Dispersing Responsibility:

From Metaphysical to Contingent Determinism

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Abstract

Do we freely choose to do what we do? Or are we determined by what nature and history have made us? If we are so determined, then can we ever really be responsible for our actions? It is only by bad logic that metaphysics can deprive us of our freedom and our responsibility. But the contingencies of life are another matter. This paper argues that so many accidents of life create who we are and how we act that the responsibility for what we do must be dispersed. There is no place where the buck stops. We are therefore called upon to moderate our resentment and to give up punitive morality in favor of a morality of love and redemption.

Preface

Unlike many other problems of metaphysics, the free will problem bears directly on how we should live. What we should be doing about crime, how we should understand and respond to drugs and alcohol, what kind of sex education should be offered in schools, and what programs should be offered to people who are homeless or chronically unemployed -- all these questions are strongly affected by our take on freedom and determinism. It also affects the way we raise our children, how we treat our friends and colleagues, and even how to manage and plan our own lives. Is it really up to us what we do and who we are? Is it right to blame individuals for their crimes and errors, their bad habits and nasty attitudes? Or is every personality and every action the product of events and circumstances beyond any individual's control?

I. Metaphysical Determinism

Stated as a metaphysical claim, determinism is the thesis that the state of the world at any one moment, plus the laws of nature, uniquely determine every subsequent state of the world. Given the totality of laws of nature and the totality of particular facts at this (or any other) moment, there is only one possible future. If this is true, it appears that none of us has any choice about what we will do at any future moment. After all, none of us has any choice about what the state of the world was before we were born, nor do we have any choice about what the laws of nature are. These are givens; they are what they are, and we have no choice about them. But since these givens determine every future event, it seems to follow that we have no choice about anything in the future. One of the things that the future contains is my continuing to write this paper or my not doing so. Since you are

now reading it, we know which I did -- but apparently I could not have had any choice about it: I did it necessarily. Whether you will go on reading it may seem to be up to you. But that is an illusion. It was not up to you what happened to create you and the circumstances in which you are now placed, nor to decide what natural laws would govern your past or present behavior and form your character. But it is these things that will determine whether you go on reading or not. It follows that you have no choice about the matter.[1]

But this argument can no more be right than Zeno's arguments can prove that motion is impossible. At every moment we move and see things moving. Every day we distinguish between what is and is not up to us, and we reflect on what we and others should and could have done differently. I cannot possibly believe that it is not up to me to write or to abandon this paper, and you, unless you are temporarily swept away by the power of the argument, cannot really suppose that you have no choice about whether to go on reading or not.[2] Furthermore, our personal and judicial judgments about whom to blame and punish for immoral and criminal actions make essential use of the notion of choice. If the argument in the preceding paragraph is right, no one is ever responsible for their actions and we could never legitimately punish anyone. Since we can hardly abandon responsibility and choice as essential parts of our understanding of ourselves and each other, there must be something wrong with the argument. What is it?

One possible answer is that determinism is false. If you drop a cannon ball from the top of the leaning tower of Pisa, the laws of physics will completely determine the position of the ball at every instant of its fall to the ground. But human beings are not like cannon balls; they have free will -- the power to freely choose their actions independently of everything that has happened in the past and all the laws of nature. This is not an unreasonable answer, and many philosophers have held it. But it is, today, a position as extreme as the one it is replying to, for it places human beings outside nature, beyond the reach of scientific inquiry. What we do is infinitely more complex and more difficult to predict than the fall of a cannon ball, but let's not leap to the conclusion that we are a completely different kind of being from the rest of the world around us. Let's see if we can avoid the paradoxical conclusion of the metaphysical argument in a less drastic way.

