

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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Fischer and Ravizza, Chapter 1

I.

- We take certain attitudes and actions towards morally responsible agents that we do not take towards those who are not morally responsible agents. Example: the malicious houseguest breaking the vase vs. the cat breaking the vase. Distinguish *causal responsibility* and *moral responsibility*.
- If you discovered that a friend of yours had her brain processes directly manipulated to reach the decisions she reached, then many of the attitudes you have toward her would change.

Your friend would no longer seem to be an appropriate object of such attitudes as respect, gratitude, love, indignation, and resentment. It would also seem somehow out of place to praise or blame your friend on the basis of his behavior. (3)

II.

- Peter Strawson coined the term ‘reactive attitudes’ to refer to those special attitudes — such as resentment, gratitude, and indignation — that we take only towards responsible agents (persons).
- We do not take these attitudes towards rats, in contrast. We may condition them by negatively reinforcing some behavior, but we do not punish them (or resent them, etc.).

... punishment involves an element of moral condemnation that is inappropriate to the rat. (6)

- Strawson’s account of moral responsibility:

Someone is morally responsible insofar as he is an appropriate candidate for the reactive attitudes. (6)

Note that to be an apt candidate for such attitudes is not the same thing as to have such attitudes actually directed at one (e.g., the charming colleague).

- Consider the “ledger view”, as discussed in footnote 12.

III.

- The main goal of this book is to figure out the conditions under which it is appropriate to assign moral responsibility.

- Methodology: Discover the principles that best systematize the shared intuitions and considered judgments of citizens of Western democracies about particular cases involving moral responsibility.

- The Aristotelian Conditions: These are the two general ways in which an agent can fail to be morally responsible — ignorance and force. The latter concerns the “freedom relevant condition” or “control condition”. This is the freedom requirement for moral responsibility with which F&R are concerned.

IV.

- F&R define ‘determinism’ and assert their agreement with at least one form of compatibilism.

But we claim that *the sort* of discovery represented by causal determinism should *not* in itself issue in our changing our very basic and fundamental view of ourselves as morally responsible agents — as persons. (15)

F&R claim that moral responsibility is independent of the question of determinism.

Thought experiment: Imagine how people would react if they became convinced of determinism.

V.

- Direct and Indirect Challenges to moral responsibility (from considerations of determinism):

The Indirect Challenges contend that causal determinism rules out control [alternate possibilities] and thus also moral responsibility. The Direct Challenges do not proceed via the intermediary notion of control; they argue that causal determinism rules out moral responsibility (but not in virtue of ruling out control). (17)

- Versions of the 2 Indirect Challenges presented by Fischer (18–24) can also be found in our van Inwagen book. The Direct Challenge employs the

Principle of the Transfer of Nonresponsibility. (24)

VI.

- Most of the remainder of the book is dedicated to answering the Indirect and Direct Challenges to moral responsibility.