The Relationship between Moral Responsibility and Freedom

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Our focus is on the relationship between moral responsibility (hereafter “responsibility”) and freedom (sometimes called “free will”). We open with remarks about the general conceptual relationship between responsibility and freedom. We then explore, as a case study, a prominent account of responsibility with special focus on what this accounts says or implies, if anything, about freedom. We close with discussion of the relation between responsibility and freedom if it turns out that there are multiple notions of responsibility.

1. **General Relationship**

Both freedom and responsibility are contested notions. There are many different theories or accounts of responsibility and many different theories or accounts of freedom. The different accounts seem to be in competition with one another. Whether such competition is real or illusory, however, is itself a contested matter. Perhaps there is one legitimate notion of responsibility with many different proposed accounts of it. Or perhaps there are multiple legitimate notions of responsibility. The same is true of the apparently competing accounts of freedom.

Given this state of play concerning accounts of responsibility and accounts of freedom, it might seem hopeless to attempt to theorize about the general relationship between responsibility and freedom. One might think that there is no hope for reaching conclusions about the relationship between two concepts about which there is so much disagreement. Such an immediate conclusion, however, would be overly pessimistic. Compare this situation to the state of the play concerning the relationship between knowledge and truth. There are many different competing theories of knowledge and many different competing theories of truth. There is also controversy over whether the different accounts of each notion are genuinely in competition with one other or whether there are multiple legitimate notions of either or both. These controversies do not prevent there from being widespread agreement about the following general conceptual relation between knowledge and truth: knowledge entails truth (knowing that P entails that P). Perhaps some similarly important conclusion about the relation between responsibility and freedom can be established despite the noted disagreements about each notion individually. We are pessimistic about a definitive conclusion about the relation between responsibility and freedom emerging as it does in the case of the relation between knowledge and truth. The possibility, however, is an open possibility worth some exploration.

Two possibilities worth consideration are (a) that responsibility entails freedom (that one is responsible for X only if one is free with respect to X) and (b) that freedom entails responsibility (that one is free with respect to X only if one is responsible for X). We take no stand about the range of “X” in the above schema, proceeding informally for ease of exposition. After the following paragraph containing one point about the suggestion that freedom entails responsibility, we focus our attention on the suggestion that responsibility entails freedom. Of the two suggestions noted above we think this is both the more plausible and more interesting possibility.

Much could be said about the suggestion that freedom implies responsibility but the view faces a challenge that we find at least initially plausible. Some free actions seem to be morally empty. For example, at 2:00 PM in an ordinary office setting Lauren freely changes into more comfortable shoes. Nothing of any moral consequence is involved. If this is correct, then being free with respect to X does not entail being responsible for X. Perhaps the suggestion that freedom implies responsibility should be understood as the suggestion that freedom with respect to X implies responsibility for X for any X of moral significance. We set aside this interesting possibility to focus more fully on the suggestion that responsibility entails freedom.

Why might one think that responsibility for X requires freedom with respect to X? As an example, why think that Michael’s being responsible for the broken glass implies that he freely broke the glass? An initial defense of this claim would likely focus on the intuitive force of a defense of Michael from the charge of responsibility that cited factors that sufficed for his not having freely broken the glass. “Michael was forced to break the glass” and “Michael accidentally dropped the glass” are two examples of possible defenses of this sort. One citing either defense in rejecting Michael’s responsibility for breaking the glass probably has the following in mind: the cited defense rules out Michael’s having freely broken the glass and claims that his lack of responsibility follows. The idea is presumably that if absence of responsibility is best explained in such situations by lack of freedom then responsibility implies freedom.