II. From Determinism to Compatibilism

Instead of doubting determinism, let's question the part of the argument that says that since (a) I have no choice about the past or about the laws by which the past determines the future, then (b) I must have no choice

[1] This is a stripped-down statement of the argument made by Peter Van Inwagen..
An Essay On Free Will(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
[2] It's true that you might say you have no choice if you have been assigned this paper in a class, but it's still up to you whether you will do what is needed to succeed in the course.

about my own future actions. Since the first part (a) is true, and the second part (b) is false, there must be a fallacy in going from (a) to (b).

The fallacy is that the premise is irrelevant to the conclusion. Whether the universe has an open future or not has nothing to do with whether an agent has a choice or not. Determinism or no determinism, it's up to me whether I finish this paper.

Let's think about the function of the words "can" and "cannot". In applying them to actions, we use them to write and edit our menus of choice. We use "can" to include or retain an option, and we exclude one by "cannot." There are many kinds of reasons why we may exclude items from our menu. Physical or conceptual impossibility is one. "You can't get blood out of a turnip." "You can't drive from Portland to Chicago in one day." "You can't get a negative number by multiplying two negative numbers." Conflicting commitments and moral compunctions are another: "I can't go hiking tomorrow because I have a class then. I can't cancel my class because they're worried about the upcoming exam." And then there are the reasons born of strong physical or emotional reactions: I can't eat butterscotch; it turns my stomach. I can't watch horror movies: they scare me too much.[3]

To say "I don't have a choice" about something is to rule it out more conclusively. It might be an exaggeration to say I have no choice about whether to go see *Aliens II*; it's just that I've already made it, and so I don't want it on my menu of choices. You *might*, however, get me to put it back if you twist my arm. By contrast, if I have a strong sense of obligation to my students and my professional responsibilities, then I may *rightly* insist I have no choice about whether to cancel my class. In an argument with you about whether we should go fishing instead, I perceive your insistence that I do have a choice, not as a statement of fact, but as a first step in persuading me to alter a choice I've already made, to restore to the menu something I've deleted. You are trying to influence my will, not my beliefs.

What this analysis of "can" and "can't" is meant to show is that whether someone has a choice about something is not a matter of getting to the true or false description of the state of the agent or the agent's place in the causal order. In reflecting on whether I can or cannot do something, or whether I do or do not have a choice about something, I am pondering what I'm *willing* to include on my list of options before actually choosing one. I do this in the light of my responsibilities and commitments, the outer limits of my physical and emotional

[3] It might be replied here, "You can, you just don't *want* to!" This is a refusal to countenance any psychological grounds (such as strong aversion or fear) for striking an item from one's menu. But there is no a priori reason for this refusal. The reply can also be seen as intimidation -- an attempt to shame the speaker into continuing to consider the option by making the fear or aversion a matter of weakness which could (and should) be overcome by an act of will.

tolerance, and the various consequences of my actions as well as what is logically and physically conceivable. It's a practical choice, an act of will, not a statement of fact.[4]

So whether determinism is true or false has no bearing on whether I have a choice about any particular action. We can see this in a specific case. Suppose I am pondering whether to join a group bike ride of some five hundred mountainous miles over seven days in August. You are sure I won't do it. You know that as the time approaches, I will come to my senses and decide against it. So you tell me, "Clayton you really have no choice in the matter. The circumstances and your physical and psychological condition entail that it's not going to happen, so it's not up to you." But you would be wrong: Even if you are right (have justified true belief) about the future, it is only my own will that can stand in the way. Until I have made my choice, I *can* do the ride, it's up to me, it's my choice. Your prediction, no matter how well founded, does not alter the justice of my claim to be able, or free, to choose.

Sometimes we speak of a person being free. This is an assessment of the degree to which the agent's range of choices is limited by circumstances or commitments. The prisoner and the slave are at one extreme of unfreedom. A single mother of three with a high school education is less free than a retired philosophy professor.

Thus we have arrived at compatibilism. Determinism might well be the metaphysical truth about how the past unfolds into the future. Nevertheless, it remains practically necessary, socially effective, and intellectually coherent to hold individuals responsible for their actions, provided that they are voluntary and that the range of options open to them was not unduly limited.[5] For the compatibilist, I am responsible for those actions which are due to me as opposed to those that are due to things other than me.

