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Strawson's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility*

Paul Russell

> Where Nature thus determines us, we have an original non-rational commitment which sets the bounds within which, or the stage upon which, reason can effectively operate. [P. F. STRAWSON, *Skepticism and Naturalism,* p. 39]

In this article I am concerned with a central strand of Strawson's well-known and highly influential essay "Freedom and Resentment."[1] One of Strawson's principal objectives in this work is to refute or discredit the views of the "Pessimist." The Pessimist, as Strawson understands him (or her), claims that the truth of the thesis of determinism would render the attitudes and practices associated with moral responsibility incoherent and unjustified. Given this, the Pessimist claims that if determinism is true, then we must abandon or suspend these attitudes and practices altogether. Against the Pessimist Strawson argues that no reasoning of any sort could lead us to abandon or suspend our "reactive attitudes." That is to say, according to Strawson responsibility is a "given" of human life and society—something which we are inescapably committed to.[2] In this article I will argue that Strawson's reply

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1. P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," reprinted in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 1–25, and also in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 59–80. References to this article will be to the Strawson ed. and will be abbreviated in these notes and in the text as FR. I will also refer to P. F. Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1985), abbreviated as SN.

2. This is a theme which Strawson emphasizes repeatedly, both in "Freedom and Resentment" and in his more recent work *Skepticism and Naturalism.* Whatever we may think of this claim, it cannot be dismissed as an unnecessary or inessential aspect of

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to the Pessimist is seriously flawed. More specifically, I argue that Strawson fails to distinguish two very different forms or modes of naturalism and that he is constrained by the nature of his own objectives (i.e., the refutation of Pessimism) to embrace the stronger and far less plausible form of naturalism. On this basis I conclude that while there is something to be said for Strawson's general approach to these matters, we nevertheless cannot naturalize responsibility along the specific lines that he suggests.[3]

I

Strawson develops his analysis of the nature and conditions of moral responsibility on the basis of what he takes to be a "commonplace" observation: the attitudes and intentions which individuals manifest to each other are of great importance to human beings, and we react to each other accordingly (FR, pp. 5–6). Strawson claims that perplexity has been generated on the subject of moral responsibility largely because philosophers have been unable or unwilling to recognize or acknowledge the significance of "reactive attitudes and feelings" in this sphere. (Hereafter, I will refer simply to "reactive attitudes.") More specifically, it is our reactive attitudes, Strawson claims, which are essential to, or constitutive of, the whole framework or fabric of moral responsibility. It seems clear, then, that we must consider the arguments of the Pessimist from this general perspective.

Strawson's general position. On the contrary, as I will show, it plays a crucial role in Strawson's effort to refute or discredit the views of the Pessimist. In a highly sympathetic discussion of "Freedom and Resentment" Jonathan Bennett has distanced himself, in this respect, from Strawson's position. Bennett claims that Strawson places too much emphasis on the claim "that we could not possibly relinquish all reactive feelings" (Jonathan Bennett, "Accountability," in *Philosophical Subjects*, ed. Zak van Straaten [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], p. 30). Whatever Bennett's views on this subject may be, however, Strawson does not show any sign of withdrawing any emphasis on this claim. See, e.g., Strawson's remarks to the contrary in his reply to Bennett: "What I was above all concerned to stress . . ." (P. F. Strawson, "Replies," in van Straaten, ed., p. 265). More critical discussions of Strawson's views, closer to my own position in this article, can be found in A. J. Ayer, "Free Will and Rationality," in van Straaten, ed., pp. 1–13; and Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 7, sec. 4.

3. On my interpretation, the core of Strawson's naturalism in regard to responsibility is contained in the claim that moral responsibility is in some way a "given" or inescapable feature of human life and existence—and it is this claim that I am especially concerned with. However, the naturalistic approach may be described, in more general terms, as involving two closely related principles. First, it insists upon an empirical, descriptive approach to this issue—one which has an informed and plausible moral psychology. Second, the naturalistic approach emphasizes the role of emotion or feeling in this sphere. Clearly, the narrower claim has its foundations in the more general principles guiding the naturalistic approach.

There are two different claims which are constitutive of the Pessimist's outlook.[4] The Pessimist maintains, first, that if the thesis of determinism is true, then we have reason to reject and repudiate the (established) attitudes and practices associated with moral responsibility on the ground that they are incoherent and unjustified. Beyond this, the Pessimist supposes that if we have reason to suspend or abandon the attitudes and practices associated with moral responsibility, then we are, psychologically or practically speaking, capable of doing so. Strawson rejects both Pessimist claims. In reply to the Pessimist he weaves together two quite distinct lines of argument, each of which corresponds to the two key claims of the Pessimist noted above. I will distinguish these lines of argument as the "rationalistic strategy" and the "naturalistic strategy." Strawson believes that his anti-Pessimist strategies, although independent of each other, are nevertheless consistent and mutually supportive. I will show that their relations with each other are not as straightforward as Strawson supposes.

