

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE NEXT GENERATION

BY MICHAEL MCKENNA

David Schmitz, Editor in Chief of *Social Philosophy and Policy*, generously invited me to guest edit an issue of this excellent journal. When he did, I knew immediately what I wanted to do: celebrate the innovative work of the next generation of promising philosophers on the topic of moral responsibility. Philosophical work in this area, and the related topic of free will, has been undergoing several exciting changes in recent times. Many of the young philosophers whose essays appear in this volume are doing just the sort of work driving these changes. Over the last five to ten years or so, I have read so much good work by so many young philosophers, and seen so many exciting talks by philosophers new to our discipline. I just wanted the chance to bring some of them together and let them loose. Thus, my wish was not just to produce a collection of essays by the next generation of philosophers working in this area. My proposal was to encourage these young minds to free themselves of the pressures of our profession, to take some risks and reach for something that currently is a source of real inspiration. To David's credit, rather than balk at my request and instead limit me to mostly senior figures at the peak of their careers, he immediately embraced my proposal.

In addition to eight early-career philosophers, I invited two prominent senior philosophers, Robert Kane and Dana Nelkin, and also two terrific mid-career philosophers, Chandra Sripada and Meghan Griffiths. To bring yet more support for the work of our next generation, I also invited two more leading philosophers whose research engages issues of moral responsibility, David Shoemaker and Ellie Mason, to serve as commentators at an exciting meeting of authors and Arizona philosophers. The authors revised their essays based on comments received at the meeting and resubmitted them for review. The essays were reviewed by anonymous referees, and publication was conditional on revision, review, and final approval of the referees. The finished product was worth all the effort! In my estimation, this volume contains twelve exciting essays exploring in novel ways new avenues in the areas of moral responsibility and free will. I hope you, our readers, will concur.

A. The essays in this volume

In "Forgiving as Emotional Distancing," Santiago Amaya offers a novel account of what forgiving comes to. A puzzle about forgiveness concerns

how we can forgive while persisting in judging that a wrongdoer's acts are objectionable. Amaya argues that forgiveness is a matter of an alteration of one's emotional response to the wrongdoer in light of her wrong. As she gains emotional distance, she forgives.

In "Forgiving the Dead," Macalester Bell offers an account of forgiving the dead that preserves the view that forgiveness is best understood conditionally. It depends upon a wrongdoer's remorse expressed within the context of a relationship with the one who was wronged. The puzzle is that the dead cannot express remorse and seemingly cannot be in relationships with those whom they have wronged. So can we forgive them? Bell argues that we can forgive them by persisting in maintaining a kind of relationship with them, one whereby we can come to see how they might express remorse.

In "Strict Moral Liability," Justin A. Capes considers the possibility that there is a moral analogue to strict liability in the law. The obvious challenge seems to be that in the moral domain, one is only accountable for what one has control over. Yet there are cases, such as innocent accidents of sorts, like spilling wine on a host's carpet, that seem to impose a kind of moral accountability on agents, even when they exercised their agency well. Capes defends the legitimacy of strict moral liability.

In "The Heart of Libertarianism: Fundamentality and the Will," Christopher Evan Franklin takes on one of the central challenges for those who defend a libertarian metaphysics of free agency: at its root, free action is inexplicable, and so not rational. Franklin argues that this challenge turns on a contested conception of the ideals of free agency, one on which having reasons that fully settle what one does are preferable to the absence of such reasons. Franklin rejects this conception and proposes one fitting for a libertarian account.

In "Narrative Capacity and Moral Responsibility," Meghan Griffith advances a narrative capacity condition on morally responsible agency. On straight reasons-responsive views that ignore this condition, we lack the resources to be able to account for an important kind of moral understanding. As such there are a host of important reasons to which an agent would not be responsive.

In "Dimensions of Responsibility: Freedom of Action and Freedom of Will," Robert Kane draws upon the distinction between responsibility for expressing one's will and responsibility for having the will one expresses. Key to his defense of libertarianism about free will is the premise that compatibilists can account for the former but not the latter. If our wills are determined by conditions beyond our control, then no one is responsible for the will one has. To actually be responsible for one's own will, one must have the capacity to determine or set her will for herself.

In "Meeting the Eliminativist Burden," Kelly McCormick distinguishes between descriptive skepticism and prescriptive eliminativism. She argues that moral responsibility skeptics who argue that no one is morally responsible

face an argumentative burden that they fail to appreciate. They need to defend the conflicting principles that generate their skeptical conclusions. Without such a defense, we might simply have good reason to resist their eliminativist prescriptions and be revisionists about our understanding of moral responsibility. We'll then preserve what is valuable in our responsibility practices and so avoid a commitment to eliminating them as a prescription flowing from a skeptical conclusion.

In "The Problem of Free Will and Determinism: An Abductive Approach," Kristen M. Mickelson pries apart two questions that have been pressed together in the free will debate. One is about whether free will can exist in a world where determinism is true. Another is *why* in worlds where determinism is true, free will cannot exist—assuming that it cannot. Mickelson explains that by asking the explanatory question, we can see that it might not be that free will does not exist because *determinism* is true. That depends on further philosophical commitments. It might be, for instance, that it is just one element in one's account of determinism, like exceptionless laws of nature, which settles the *why* question. But then indeterministic worlds with exceptionless laws would also undermine free will, and so it is not determinism *per se* that is really what threatens free will. By exploring this issue, Mickelson makes clear how different theorists arguing for incompatibilism might have quite different bases for their conclusions.

