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Free Will

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### A Moral Dialog

Upon reading about the horrendous actions of Robert Alton Harris, a question for me arose regarding whether his actions seemed more horrendous towards the end of his life than they did at the beginning. Or whether the actions that he committed later in life were more grievous than those committed earlier; if so, then why? This is a question about whether our reactive attitudes reflect the truth about free will or whether they reflect the truth about determinism. It is a question that is central to discovering how we might answer this question about our reactive attitudes and determine what it is exactly that they might be reactions to. Wherever we read about the story of Robert, it almost always begins with his killing of two teenage boys. Next we might learn about his unhappy and abusive childhood. Presumably man who initially found Harris' actions unacceptable, become more sympathetic once they learn about this childhood.

Given the first question, it is not directly apparent whether, given his unhappy childhood, we develop more open-minded responses to those actions committed by him in his earlier years, a a result of his upbringing, than we do to those committed later in his life. At what point in time did he reach the limit of sympathy that he could garner from those around him and whether or not there is such a limit? If it is true that we are more forgiving of his earlier actions than we are of his later actions, then it seems to be the case that Strawson's expressive theory of moral responsibility is correct in stating that agents are exempted from moral responsibility under type 2 pleas. Supposing that agents are exempted from moral responsibility under type 2 pleas

assumes that we naturally except the theory of determinism. By exempting a certain agent from moral responsibility, or rather by inhibiting our moral demands of him, we might be saying in effect that that agent does not have the proper historically formative characteristics which we deem to be central to his ability to meet our moral demands. Some other features that we might suppose that agent to not possess might be certain cognitive elements we might deem necessary in his ability to meet our moral demands.

An agent becomes exempted under type 2 pleas whenever “the agent, temporarily or permanently, globally or locally, is exempted from the basic demand in the first place” (Watson, 123). Essentially type 2 pleas “bear upon the question of whether the agent is a proper object of that kind of demand for goodwill or regard which is reflected in ordinary reactive attitudes” (Watson, 123) Agents that are too young to engage in the moral dialog might meet the requirements expressed by these types of pleas. There are still some problems here as well however. The primary problem that I am concerned with is the problem of Harris. It seems as though he is an agent who initially experienced many graces for various infractions that he committed in his lifetime. However it seems as though he finally reached the limit of grace that would have been offered to him. The question therefore is this; how many negative attitudes could an agent be exempted from before our inhibitions are overcome by our attitudes. If we suppose Robert to have initially been exempted under type 2 pleas, then at what point did the inhibitions of our attitudes become strained and negated? Someone might assume that there is an easier answer to this question. Further in this paper I will present this possible solution and show why it is not one that could easily be accepted.

The Harris case is a complicated one and does a good job of highlighting some of the difficulties that we are confronted with in both Strawson’s and Watson’s solutions. Strawson’s

solution becomes complicated due to the fact that he leaves out certain aspects of central to our understanding of reactive attitudes. While he hints at the fact that our attitudes are parcel to the “concerns and demands that we have of one another” (Watson, 121), he does not fully develop that these sorts of concerns we have could ultimately involve actions as they are perceived by us as directed towards us. If he does, and there is good reason to suppose that he does believe that our concerns involve the perceptions that we have of other’s attitudes as directed at us, he does not do so in a way that is apparent to Watson.

Rather than restating the Harris case conclusively, I will primarily rely on various aspects of the case that I feel are relevant to our discussion. One such aspect involves Watson’s understanding of type 2 pleas; that once we develop the attitude that the agent is not responsible for their own lack of moral understanding, we exempt said agent from the communal dialog surrounding moral responsibility<sup>1</sup> (Watson, 130 - 131<sup>2</sup>).

If this is true, then a further question would be whether our reactive attitudes reflect attempts by us to influence another's actions; or whether they are merely reflections of some set of moral principles that objectively exist and we are in some way privy to. Attempting to influence another's actions would require that the agent be able to apprehend what is being communicated. Strawson refers to these as basic demands. The lack of ability on the part of one of the agents to engage in dialog places a strain on any moral dialog that might take place between that agent and other members of his community. The other idea is that reactive attitudes are responses based on a particular phenomenological experience as contravening or intervening with some truth about what morality consists of. Strawson does not believe in an "independent notion of responsibility that explains the propriety of the reactive attitudes" (Watson, 121), therefore he would disagree with the second account.