Let us consider these strategies in more detail. The Pessimist believes that if determinism is true, excusing considerations will (somehow) apply to all human action and thus hold universally. It follows that in these circumstances no individual is ever responsible for anything. Strawson's rationalistic strategy counters by way of an analysis of excusing considerations. Under what circumstances, he asks, do we "modify or mollify" our reactive attitudes or withhold them altogether? There are, he maintains, two different sorts of excusing consideration (FR, pp. 7–9). The first sort—which I will refer to as "specific" considerations—in no way suggests that the agent is (either temporarily or permanently) an inappropriate object of reactive attitudes or one of whom it is not reasonable to demand some degree of goodwill and regard. Rather, in these cases (e.g., accident, ignorance, etc.) "the fact of injury [is] quite consistent with the agent's attitude and intentions being just what we demand they should be." By contrast, the second sort of excusing consideration—which I will refer to as "global" considerations—invites us to withdraw entirely our reactive attitudes in regard to the agent on the ground that the individual is not one from whom we can make the usual demand of goodwill. Such individuals may be placed in abnormal circumstances (e.g., stressed, drugged, etc.) or, more important, they may be either psychologically abnormal

4. There is, of course, a large literature defending the Pessimist outlook—particularly from a libertarian perspective. The classic statement in this century is given by C. A. Campbell: "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" reprinted in *Free Will and Determinism,* ed. Bernard Berofsky (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 112–35. Strawson's asides concerning "contra-causal freedom" suggest that he has Campbell primarily in mind; cf. FR, p. 24, with Campbell's remark that "moral responsibility implies a contra-causal type of freedom" (p. 126).

or morally underdeveloped. In situations such as these we must adopt what Strawson describes as the "objective attitude." "To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something . . . to be managed or handled or cured or trained. . . . *But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships*" (FR, p. 9; my emphasis). It is important to be very clear about how the objective attitude relates to excusing considerations. The following distinction is especially important. (*a*) Where excusing considerations of the second sort apply ("abnormality," etc.) we must—that is, we are rationally and morally required to—adopt the objective attitude (FR, pp. 9–11 and SN, pp. 39–40). In other words, as Strawson's rationalistic strategy would have it, there are circumstances in which the objective attitude is not merely an option for us, regarding certain individuals but it is, rather, demanded of us (at least, insofar as we are "civilized"; cf. FR, pp. 11–12).[5] (*b*) There are other circumstances, it is argued, when the objective attitude is an available option, which we may choose to adopt if we wish, though we are not required to do so. That is to say, the objective attitude may sometimes be adopted even when we are dealing with "the normal and mature" because we want, for example, to use it as a "refuge from the strains of involvement" or an "aid to policy" (FR, pp. 10, 11, 12, 17; and SN, p. 34). However, in these cases (i.e., circumstances where we are dealing with normal adults) there are strict limits to the extent to which we can adopt the objective attitude. More specifically, being human, Strawson says, "we cannot *in the normal case,* do this for long or altogether" (FR, p. 10; my emphasis).

In what way are Strawson's observations concerning excusing considerations supposed to refute the Pessimist? Strawson maintains that nothing about the thesis of determinism implies that we always act accidentally, or in ignorance, or without forethought. Nor does the thesis suggest that we are all (somehow) rendered psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped. In short, considerations of determinism, however they are interpreted, do not, as such, provide us with any reason to modify or suspend our reactive attitudes. The grounds on which we do suspend or alter our reactive attitudes are of a wholly distinct and independent nature (FR, pp. 10–11, 18). We have, accordingly, no reason whatsoever to suspend or abandon our reactive attitudes entirely even if the thesis of determinism is true. This is the essence of Strawson's rationalistic reply to the Pessimist.

5. Strawson, it should be noted, speaks of the objective attitude as being a *consequence* of viewing the agent as one in respect of whom global excusing considerations apply (FR, p. 12). This indicates the strength of the demand that we withdraw reactive attitudes in these circumstances.

