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Freedom, Resentment, and the Metaphysics of Morals by Pamela Hieronymi (review)

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HIERONYMI, Pamela. *Freedom, Resentment, and the Metaphysics of Morals*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020. xx + 168 pp. Cloth, \$29.95—Contra the dominant readings, Hieronymi—refusing to sideline concerns of metaphysics for the impasse of normativity—argues that the core of Strawson’s argument in “Freedom and Resentment” rests on an implicit and overlooked metaphysics of morals grounded in social naturalism, focusing her discussion on Strawson’s conception of objective attitudes. The objective attitude deals with exemption, rather than excuse. This distinction is critical to Strawson’s picture of responsibility: In addition to our personal reactive attitudes are their impersonal or vicarious analogues. There are two such cases: first, cases where we suspend or modify reactive attitudes due to error about the quality of the will. In these cases of excuse, we might include an actor who we learn was innocently ignorant, or whose behavior was an accident, and so we see that he or she really meant no harm. Consequently, we exculpate the injury in question. In cases of excuse, we are mistaken about the quality of the actor’s will and, thus, our reactive attitude changes, but the moral demands stay. However, one might view other people as equipped with mental attributes and as people about whom one is disposed not to indulge in with those reactive attitudes of resentment, approbation, and so on; this involves viewing others objectively. We encounter these scenarios in the case of small children, people suffering from dementia, or those with forms of other serious mental illness. This second category involves exemption: Rather than reacting with the corresponding reactive attitudes, we view those actors—who lack the capacities required to fit into the usual system tolerably well—objectively, thereby exempting them from the usual demands of ordinary interpersonal relating.

Strawson speaks of a “resource” as we sometimes shift from a reactive to an objective attitude even in cases in which the will is neither immature, diseased, nor in extreme or unusual circumstances. These are instrumental scenarios of emotional effort, as demonstrated in scenarios of emotive disengagement from the stresses of involvement, involving a stepping away from the natural reaction to offensive behavior to adopt a more objective attitude. Could or should the acceptance of the determinist thesis lead us always to look on everyone exclusively this way, where the acceptance of determinism could lead to the decay or repudiation of “participant reactive attitudes”?

For Strawson’s unconvinced pessimist—an incompatibilist about moral responsibility and freedom—a metaphysics of morals could enumerate an argument that starts from claims about the nature of moral requirement or moral demand and reach the conclusion that moral demands require a form of control, possibility, originality, or spontaneity, which is ruled out by the truth of determinism. It would follow that we would universalize the objective attitude, applying the “resource” indiscriminately. Absent social naturalism, Strawson’s rejection of the pessimist’s moral standards—that all ordinary interpersonal relating could fail to meet, requiring us to adopt the objective attitude universally—would rest simply on his examination of our practices, on his interpretation of cases in

which we modify or suspend reactive attitudes. The pessimist trades in intermediate moral principles—standards about desert, control, alternatives, possibility, and so on—which they present as intuitively compelling. However, Strawson's analysis demands that we go beyond a simple appeal to intuition in order support these intermediate principles.

Why does Strawson think that whether we could or should exempt depends on what is "ordinary," statistically speaking? Consider Strawson's argument that no general thesis could provide a reason to exempt everyone from moral demands: We do and should exempt the outlier cases, and it cannot be the case that everyone is an outlier. Strawson thinks that we have a natural, nonrational commitment to engaging in characteristically interpersonal relationships. The quality of others' wills toward us matters to us and are manifest in their behavior such that we put some set of demands on the quality of others' wills; accordingly, we will react in certain ways when those demands are violated. For Strawson, this fact is naturalized: It is given with human society and not something for which there are or need to be reasons. We typically engage with others in the characteristically interpersonal way—the specific demands and reactions are themselves a product of life as it actually happens, such that the detail of our system is sensitive to statistically typical human capacities and circumstances.

We sometimes exercise our "resource" so as to opt out of relating. This employment of the "objective attitude" can be to avoid the strains of involvement, for therapeutic purposes, or for curiosity. However, it cannot be the case that everyone is incapable of ordinary relating or that everyone is in unusual or extreme circumstances—to say either would be to assert a contradiction. The condition worth considering here is whether we could or should come to exercise our "resource" at all times and thus give up characteristically interpersonal relating (the pessimist seems to think so).

Practically speaking, it seems that it is inconceivable to always use the objective attitude. In dealing with the normative question of "should we do so," we see that characteristically interpersonal relating is not done for reasons, nor is it something that requires justification, so this question is idle. There is a further point that can be made explicit: We can know in advance that being determined is not a reason to exempt. We do not shift to a more objective attitude because we believe that the person's behavior is determined (that is, forced, caused, fated) if determinism is true. Strawson claims that when we do adopt such an objective attitude, our doing so is not a consequence of a theoretical conviction. This undercuts the generalization strategy, the robust theory that bolsters the pessimist's incompatibilism that "if determinism is true, everyone should be exempt for the same reason that we now exempt certain people."

