

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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Fischer and Ravizza, Chapter 3

I.

- This chapter continues the discussion of reasons responsiveness. They argue that weak reasons-responsiveness (WRR) is too weak of a requirement for moral responsibility. Instead, they develop an account of moderate reasons-responsiveness.

II.

- F&R add an amendment to WRR (and other forms of reasons-responsiveness) that the action (in both the actual and at least some alternative sequences) must be done *for the recognized sufficient reason*.

III.

- The Problem of Strange Patterns:

Consider the recent case in which a person boarded a ferry, and once the boat was underway, produced a saber and proceeded to slay his fellow passengers. Imagine this person to be so disposed that, regardless of how strong the reasons are not to wield his saber, he would still wield the saber (and, upon reflection, approve of the act) in all but *one* possible scenario — a scenario in which he is presented with the reason that he should not kill these people because a passenger is smoking a Gambier pipe in the lower cabin. (65)

- This story appears to meet the WRR conditions, yet it does not seem that this man is morally responsible. In particular, he is not properly responsive to reasons. The possible situation in which he responds to sufficient reason, and therefore counts as morally responsible according to WRR, simply shows his psychology to be even more bizarre. Even if there were several situations in which he responded to sufficient reasons, if they were an arbitrary lot then his psychology would still be bizarre enough that he would not be morally responsible.

IV.

- They simplify reasons-responsiveness and break it down to 2 aspects: *receptivity* (a cognitive power) and *reactivity* (an executive power). Receptivity is the capacity to recognize reasons, and reactivity is the capacity to choose and act accordingly on those reasons.

- They propose stronger conditions for receptivity than for reactivity:

We contend that the reactivity to reasons and receptivity to reasons that constitute the responsiveness relevant to moral responsibility are crucially *asymmetric*. Whereas a very weak sort of reactivity is all that is required, a *stronger* sort of receptivity to reasons is necessary for this kind of responsiveness. (69)

- Example: Brown and Plezu.

- Claim: Morally responsible agents exhibit “an *understandable pattern* of (actual and hypothetical) reasons-receptivity.” (71)

In judging a mechanism’s receptivity, we are not only concerned to see that a person acting on that mechanism recognizes a sufficient reason in one instance; we also want to see that the person exhibits an appropriate *pattern* of reasons-recognition. In other words, we want to know if (when acting on the actual mechanism) he recognizes how reasons fit together, sees why one reason is stronger than another, and understands how the acceptance of one reason as sufficient implies that a stronger reason must also be sufficient. (70–71)

Do note that they assume a degree of objectivity in the assessment of reasons-receptivity. (72)

- Only weak reactivity is required for moral responsibility. What should we make of this claim?

That is, we believe that if an agent’s mechanism reacts to *some* incentive to (say) do other than he actually does, this shows that the mechanism *can* react to *any* incentive to do otherwise. (73)

Why think this is true? (Is any argument for this presented on pp. 74–75, where it is discussed?)

- Non-human (but intelligent) animals, young children, and psychopaths do not count as moral agents, because they do not recognize moral reasons.

But, they can recognize prudential reasons. So, the theory should be revised so that moral responsibility requires receptivity to at least some moral reasons. Importantly, they do not require weak reactivity to *moral* reasons. (There is a nice discussion of psychopaths on pp. 78–80.)

- Check out the taxonomy of bodily movements provided on p. 83.

- We are also morally responsible for some actions that do not issue from practical reason (deliberation). These are actions done out of habit, character, or instinct. But are such actions performed in response to reasons? F&R say “yes”, and deny that the relevant reasons-responsive mechanism must be a kind of practical reasoning.

- Furthermore, people can be morally responsible for “trait actions” in virtue of having guidance control over the formation, retention, or expression of that trait. (89)