



# Two Dimensions of Responsibility: Quality and Competence of Will

**ABSTRACT:** *Pure quality of will theories claim that ‘the ultimate object’ of our responsibility responses (i.e., praise and blame) is the quality of our will. Any such theory is false—or so I argue. There is a second dimension of (moral) responsibility, independent of quality of will, that our responsibility responses track and take as their object—namely, how adroitly we are able to translate our will into action; I call this competence of will. I offer a conjectural explanation of the two dimensions of (moral) responsibility: it matters to us that people actually perform adequately well because of how much it matters to us that we are able to live and work together successfully.*

**KEYWORDS:** praise, blame, moral responsibility, quality of will, competence

‘Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, *we regard only the motives that produced them*, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind or temper. *The external performance has no merit*. We must look within to find the moral quality. This we cannot do directly; and therefore fix our attention on actions, as on external signs. But these actions are still considered as signs; and *the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc’d them*.

—Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*: 477; emphasis added

## Introduction

There is widespread agreement that moral responsibility concerns the appropriateness of praise and blame. In the wake of ‘Freedom and Resentment’, the ‘majority of contemporary philosophers have followed Strawson (1962) in contending that praising and blaming an agent consist in experiencing (or at least being disposed to experience) reactive attitudes’ (O’Connor and Franklin 2021). Reactive attitudes, in turn, are an agent’s emotional responses (such as varieties of anger in the case of blame or admiration and gratitude in the case of praise) to their perception of or judgment about someone’s ‘quality of will’ (Hieronymi 2020; Zimmerman 2015). As a first pass, an agent’s ‘quality of will’ refers to the extent to which they took into account the moral rights or interests of people and things that matter—or, in more colloquial terms, the extent to which they had their heart in the right place (cf. McKenna 2012). The basic idea is that our

emotional responses that (partially) constitute praise and blame are symptomatic of how much it matters to us that people have their heart in the right place, so to speak (Hieronymi 2020).

In short, a prominent conception of moral responsibility is comprised of three interrelated claims:

1. Moral responsibility is to be understood in terms of the appropriateness of praise and blame.
2. Praise and blame are to be understood in terms of reactive attitudes.
3. Reactive attitudes are to be understood as responses to perceptions of or judgments about someone's quality of will.

Any theory that strings these ideas together and maintains that the appropriateness of praise and blame tracks an agent's quality of will can be called a *quality of will theory* of moral responsibility. So understood, it is hardly controversial that the appropriateness of praise and blame often stands in some relationship to an agent's quality of will.

A more provocative position—what Shoemaker (2013) dubs a 'pure' quality of will theory—maintains that an agent's quality of will serves 'as the target of *all* our responsibility responses', such as praise and blame (emphasis added). This position is articulated succinctly by Hume in the opening epigraph (no matter Hume's final views on the matter; see Russell 1995). According to a pure quality of will theory, how we actually manage to conduct ourselves (the external performance) is never itself the ultimate object of appropriate responsibility responses. Rather, performance is significant insofar as it is a sign for what is in our heart or mind: the significance of performance derives from its expressive and evidential connection to features of mind.

Any pure quality of will theory is false. Or so I argue. Quality of will is neither necessary nor sufficient for responsibility in general in ways that cast doubt on whether it is necessary or sufficient for *moral* responsibility in particular. My critique reveals that there are two dimensions to (moral) responsibility: in addition to quality of will, there is a dimension that tracks how adroitly we translate our will into action. I call this second dimension competence of will and explain how it affects the appropriateness conditions for certain reactive attitudes. I conclude with a conjectural explanation of the two dimensions of (moral) responsibility.

## 1. Quality of Will: A Second Pass

What any given quality of will theory amounts to depends on what it takes 'the will' to be and the corresponding sense in which it takes the will to be of some 'quality'.