III. From compatibilism to Contingent Determinism

[4] Saying of an agent, whether oneself or another, that she can or cannot do something is categorially different from saying of a machine, for example, that it can or cannot perform some operation. More fundamentally, however, I would argue that there is no pure modality *de re*. That this rope *cannot* reach from a to b is not about the rope *simplicter*; rather it rules out our *using* the rope for tying a to b, and it deletes the proposition that the rope reaches from a to b from our list of propositional options. Modalities, as Kant says, are always relations among judgments (propositions) rather than between judgments and objects. They are ways of leaving them on or striking them from our considerations. Modal propositions are, then, normative, prescriptive. It's a fact about the rope and about a and b that the length of the rope is less than the distance from a to b. This fact validates our act of crossing the action or state of affairs off our list of things to consider asserting or doing, and we do this by saying the rope *cannot* reach from a to b. This is the basic insight I want to extend to action theory. However, what I say here probably draws to sharp a line between fact and prescription. A more deeply pragmatic account would say that all our descriptions of objects are inseparably factual and action-guiding.

[5] That is, I have acted freely, and am responsible for what I've done, if (a) I was not forced to make my choice by the actions of others or by circumstances I could not control; and (b) I knew what I was doing (or should have known); and (c) I had other options of which I was, or should have been, aware.

But is compatibilist freedom as just described enough for full moral responsibility? If you are to be fully responsible for your actions, it would seem necessary not only that they flow from who you are, but that who you are is something you have chosen to be. But can you choose who you are? Can you, or did you create yourself? Is not self-creation a privilege reserved to God? If you -- your character, your preferences and attitudes -- are created by events and circumstances that precede and surround you, then surely your actions are not your own.

The compatibilist says an action is free to the extent that the agent has a satisfactory range of options and is not constrained by external circumstances. But what if the range of one's choices is restricted internally, by the nature of the agent? Let's be more specific.

The compatibilist acknowledges that your freedom is limited if you are ignorant of alternative possibilities. The option to receive food stamps may be legally available to you, but if you don't know about it, then it's not on your menu of choices. Legally you are free to get them, but *practically* you are not. Now the reason you don't know about your eligibility for food stamps may be that your social worker lies to you about it, or because there is no information about food stamps in your neighborhood or in a language you can read. Those would be external circumstances. But there may be internal obstacles to your knowledge of possibilities. What if the reason for your ignorance is that you are illiterate, mentally retarded, or demented and cannot understand or remember the information? Perhaps you cannot accept the information given you about food stamps because of paranoid delusions about the government -- that government agencies lie to you. In these cases, you are not constrained by external circumstances, and yet you are unable to apply for food stamps.

I may lack the freedom to act in the way I should, not because I'm ignorant of the options, but because of an overwhelming fear or compulsive desire. If I am subject to panic attacks when I appear in public, then I am not free to go to an office to apply for food stamps. I may be unable to apply for food stamps if voices in my head tell me not to and I am terrified of disobeying them.

It can also happen that individuals lack certain attributes that normally prevent people from doing bad things to others. They may lack the ability to restrain their violent or acquisitive impulses. Or they may not have the capacity for empathy, the ability to see other persons as persons and to see or care about how their own actions impact upon others. Psychologists disagree about how to understand these conditions; some say they are acquired through neurological disease, physical damage to the brain from childhood beatings, or emotional trauma from psychological and physical abuse. Such afflictions of the will were certainly not chosen by those who suffer from them, nor did they result from their own choices. The same is true for those of us who are free from these defects: we did not choose our own good fortune. We have had moral luck.[6]

[6] See Thomas Nagel, "Moral Luck," in [Nagel, 1979 #19]

Contrary to what my compatibilist was arguing earlier, the little words "can" and "cannot" have a use other than for each of us to edit our own menus of choice. Others may know things about our menus of choice that we ourselves do not. You may have good reason to think that I am ignorant of an important option, or that I am mentally or emotionally unable to recognize it or give take it seriously.