This idea requires further scrutiny. Even if in some cases a lack of freedom significantly explains the absence of responsibility, it does not follow that responsibility requires freedom. It might be, for example, that **the way** that freedom is undercut in a particular case (rather than simply the absence of freedom itself) is what explains the absence of responsibility in that case. This would block the general conclusion that freedom is necessary for responsibility. Though it seems quite plausible that if Michael is forced to break the glass then he is not free and therefore not responsible, this may have more to do with his having been forced (this is **the way** he is not free) than simply with his not having been free. Other factors that would plausibly undermine Michael’s freedom would not so plausibly block his responsibility. We briefly discuss two such factors below. Both issues to be discussed are themselves quite controversial. We introduce the issues to illustrate challenges one must face if defending the claim that responsibility requires freedom. We do not here take a stand on the debate about either sub-issue.

First, if Michael breaks the glass but does not freely do so he may well still be responsible if he is in a situation that in many ways parallels standard Frankfurt cases (see this volume, Chapter ##). Michael breaks the glass, and intentionally so, because he wants to do so and no significant outside pressure or force makes him do this. Unbeknownst to Michael, a Frankfurt-style (inactive) counterfactual intervener stood ready to intervene in such a way that inevitably Michael would choose to break the glass and then break the glass. The counterfactual intervener did not, however, intervene. Michael breaks the glass, as one says, on his own. Many think that in such a case, it’s quite plausible that Michael is responsible for breaking the glass (he did so because he wanted to, no significant external pressure, etc.). It is at least arguable, however, that the presence of the Frankfurt intervener in the overall situations suffices for Michael’s not having freely broke the glass. This is especially plausible if one thinks that freedom requires alternative possibilities and that a suitably constructed Frankfurt scenario precludes alternative possibilities. As noted above, these assumptions are contentious (see Warfield 2007 for extensive discussion of the relation between freedom and responsibility in the context of Frankfurt cases).

Second, one might think that Michael is responsible, though not free, for breaking the glass if he breaks the glass because of features of his longstanding well-formed character. A variant on this suggestion adds additionally that the longstanding well-formed character also be a virtuous character. The main idea behind this suggestion is that habitual character-driven behavior may well be behavior for which one is responsible even if the behavior in question is not free because it is driven by a strong character. The idea behind the variant proposal is that in the case of virtuous actions ascriptions of responsibility are true even if an agent’s freedom is undermined by the force of virtuous and strong character (for roots of the former sort of proposal see Dennett 1984 and for one discussion of the latter type proposal see Nelkin 2011). Why would one think that actions “driven by” (that is, “necessitated in the context by”) character are not free? The first pass suggestion is that such necessitation precludes the existence of alternative possibilities required by freedom. We emphasize that the view that freedom requires alternative possibilities does not presuppose any particular type of theory of freedom. The view is consistent with both compatibilist and incompatibilist positions on freedom (for discussion see van Inwagen 2008). Why think that such character driven acts are acts for which the agent in question is responsible? The likely defense parallels that in the Frankfurt-style possibility explained above (he does so intentionally, because he wants to do so, and in the absence of outside pressures) and adds that an act that is character driven in this way is plausibly an expression of important facts about the agent in question’s (metaphorical) identity. Again, such positions are controversial and we are not attempting to settle or even enter the debate here.

So far we discussed what might be called substantive attempts to defend the claim that responsibility requires freedom. We close this section with a rather different approach one might take to this issue. This approach can be called a “stipulative” approach to the issue. Robert Kane, though providing no citations, has noted that “[m]any philosophers actually define free will as the kind of freedom (whatever it may be) that is necessary [for] … moral responsibility” and Kane calls such a stipulation “useful” for various purposes (Kane 2005, 80). If such a stipulation is introduced, it might seem that the question of the whether responsibility requires freedom is trivialized. If free will just is any notion of freedom necessary for responsibility then it might seem that responsibility does indeed require freedom and that the issue of the relation between freedom and responsible is settled quickly via stipulation.

This, however, is not the case. After all, if there is no “kind of freedom” necessary for responsibility then the attempt to define free will in this way either fails or leads to the conclusion that there is no such thing as “free will” so defined. No mere stipulation can avoid these possibilities. We reject Kane’s clam that such a stipulation is useful and think it is clearly a mistake to attempt to settle via stipulation the issue of the relation between responsibility and freedom. The earlier discussion in this section strongly suggests that the issue is a matter of substantive debate. A stipulation that one side of this debate is correct will not make that debate go away.

