Frankfurt — *Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility*

- Here is an influential argument for Incompatibilism:

  \[ P_1 \] You act freely only if you could have acted otherwise.
  \[ P_2 \] If Determinism is true, then we could not have acted otherwise.

  \[ C \] If Determinism is true, then we do not act freely.

- Consider (a slight variant of) the final inference in the argument from class on Tuesday, which attempts to argue from Determinism to the conclusion that we are not morally responsible:

  \[ P_1^* \] You are morally responsible for an action only if you could have acted otherwise.
  \[ P_2^* \] Hitler could not have failed to invade Poland.

  \[ C^* \] Hitler was not morally responsible for the invasion of Poland.

- \( P_1 \) and \( P_1^* \) say that in order for us to be free/morally responsible for an action, we must have been capable of not performing that action. Call this the *Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP)*. The PAP comes in two flavors, depending on whether it claims that alternative possibilities are necessary for moral responsibility or necessary for free will.

  \( PAP_M \) In order for you to be morally responsible for an action, it must have been possible for you to have acted otherwise.

  \( PAP_F \) In order for you to perform an action freely, it must have been possible for you to have acted otherwise.

- Frankfurt thinks that \( PAP_M \) is false. He gives a counterexample to this claim: a case in which it is not possible for a person to have acted otherwise, but in which the person is nevertheless morally responsible for their action. This shows that the ability to have acted otherwise is not a *necessary* condition for being morally responsible.

  – Here is (one version of) the counterexample:

    Black is a brilliant but evil neuroscientist. He wants Jones to kill Smith. However, he doesn’t want to get his hands any dirtier than he has to. If Jones is going to kill Smith on his own, then Black doesn’t want to intervene. So, unbeknownst to Jones, Black plants a device in his brain one night. This
device can both monitor and intervene upon Jones’ brain. Black’s plan is to watch Jones carefully — if Jones intends to kill Smith, then Black will stand back and let him do so. If, however, Jones doesn’t form the intention to kill Smith, then Black will step in and stimulate Jones’ brain so that he does form the intention to kill Smith. As it happens, Jones intends to kill Smith all on his own, and so Black never has to intervene. Jones kills Smith.

- According to Frankfurt, in this story:
  1. Jones is morally responsible for killing Smith; yet
  2. It was not possible for Jones to not kill Smith.

- So, $PAP_M$ is false.

- A possible extension of this argument:
  
  $P1^{**}$ You are morally responsible for an action only if it was performed freely.

  $P2^{**}$ Jones is morally responsible for killing Smith.

  $C1^{**}$ Jones’ killing of Smith was freely performed.

  $P3^{**}$ Jones could not have failed to kill Smith.

  $C2^{**}$ It is possible for an act to be freely performed even if the agent could not have done otherwise.

- So, $PAP_F$ is false.

- Alternatively, we might try to use Frankfurt’s case to argue against $PAP_F$ directly. We might say that, in this story:
  1. Jones freely chose to kill Smith; yet
  2. It was not possible for Jones to not kill Smith.

- So, $PAP_F$ is false.

- If $PAP_M$ and $PAP_F$ are false, then both the argument for Incompatibilism and the argument that we are not morally responsible have false premises.
  
  - Does this mean that Incompatibilism is false?
  - Does this mean that moral responsibility is compatible with Determinism?