

Wednesday, 17 December 2025 // filmesofia 13 at Rozz-Tox // *A Clockwork Orange* (1971 Kubrick, dir.) & “Defending Hard Incompatibilism” (2005 Pereboom)¹

Agenda:

- pre-screening discussion (about 6:30pm, informal)
- film starts 7:00pm
- 10 minute break
- post-screening discussion of Pereboom reading selection and film from 9:30pm to 10:30pm

Pre-screening discussion (6:30pm)

- general remarks about our filmesofia series:
 - roughly every other month we screen a film and we pair it with a famous philosophical text that examines themes related to that film
 - future filmesofia plans will be announced on instagram (@rozztox_qc & @casuallyineffacious) and on the Rozz-Tox website: www.rozztox.com
- More details on the four main branches of philosophy:
 - metaphysics: the theory of reality
 - notable sub-fields: ontology (the study of what exists), philosophy of mind (theory of the nature of consciousness), free will, God, personal identity
 - epistemology: the theory of knowledge
 - notable sub-fields: analysis of ‘knowledge’ (challenges to the “Justified True Belief” model), debates over the a priori vs. a posteriori justification (whether there is justification independent of experience)
 - axiology: the theory of value
 - notable sub-fields: normative ethics (theory of right/wrong), aesthetics (theory of good/bad art), social and political philosophy
 - logic: the theory of right reasoning
 - notable sub-fields: classical logic (modern formal theory of entailment), non-classical logics (formal theories that reject assumptions in classical logic, such as the principle of explosion (*ex falso quodlibet*) in paraconsistent logics)

¹ Pereboom. (2005) “Defending Hard Incompatibilism.” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. 29.1: 228-247.

- tonight's topic: free will and moral responsibility (metaphysics and axiology)
 - Does Alex act out of his own free will?
 - Is free will part of the "essence" of a human person?
 - What role does the surrounding society (family, institutions, political figures) play in Alex's actions?
 - Does Alex get what he deserves?
 - Is the "Ludovico technique" appropriate or inappropriate? Why or why not?

Post-Screening Discussion (9:30pm)

- tonight's topic: free will and moral responsibility (metaphysics and axiology)
- key concepts:
 - the free will thesis (FWT): a person's actions are (in some sense) up to them
 - the determinist thesis (DT): the present state of affairs are necessitated by (a) the past state of affairs, and (b) the laws of nature
 - incompatibilism: the FWT and the DT cannot both be true at the same time
 - compatibilism: the FWT and the DT could both be true at the same time
- the DILEMMA:
 1. Either the DT is true or the DT is not true.
 2. If the DT is true, then the FWT is not true.
 3. If the DT is not true, then the FWT is not true.
 4. So, either way, the FWT is not true.
 - a. the argument is deductively VALID (necessarily, if the premises are all true, then the conclusion is true too)
 - b. is the argument SOUND (i.e., valid and all the premises are actually true)?

- the POSITIONS in response to the Dilemma:
 - metaphysical libertarianism (a species of incompatibilism): premise 3 of the Dilemma is false because the FWT is true, and so the DT is false.
 - “agent causation” (Chisholm): we know that the FWT is true from experience, and that means the DT is false
 - hard determinism (also a kind of incompatibilism): the argument is sound because the DT is true, and so the FWT is false
 - “hard incompatibilism” (Pereboom, Strawson): non-committal about the DT, but embraces the above argument as sound
 - compatibilism (Frankfurt, Lewis, Fischer): premise 2 of the Dilemma is false because it’s possible that the DT and FWT are both true
 - “soft determinism” (Ayer): the DT is actually true, but that doesn’t interfere with the truth of the FWT
 - by far the most popular view among professional philosophers (see Bourget & Chalmers):
 - 59.2% accept compatibilism
 - 18.8% accept metaphysical libertarianism
 - 11.2% accept that there’s no free will