**II. Case Study**

We now consider, as a case study, one specific well-known account of responsibility: R. Jay Wallace’s compatibilist account. We focus on Wallace’s remarks in *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (1994) as the main statement of his view and explore what the view implies about the relation between responsibility and freedom. We do not extensively critically assess the theory of responsibility itself. Our purpose is to show and explore some of the complexities that arise concerning the relationship between responsibility and freedom on this well worked-out theory of responsibility.

Wallace’s account of responsibility foregrounds the role of Strawsonian reactive attitudes like guilt, indignation, and resentment. On Wallace’s view, these attitudes are grounded in beliefs that the expectations—and in particular, the moral obligations—to which we hold persons have not been met. To hold someone responsible, on this view, is essentially to be subject to such attitudes and to express them in the form of sanctions. By the same token, to judge that someone is responsible is to judge that they or their actions are the appropriate object of such attitudes. Furthermore, the norms that govern the appropriateness of reactive attitudes are themselves moral norms. Hence, for Wallace a person is morally responsible for an action if and only if it is *fair* to hold her responsible for that action. As a consequence of this approach, Wallace is concerned throughout with identifying principles of fairness that can explain and justify commonsense patterns of responsibility ascriptions.

Wallace distinguishes between two sorts of responsibility ascriptions. The first is moral *accountability:* a morally accountable agent is the sort of agent whose violation of moral obligations one accepts would render reactive emotions appropriate. The second is moral *blameworthiness*: a blameworthy agent is a morally accountable agent who is appropriately blamed for violating moral obligations we accept in a specific instance. Wallace identifies two conditions corresponding to these ascriptions that govern their appropriateness: an accountability condition (“A” condition) and a blameworthiness condition (“B” condition). On Wallace’s view, an agent is morally accountable only if she possesses the power to grasp and apply moral reasons and the power to control or regulate her behavior in the light of such reasons. Wallace calls these powers the “powers of reflective self-control” (Wallace 1994, 157). An agent who is not morally accountable is, in Wallace’s terminology, *exempted* from moral responsibility. An agent is appropriately blamed only if, in addition to possessing these powers, she intentionally violates a moral obligation to which we hold her. An agent is not blameworthy for Φ-ing (despite being morally accountable for Φ-ing) when she is excused.

As we have seen, Wallace’s conception of responsibility is grounded in the practice of holding others responsible through the expression of reactive attitudes, and the conditions for fairly holding an agent responsible for some action are just that the agent is both accountable and blameworthy in acting. The main point of relevance to our case study can now be stated: nothing falls out of this general conception of moral responsibility about the relationship between moral responsibility and freedom *or* the nature of whatever freedom we may enjoy. Indeed, one of the primary burdens of Wallace’s book is to substantively argue that neither accountability nor blameworthiness require incompatibilist freedom. In so doing, Wallace addresses the line of argument according to which what unifies standard excusing and exempting circumstances for moral responsibility is that they demonstrate that the agent could not have done otherwise. Since according to incompatibilists, determinism is incompatible with robust access to alternative possibilities, all agents would be either exempted or excused from moral responsibility if determinism were true. Wallace blocks this “generalization” strategy by invoking his A- and B-conditions to explain exemptions and excuses. The satisfaction of the A- and B-conditions is not at all threatened by the truth of determinism, according to Wallace (although for critical discussion, see Haji 2002, 209). In the rest of the section, we will discuss Wallace’s conditions and their relationship to freedom in more detail.