However, if the second account *were* true and Strawson were wrong in the aforementioned respect, then this proposition could imply an agent's ability to be able to experience this truth in the same way as another would. Thus leading to a possibility of a certain reaction towards an agent in the event of a perceived inability of the agent being incapable or unwilling to do this. The source of the reaction would essentially be a type of response towards the individual as one who does not exhibit similar features of moral conviction with one feature being that of exhibiting a willingness to do so. Therefore this would represent our responses towards some individual who is in some way deficient. Recall the way in which some historical communities responded to individuals with grouse and often misunderstood diseases, such as leprosy or HIV (Madru).

Gary Watson identifies several issues with both accounts. He argues that under Strawson's theory, we can account for type 1 pleas, which deny the appearance that another

failed to fulfill the basic demands made of him; but that we cannot account for Strawson's type 2 pleas. His own attempt to solve this problem involves making a statement about there being particular constraints on intelligible moral demand which in turn inhibits the basic demand (Watson, 126). Conversely, Strawson argues that "reactive attitudes are constitutive of moral responsibility. Watson does not feel however that Strawson provides "an explanation of the exempting conditions (Watson, 126). Additionally Strawson argues that "the [participant] reactive attitudes are essentially natural human reactions to the good or ill-will or indifference of others towards us, as displayed in their attitudes and actions" (Strawson, 80). I believe that if we consider our reactive attitudes to be constitutive of our *subjective* wishes regarding actions directed towards us as Strawson states. With the majority of our moral concerns being centered on these, it then seems to me that we will not have any issue considering Strawson's account. By highlighting those elements in Strawson's account which reflect our concerns about ourselves, I believe that I can make Strawson's argument more forceful and one which will align more closely with our own intuitions and experiences as well as satisfy Watson's concerns.

Additionally, I will highlight and contrast some of the points available to the compatibilist and the incompatibilist regarding moral responsibility. I feel that neither fully accounts for our reactive attitudes given our concern about freedom or its alternative. However, I feel that with slight modifications of both theses, there might be some plausible considerations for further conversation. Under Watson's summary of Strawson, the incompatibilist represents the libertarian free will theorist. Given that the libertarian does not believe in determined outcomes, she would not be able to argue that our reactive attitudes are instances of moral coercion. Rather, the move that is available to her is some assumption that our attitudes commit us to some truth about the belief in moral responsibility. Given this, I argue that their truth need

not necessarily be present “out there”, but might be more plausibly considered as a plausible proposition reflected in some desire central to the heart of the demander. Additionally, it is not necessary that one be a determinist to derive value from reactive attitudes in the same way as argued by the thesis of social regulation. Given this conclusion, it is possible that our reactive attitudes are responses towards agents out of some sense of understanding of some objective moral proposition. However rather than say that this truth exists “out there”, I believe that my argument will show that it can could also exist somewhat “in here”, in our hearts.

Strawson rejects the view that our reactive attitudes point out certain objective truths relating to moral responsibility. For Strawson, it is not the case that our reactive attitudes point out morally salient features about responsibility. Rather, they do the opposite. They express the demands that we have of one another (Watson, 121). For Watson, there are several problems in accepting this belief. One of the primary issues that he seems to be confronted with regards the distinction between type 1 and type 2 pleas and how these relate to the exempting conditions which might absolve us of a particular moral demand<sup>3</sup>.

This belief (that one of the pleas do not fully account for certain principles that would exempt an agent from moral responsibility) has ramifications for a consequentialist *and*<sup>4</sup> libertarian sort of view of moral responsibility. The consequentialist concern relates to the proposition of the having and expressing certain reactive attitudes and what role these attitudes play as an activity understood in the broader spectrum of a community (Watson, 121<sup>5</sup> *emphasis mine*). The consequentialist might believe that our reactive attitudes are forms of social communication that the have the desired effect of bringing about certain consequences related to