But isn't it possible that some people simply *choose* not to restrain their impulses, choose to do whatever they feel like doing regardless of the feelings of others and the norms of society? One might put this in Kantian terms. Inclinations by themselves do not compel us to act. Lust or anger motivates us to act only if we have incorporated it into our set of subjective principles, or maxims, into our chosen way of life, our moral character. A person chooses to live violently or peacefully, to control his impulses or to follow them, to respect others or to regard them merely as instruments. If he is no longer free to act otherwise, this is only because he has deliberately eliminated the alternatives from his menu of choice. In that case, the violent person is not free to live in peace only in the way that a happy and successful physician in mid-career is not free to become a grocery clerk: every choice and acquired taste and skill has closed off that alternative. But just as the attorney is responsible for what he has become, so is the violent criminal. Each way of life is the ongoing expression of a settled will.

Aristotle, too, holds us responsible for having the moral character we do. We become just by performing just acts, and unjust by behaving unjustly. Unlike Kant, however, Aristotle recognizes that the self-forming choices we make in early childhood depend a great deal on our upbringing.

> In a word, characteristics develop from corresponding activities. For that reason, we must see to it that our activities are of a certain kind, since any variations in them will be reflected in our characteristics. Hence it is no small matter whether one habit or another is inculcated in us from early childhood; on the contrary, it makes a considerable difference, or rather, all the difference. (*Nichomachaen Ethics*, II, 1, 1103b 23-25)

Marx says that human beings "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."[7] So with us as individuals: to the extent that we do choose our own moral character, we do so under circumstances we inherit, in situations that unfold around us and even within us.[8] Children choose their ways of life, especially, as I will argue later, the more problematic paths, with limited knowledge and appreciation of the alternatives, and under considerable emotional duress which makes deliberation very difficult. A boy trying to survive and establish for himself some respect in a violent milieu, one in which

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[7] Marx, *18th Brumaire*, in David McLellan, editor, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 300.

[8] The emotional responses of a child to being beaten or belittled (resentment, rage, or self-contempt) are phenomena that arise unbidden in her and that shape her future interpretations of events, her attitudes and decisions.

other options are either not available to him or are unrealistic, may well find that violence is his salvation.[9] He *is* responsible for who he his and what he does, but the responsibility must be dispersed to the conditions in which he made his choices. Aristotle's mariner who jettisons the cargo in a storm to save the ship and crew is responsible for his action--but so is the storm. Someone who smokes cigarettes and dies painfully of lung cancer or emphysema is responsible for her own death -- but so are the tobacco and advertising industries. The brutal Nazi death camp guard and the US soldier killing women and children in My Lai are responsible for their atrocities -- but so are the men and the institutions that gave rise to the orders they were, after all, following (but not "just" following).

These reflections bring us, I think, to a more forceful appreciation of determinism's insight:

> *All human affects and cognitions, capacities and limits, fears and desires, attitudes and habits, actions and aversions, for good and for evil, are grounded in various ways in natural and historical world-processes, which means that no individual can be fully the author of his or her choices or actions.* However reasonable, legally and morally, it may be to hold me responsible for what I do, much more is responsible for it than just myself. The agent, the acting individual, is always part of a larger dynamic whole. The individual is not *in* an environment; she is part of a social-ecological process.

