way home, Schenk drops by Walmart to buy windshield wiper fluid, and finds a 12 gauge, pump-action Winchester shotgun for \$175. He feels the urge to buy it, given how much his college wage earns him, so he gets it.
- On the way home, he suddenly gets the thought to go house-hunting in Dearborn Street in Carlisle. When he reaches the neighborhood, he finds a house that says "For Sale, Open House." So he goes to ring the doorbell, carrying the shotgun. A woman comes out and startles Schenk so by reflex, he shoots her head off. Afterwards, he looks through the house and then returns home to take a nap. When he wakes up, he is surprised to find the shotgun.

Explanation

- Schenk was never given the anesthetic for his teeth. He was simply hypnotized by his dentist, who influenced all the random impulses Schenk experienced after leaving the dental care. Dr. Mike's motive was to get Schenk to kill his estranged wife, who was the woman that Schenk shot. He even hypnotized Schenk to forget the whole checkup experience, and swipe his credit card in a way that doesn't retain the login information about the checkup.



- The story is a parallelism of our inner desires and the 'free will' we have when we follow them. Did Shenk really have free will when he was following his desires to buy the shotgun and go house-hunting? No, all that was the machinations of his psychotic dentist Dr. Mike.
- But by Hume's definition of free will, because Shenk was following his impulses, he would be acting with free will, so he would be held morally as well as legally responsible and would be jailed.