There is no shortage of interpretations. For instance, 'the will' might refer to the capacity to choose a course of action, as distinct from our capacity to judge what we should or ought to do (Gilbert 2013). Or, instead, 'the will' might refer to the quality of one's judgment (or lack thereof) about the considerations relevant to choice (Scanlon 1998). Or, 'the will' might refer to what we want, desire, or prefer, or to particular hierarchies or structures of such attitudes (Frankfurt 1988). Or 'the

will' might mean the capacity to 'try, endeavor, or make an effort' to do something in a sense closely connected to willpower and weakness of will (Kane 1996). Or 'the will' might mean any and all attitudes or mental states that contribute to what we intend (Zimmerman 2015).

For all the important differences between these conceptions of the will, they share something important in common. In each case, the will is something internal, something restricted to an agent's heart or mind (or some privileged part of it) or to its machinations. By contrast, our overt behavior—what we actually do or fail to do—expresses or reflects this internal will. In other words, a pure quality of will theory of moral responsibility, construed along any of the lines above, maintains that, fundamentally, the appropriateness of praise and blame is a matter of what is found in the 'inner citadel' of our souls (so to speak)—it is what is found in our hearts or minds that is the ultimate 'target of all our responsibility responses' (Shoemaker 2013: 96; cf. Hume 1978). This is the view—or, rather, the common feature in a family of related views—that I critique in what follows.

So understood, pure quality of will theories imply, if not outright assert, that the significance of how we actually manage to conduct ourselves (i.e., how we actually perform) is merely derivative. The significance of performance is derivative because how we perform expresses or reflects—and so is evidence for, or the expressive vehicle of, what our responsibility responses always ultimately track—such as having our heart in the right place or trying our best. The greater our awareness and control over our conduct, the better the evidence that our conduct expresses what matters to us and what we think the world is like. Accordingly, on a quality of will theory, the significance of how we actually perform derives from the expressive and evidential connection between mind and action, given that action involves a special kind of awareness and control over our behavior.

The basic mistake that pure quality of will theories make, however they are construed, is relegating the significance of performance in this way. I defend the claim that the adroitness of our performance is often itself the ultimate object of our responsibility responses. The significance of performance for responsibility cannot always be relegated to its expressive or evidential link to what is in our hearts or minds. How adroitly we perform is often independently significant for the appropriateness of our responsibility responses in actual practice. Accordingly, a theory of responsibility rooted in actual practice must include a second dimension of responsibility, in addition to quality of will.

## 2. Why Any Pure Quality of Will Theory is False

Often, quality of will is not necessary for the appropriateness of praise or blame. This is initially easier to spot in cases of responsibility other than moral responsibility. Accordingly, in this section I point out that, in general, our responsibility responses do not always target the moral quality of a person's will. Thus, any pure quality of will theory is false as a general theory of praise and blame. This raises interesting questions about just what praise and blame are generally tracking and why (section 3 and 4) in ways that put pressure on us to reexamine pure quality of will theories of moral responsibility, in particular (section 5).

There is a growing array of examples of appropriate praise or blame for aesthetic, athletic, and epistemic successes and failures. For example, audiences and critics rant or rave over the performance of musicians or thespians or, more simply, admiringly give standing ovations or angrily throw rotten tomatoes (literally or figuratively) at the performers (Nelkin 2020; Wolf 2015). Similarly, athletes, coaches, and fans routinely praise and blame athletic performance (as well as the performance of the officials); in addition to angry boos and adulatory cheers, it is commonplace to hear athletes blame themselves for their mistakes or their substandard performance in post-event interviews or to be praised for their successes by their teammates, coaches, and sports media (Shoemaker and Vargas 2021). We also praise and blame one another for reliably discriminating between reliable and unreliable sources of information, for falling prey to fallacious reasoning, or for failing to make a salient inference—as many arguments over Thanksgiving dinner can attest; positively, we also praise one another for creative insight and imagination (Tollefsen 2017; Goldberg 2018; Kauppinen 2018).