But this position, which I will call "Contingent Determinism", or just CD, is not the metaphysical determinism (MD) we visited at the start of this paper. MD is dogmatic: it represents itself as a universal and factual claim needing no other ground than the general principle of cause and effect. CD is a regulative idea, a maxim of inquiry that asks us to look for the origins of an action beyond the will and the motives of individual agents in trying to understand a crime, an error, or a tragedy. MD invalidates responsibility wholesale, abstractly, and therefore implausibly. CD reapportions responsibility selectively, according to the concrete circumstances revealed by empirical inquiry. CD does not undermine the reality of choice, or the real distinction between actions we choose and those we do not. Rather, it puts our choices in the larger context of cultural, historical and personal contingencies.[10]

The obverse of CD, of course, is Contingent Freedom. People are free to the extent that they live in full and deliberate responsiveness to what is going on around them, and appreciate how they are situated in their relations with others. But this freedom comes to them through circumstances, past and present, which they did not

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[9] See [Athens, 1992 #200]

[10] As responsibility is dispersed, its moral component thins out into factors beyond human agency. However, it may be that whenever we are asking for the causes of events in the human realm, we are within the domain of responsibility since we are looking for explanations with a view towards possible control or alteration. The frontiers of knowledge are at the same time the frontiers of responsibility. This is not the credo of crude techno-science that if we know how to do it (build an H bomb, clone a human being) then we have to do it. But it does mean that if we know how to do a thing, then we are responsible for whether it is done or not.

order up for themselves. Their freedom is contingent, not something metaphysically guaranteed by their nature as rational beings.

Contingent Freedom is the only possible freedom, and CD is the only determinism that really matters. CD is a thesis about the ills that human flesh, and spirit, are heir to. As such, it recommends mercy rather than strict and narrow justice in responding to crime and error.[11]

IV. Allocating Responsibility

CD does not eliminate the responsibility of a malefactor, it only disperses it to a multitude of other factors beyond the individual. But the assignment of responsibility for wrongdoing is an essential part of social life. So it is important to say something about *how* responsibility is dispersed and how much of it remains on the shoulders of the individual.

According to CD, *to the extent that* my choices and actions proceed from conditions outside myself, I am not responsible for what I have done. This does not preclude the possibility that my choices have some roots with me, and that to that extent I am responsible for them. What would determine this degree of responsibility?

As always, it helps to start by establishing the function of a concept: what is the practical point of assigning responsibility to someone? It is to locate *a* point of intervention, *one* place where our action might correct or maintain a process or activity. We hold both human and non-human actors responsible in this broad sense: a careless builder may be responsible for the collapse of a building, but that does not rule out the responsibility of the earthquake.

How do we decide upon the extent to which a person, P, is responsible for some event or state of affairs, X, by the performance of an action A? Perhaps the steps of such a determination could be structured as follows.

What was the extent of A's contribution to X? P's responsibility for X is diminished if the actions of other agents or circumstances and events not under P's control played a major role in producing X. For example, P's responsibility for missing her flight is diminished if her alarm clock battery failed.

Was A's action voluntary, i.e. willed by A? Or did P do A in ignorance of what he was doing, or because of paranoid delusions, deep depression, or a hypnotic state? The less voluntary is P's action, the less responsible is P for X.

[11] More about this in Section VI.

If P acted voluntarily, then to what extent were her choices limited, or even forced, by circumstances? All choices are made from a limited menu, some more limited than others. Someone who is tortured into betraying her comrades is less responsible than someone who sells out for money. The person who joins in racist or sexist joking is less responsible for it than the one who instigated it.

The greater the contribution of the action A to X, and the more voluntarily it is chosen by P from a wide range of choices, the more it seems that it is P herself who is responsible for X.[12] But now we must ask to what extent P is responsible for her own principles of conduct and her attitudes towards others. *To the extent that P is not responsible for her own moral character, to that extent her responsibility for X is diminished*.

Let us suppose, with Aristotle, that we form our character by the choices we make, but remember that these choices, like all choices, are made under conditions not of our own choosing. Under what conditions of character-forming choice will we be less responsible for what we become? We should be held less responsible for having formed ourselves to the extent that we made ourselves in a social environment limited in the opportunities and options it offers, and in the information it provides about alternatives. Our character is also not our own when the price to be paid for divergent paths to which we might be drawn is very high. We are also less responsible for who we are if we must make our decisions about how to live under duress, threatened by violence, unsupported by people who love us, and provoked into resentment and rage by the brutal treatment of the people closest to us.