those reactions. Here I should point out that it seems that there is the conflation of an attitude being presented as a type of action. If we consider reactive attitudes in the consequentialist sense, it is apparent that I am justified in converging the idea of an attitude with that of an action. Saying that reactive attitudes are responses either in the Strawsonian sense of being reactions to the good or ill-will of others towards ourselves, or a type of social regulation, implies that it is possible that they exhibit some of the properties of an action<sup>6</sup>. Here a slight concern might develop however. If I desire a certain state of affairs, as I would if I ascribed to the consequentialist perspective, then it seems as if the actions that I do to bring about that state of affairs should in some sense be deliberate. This would present a question of whether or not attitudes in this sense are automatic responses or not. If they are not automatic, then they are some deliberate action on my part to bring about a particular consequence or prevent the reoccurrence of some other consequence. Some could say however that not all actions that result from certain desires are intentional. For instance, I might come across one who is in trouble. Without thinking, I might rush to this person's aid. Here an automatic response, which could have resulted from some deeply held desire, one that I need not be aware of, results in some action. Whether or not our actions and intentions must be deliberate or not is a contentious conversation and one that I am not ultimately concerned with nor equipped to engage in. For my purposes, it is enough to show that actions do not necessarily have to be deliberate. So whether they are or not is not important. Therefore, if actions are deliberate, they then might result from our various desires, as a consequent of those desires. If they are to, they then could be said to result spontaneously as a result of some prior event (such as my unwilling response to something said to my wife by a stranger). Or as in the case of libertarian free will, willy nilly, which is an implausible conclusion.

It is not clear then whether reactive attitudes need to be deliberate in the sense needed to account for one theory of social regulation. It is possible that some attitudes arise from some overarching desire to see that people do well while others might arise from desires that the agent themselves do well<sup>7</sup>. Though both Watson and Strawson agree that the social regulation theory is implausible, neither bring up this specific objection.

The libertarian view is a view that concerns metaphysical freedom (Watson, 121). It is a plausible distinctive way of looking at our own reactive attitudes and questioning whether or not they are responses to some proposition. Nevertheless, seeing as how the libertarian and consequentialist views are opposing views about what role, if any, our attitudes play concerning the moral responsibility of ourselves or of other's, it seems to me that there might regardless be some similarity between them. Supposing that there are two differing views to account for the same phenomenological problem, what if both were in reality just two ways of looking at the same problem?

Until now, I have only been concerned with moral responsibility, possibly it might help to take a different approach. One thing that we have not talked about are any metaphysical ramifications brought about as a result of our own attitudes. For instance, we have not considered any possibility our reactive attitudes would be negated by a determinist thesis. Besides the question of whether or not our attitudes would be curtailed by the thesis of determinism; another possible implication of having our reactive attitudes could be that we are reacting to some real proposition regarding our moral intuitions. Once again, this is not some deterministic proposition arriving from the considerations of us having reactive attitudes, but that rather given libertarian free will, how we might account for us having reactive attitudes. Both Strawson and Watson dismiss the libertarian response towards our reactive attitudes pretty quickly, neither spending



much time discussing a plausible libertarian response. Presumably, the reason for this is that it is very difficult to discover what a truthful proposition a libertarian might consider. Strawson additionally argues that there is no objective truth as such which explains “the propriety of the reactive attitudes” (Watson, 121). In addition, each of these views are meant to be rivals to a deterministic theory of causation. Therefore, whether it is a theory about the consequences arising from the expression of our own attitudes, or some other thing, I also am not at all sure about all the ways in which our reactive attitudes might come about in a libertarian view of the world.

Some points that might become pertinent if we did find that we should be concerned with a potential association between our attitudes of social regulation is that this is just one out of a plethora of plausible theories implying a deterministic<sup>8</sup> view of the world, but what would a libertarian view imply? What plausible theories are available to the libertarian?

I am not sure what responses are available to the libertarian as such, but I believe that a closely related view is one argued by Thomas Nagel. I will only present this view for the purposes that it gives a plausible account of a thesis contrary to determinism and allows for a significant degree of free will. The freedom implied by his thesis is difficult for me to comprehend fully. In a sense it is more closely aligned with an agent theory of causation rather than a libertarian one. However it does provide a plausible account representing our experiences of freedom which might provide a descriptive theory of our attitudes towards other agents.