- tonight's focus: hard incompatibilism and moral responsibility
 - some compatibilists argue that even if, in some cases, you couldn't do otherwise, you are still morally responsible (Frankfurt 1969):
 - "Frankfurt-cases", very roughly: suppose Smith wants to kill Jones, but there's a chance that Smith might change his mind. Evil super-neuroscientist Black implants in Smith's brain (unbeknownst to him) a device that will cause him to carry out the intention to kill Jones if Smith begins to change his mind.
 - Is Smith responsible? Frankfurt argues that he is, even though he couldn't do otherwise.
 - Pereboom argues that no one is responsible using his "four-case argument":
 - Case 1: Plum is caused by dastardly neuroscientists to act on intention to kill White through devices implanted in his brain, even though he wouldn't have if they didn't intervene.
 - Case 2: Plum is programmed by conditioning from birth by neuroscientists to act on the intention to kill White, even though he wouldn't have otherwise.
 - Case 3: Plum is conditioned by being raised by an extreme community/cult to have the intention to kill White, etc.
 - Case 4: Plum is otherwise normal but acts on the intention to kill White, etc.
 1. There is no relevant, non-arbitrary difference between Cases 1, 2, 3, and 4.
 2. If that's right, then if Plum is not morally responsible in Case 1, then he isn't in Case 4.
 3. Plum is not morally responsible in Case 1.
 4. If Plum isn't morally responsible in Case 4, then no one is ever morally responsible.
 5. So, no one is ever morally responsible.

- Back to *A Clockwork Orange*:
 - Does Alex act out of his own free will?
 - no, or what really matters: he is not morally responsible
 - if the Dilemma above is sound, then the Free Will Thesis is false and no one really has “free will” in any robust sense
 - for hard incompatibilists like Pereboom, if there’s the FWT is false, then we lose moral responsibility, too
 - in his view, that’s just fine, as the concept of responsibility is, he thinks, outdated and causes more harm than good (similar to how the concept of demon-possession)
 - Is free will part of the “essence” of a human person?
 - not really, but in any case, moral responsibility is (according to the hard incompatibilist) an illusion
 - What role does the surrounding society (family, institutions, political figures) play in Alex’s actions?
 - clearly there are many factors that contribute to Alex’s state...
 - Does Alex get what he deserves?
 - the treatment looks brutal, but the institutions are not doing it for retribution; rather, they are concerned with “rehabilitation”
 - on the hard incompatibilist view, no one really “deserves” praise or blame as often as people dish out their moral assessments
 - instead, a focus on rehabilitation should be priority for these sorts of cases, or in worst case scenarios, quarantine
 - Is the “Ludovico Technique” appropriate or inappropriate? Why or why not?
 - A hard incompatibilist argument that the Ludovico Technique is appropriate:
 1. No one is ever really morally responsible (see the four-case argument above), but people still commit heinous crimes.
 2. If there is a procedure that can prevent those heinous crimes, then it should be used.
 3. The Ludovico Technique is a procedure that can prevent those heinous crimes.
 4. So, the Ludovico Technique should be used.

- Some questions about the Hard Incompatibilist Argument for the Ludovico Technique:
 - Should we merely care about results? Or should we instead care about altering the person's desires? Alex seems to still have the desires, but the internal states are in conflict—he seems to lack higher-order volitions, but that seems to be what we really want.
 - Does the Ludovico Technique really work all that well? Seems like Alex just got a bump on the noggin and at the end of the film he's right back to where he was.
 - Does the Ludovico Technique clash with human dignity? Are there procedures we should be willing to tolerate even though they undermine dignity, provided that they achieve results?

Recommended Further Reading/References (email gouldde@gmail.com for digital copies):

1. Ayer. (1954) "Freedom and Necessity." *Philosophical Essays*. St. Martin's Press. 273-284.
2. Bourget & Chalmers. (2023) "Philosophers on Philosophy: The 2020 PhilPapers Survey." *Philosophers' Imprint*. 0.0: 1-53.
3. Chisholm. (1964) "Human Freedom and the Self." *The Lindley Lecture, Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas*. 3-15.
4. Fischer. (1982) "Responsibility and Control." *Journal of Philosophy*. 79: 24-40.
5. Frankfurt. (1969) "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility." *Journal of Philosophy*. 66.23: 829-839.
6. Frankfurt. (1971) "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy*. 68: 5-20.
7. Lewis. (1981) "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" *Theoria*. 47: 113-121.
8. McCann. (1974) "Volition and Basic Action." *Philosophical Review*. 83.4: 451-473.
9. O'Connor & Franklin. (2022) "Free Will." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Zalta & Nodelman, eds. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/freewill/>
10. Pereboom. (2005) "Defending Hard Incompatibilism." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. 29.1: 228-247.
11. Smart. (1961) "Free-will, Praise and Blame." *Mind*. 70: 291-306.
12. Strawson. (1994) "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility." *Philosophical Studies*. 75: 5-24.