Examples like these demonstrate that in the course of everyday life we take praise and blame to be appropriate for a wide variety of successes and failures, many of which have nothing to do with having and displaying adequate care or regard for the moral rights or moral interests of people or things that matter. That is, if moral responsibility is responsibility for meeting, exceeding, or living up to distinctively moral norms and if moral norms enjoin having adequate care or regard for the moral rights or moral interests of people or things that matter, then we take there to be many other kinds of responsibility besides—namely, responsibility for living up to norms in other domains, such as aesthetic norms, athletic norms, or epistemic norms.

The moral quality of someone's will, so understood, is not necessary to be responsible for living up to non-moral norms such as those above. Insofar as we take our actual practices of praising and blaming seriously—as the data that any adequate theory of responsibility must by and large accommodate—the examples above establish that, in general, any pure quality of will theory of praise and blame is false: praise and blame are not always responses to perceptions of or judgments about whether an agent had or displayed adequate care or regard for the moral rights or moral interests of people or things that matter.

In reply, the defender of a pure quality of will theory might first try to claim that despite initial appearances to the contrary these purported examples of non-moral responsibility are actually cases of moral responsibility after all. That is, in each case, an agent's failure to meet an aesthetic, athletic, or epistemic norm is really, at bottom, a moral failure, expressive of the agent's inadequate care or regard for the moral rights or interests of people and things that matter.

Of course, sometimes this is the right explanation. For example, sometimes people fail epistemically because they do not take the testimony of other people seriously in a way that manifests disrespect or disregard for other people, in which case their epistemic failure is rooted in a moral failure (Fricker 2007). Likewise, we sometimes hold athletes or artists responsible for not putting in the work or giving their best effort in a way that displays disrespect or inadequate care or regard for

others (such as their teammates or the consumers of their work). In such cases we *can* reduce the failure to having or displaying inadequate quality of will.

However, in many other cases, no such reduction is possible. To elaborate, consider a slightly more detailed example of epistemic responsibility. In 1986 seven astronauts died when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded shortly after launch. The explosion was due to O-ring rocket booster seals failing to function properly after an unusually cold Florida night. It would not be unintelligible to hear a relevantly situated party—an engineer, say—blaming themselves for failing to calculate or calculating incorrectly whether the O-rings would function properly in the colder temperatures and thus for the astronauts' deaths.

Of course, it is possible that the engineer omitted to perform the calculations because they just did not care about the astronauts' safety. But I am safe in assuming that in a great many cases a failure to care or regard adequately the moral rights or interests of others would not be a good explanation for the engineer's blameworthiness. This can be seen more clearly if we modify the example to strip it of any lingering moral features: suppose that there were no astronauts on board the shuttle, and so no one was harmed. Instead, suppose the shuttle was filled with robots designed to gather important information on a purely scientific mission. The express purpose of the mission was to enhance our understanding for its own sake, and there was no anticipated moral upshot, such as discovery of new life-saving technology.

Events otherwise unfold as in the original example: the shuttle explodes, the robots are destroyed, and the voyage fails in its scientific mission before it had even really begun. In this version of the story it remains intelligible that the engineer blames themselves for the failure of the mission, but then the engineer's blame is not a response to the moral quality of their will. It is not a matter of the engineer failing to take the moral rights or interests of people or things that matter adequately into account because in the modified example there were no moral patients to take account of. Of course, there were relevant interests at stake, but they were epistemic interests, not moral interests, and it is not faithful to the events to try and reduce them to moral interests.

In short, if we take our ordinary practices as our point of departure, then it is relatively straightforward to arrive at the conclusion that, in general, any pure quality of will theory of praise and blame is false. Our actual practices allow that, in general, praise and blame are often appropriate even when the moral quality of one's will is not their ultimate target. This is evident in cases in which we hold one another responsible for meeting, exceeding, or living up to non-moral norms.