One feature of Nagel’s response “regard[s] action as a basic mental[/psychophysical] category that is neither reducible to physical nor to other mental terms” (Nagel, 230). Elsewhere in his paper, Nagel distinguishes between what he calls the objective view and subjective view. It

seems as if the subjective view could be explained as a type of free will defense in which our own subjective experiences of free action account for our justified belief in free will. (Here it is important to notate that I do not intend to present a thesis of free will but rather reflect on how our experiences of freedom might account for our reactive attitudes.) Another important distinction entails a similarity with the basic epistemological problem in that both involve our experiences as of having tangible evidence to conclude the truth of some proposition (knowledge/free will). But that upon further consideration, it is not apparent why this belief might be justified. Nagel says that the determinism/free will debate is not a problem of what someone “could or could not have done”, but rather “lies in the loss of belief and the invasion of doubt, an erosion of interpersonal attitudes and sense of autonomy” (Nagel, 231). Therefore Nagel defines the free will thesis as one that reflects our subjective experiences. For Nagel though, this is not enough to bring any resolution between the determinist’s and free will camps. For my purposes it is enough that we have a plausible alternative to the deterministic thesis. We are making the less strong statement that our reactive attitudes are just reflections of our own phenomenological experiences.

Given the Nagelian definition, the objective view accounts for the problem of determinism. When viewed at objectively rather than subjectively, we are able to see all actions and the preceding events which led to their unfolding. Subsequently this view becomes a source of our own skepticism regarding the free will thesis. From the objective perspective, the world is very determined and there is no room for free agency. He argues that our feelings of freedom, in regards to a presumed ability to make decision, derives from a subjective view. This view does not allow us to see the connections between current and past actions as conclusively as would the objective view. Though Nagel’s view is primarily a stating of the problem involving

determinism, it does do a good job of mapping out a description of our own experiences. In a way, it represents the dual experiences that we have of freedom and determinism. On the one hand we experience life as one that contains a myriad of open possibilities, while on the other hand there seem to be no justification for these experiences. Considering the way it seems that action occurs, only by the existence of some preceding action, it seems highly probable that our skepticism is justified. But more importantly, this is still not a reason to conclusively reject the free will thesis.

It is not directly apparent whether our feelings of moral responsibility also derive from the subjective view under Nagel's view or whether or not we should consider them to. Nonetheless, Nagel makes a very convincing case that it does. The difficulty that arises then is through what he calls ordinary judgements. Ordinary judgments are a description of what he calls our "natural human point of view". A projection occurs whenever we ascribe a view of free action which corresponds with our own subjective experiences, onto other agents stopping as he says "only where it will not fit" (Nagel, 242). This in turn involves a supposition by us that the agent in question was free in the sense required. This is based on the assumption that the agent experiences the world in much the same way that we do. If we are to accommodate our negative or positive reactive attitudes towards the agent in question, it requires that we assume that this supposed perspective of the agent is similar to our own experiences. The subjective stance of the agent implies a free and open future available to the agent based on the seemingly free and open future that we ourselves experience.

For Nagel, and also for the Harris case, the proper question then is where or when does a break down occur? Given a subjective view which requires that we are presented with free choices, and given that we assume that other agents have a similar experience, it is plausible that

our own reactive attitudes are responses to this sort of state of affairs. That we are reacting out of the assumption that other agents experience the world in much the same way that we do. Given this experience, if we react in a certain way, it is because we feel that we are reacting out of the assumption that other agents experience the world in much the same way that we do. Given this experience, if we react in a certain way, it is because we feel that there is some other way in which the agent might have reacted but did not. At what point do we find that the agent might not be wholly similar to us regarding their own moral intuitions? When is it that we give up hope that the agent's own experiences are in no way similar to our own?

It seems that whenever these states of affairs do occur, there are a number of ways in which we might respond. One of these being the type 2 pleas which we considered earlier. Nagel believes that a particular problem of determinism occurs whenever we lose the perception of similarity between our own experiences and that of the agent's. He argues that the resulting objective view can "block the perception" of the agent as being presented with the sort of freedom that it seems that we subjectively experience (Nagel, 244). One possible way of stating this problem is by saying that we stop projecting our subjective experiences onto the agent; instead, we view the agent objectively as a consequence of a deterministic outcome of an unfortunate or fortunate series of events over which the agent had no control. Ordinarily, according to Nagel, whenever "we hold [a] defendant responsible, the result is not merely a description of his character, but a vicarious occupation of his point of view and evaluation of his action from within it." (Nagel, 240). Therefore conversely it can be said that whenever we do not hold an agent responsible, it is because we have ceased projecting our own experiences onto the agent. We no longer evaluate his actions from within the projection of this subjective stance and cease to consider him as having the same experiences as us.