On Wallace’s view, freedom is not required for moral responsibility: it is neither a necessary condition for being a responsible agent, nor a requirement for being appropriately blamed for some specific action (Wallace 1994, 3). Wallace’s conception of freedom is what he calls “strong freedom of the will,” by which he means “the kind of freedom [that] involves, roughly speaking, the availability of a range of alternative possibilities, holding fixed the laws of nature and the facts about the past” (Ibid., 230). He assumes that freedom so construed is incompatible with the truth of determinism, and argues that it is not necessary for responsibility. First, the crucial necessary condition for being a responsible agent involves the possession of certain general capacities—namely, powers to recognize and respond to moral reasons—and merely *possessing* these capacities does not require that an agent be able to do otherwise holding fixed the laws of nature and the past. Although Wallace does not give a detailed account of the relevant powers, nor of what it is to possess them, we might imagine an account along the lines of John Martin Fischer’s “reasons-responsive mechanism” view (Fischer 2006). On this view, an agent possesses reasons-responsive powers just in case in a wide range of circumstances in which the agent’s reasons were different than in the actual sequence, the agent would recognize these reasons and in at least some of these circumstances would respond appropriately. In other words, the possession of general powers might be cashed out in terms of a series of counterfactuals relating different sets of reasons for action (in Wallace’s case, moral reasons) to different responses. As an account of the conditions for responsibility, this account does not require “strong” freedom of will. It requires that the agent has the ability to do otherwise only given an alternative or counterfactual past in which the agent had different reasons than she, in fact, has, and it does not require that the agent has the ability to do otherwise than what she did in a specific instance. In addition, Wallace does not think that the powers of reflective self-control need to be *acquired* in any particular way in order to be responsibility-grounding.

Furthermore, Wallace’s view is significantly less demanding than other compatibilist accounts of responsibility in not requiring that an agent’s action either *issued from* the exercise of the relevant moral capacitiesin the actual sequenceor *could have* issued from these capacities in alternative sequences at the time of action (for such a view, see Wolf 1991). Wallace’s account does not require that for an agent to be responsible for Φ-ing, she must have either exercised or had the ability to exercise reflective self-control in Φ*­*-ing or deciding to Φ*.* Wallace’s argument for this claim once again relies on our intuitions about moral exemptions. Agents are exempted from responsibility, Wallace argues, not because they lack the specific ability or opportunity to exercise their powers of reflective self-control at the time of action, but because they lacked the *general* capacities for reflective self-control. The specific ability requirement, if accepted, could motivate a stronger freedom condition: suppose that an agent S had decisive moral reason not to Φ at *t* and she Φ-ed at *t.* If her moral responsibility for Φ*-*ingrequires that she was able to appropriately respond to her moral reasons at *t*, then it requires that she was able not to Φat *t.* But this ability to do otherwise than what she did could entail an ability to access an alternative possibility holding fixed the past and the laws. Thus, by arguing against the requirement for a specific ability to exercise the moral powers, Wallace blocks one motivation for an incompatibilist freedom requirement.

If freedom of the will is not necessary as an “A-condition” of responsibility, neither is it necessary as a “B-condition” on Wallace’s view. To be blameworthy for a specific action, Wallace claims, an agent needs only to have intentionally, or by choice, violated a moral obligation we accept. But agents can meet this condition without being free to do otherwise: to intentionally Φ, it is not necessary that one was able not to Φ*.* All that is required for blameworthiness is the capacity for agential choice, the exercise of that capacity, and a non-deviant causal connection between choice and action.

As we have seen, Wallace’s claim that freedom of the will is not required for responsibility is motivated by his denial of the “generalization strategy.” If non-freedom-requiring agential features can best explain why some agents are either exempted or excused from responsibility, the argument goes, then it is safe to conclude that non-freedom-requiring conditions are all that is needed for responsibility. This conclusion may be too hasty. Wallace’s account of the excusing and exempting conditions, if correct, does not seem to establish the necessity and *sufficiency* of the relevant agential powers for responsibility. At best, it establishes only that these conditions are necessary. For this reason, it does not follow from Wallace’s argument that “strong” freedom of the will is not *necessary* for responsibility. Because his A- and B-conditions are merely necessary conditions for responsibility, there is logical space for, say, a libertarian account according to which Wallace’s A-condition *plus* freedom of the will are jointly necessary and sufficient for moral accountability, or that Wallace’s A-condition plus his B-condition *plus* freedom of the will are jointly necessary and sufficient for blameworthiness.