This raises the question: Why do praise and blame find expression across a variety of domains, both moral and non-moral? Any adequate theory of responsibility should explain why there are many different kinds of responsibility or why we are prone to praise and blame across a variety of domains for different sorts of successes and failures. I return to this question in section 4.

When I have raised this issue with philosophers, I have received wildly different reactions. On the one hand, I have heard that moral responsibility is the only 'real' kind of responsibility and that the others are mere simulacra (Matheson and Milam, [forthcoming](#)). I will not try to get to the bottom of that thought here. On

the other hand, I have heard that of course there are other, non-moral kinds of responsibility; the issue is to identify what is distinctive about moral responsibility. But how are we supposed to know what is distinctive about moral responsibility unless we have an understanding of responsibility to serve as a baseline that supplies the needed contrast? We will be in a better position to understand what, if anything, is distinctive about moral responsibility once we have a better understanding of what makes praise and blame, in general, appropriate.

### 3. The Second Dimension of Responsibility: Competence of Will

If praise and blame are not, in general, responses to the moral quality of someone's will, to what are they responses? In this section, I draw on work from social psychology to explain how the appropriateness conditions for responses like praise and blame are affected by our ability to manifest our will in the world—what I call competence of will (Sapolsky 2017). That is, how adroitly we actually perform reflects our skill or competence in executing our designs—whether for good or for ill—and that is what our responsibility responses often track and take as their ultimate object. Thus, competence of will is a second dimension of responsibility and, in general, irreducible to quality of will.

In a second attempt to parry the charge of the examples in the previous section, a defender of a pure quality of will theory might want to alter the operative conception of quality of will. If moral responsibility tracks having due care or regard for moral concerns, then, by analogy, perhaps each kind of non-moral responsibility tracks having due care or regard for the corresponding non-moral concerns. For example, on this hypothesis epistemic responsibility might track having due care or regard for obtaining the truth and avoiding error. Accordingly, a pure quality of will theory can explain epistemic responsibility in terms of the way in which our conduct expresses or reflects inadequate care or regard for discerning the truth and shunning error in a way that holds on to the idea that what we are ultimately responsible for is what is in our heads or hearts.

This will not work, however. Again, it is true that sometimes inadequate care or regard for things related to the norms at issue will explain the agent's failure to live up to them and thus the agent's corresponding blameworthiness. But again it is true that in many, many cases this will not be the case. It is easy to come up with counterexamples. Here is a recipe for constructing cases:

Compare two scenarios. The scenarios hold fixed all variables, including an agent's quality of will, except the agent's skillful exercise of agency in ways that translate into different outcomes. For example, suppose an athlete or thespian gives it their all and puts on an astounding performance and is much praised by everybody. Now stipulate that there is another agent with an identical quality of will in circumstances that are otherwise identical except for the fact that this second agent gives a poor performance whose quality triggers the opposite responsibility response. For example, take another athlete or thespian who is in the same situation as the agent in the first example, with the same quality of will—they are trying just as hard; they have their heart in the same place (i.e., they have the same cares and concerns), and so on— except this agent performs

terribly: they fumble the ball or fumble their lines or what have you to the outrage of fans or critics. Given that, by stipulation, the agents have identical quality of will, yet (for example) admiration is appropriate in one case and anger in the other, quality of will cannot be the only target of our responsibility responses.

Moreover, the relevant difference between the two agents seems to be how adroitly they actually perform—how effectively they are able to translate their will into action—since we held other dimensions of the cases fixed. However, we cannot yet be sure that the appropriateness of praise and blame are tracking agential adroitness; instead, it may be that the differing responses stem purely from a difference in the outcomes.