I think that the Harris case is a good one because it brings up the question of whether or not the belief in determinism really does block the perception of freedom that we might suppose other agents to have. On one hand, it does seem plausible that Harris might have been exempted from moral demands because of this background which in itself might presuppose a belief in determinism. But if we consider his final infraction to be somehow distinctive from his earlier infractions, why did those inhibitors which worked earlier in Harris' life not work for him later in his life, assuming that Harris was initially the product of type 2 pleas? For instance, why did his first murder not generate as much public disgust and outcry as his last murder? Essentially the

public showed a more negative reaction to Harris' final infraction than they did to his earlier ones. I believe that the answer to this question has implications for both a determinist thesis regarding our reactive attitudes as well as a thesis of undermined agent causation (as a concept of free will) in the Nagelian sense.

Regarding our reactive attitudes, under a consequentialist understanding, these attitudes lead us to bestow praise and blame whenever we deem it appropriate to do so. By doing so, we encourage additional praiseworthy actions while discouraging blamable actions. Therefore, it assumes a strong causal relationship between our own attitudes towards certain actions and the desire that a different set of actions consequently occur as a result of these attitudes. Under this formulation, the circumstances surrounding our actions of praise and blame involve our own desire to enforce social norms.

On the other hand, what Watson seems, in expressing Strawson's understanding of the libertarian response, to say is that our own reactive attitudes point us to the truth of some independently apprehensible proposition which gives the content of belief in responsibility (Watson, 121). Therefore under this assumption, if we are libertarians regarding free will, then it would be the case that our own reactive attitudes actually reflect some objective truth about morality. It is unclear why a libertarian might suppose this. A probable answer is that the libertarian does not have many arguments to contrast our experiences of reactive attitudes with the metaphysical existence of some related proposition. For instance, given libertarian freedom, it would be difficult to say that our attitudes are real responses to things that happen because this implies determinism. This assertion implies that the reasons why one acts, or rather acts, is because of the occurrence of some prior thing. This implies that there is some causal relationship between our own attitudes and the existence of this objective moral truth making the libertarian

response indefensible as such. The proposition that our attitudes are responses to some metaphysical possibility given the libertarian conclusion seems unlikely.

Because this proposition would be highly doubtful under a libertarian view of free will<sup>9</sup>, it seems that the libertarian cannot provide a plausible account of our reactive attitudes. Initially then, we might suppose that the consequentialist statement about my attitudes being dependent on some prior events or proportions is the more plausible account. Therefore one additional problem of the libertarian response to our reactive attitudes is that it does not respond in any real way to the question about our reactive attitudes corresponding with any objective moral truth.

If we are to include the free will theorist into our conversation then, it seems that what I consider to be Nagel's sense of freedom more accurately reflects our intuitions and experiences and is a more defensible thesis than the libertarian response. As I have previously mentioned, Nagel's response is not meant to be a complete defense of free will as such, but I am using the term loosely to reflect our own experiences of free will.

Therefore the problem presented thus far is that if we understand the consequentialist explanation for our reactive attitudes, they would then seem to point to some desire of ours to see that certain moral principles are carried out in the society around us. A Nagelian type free will argument on the other hand could respond by saying that our reactive attitudes reflect some salient feature of morality that subjectively exists as evidenced by the way in which we experience the world.

Robert Alton Harris was convicted of the 1978 murder of Michael Baker and John Mayeski. Both were 16 year old teenage boys living in San Diego California where the murders took place. After the murder, the community expressed shock and outrage to the murder. What is interesting about the case is that this was not Harris' first murder conviction. At the time of the

double murder, Harris had been convicted of the murder of James Wheeler and served 2 and 1/2 years for voluntary manslaughter. Prior to this stay, Harris had been arrested for theft and other offenses.