Conversely, our responsibility increases when the reverse of these conditions obtain as we are growing up. People are responsible for what they do to the degree that they are able to make their choices in an open and supportive setting, and less responsible when the conditions of their choices, the conditions in which they form their expectations and their attitudes are limited and coercive. So it turns out that people of good character are more responsible for what they do than those of bad character. People who become what they are in good conditions have a greater role in creating their moral character.[13]

V. Why We Resist the Dispersal of Responsibility

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[12] However it is never the case that P is *solely* responsible for X: other circumstances and events always make their contributions. That the alarm clock functioned properly, that one is free from paranoid delusions, that one's options were open -- these things happen thanks, in large measure, to one's good fortune.

[13] This helps us to clear up a paradox: We call people who fail to meet their obligations and who are careless of the rights of others irresponsible. Yet when they cause trouble, we insist that they *are* responsible! I think there is indeed a contradiction here in our practices of punishment: In general we recognize that some people have little or no capacity to act responsibly, and yet when we want to punish them, we insist that they could have done otherwise and that therefore it's just to punish them severely. This violation of logic legitimates our resentment. However, the contradiction in principle can be cleared up. Responsible people are those who build their characters in non-coercive situations. But someone who acts "irresponsibly" is responsible only in a diminished sense: this individual is an important point of intervention. It is this person's beliefs, attitudes, preferences, and strategies that we need to engage in order to address the damage that has been done.

The sand bar on which the compatibilism - incompatibilism debate has been stuck is the need to be able to assign full moral responsibility for any crime or accident to just one individual (or group of individuals acting in concert). It is difficult to wrap the mind around the idea that responsibility needs to be assigned to multiple factors in a complex network of past and present conditions. Why are we so fixated on confining responsibility to one location, to stopping the buck, whole and entire, on one desk?[14] I have two reasons to offer.

First, whenever we make judgments about who is responsible for something, we step into the role of defender of the moral order and its institutions. Wearing this white hat, we are constrained from allowing what individuals do to call into question that order of things of which we now feel ourselves to be guardians. The doctrine of individual responsibility, supported by the belief in free will, places blame for dysfunction on individuals and exonerates entrenched relations of power.[15]

A second reason our minds resist the spread of responsibility is the dominance of what I will call condemnatory (or punitive) morality over the morality of love and redemption. Our response to crime is resentment, and resentment, being an angry and unsympathetic passion, requires retribution, i.e. hard treatment of some kind. We who belong to, or speak in concert with, the ruling powers, do not want to resent ourselves or our way of living. So we want responsibility to be narrowly directed, to strike at just one individual, as a kind of scapegoat for more general problems.[16]

VI. New Reactive Attitudes

But would a fuller appreciation of the complex and deep contingencies of our choices and actions result in far-reaching changes in the way we assign moral responsibility? P.F. Strawson's seminal paper "Freedom and Resentment" raises some important questions about this. [17]

Strawson makes us see something that analytic moral philosophers generally overlook: that holding people responsible for what they do is not a formal and bloodless procedure. Because we are deeply social beings who depend on each other for the recognition of our dignity and self-respect, it matters very much to us how others treat us and perceive us. It is an essential part of our being human together that we react with gratitude, resentment, and moral approval and disapproval to the conduct of others, both towards ourselves and toward

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[14] The origin of the saying "The buck stops here" was a plaque President Truman had on his desk.

[15] The doctrine and the problem of free will is due to St. Augustine. Having created an impossibly powerful and impossibly judgmental God -- one who knows not only our acts but our hearts as well -- it required an equally absolute (and impossible) power of choice to maintain our responsibility for evil and to defend God's innocence. Augustine was faced with a problem analogous to the old puzzle about whether God could create a thing he could not lift: could he (as the only agent on the scene and one who had absolute control of all conditions) create a being (man) for which He was not responsible? The only answer to an impossible riddle is an inconceivable notion.