Famously, it has been observed that our responsibility responses often vary with the outcome or consequences of behavior in ways that seem to be purely due to chance or luck (Williams and Nagel 1976). For example, take two identical field goal kickers attempting to make the kick to win the game. In one case the ball flies through the uprights, their team wins the game, and the agent is hoisted onto the shoulders of their jubilant teammates; they are celebrated on the front page of the next day's paper. In the second case, a strong gust of wind blows through the stadium while the ball is in midair, changing its trajectory. The kick is wide-left, the kicker's team loses the game, and the kicker is lambasted on the front page of the next day's news.

In order to ensure that differences in the appropriateness of praise and blame are not due simply to outcome luck, consider cases that isolate the agent's ability to skillfully execute their designs. Let us modify our initial recipe for constructing examples by adding that the bumbling, incompetent agent manages to bring about the same outcome as the dextrous, competent agent but does so through a deviant causal chain that obviously does not evince the agent's ability to manifest their will in action. For instance, suppose an incompetent field goal kicker makes a terrible kick that is clearly offline, but then a hawk swoops down, grabs the ball in its talons, and drops the ball as it flies through the uprights—the field goal is good, and the team wins the game. It seems that it would be appropriate for players and fans to be ecstatic that their team won the game, but it would be more than a little odd for people to go on to praise the kicker for their role in the victory; the hawk deserves more attention than the kicker. The outcome is now the same as in the case that was skillfully executed—the field goal is good, and the team wins the game. Yet there remains a difference in the sorts of responses that are appropriate to the competent and incompetent kickers: one is praiseworthy and the other is not.

Thus, even once we have isolated the effects of outcome luck, there remains a difference in the responses appropriate to an agent in virtue of how they performed, insofar as their performance is a reflection of the adroitness of their agency. Thus, responsibility seems to track performance to the extent that it is a sign of our competence as agents—that is, of our ability to translate our will into action—independently of quality of will. Call this second dimension of responsibility competence of will. As the examples in this section are designed to show, the fact that there are two dimensions to responsibility is evidenced by the fact that we can hold the quality of will dimension fixed while varying the

competence of will dimension in ways that affect the appropriateness of praise and blame.

The claim is not that quality of will does not matter to responsibility; it does. Rather, the claim is that, often, competence of will is itself the ultimate object of our responsibility responses in a way that is not reducible to its being evidence for or the expressive vehicle of quality of will. The fact that there are two dimensions of responsibility—quality of will and competence of will—provides a desideratum that any adequate theory of responsibility must explain. Why are there two dimensions to responsibility? Why there is a quality of will dimension has been much discussed in the existing literature: very often it really does matter to us that people not only adequately take our rights or interests into account, but that they adequately account for the rights or interests of people and things that matter (Hieronymi 2020). Accordingly, we must turn our attention to why performance is of independent significance to responsibility.

#### 4. A Conjectural Explanation: Responsibility and Cooperation

Over the course of the discussion so far we have identified two desiderata that any adequate theory of responsibility must explain. They are:

(D<sub>1</sub>) Any adequate theory of responsibility should explain why there are many different kinds of responsibility or why we are prone to praise and blame across a variety of domains for different sorts of successes and failures.

(D<sub>2</sub>) Any adequate theory of responsibility should explain why competence of will is of independent significance to responsibility.

Before turning to distinctively moral responsibility, I offer a conjecture that explains D<sub>1</sub> and D<sub>2</sub>. Recall that one of the things a quality of will theory emphasizes is that our responsibility responses are a symptom of how much it really matters to us that people behave in certain ways. In the case of moral responsibility, we care that people take into account the moral rights or interests of things that matter, and our proneness to responses such as guilt, resentment, and indignation are symptomatic of just how much we care about this.

Quality of will theories are right to emphasize the connection between our responsibility responses and what matters to us, but they are wrong to delimit those concerns so narrowly. It also matters to us, both for its own sake and for the sake of what it brings about, that we are able to live and work together successfully—in short, to cooperate. We are deeply social creatures, and the significance of successfully living and acting together is difficult to overstate (Bratman 2014; Tomasello 2016). Acting together often matters to us in and of itself because our relationships and our standing in them are among the most important things in our lives. But even when living or working together is merely a means to an end, there are many things that are made easier through cooperation, and there are some things that we simply cannot accomplish alone.