Harris' childhood was far from idyllic. He was one of 9 children born to an alcoholic father who would eventually go to jail for sexually assaulting one of his daughters. When Harris was younger, his father would load his gun and tell him to run. Because of this childhood, one might assume that Harris would be a prime example of one that should be excluded from any moral communication. We have every reason to believe that Harris suffered many cognitive disabilities as a result of the abuse that he suffered as child. Theoretically this abuse would impair his ability to converse about morality in the same way as one who did not suffer in the same way.

One particular feature of the Harris case that is salient to the problems that we are confronted with, is the problem that Harris did not seem to be exempted under the Strawsonian type 2 pleas at the end. Those actions that he finally committed towards the end so thoroughly enraged the community that it would be hard to see how he might have escaped his final fate. But why should we suppose that his final murder is any different than his first murder?

As we have seen, Harris is an agent whom we might recognize as one who should be held to the same moral standards as any other agent in our society. However the problem that I feel is central to his story is that in the end he was executed because of his final actions; even though it could be argued that these were in some way similar to previous actions that he committed. If there is a distinction in his actions, I believe that this distinction could possibly make all the difference. One weak response might be that his final action was contrasted against a mosaic of all of his other actions. However the murder that he committed prior to the San



Diego murder was also contrasted against this same backdrop minus the San Diego murder. It is a very large leap to go from 2 and 1/2 years for one murder to the gas chamber for the other when the only thing that separates the two is a 2 and 1/2 year stint in prison and a few months on the outside.

Another central feature that I would like to highlight is the fact that we must also consider the possibility that Harris did not fully understand the damage caused by his actions or rather what demands he might have been obligated to uphold. Given the deterministic thesis, there is a case that could be made saying that it is not just what you are told that influences your choices, but also your experiences which have the prospect of being normative. If we accept determinism, then it does seem that every thing that happens in our purview has the possibility of influencing our actions. The question then is, did he not understand the moral requirements demanded of him or did he not care what those moral requirements were? It is difficult to imagine that he did not care about these requirements but there is some evidence to suggest this. One argument that could be made is that he did not care because he considered himself to be an enemy of the moral community<sup>10</sup>. But what is an enemy of a moral community? It is difficult to surmise that Harris, in determining himself to be a moral outlaw, would willingly assume this role unto his death. If his moral outlaw stance derived from a type of protest against his community, he had alternative protest options available to him. One does not need to desire death just because he is not a willing participant in the community's moral dialog. However, given determinism, it does seem that his actions were just a result of his upbringing allowing him no other choice. But then what of our reactions towards him? It seems that initially we were quite willing to accept that he unwillingly played the part of the moral deviant. Many times throughout his life, various authorities responsible for him the expressed concern that he receive additional

psychological help. It seems that these in making these suggestions were taking an objective stance of Harris. They viewed Harris objectively and determined that certain counter influences were needed to improve his ability to engage in moral discussion. (One such instance involved a report written about Harris after he was released following the Wheeler murder) Therefore what was different about the San Diego murder?

As we have seen, the Strawsonian account of the pleas represent their ability to inhibit or modify our negative reactive attitudes. Initially it seems to be the case that he should have been exempted from moral dialog, as he was with his earlier actions, because of his horrendous childhood under Strawsonian type 2 pleas. Imagining that he is exempted, a consequentialist might imply that an agent's past must include certain features in order for us to conclude that that agent is responsible for his actions. These features, whether they be certain past formative experiences had by the agent or certain developed abilities to reason are central to our concept of the moral development of the agent. Harris' past does not include these features and therefore he should have been exempted from the demands of the community under type 2 pleas.

Recognizing this Watson seems to suggest that this case presents a troubling picture for Strawson's narrative. I on the other hand believe that if you consider Strawson's point, that the basic purpose of the moral dialog is to express our concerns regarding other's attitudes towards us, it then seems that Harris violated our primary principle when he murder the San Diego boys; but not when he committed any of his other infractions. This locus represents the primary consideration central to moral dialog.