[16] Something like this impulse is rather vividly illustrated by Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery."

[17] In [Strawson, 1974 #205]

others we care about. We are especially sensitive to how others feel about us. Whether another person or group treats us with good will, indifference or contempt matters imensely to each of us.
We react as well to our *own* conduct: we feel guilt or remorse when we think we have treated others badly. These "reactive attitudes" are central to our participation in human life, and Strawson calls them *participant reactive attitudes*. They are essential to the weaving and the mending of the social fabric, to the way we instruct and correct ourselves and each other.

Resentment and moral indignation, emotions though they are, are part of the human practice of holding people responsible for their actions. So it makes sense to react in these ways only to people who are capable of responding to us by altering their conduct. If an injury results from the action of young child or someone suffering from mental illness, then., Strawson suggests, we suspend, or inhibit, our participant reactive attitudes, and instead regard the person as a problem (or a "case") to be managed or treated. Our attitude becomes *objective*, rather than participant. If it turns out that the man who shot your child was a schizophrenic who was beset by the voice of God in his head, then your resentment should give way to the resignation we feel about the losses caused by hurricanes or earthquakes.

It is also possible to take the objective attitude towards normal people when we are concerned with social policy or as a respite from the stress of involvement with others. But could we, persuaded of the truth of determinism, adopt this point of view towards everyone all the time? Strawson thinks not, for two reasons. One is that our reactive attitudes are too much a part of who we are and how we live together to be abandoned. The other is that the reasons we now use for substituting the objective attitude for the reactive ones are precisely reasons for suspending our *normal* reactions. They involve the recognition of specific types of exceptions to the normal situation, such factors as paranoid delusions or immaturity. They are, then, categorially different from the sort of reason the general theory of determinism would provide. The objective attitude exists as a response to specific factors that differentiate this case from the normal. It cannot, then, be a universal response to a general truth about human life.

I think Strawson's second argument shows the incoherence of metaphysical, or wholesale, determinism with its blanket entailment that no one is ever responsible for anything. However the contingent determinism I have argued for undermines responsibility more selectively -- dispersing rather than eliminating it. CD focuses attention specifically on problematic actions, and it tells us to expect to find, if we inquire, that much of the responsibility for them lies beyond the power of the agent. It agrees that it is only certain specific factors that justify our reducing the responsibility of an agent, but it advises us that those specific factors are more ubiquitous than we usually suppose.

The first argument, however, remains. CD seems to counsel a wide-spread inhibition of resentment and moral indignation. It challenges our participant reactive attitudes by asserting that they are least valid where they

are felt most strongly, namely in the most heinous cases. This is because those with the worst moral character have had the least to say about their character.

For Strawson, the alternative to the moral and legal practices that express our resentment and moral indignation is an attitude of objectivity. In this posture, we would regard those who trespass against us in the way that highway engineers regard cars: as moving objects whose behavior is to be modified by controlling their environment. Instead of resenting and punishing a misbehaving child or a serial killer, we would coolly consider the best way to prevent further damage and, if possible, to redirect the offender towards better behavior. This would mean stepping outside the fabric of moral life and into a world where

> there were no longer any such things as impersonal relationships as we normally understand them. Being involved inter-personal relationships as we normally understand them precisely *is* being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question. …A sustained objectivity of inter-personal attitude, and the human isolation which that would entail, does not seem to be something of which human beings would be capable, even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it (11-12).[18]

So, for example, if I were to speak in front of the victims of a terrible crime in the objective manner, giving socio-economic explanations for criminal behavior and counseling against resentment and punishment, I would be radically isolating myself from them, refusing to participate in their very human and natural reactions. Human solidarity requires that we identify with and sympathize with those who suffer and that we collectively take action against those who willfully inflict suffering. Otherwise we show disrespect, not only to victims, but to the whole community who identifies with them and shares their moral outrage. We would thereby earn their justifiable resentment.