The rationalistic strategy does not, by itself, convey the real force or power of Strawson's position. The most interesting and most controversial aspect of Strawson's reply to the Pessimist is contained in the naturalistic strategy. The heart of the naturalistic strategy is the claim that it is psychologically impossible to suspend or abandon our reactive attitudes entirely. Our "human commitment" to the whole framework of reactive attitudes is so "thoroughgoing and deeply rooted" in our nature that it is "practically inconceivable" (though perhaps not self-contradictory) that we should simply "give them up" or entirely abandon them. A sustained objectivity of attitude to all people through time "does not seem to be something of which human beings would be capable, *even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it*" (FR, pp. 11–12; my emphasis). Our "commitment" to reactive attitudes is, on this account, insulated from skeptical doubts by our inherent nature or constitution. It is, therefore, "useless" and "idle" to ask whether or not it would be rational to suspend or abandon our reactive attitudes if the thesis of determinism is true. On any interpretation, no such option is available to us. If reason were to point us in this direction, Strawson argues, we would be constitutionally incapable of following its lead. Clearly, then, we cannot expect to follow reason in an area where it is nature that must be our guide (FR, pp. 18, 23).[6]

Contrary to what Strawson seems to suppose, there are, I suggest, significant strains between his two anti-Pessimist strategies. That is to say, on the face of it, the naturalistic strategy appears to imply that the rationalistic strategy, considered as a response to the Pessimist, is fundamentally mistaken or misguided. To reason with the Pessimist, to endeavor to meet his arguments with counterarguments, is, according to the naturalistic strategy, to share the Pessimist's mistaken views about the nature of our commitment to reactive attitudes. That is, insofar as the rationalist strategy is understood as an effort to show that we have no reason to suspend or abandon our reactive attitudes (if the thesis of determinism is true), it suggests that without some adequate philosophical or rational defense our reactive attitudes may indeed (have to) be abandoned altogether. From the point of view of the naturalistic strategy, such an approach is wholly mistaken. This

6. The same themes are pressed by Strawson with, perhaps, even greater vigor in *Skepticism and Naturalism*. Arguments and counterarguments concerning whether it would be rational for us to suspend the whole framework of our reactive attitudes (given the truth of some general metaphysical thesis) are both, equally, "inefficacious and idle." Such arguments are beside the point because our reactive attitudes are "neither shaken by skeptical argument nor reinforced by rational counter-argument" (SN, p. 39). In other words, reason simply does not operate at this level of moral life. In repect of these matters, Strawson claims to follow "Hume the naturalist against Hume the skeptic." "According to Hume the naturalist," Strawson says, "skeptical doubts are not to be met by argument. *They are simply to be neglected*" (SN, pp. 12–14, 38–39; my emphasis).

observation suggests that something has gone amiss in Strawson's twofold reply to the Pessimist. A more detailed analysis of Strawson's specific arguments will reveal where the trouble lies.

II

Lying at the heart of Strawson's naturalistic strategy is, I have argued, the claim that it is psychologically impossible altogether to suspend or abandon our reactive attitudes (i.e., such reactions are an inescapable feature of human life). This claim is, of course, intimately bound up with the related but distinct claim that responsibility must be understood or interpreted in terms of our emotional reactions or responses to the attitudes and intentions which we manifest to one another. Strawson speaks of "reactive attitudes and feelings" but he points out that the phrase "moral sentiments" would be a good name for the network of emotions that he is concerned with (FR, p. 24). When we recognize the parallels between our reactive attitudes and other emotions, then it seems that much of what Strawson is claiming falls into place. The fact that the whole framework of reactive attitudes "neither calls for nor permits, an external 'rational' justification" is easily understood once we recognize that the reactive attitudes (or moral sentiments) are simply a species of emotion. No species or type of emotion requires an external rational justification. Nor is there any question of us suspending, abandoning, or giving up the various emotions (e.g., love, hate, fear, grief, etc.) of which we are susceptible. Within the framework of these emotions there may be, as Strawson suggests, considerable scope for criticism, modification, redirection, and justification. Clearly, however, "questions of justification are internal to the structure [of any particular species of emotion] or relate to modifications internal to it." It is, as Strawson suggests, useless to ask whether it would or would not be rational to "suspend" a particular species or type of emotion. Someone who presses such a question reveals that he or she has failed to grasp the fact that our "commitment" to a given kind of emotion is simply founded upon human nature. Further, someone who presses this sort of question reveals that he has failed to grasp the role which reason plays in justifying our emotions. Our questioner has, as Strawson puts it, "over-intellectualized" the facts and, consequently, his whole line of questioning proceeds from presuppositions which are themselves seriously mistaken.