Presumably, Harris' past does not include any of the notable features that we have

discussed thus far. Therefore as an adult, we should not have expected him to understand any of the moral demands that were placed on him. Given Strawsonian type 2 pleas, this fact should have inhibited our negative attitudes towards him, and yet it does not. Some might argue that this represents the compatibility of determinism and moral responsibility<sup>11</sup>, that even though it seems that Harris should have been exempted from moral responsibility, he was not. However I do not believe that this is a necessary conclusion, because our problem with Harris is that it seems as if he were responsible for all of his actions. Our reactions towards his final actions represent a distinction that I feel is important, one between his earlier actions and his latter ones. If there were no distinction, then I might conclude that this shows the plausibility of compatibilism, but there is a distinction and therefore it is hard for me to lump our reactions to his second murder with the experiences that he had growing up. While it might seem that Harris should have been exempted from punishment as well as blame because of type 2 pleas, this is not necessarily apparent. If his case was an example of the plausibility of compatibilism, it seems that he should have either been exempted from responsibility for all of his actions or not for any of them. But because we seem to have exempted him from responsibility for his former actions but not for his latter, I am not sure that he was exempted at all under type 2 pleas.

The point about Harris' past crimes involve the many seeming chances that he was given to avoid a life spent in prison. It appears that the purpose of the various authorities light reactions to his earlier crimes might presuppose that some of his actions could be controlled in the future. Therefore his light sentences were really just meant to be constructive rather than retributive. At what point did the society seek retribution for rather than influence over his actions?

It is here that I think that Strawson's view that our reactive attitudes reflect our concern of other's attitudes towards us has strong appeal. I would like to argue that prior to Harris' final

murder, his actions were directed towards individuals who would not decide his fate; unlike his final murders. Therefore whether or not Harris could conduct a moral conversation with the society at large is inconsequential. When we engage in moral dialog, we express our concerns of other's attitudes towards us. Because of this, the only aspect of Harris' ability to communicate that is important, is what he intends to say to those who would decide his fate.

We might conclude that Harris was not able to engage in moral dialog with the community at large, much in the same way that a child does not possess this ability. Therefore it does not matter whether Harris is really morally responsible or not, the only thing that does matter is whether or not Harris represents the threat of a violation to our primary moral concerns.

#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I have mentioned only one possible exemption here. Because this is only my introduction, I felt that it was only necessary to present an example of the problem rather than a full exegeses at this stage. I will fully suss out the concern over the next few pages.

<sup>2</sup> Assuming that a moral community is necessary to ensure dialog about morality, this also seems to imply that reactive attitudes are an important aspect of this type of communication.

<sup>3</sup> Watson says that Strawson is defending the idea that our reactive attitudes reflect a moral understanding that we in a society feel is acceptable to request from other members of that society. I am not sure if this specifically captures all of what Strawson intends. I believe that the dimension that is missing is that these demands are more subjective than that. It is not that I expect members of my society to act *thusly*, but rather that I *want* them to act thusly towards me. I am merely expressing a wish of how I would like others to respond towards me.

<sup>4</sup> *What these otherwise very different views share is the assumption that our reactive attitudes commit us to the truth of some independently apprehensible proposition which gives the content of belief in responsibility.* (121)

<sup>5</sup> It is important to recognize that the problem presented surrounding our reactive attitudes only because important in a sociological setting.

<sup>6</sup> Using the language of the determinist, we might say that  $x$  happened and the resulting action was my attitude response  $y$ .

<sup>7</sup> Under this view, I would develop certain attitudes that reflect concerns that I have towards others of the intentions they might have towards me.

<sup>8</sup> Watson acknowledges such a consequence. Under his argument, if determinism is true, then evil is a result of nature and nurture. (141)

<sup>9</sup> However some might be able to make the argument that a dualist sort of argument. Causation between non-physical entities and physical ones do not suppose determinism. However this argument is primarily used to support

physical determinism and is an argument that I do not feel is necessary to indulge at this time.

<sup>10</sup> There does exist some evidence to suggest that Harris might have considered himself to be an enemy of the moral community. Watson identifies some reasons that we might suppose this to be true. For instance, he mentions that by refusing “dialog (an interpretation of Harris’ actions could be that he refuses to be involved in the moral community, thereby refusing to participate in its’ moral dialog)”, Harris presents himself as a moral outlaw. (134)

<sup>11</sup> On page 130, Watson presents a notion that moral responsibility requires that one be able to intellectualize the moral requirements demanded of him by his community. This proposition *would* do well to articulate the attitudes focused on young children who violate the requirements demanded of them. In other words, it would do well to explain the lighter moral demands placed on children and the cognitively disabled.