But is the objective, social management point of view the only alternative to our existing reactive attitudes? Strawson does allow that there are a couple of contexts where these two opposing perspectives can be employed together: raising children and psychotherapy. Parents, teachers and therapists suspend their moral judgments and resentments in the process of bringing their charges to the point of maturity where that suspension is no longer necessary. "The treatment of [children] must … represent a kind of compromise, constantly shifting in one direction, between objectivity of attitude and developed human attitudes" (19).

What's wrong with this picture? A parent confronted with a child behaving irresponsibly can remain a participant in solidarity with the child without succumbing to resentment and moral indignation. The key, of course, is love, the missing ingredient in Strawson's binary opposition of attitudes.[19] A parent guided by love takes neither of Strawson's attitudes as they stand, nor does she take them one at a time by turns. Rather, she tries

[18] I have taken the liberty of making some slight changes to reduce, slightly, the convolution in the original prose.

to encourage responsibility, reason and respect, but is *always* aware that the child is unformed and that the hoped-for behavior is liable to failures. Misbehavior is not an occasion to treat the child as an object, nor to react with resentment or moral rebuke, but rather to help the child to understand the parent's expectations and the reasons for them. Even when physical restraint is needed, it can be done with an attitude of love quite opposed to objectivity.

Love has a place, or ought to, not only in the raising of children, but in dealing supportively with our friends, colleagues and neighbors as well. We might try assuming from the outset that every one of us is subject to weaknesses and temptations, that everyone needs affection and support in our efforts to get along with each other and to stay out of trouble. Perhaps this would be a better way of looking at each other than the presumption that we are perfectly mature and responsible adults until we cause trouble, and then reacting either with resentment or with behavior management techniques.

Nothing I've said so far in criticism of Strawson's picture proposes radical changes in existing human feelings and practices; it points to a dimension of them which his picture left out. But when we turn to implementing the helping hand approach in the arena of crime, the position does, admittedly, become radical.

Contingent determinism disperses, rather than eliminating, the responsibility for a disaster, finding responsibility in varying degrees in many places, from voluntary agents to unforeseen circumstances. We should, then, disperse, not eliminate, our participant reactive attitudes. If we can become vividly aware that what individuals do emerges out of a multitude of current conditions and past events, out of the processes of social and organic life, we may shift our resentment away from individual offenders and towards the institutions and practices that tend to give rise to cruelty and indifference.

This is not to deny that a portion of resentment and moral outrage, tempered with mercy, should rightly be directed towards offenders in proportion to their degree of responsibility. Why mercy? First, note that the expression of resentment and outrage communicates to the offender (as well as to the community) the significance of what he has done. But if we are aware of the diffusion of responsibility for the damage, then we will feel some compassion for the offender's misbegotten condition, for example, for his incapacity to love, for his condemnation to hatred, and for the experiences that led him to adopt those attitudes. We should also be conscious that we ourselves, law abiding citizens, did not create the conditions that enabled us to avoid the fate of the defendant before us. By not treating the offender with the hatred and contempt owing to one who embodies pure evil but with the sympathy we owe to one of us who has failed tests any of us might have failed, we increase the chances that when we do express our resentment, he will respond with remorse to the suffering our resentment conveys.

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[19] Curious that Strawson mentions love only in the context of adult relationships (where it presupposes the normal range of reactive attitudes) but in his remarks about children, the word is never mentioned!

I have no illusions that the political and cultural implications of what I've said here are likely to be implemented any time soon, even if this point of view were more widely disseminated than it will be. But one can hope that a more merciful form of justice, founded on an appreciation of contingent determinism might gradually draw the needle of our moral compass away from its fixation on the false north of resentment.

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