This is an instance of a more general point about the debate about freedom and responsibility: dialectically, those who deny that responsibility requires freedom need to argue that the conditions they offer on responsibility are *sufficient*, and not merely necessary, for moral responsibility. Without this, their account is simply silent on whether responsibility also requires freedom. Of course, to defend the additional claim that responsibility does require freedom requires an argument. And Wallace’s point is that given his “normative” account of responsibility, we do not have a source of intuitions relating freedom and responsibility that is *independent* of intuitions about excusing and exempting conditions that might give the freedom requirement purchase. Wallace takes this to raise a significant barrier for one wanting to defend the view that responsibility does require freedom.

It should be clear that nothing in Wallace’s account rules out the possibility that agents sometimes or always *have* “strong” freedom of the will, even supposing that free will is incompatible with determinism. His account does entail, however, that having free will is never itself sufficient for responsibility even if, as we suggested in the last section, we restrict the “freedom with respect to X entails responsibility for X” thesis to any X of moral significance. On his view, a hypothetical agent who acts freely even in the “strong” sense but lacks the power to respond to moral reasons is not a responsible agent—not even the sort of agent whom it *makes sense* to hold responsible. Furthermore, a hypothetical agent who acts freely and with the power to respond to moral reasons but who acts unintentionally is excused from blame, despite the fact that she could have done otherwise.

Wallace’s account of responsibility, then, is strictly committed to the claim that “strong” freedom of the will is neither necessary nor sufficient for responsibility. However, his argumentative strategy leaves logical space for the necessity of freedom for responsibility. Moreover, nothing falls out of his theory about whether human agents sometimes or always enjoy strong freedom. The case study of Wallace illustrates some of the complexities of determining the relationship between responsibility and freedom within a particular theory.

***III. Moral Responsibility Equivocity***

Recent writers on responsibility have come to recognize a position noted in our opening section that we will call “moral responsibility equivocity”: the claim that there are multiple “senses” or “conceptions” of responsibility. This raises the following possibility: if responsibility is an equivocal notion, then each sense of responsibility may exhibit a different relationship to freedom.

Gary Watson was one of the first writers to offer a sustained discussion of the different “faces” of moral responsibility, and many others have employed his initial distinctions with significant modifications. We cannot do justice to all of the subtleties of these discussions here, so what follows is merely a broad outline of the conceptual terrain. Broadly speaking, moral responsibility has been distinguished into two kinds: *attributability* and *accountability.* For an agent to be morally responsible in the attributability sense for some action Φ is for the agent to be open to certain sorts of appraisals on account of Φ. These appraisals are commonly called, after Watson, *aretaic*, and they are concerned with the agent’s character (Shoemaker 2011), adopted ends and values (Fischer and Tognazzini 2011), or reason-based evaluative judgments (Smith 2008). The general idea is that an action is attributable to an agent when it is reflective of, because it flows from, the agent’s *practical identity*: her commitments, values, cares, and the like. *Aretaic* appraisals evaluate those aspects of an agent’s practical identity in terms of norms or standards of excellence in the relevant practical domains. Causal responsibility for an action is not sufficient for attributability-responsibility, since some actions may not reflect an agent’s practical commitments—e.g., involuntary actions. The *aretaic* appraisals that attributability-ascriptions license are normatively “deeper” than appraisals of, for example, an agent’s beauty because they concern aspects of her “self” that determine the sorts of relationship we can have with her. So, for example, when I recognize that a certain action performed by an agent reflects the reasons the agent took to justify the action, my recognition of these reasons (and their divergence from the actual justifying reasons there are in that situation) may give me serious pause about whether or not to deal with the agent in various ways in the future. Finally, such appraisals might include moral predicates such as “cruel,” “malicious,” or “selfish”; but they may also include non-moral predicates like “shoddy,” “lazy,” and the like. In this sense, *attributability-responsibility* is a wider notion than, but includes, a kind of moral responsibility.