Consider, for example, the emotion of fear.[7] When we are afraid, there are many considerations which may be brought to our attention which will "modify or mollify" this emotion (i.e., particular instances or given tokens of this emotion). Sometimes, for example, we may

7. The analogy between reactive attitudes and fear is suggested by Strawson; see his "Replies," p. 265.

recognize, in the light of new information, that our being afraid is unjustified or unreasonable. At other times, we may recognize that we actually have good reason for being afraid. Clearly, then, we all recognize in day-to-day life that this emotion may be deemed reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified, depending on the circumstances. Thus, on any particular occasion, if relevant considerations are brought to our attention, we may either cease to be afraid or become afraid. Beyond this, however, the question of justifying the fact that we are susceptible to this species of emotion does not arise. The whole framework of the emotion of fear, obviously, comes with our human nature. Nor is there any question of us giving a reason for the fact that this species of emotion is "retained." We no more need to, or can, justify the fact that we are susceptible of fear than we need to, or can, justify the fact that the human being is born with a heart and two kidneys.[8] In short, an appreciation of the parallels between reactive attitudes and other emotions provides considerable support for the view that reactive attitudes require no external, rational justification and are, at least in some sense, a given of our human nature.[9]

Strawson, as I have indicated, believes that these naturalistic observations constitute an effective way of refuting or discrediting Pessimism. I believe that he is mistaken about this. Consider, again, the parallels between reactive attitudes and the emotion of fear. Suppose that we encounter a pessimist with respect to fear—the counterpart

8. Consider what may happen if we fail to grasp this point: namely, that the emotion of fear requires no external rational justification. More than likely, some philosopher (e.g., a "one-eyed utilitarian") will suggest that this emotion is justified by its social utility. Without fear, it may be argued, man would not respond so effectively in dangerous situations and this would threaten our species. Thus, it may be suggested that this emotion can be "justified" in terms of considerations regarding our individual well-being and the interests of human society. It is, I think, obvious that this line of reasoning is mistaken. Were we to discover, e.g., that the emotion of fear is of little value to man, we could hardly reason ourselves into "abandoning" this emotion altogether (although, no doubt, we would do our best to inhibit it).

9. The inclination to justify the fact that we are susceptible to various species or types of emotion is perhaps encouraged by certain theological doctrines. In particular, once it is assumed that God made humans the way we are with some reason or purpose in mind, then it is not entirely unnatural to ask for a general, external rationale for the emotion in question. Thus Bishop Butler, e.g., in his sermon "Upon Resentment," asks: Why, for what end, is "so harsh and turbulent" a passion as resentment "given" to man? Butler argues that the passion, "as implanted in our nature by God," has a good influence "upon the affairs of the world." Men, he suggests, "are plainly restrained from injuring their fellow-creatures by fear of resentment; and it is very happy that they are so, when they would not be restrained by a principle of virtue" (Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons* [London: Bell & Sons, 1949], p. 131 [sermon 8]). The important point here is that while it, perhaps, makes some sense to ask for God's justification for "giving" man some species of emotion, it is senseless for men to demand of each other that they justify their own emotional make-up as if they created themselves *ex nihilo*.

of the Pessimist with respect to reactive attitudes. There are, I suggest, two very different sorts of pessimism which we may be presented with. The first, type-pessimism, focuses on the supposed need for an (external, rational) justification for the fact that we are susceptible or liable to fear. Having failed to identify any satisfactory justification of this nature, the fear-type-pessimist maintains that we can and must free ourselves of this (irrational) disposition to fear. The appropriate response to this mode of pessimism is provided, in general terms, by the naturalistic argument or observations outlined above. Let us refer to this response as type-naturalism. Type-naturalism claims that our liability to fear is natural to humans and requires no general justification of any sort. It is not possible for us to disengage from fear at this level.

The fear-pessimist may reply, at this point, that his concerns have been misunderstood. The fear-pessimist should be interpreted as claiming only that given our circumstances we are never justified in being afraid (i.e., we are never justified in entertaining any tokens of fear). This claim may be in itself highly implausible, but it cannot be dismissed on the ground that it commits the fear-pessimist to type-pessimism (i.e., the demand for external, rational justifications, etc.). On the contrary, the fear-pessimist, on this account, insists on being interpreted as a token-pessimist and rightly points out that this is consistent with being a type-naturalist. In other words, it is at least consistent to maintain that while we may be (naturally) prone or liable to fear, we are nevertheless capable of altogether ceasing to feel or experience fear if and when we judge that, given our circumstances, this emotion is never justified.