In "Guilt, Grief, and the Good," Dana Kay Nelkin explores the thesis that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt to a proper degree. While Nelkin wishes to defend the view, she argues that two ways of arguing for it do not work. One approach focuses on the contention that it is intrinsically or noninstrumentally good for the blameworthy to experience the pain of guilt. The second approach focuses on the contention that it is right for the blameworthy to experience the pain of guilt. How then do we account for the judgment that the blameworthy deserve to feel guilt? Nelkin proposes an intriguing solution.

In "Autonomy and Indoctrination: Why We Need an Emotional Condition for Autonomous Reasoning and Reflective Endorsement," Mirja Pérez de Calleja seeks an explanation for why certain forms of indoctrination seem to defeat an agent's autonomy and, so, responsibility. To do so, she focuses on a familiar case of radicalization of the sort involved in leading one to terroristic activities. Pérez de Calleja argues that a key component in relevant cases of autonomy-undermining indoctrination is the exploitation of certain emotional vulnerabilities. And this in turn suggests that a proper account of the historical constraints on autonomously acquiring one's values is that they are not generated in ways that exploit a person's emotional vulnerabilities.

In "Robust Flickers of Freedom," Michael Robinson defends the thesis that a person is morally responsible for what she has done only if she was able to do otherwise. Robinson argues that in the famed Frankfurt cases,

intended as counterexamples to this thesis, an agent will always retain a robust alternative to what she does do. She will be able to avoid doing what she does *on her own*. Acting on one's own, Robinson argues, is the thing for which an agent is most basically responsible. So agents in Frankfurt cases retain the freedom to act or not act on their own.

In "The Fallibility Paradox," Chandra Sripada puts a challenge to reasons-responsive theorists of freedom. Consider the failures of agents to perform simple tasks, like pressing a button for a color when a color word pops up in a screen—a Stroops task. The directions are to press the button corresponding to the color of the fonts rather than the content of the word. (For example, if the word "red" pops up in blue letters, the task is to press the button for blue, and one makes a mistake if she presses the button for red.) As Sripada explains, the neuroscience offers pretty solid evidence that various errors are liable to arise; they are inevitable, given how we are built. But is the agent acting from reasons-responsive resources? Since it is unreasonable to require perfect reliability from such resources, it seems the reasons-responsive theorist must answer yes. But when the agent acts, fully committed to success, it also seems the errors are inevitable and so *not within her control*. This is a paradox for reasons-responsive theorists, Sripada contends. He then proceeds to argue that this is an incentive to seek an alternative account of an agent's freedom, one that yields the result that in cases of failure, the agent was not acting freely.

B. *Some emerging themes*

Note the striking range of themes in this collection. Several essays focus on the metaphysics of agency and the free will problem, such as Mickelson's, but also Kane's and Franklin's. Mickelson is interested in the grounds of incompatibilists' claims that determinism is freedom-defeating. Kane and Franklin are interested in advancing a libertarian metaphysical account of free will. Two essays tend to reasons-responsive theories of freedom. Griffith seeks to advance such a view by including a narrative capacity condition. Sripada argues for rejecting such theories because they yield the wrong verdicts for many cases of routine failures in acting. Three develop accounts about the nature of moral responsibility. Capes argues for the plausibility of a view of strict moral liability. Nelkin advances an account of the desert relevant to moral responsibility for blameworthy conduct. And Pérez de Calleja argues that a crucial ingredient in explaining certain failures of free agency is a condition of emotional stability in the acquisition of one's values and commitments. Two essays develop theories of forgiveness as a response to those who are responsible for wrongdoing. Amaya offers an account of its nature as emotional distancing. And Bell aims to explain the plausibility of forgiving the dead in a way that preserves the thesis that forgiveness is a relational matter. Another by Robinson tends to the controversy of the kind of freedom

required for moral responsibility: Does it require the freedom to do otherwise? Finally, McCormick focuses on a way to resist the prescriptions of the free will skeptics who contend that we should not hold people morally responsible.

C. *Concluding remarks*

The essays in this volume together are representative of several innovative areas of inquiry. Note that there is a natural way they nevertheless all fit together. Begin with basic questions about the metaphysics of agency. Then consider different accounts of freedom, like reasons-responsive accounts, meant to clarify what free will is like, or whether the freedom that matters for responsibility requires the freedom to do otherwise. Then consider freedom's relationship to moral responsibility and its nature, which will include questions about scope, as it is with strict liability, and of justification, as arises with the topic of desert. There are, also, further questions about forgiving those we hold responsible. And, finally, there are questions about the status of skepticism regarding freedom and responsibility.

For readers of *Social Philosophy and Policy*, along with our authors, and of course David Schmdtz, I welcome you to the work of the next generation of philosophers working on these topics. Enjoy!

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