For an agent to be morally responsible in the *accountability* sense for Φ is for her to be a sensible target of moralized reactive attitudes on account of Φ. When an agent is morally responsible for Φ-ing in this sense, responding to the agent in certain ways—e.g., by having and/or expressing indignation, resentment, anger—would be appropriate in principle. Attributability and accountability ascriptions can come apart for at least two sorts of reason. First, an agent’s being attributability-responsible for an action or attitude does not entail that she is accountable for the action or attitude if there are no substantive moral duties, liabilities, etc. that govern the attitudes or conduct in question. Watson offers an illuminating example:

If someone betrays her ideals by choosing a dull but secure occupation in favor of a riskier but potentially more enriching one, or endangers something of deep importance to her life for trivial ends… then she has acted badly—cowardly, self-indulgently, at least unwisely. But… [u]nless we think that she is responsible to us or to others to live the best life she can—and that is a moral question—we do not think she is accountable here. (Watson 1996, 231)

Watson’s point is that a person’s betrayal of her personal ideals may or may not count as a violation of an interpersonal moral norm, depending upon our operative moral theory. If it does not, then the agent is not a sensible target of the reactive attitudes in virtue of her betrayal: she is not accountable.

In the second sort of case, an action Φ may be attributable to an agent but she is not accountable for it because the appropriateness of the accountability ascription depends upon the agent possessing or exercising some powers or capacities that she lacks in the circumstances of her Φ-ing. Here writers often focus on the case of psychopaths, as in David Shoemaker’s discussion of moral responsibility:

[I]s [the psychopath] accountability-responsible? I do not believe so. To be accountability responsible is just to be susceptible for being the appropriate target of sanctions... communicating relationship-defining demands. But the key moral relationship-defining demand—that you be sensitive to my interests—is simply lost on the psychopath… The kind of moral address involved in holding someone accountable is thus pointless with respect to the psychopath (Shoemaker 2011, 629).

The point is that while the psychopath may be subject to various *aretaic* appraisals to the extent that his actions reflect his evaluative commitments and reason-grounded evaluative judgments, he may *not* be a sensible target of the reactive attitudes given his inability to respond appropriately to specifically *moral* reasons. A psychopath may be rightly appraised as cruel, cowardly, or self-indulgent—and we may be disposed to alter our relationship to him in various ways on the basis of these predications—even when he cannot respond to moral reasons.

There is, in addition, a third distinctive component of moral responsibility that we will call *culpability.* As with accountability, this notion also implicates the reactive attitudes. However, culpability goes beyond accountability in this sense: while accountability is concerned with whether an agent, in Φ-ing, is a sensible targetof the moralized reactive attitudes, *culpability* is concerned with whether we are justified, in the circumstances, in targetingthe agent with any of the reactive attitudes or the various sanctions that express these attitudes on account of her Φ-ing. An example might help illustrate the point.

Suppose Jones comes upon a car accident; the driver is unconscious. Being a member of the “TV” generation, Jones expects the car to explode at any moment, and so he rushed to the driver and drags him clear of the wreck. The result: the driver is paralyzed for life (whereas he would not have been if Jones had left him where he was), and the car does not explode. Now, did Jones do wrong? (Zimmerman 1988, 41).