(As a dramatic illustration, imagine a Paleolithic tribe that must work together to hunt mammoths or starve.)

In short, it often matters very much to us, either for its own sake or for the sake of something else, that certain cooperative activities succeed, especially those in which we have a part to play. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that we often care about the success of shared activities. The success or failure of cooperative activity, like the success or failure of individual activity, often depends on capricious gods or the vagaries of chance, but it also depends, in large part, on us and on our conduct. That is, the success or failure of cooperative activity often depends on how the participants perform—enough participants must adequately play their part for the endeavor as a whole to have a reasonable chance of success (Gilbert 2013).

Here is my conjecture: our care and concern for successful cooperation extends to a concern for the performance of participants, given the intimate relationship between performance and cooperative success. Thus, we are prone to praise and blame performance (in part) because of how much it really matters to us that cooperative endeavors succeed, especially those in which we play a role. Given the robust connection between successful cooperative activity and the competence of the participants, our care and concern for successfully living and working together generates care and concern that each person competently plays their part. This explains D<sub>2</sub>, or why performance has distinctive significance for responsibility: it really does matter to us that particular shared endeavors are successful and in turn that participants are competent contributors to their success.

In sum, we can better understand our practices of judging and holding one another responsible in terms of the distinctive role, or function, they have in our social lives—namely, these practices enable, bolster, and regulate cooperation or a distinctive kind of shared agency: roughly, that of working together in relationships or communities organized around shared goals (Bratman 2014; Gilbert 2013; Salomone-Sehr 2022; cf. Vargas 2021). Accordingly, there are different kinds of responsibility because there are different kinds of shared activities: different shared activities are organized around different ends and so are bound together by correspondingly different sets of norms. Norms are, in effect, the glue binding participants together in pursuit of a common goal (cf. Gilbert 2013). Accordingly, what is distinctive about different species of responsibility stems from differences in the sort of shared activity that a given responsibility practice regulates.

For example, we hold one another epistemically responsible in the context of relationships or communities with (partially) epistemic aims. In some minimal sense, this might turn out to be nearly all of them. Nonetheless, our epistemic responsibility is foregrounded in relationships or activities whose primary or most salient shared goals are epistemic. For example, the academic community is, in some sense, organized around the epistemic goals of producing knowledge and enhancing understanding and storing and disseminating that knowledge and understanding. In turn, we hold one another epistemically responsible through hiring, granting, or denying tenure and differential status and esteem for our epistemic success and failures—for instance, whether our research is innovative

and groundbreaking or trite and unsophisticated. This is, I maintain, relatively straightforward to explain when we view our responsibility practices and responses through the lens of cooperation. Analogous remarks can be made for aesthetic or athletic responsibility. Thus, a cooperation-based understanding of responsibility also promises to satisfy D1 or why there are many different kinds of responsibility.

## 5. Quality of Will and Moral Responsibility

One response to all that I have said so far is that I am simply off the mark: a pure quality of will theory was never meant to explain the appropriateness of praise and blame per se, but rather the appropriateness of moral praise and blame. One kind of critic will complain that we were never interested in the appropriateness of blame, in general, but were concerned with the appropriateness of specifically moral attitudes such as guilt, indignation, and resentment (Wallace 1994).

It seems to me, however, that once we see that quality of will is not ‘the target of *all* our responsibility responses’ in general, this puts pressure on us to reexamine pure quality of will theories of moral responsibility in particular (Shoemaker 2013, emphasis added). Once we see the ways in which performance matters to responsibility in general, we can then look for the ways in which it matters to moral responsibility in particular. (Moreover, part of what I want is a theory of responsibility in general, ideally in a way that is informatively unifying, as the cooperation-based conjecture in the preceding section promises to be.)