Given Strawson's social naturalism, we can know that the principles that govern moral and interpersonal relating will not include the contradiction that would require that if we discover an apparent contradiction in our principles, we have discovered that we ought to

revise our understanding of those principles. Nothing that is true of everyone, that is, the thesis of determinism's application, provides a reason to exempt. Even if we could face a choice about whether to abandon our commitment to characteristically interpersonal relating—a choice that Strawson finds impossible—our reasons for making the choice would not be the kind that motivate the pessimist because they would not be moral reasons.

The “crucial objection” is the question of whether the truth of determinism should lead us to use our “resource,” repudiate the reactive attitudes, and lift all moral and interpersonal demands and expectations, even for that which is statistically ordinary. Strawson will see the universal use of the resource as indistinguishable from the lifting of all demands—universal exempting is impossible because, once the suspension of reactive attitudes is universalized, there are no demands from which to “exempt.” Strawson's answer to the “crucial objection” is two-part:

(1) As we are, we cannot adopt an objectivity of attitude to others as a result of our theoretical conviction to the truth of determinism.

(2) When we do adopt an objective attitude, it is not due to the theoretical conviction that “determinism is the case” but a consequence of our having abandoned ordinary interpersonal attitudes.

If we were to decide that no one should be held responsible, we would have to make this decision for reasons that concern not questions of justice but the gains and losses to human life.

The truth or falsity of determinism has no bearing on this choice. Strawson and the pessimist agree that our practices would be inconsistent if we exempted only some people because we believe of them something we know to be true of everyone. By reflection and reasoning, we can rule out the possibility that anything true of everyone is a reason to exempt. Reflection can help us better understand the terms of our relating—reflection reveals to us the principles actually at work. Tasked with revising our reasons for exempting in the face of novel scientific/ethical discoveries we, via rational reflection, can refine standards, improve practices, and supply rules.

When an inconsistency threatens to undermine an entire system, no particular part of the system must retain special authority. Following the thread that practice precedes standards and that existence precedes essence, Hieronymi notes a difference between standards of regard—by which we determine whether one's “will was ill”—and exempting conditions—the conditions that preclude being a participant in the framework. Depending on a community's natural capacities, standards of regard adjust to suit actual capacities, rather than everyone in that community constantly exempting one another from some set of unchanging universal standards of regard. These standards of regard adjust because they are the expectations and demands constituted by reactive attitudes. Thus the “serious objection”: what it is that prevents those standards from adjusting downward? There will be pressures for

standards of regard to adjust to the status quo, accommodating the tendencies and incapacities of the majority or culturally dominant. A “counterpressure” transpires from the needs and interests of those who are disadvantaged.

While demands or expectations that exceed typical natural capacities will be met with difficulty, this is not the case for demands for socially developed capacities or incapacities (resulting from socialization, education, inculturation). Socially developed capacities’ demands can be reasonable and sustainable if enough is at stake for those making the demand. Even though those ignoring the demand will resist seeing it as reasonable, critical purchase within a system often involves those who are disadvantaged appealing to consistency, which, paired with appeals to needs and interests, can result in change. The same natural human commitment to characteristically interpersonal relating that adjusts our standards toward the majority or dominant, when in conjunction with the needs and interests of individuals and standards of consistency, can generate “counterpressure” to maintain and advance certain ideals. However, consistency is not enough—spurious claims of being “consistent” can be readily fabricated; such development also requires empathy, although this could perhaps be understood as included in our commitment to ordinary interpersonal relating.—Ekin Erkan, *CUNY Graduate Center*

HUXFORD, George. *Kant and Theodicy: A Search for an Answer to the Problem of Evil*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2020. xxiii + 149 pp. Cloth, \$90.00—Huxford’s book aims to clarify Kant’s understanding of the problem of evil by examining Kant’s evolving conception of the task of theodicy qua “the challenge to explain how it is possible that there is evil in a world created by an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God.” Huxford’s thesis is that “Kant was engaged with the subject of theodicy throughout his career.” Huxford defends this claim by tracing Kant’s approach to theodicy “from early to late career to show not only the continuity of Kant’s consideration but also his philosophical development on the subject.”

Huxford divides the development of Kant’s thinking on theodicy into three stages: (1) an early, exploratory stage in the 1750s and 1760s, during which Kant considers how the theodicies offered by Leibniz and Pope might be compatible with Newtonian physics, on one hand, and human morality, on the other (chapters 1–3), (2) a middle, transitional stage in the 1780s, during which Kant begins to apply the conclusions of *Critique of Pure Reason* to the problem of theodicy (chapters 4–6), and (3) a final, concluding stage in the 1790s, during which Kant recognizes the full significance of his critical philosophy for the problem of theodicy (chapters 7–9). Huxford argues that Kant moves from an early belief in the