

PHIL 3923H: Honors Colloquium on Free Will
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Fischer and Ravizza, Chapter 8

I.

- One must have “taken responsibility” of a mechanism in order for it to be one’s own (and, thereby, in order to be morally responsible).

II.

- This section discusses the development of a child into a moral agent, via moral education.

- We turn a child into a moral agent by treating it as if it is one (even before it is):

For example, a young boy, overcome by excitement, tears open the presents belonging to the birthday girl, despite having been instructed in the proper etiquette. We might well correct him and show the customary signs of indignation, even though we are well aware that the child is not yet fully responsible for his antisocial behavior. By adopting certain attitudes toward the child (and expressing them suitably) — by acting *as if* the child were a fully developed moral person — we begin to teach the child what it means to be such a person. (208)

One step in this process is to teach the child that he is the agent, the source, behind this action. Then, the child is taught that in these contexts it is appropriate to praise or blame him as the responsible agent.

- The child should then internalize (some variant of) the reactive attitudes that we take toward him.

When we adopt such attitudes toward the child, we expect that they will be met with an appropriate response, and that the child will adopt an internal attitude toward himself that corresponds to the external attitude we adopt toward him. For example, when we show moral indignation, we expect the child to feel guilty, and when we show admiration and respect, we expect the child to feel a sense of pride. (209)

- F&R distinguish 3 stages in the development of moral agency: training, taking responsibility, and being held responsible.

III.

- But, what is it to “take responsibility”? F&R divide this stage into 3 subparts. See their discussion on pp. 210–214.

- Note the metaphor of a *moral conversation*, as discussed on pp. 212–213. How should we treat those who opt out of this conversation?

If, however, a person resolutely shows no moral response or *appreciation* of the moral force of the attitudes we take toward him, then eventually we must concede that he is not an appropriate partner in the conversation: he has not take responsibility for himself. In this case, we stop resenting him as a person, and begin treating him as we would a distasteful object or a dangerous (or annoying) animal. (213)

IV.

- Moral responsibility is an historical notion in the sense that the agent must have taken responsibility in the past.

- Agents can take responsibility for mechanisms of practical reasoning and mechanisms of nonreflective habit.

V.

- Objection: There may be cases in which people have not taken responsibility in the F&R sense, but, intuitively, they are morally responsible agents nonetheless (i.e., appropriate targets of the reactive attitudes).

It may be useful to separate two aspects to the objection. First, our account seems to provide *incentives* to agents *not* to take responsibility (and thus to evade moral responsibility). Second, there may appear to be cases of moral responsibility in which the agent has failed to take responsibility. (217)

- But, taking responsibility is not a bit of verbal behavior, such that one can simply disavow responsibility. Rather, taking responsibility consists in possessing a cluster of beliefs about one’s own agency, etc.

- Further, F&R contend that their account does not encourage people not to take responsibility. For, the costs of this — e.g., being treated like a wild

animal or incapable of meaningful human relationships — are too high.

- How one views oneself makes all the difference, on F&R's view:

The basic idea is that an individual who really does not see himself as an agent and a fair target for the reactive attitudes cannot be deemed genuinely active and morally responsible. In *not seeing himself* in a certain way, he *fails to be* a morally responsible agent. (221)

VI.

[Ignore this section.]

VII.

- In this section F&R argue that taking responsibility is compatible with determinism. The main worry for their account is whether agents who are reflective and believe in determinism can think of themselves as agents.

VIII.

- In this section F&R consider various forms of manipulation (of poor Judith), and the extent to which these undermine her moral responsibility (and her ownership of the operative mechanism, in particular).

- Is their claim about continuous psychological manipulation, in footnote 28, mistaken? (It is just like a claim Frankfurt made with respect to one version of the Devil/neurologist story.)

- One can discover manipulation but nevertheless take responsibility for such a mechanism, and thereby become morally responsible for it.