It is plausible that a distinctive feature of moral responses such as guilt, indignation, and resentment is that the moral quality of someone’s will is necessary for them to be appropriate. Pure quality of will theories seem to get that much right. However, even if quality of will is necessary for moral responsibility, it is clearly not sufficient: the appropriateness of both moral praise and moral blame vary with an agent’s competence of will in just the same ways as in the other examples we have heretofore considered. This is demonstrated by two sorts of cases.

In one sort of case, an agent clearly has their heart in the right place and is trying their best, but praise is not appropriate because their efforts fail to make anything better, and in fact often make things worse (not merely as a result of luck, but due to the clumsiness of their own agency). Take, for example, the character Pierre from *War and Peace*. Pierre is an extremely wealthy nobleman who embarks on a philanthropic project to improve the conditions of the ‘peasants’ living and working on his land. In a good-faith attempt to improve their lives, he orders that their work and rent be reduced, children be sent to schools, and new buildings erected. After instituting his reforms, he tours his estates, at which point the narrator explains that Pierre:

did not know that as a result of his orders to stop sending nursing mothers out to work on the master’s land, those same mothers had to work even harder on their own patches of land. He did not know that the priest who met him with the cross oppressed the peasants with his

methods of extortion, and that the pupils gathered round him had been yielded up with much weeping and could be redeemed by their parents only for large sums of money. He did not know that the stone buildings were being put up, all to the same plan, by his own workers, which meant an actual increase in the forced labour of his peasants, but that didn't show up on paper. He did not know that where the steward's records showed a one-third reduction in rent, in accordance with his instructions, their compulsory labour had gone up by half. (Tolstoy 2006: 409)

Pierre is not worthy of admiration or praise for what he has done because what he has done is make the lives of the people working and living on his land worse. Of course, he has more than adequate good will, and there is something to be said for that. But when combined with his executive incompetence, pity seems a far more appropriate reaction to Pierre's conduct than admiration or praise.

The second sort of case that demonstrates that even moral responsibility is sensitive to competence is when an agent clearly has their heart in the wrong place, so to speak, and is trying their best to do evil, but they are so incompetent in carrying out their wicked designs that blame does not seem to be an appropriate response. To borrow an example from the television show *South Park*, consider Professor Chaos, who is trying with all his might to rain destruction and havoc on the innocent residents of the titular town. Professor Chaos believes that the most wicked thing he can do is wander into local restaurants and rearrange the cutlery, switching the places of forks and knives in their table settings. He goes from restaurant to restaurant wreaking this havoc, laughing maniacally at all the evil that he has accomplished.

Professor Chaos has ill will toward his fellow human beings. He wishes the worst for them, displaying not merely inadequate care or regard for their moral rights or interests, but positively striving to harm them. Nonetheless, because his ill will is mixed with such incompetence, it seems more appropriate to respond to his actions with laughter and amusement than with resentment or indignation.

In both cases, the respective competence of will of Pierre and Professor Chaos alters the responses that are appropriate to them. Each fails to impose their will on the world adequately, not due to accident or chance, but due to the unskilled nature of their own agency. In other words, each agent displays a kind of incompetence, and their incompetence distorts the normally appropriate reactions of praise and blame—or more specifically admiration or gratitude, on the one hand, and resentment or indignation, on the other—and instead makes pity appropriate, in the first case, and humorous amusement, in the second (Sapolsky 2017). Thus, competence of will affects the appropriateness of our responsibility responses even when we restrict our attention to the responses that characterize moral responsibility—responses such as gratitude, indignation, and resentment.