Now, one possible reading of this case is that what Jones did was morally wrong, since believing that what you are doing is the right thing does not make it so, but that he ought to be excused from culpability because of his beliefs. To put the point in terms of our distinctions between senses of responsibility, Jones is *accountability-*responsible for his actions and their consequences just because he is the sort of agent that it makes sense to target with the reactive attitudes—unlike, e.g., a dog, a psychopath, or a temporarily insane person. In addition, what Jones *did* falls within the domain of conduct governed by interpersonal moral duties. But because he is *excused* in virtue of his (let us suppose) false but justified beliefs, he does not deserve to be the target of the reactive attitudes. He is not, in other words, *culpable* for what he did. Further evidence of this distinction comes from cases like that of Robert Harris, a severely abused child turned adult murderer. Gary Watson argues convincingly that such cases demonstrate the sensitivity of our reactive attitudes to factors like abusive childhoods. One way to understand such cases is in terms of the distinction between accountability and culpability. While killers like Harris exercise the capacities that make them sensible targets for the reactive attitudes, their formative circumstances render them at least less *culpable* for their actions (for discussion of further possible distinctions within the general notion of culpability, see Fischer and Tognazzini 2011).

We have then, perhaps, three distinct and independent notions of responsibility. The important point for our discussion is that each distinctive conception of responsibility may have different conditions of successful ascription, including conditions pertaining to freedom. For example, Watson argues that because culpability-ascriptions—as distinct from attributability or accountability ascriptions—license the “imposition of demands on people—demands that are often adverse and unwelcome—it is “unfair to impose sanctions upon people unless they have a reasonable opportunity to avoid incurring them” (Watson 1996, 237). This leads him to postulate a requirement on responsibility that the agent had a reasonable opportunity to have done otherwise. It is unfair, Watson argues, to target agents with the reactive attitudes or related sanctions if they couldn’t have avoided performing the morally objectionable act. One might argue that avoidability requires the ability to do otherwise, and *further* argue that such an ability is incompatible with determinism. One could hold all of this while still believing that accountability and attributability ascriptions do not require avoidability, and that such ascriptions are independent of any notion of freedom. Perhaps all that is required for successful attributability- and accountability-ascriptions is the possession and/or exercise of various agential capacities under the circumstances of action, and not the ability to do otherwise at the time of action or that the action can be causally traced to some antecedent free choice.

Another possibility here, however, is that the three allegedly distinct notions we have identified are not wholly independent. It’s plausible, for example, that these notions of responsibility are not logically unconnected: in particular, we think it likely that culpability-responsibility entails both accountability-responsibility and attributability-responsibility (although for an opposing view, see Scanlon 1998, ch. 6). After all, how can an agent be an appropriate target of reactive attitudes in virtue of Φ-ing unless her Φ-ing reflected the agent’s practical identity and her powers to respond to moral reasons and fell within a domain of conduct governed by interpersonal moral norms?

One agreeing with the above observation might push for further connections between these notions of responsibility and freedom. For example, a theorist who requires Wallace’s “strong” freedom for mere *attributability*-responsibility may be committed to such a freedom condition for all three forms of moral responsibility. Peter Vallentyne appears to be one such theorist, at least with respect to attributability-responsibility for morally bad *outcomes.* Vallentyne argues that attributability-responsibility requires that the outcome must be suitably causally related to at least one of the agent’s choices (Vallentyne 2008, 62). In addition, his conception of causal relation is that the choice increases the objective chance that the outcome will occur. On Vallentyne’s understanding of this conception, if a choice was determined by prior events, then the agent is not responsible for any outcome in virtue of that choice. Hence, his chance-increasing conception of the causal condition of *attributability-responsibility* entails a freedom requirement on both accountability-responsibility and culpability given that attributability-responsibility is necessary for both.

The previous two paragraphs illustrate at least the following three points. First, we see that that moral responsibility equivocity raises the possibility that various distinct notions of responsibility relate differently to freedom. Second, we see that (arguable) formal relations between various notions of responsibility may imply that even distinct notions of responsibility stand in the same relationship to freedom. Third, we see that within debates about whether responsibility is an equivocal notion, further debates about the relation between various notions of responsibility and freedom remain complex.

Related Topics

Reasons-responsive views

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Frankfurt-style examples

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