To drive the point home, we can employ the same argumentative strategy used in section 3: generate cases for comparison that hold the moral quality of an agent's will fixed while varying their competence of will and see whether the same responsibility responses are appropriate in each case. If the appropriateness of moral responsibility

responses covaries with competence of will while the moral quality of someone's will is held constant, then two dimensions of responsibility are present even in the moral case. To illustrate, contrast Pierre (or Pierre's real-life counterpart) with someone like Martin Luther King Jr. Even if we suppose that Pierre and Dr. King have identical moral qualities of will, Dr. King is admirable in a way that Pierre is not; conversely, Pierre is pitiable in a way that Dr. King is not. Moreover, this difference is explicable by the fact that Dr. King competently and effectively organized protest and spurred consciousness raising, while Pierre incompetently changed the lives of others, failing to achieve what he intended—namely, to improve their lives.

To reiterate, the point is *not* that the moral quality of someone's will does not matter for moral responsibility. Of course it does. And we might want to insist that there is something admirable in Pierre's motives, no matter his ability to enact them, and likewise something blameworthy about Professor Chaos, irrespective of his ability to do any harm. Rather, the point is that competence of will *also* matters and that it often matters in a way other than its serving as evidence for or as the expressive vehicle of an agent's quality of will.

In order for an agent to be the appropriate target of attitudes such as guilt, indignation, and resentment, it looks as though they must display ill will or inadequate good will *and* be competent. Without a presumption of competence, different responses would be appropriate. For instance, often the reason I get angry, annoyed, or frustrated with people is that I think they *are* competent—anger is a way of signaling that I expect more from them, that they can do better. This seems especially vivid to me in the reflexive case—I routinely get upset with myself because I think (perhaps falsely) that I can do better (not because I think I care about the wrong things). The appropriate responses to moral failure at the heart of existing debates seem to *presume* competence of will, which is perhaps why its significance has been overlooked.

In short, how adroitly we perform matters to specifically moral responsibility, just as it matters to responsibility generally, in a way that cannot always be relegated to its being evidence of or the expressive vehicle for an agent's quality of will. With the lessons of the preceding sections in hand, an explanation that suggests itself is that moral praise and blame vary with the competence displayed by the agent because our responsibility responses target threats and contributions to living and working together (cf. Bagley 2017). Without some degree of competence an agent cannot pose a threat or make meaningful contributions; that is why what responses are appropriate changes with changes in an agent's adroitness or competence of will. In the case of moral responsibility, what we are trying to do together is something like achieve and sustain peaceful cohabitation; in other words, we are trying to share a world. Moral responsibility, then, tracks behavior that threatens or contributes to achieving this shared goal—shared, at least, among those committed to living morally.

In other words, the two dimensions of (moral) responsibility view makes certain predictions about who we will hold responsible and why. For example, as a final piece of evidence for this view, consider the way in which it predicts and can explain how we react to the misbehavior of children. There are many reasons why

we might excuse a child's misconduct and just as many reasons why we often find it funny. But note the way in which the present theory can explain that even when children understand that their behavior is selfish or malicious, we are prone to react (inwardly, at least) with humorous amusement more often than we are prone to react with genuine anger: children are often incompetent in relevant respects and so do not pose any real threat.

With trademark ecumenicism, Shoemaker combines different conceptions of the will to create a quality of will theory, which he claims 'accurately captures who we are and what matters to us about agency' (2013: 120). I demur; any pure quality of will theory is inadequate. Invoking two dimensions of (moral) responsibility—quality and competence of will—'more accurately captures who we are and what matters to us about agency' (2013: 120). We are social animals who need to live and work together successfully, and our responsibility responses are, at bottom, a symptom of how much it really matters to us, how much we really care, that certain relationships and communities successfully survive or flourish.

## 6. Conclusion

Pure quality of will theories claim that the ultimate object of our responsibility responses (i.e., praise and blame) is the quality of our will. Any such theory is false; or so I have argued. There is a second dimension of (moral) responsibility independent of quality of will that our responsibility responses track and take as their object—namely, how adroitly we are able to translate our will into action, what I call competence of will. A conjectural explanation of the two dimensions of (moral) responsibility is that it matters to us that people actually perform competently because of how much it matters to us that we are able to live and work together successfully.

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