What, then, is the appropriate (naturalistic) reply to this distinct form of pessimism? The most obvious strategy is to establish that, contrary to what has been claimed, we regularly and inevitably encounter circumstances in which fear is entirely appropriate or reasonable and, hence, feelings or experiences of fear will continue to be an inescapable part of human life. It is important to note, however, that this reply turns, crucially, on the claim that we do regularly and inevitably encounter the relevant or appropriate circumstances or conditions required to render fear reasonable or appropriate. The naturalist of a Strawsonian disposition may regard such a response as conceding too much to the fear-pessimist. Accordingly, a stronger line may be pursued. It may be argued that no reasoning of any sort could ever lead us to cease altogether entertaining or feeling this emotion. That is to say, on this strong naturalistic account, it is claimed that no reasoning or theoretical considerations of any sort can prevent us entirely from having or experiencing tokens of fear. Whatever considerations are brought to our attention regarding our circumstances—whatever reason may suggest to us—we will nevertheless continue to experience fear as an active force in our lives. No matter what arguments the fear-token-

pessimist may present us with in an effort to show us that fear is never in order or called for, the fact is that we will continue to feel and experience fear. Nature, according to the token-naturalist, insulates us from the skeptical arguments of the token-pessimist no less than it insulates us from the skeptical arguments of the type-pessimist. We do not need to reason against token-pessimism any more than we need to reason against type-pessimism. Fear is natural to human beings not only in the sense that we are inescapably liable to this emotion but in the further, stronger, sense that we will inescapably or inevitably continue to entertain or feel this emotion, whatever reason suggests to us.

In respect of fear-pessimism, both type- and token-pessimism are equally implausible—but they are implausible for very different reasons. Type-pessimism, as I have suggested, misrepresents the way in which our disposition to fear is embedded in our human nature. There is no scope for skeptical anxieties at this level. Things are very different, however, with regard to token-pessimism. What is implausible about token-pessimism is the claim that circumstances are never such that fear is in order or justified. Clearly, we have good reason to be skeptical about this claim. Note, however, that if the token-pessimist were right about this, then it is not implausible to suggest that in these circumstances we should cease, and are capable of altogether ceasing, to entertain or feel (tokens of) fear. From this perspective it seems evident that the token-naturalist (unlike the type-naturalist) puts forward the wrong sort of reply to his pessimist counterpart. More specifically, the token-naturalist, in an effort to discredit the token-pessimist, makes claims that seem suspect in point of fact and which, in any case, do nothing to lift or remove the wholly legitimate concerns of the token-pessimist (i.e., that in the circumstances fear is inappropriate and uncalled for). The claims advanced are suspect in point of fact because it is far from obvious—indeed, it seems simply untrue—that we are constitutionally incapable of entirely ceasing to entertain or feel fear in circumstances where we believe that it is never appropriate or called for. Similarly, the claims advanced by the token-naturalist do nothing to lift or remove the (wholly legitimate) concerns of the token-pessimist because they do not even address the justificatory issue which is the focus of the token-pessimist's concerns.

The parallels between pessimism in respect of fear and pessimism in respect of reactive attitudes are, I believe, quite straightforward. The crucial question, therefore, is, What sort of naturalism does Strawson embrace? and—on the other side of the same coin—What sort of pessimism is he trying to discredit? Given our analysis of fear-pessimism it seems clear that Strawson's position is much more plausible if he is interpreted as a type-naturalist who is seeking to discredit type-pessimism in respect of reactive attitudes. Much of what Strawson says suggests that this is how he understands his own position (insofar as

he draws the distinction at all). On this view of things the Pessimist who is the target of Strawson's remarks in "Freedom and Resentment" is a type-pessimist—one who believes that if determinism is true, then we are not justified in being disposed or prone to reactive attitudes and that we must, therefore (somehow) rid ourselves of this type or species of emotion.

This interpretation of the Pessimist's position, I believe, misrepresents the nature and character of his (or her) concerns. That is to say, the Pessimist may argue that the issue which ought to concern us is whether (granted our liability to reactive attitudes) we can or cannot reasonably or appropriately entertain or engage these attitudes. Strawson acknowledges that we may find ourselves in circumstances where our reactive attitudes are not called for or are inappropriate. Accordingly, at this level—the level of entertaining or engaging our reactive attitudes—emotional reactions of this nature can and must be withdrawn or suspended altogether when this is required of us. Clearly, then, while we may remain prone to reactive attitudes, they are, with us, in these circumstances, wholly inactive and disengaged (because they are acknowledged to be inappropriate and uncalled for). These straightforward observations—which Strawson readily accepts in the context of his rationalistic strategy—may be further extended by the Pessimist and applied to the question of determinism. The Pessimist does not (or need not) claim that we are capable of suspending or abandoning our disposition or liability to reactive attitudes—much less that the thesis of determinism requires us to do so. This is not the level at which his concerns arise. Rather, the Pessimist claims only that we can and must cease to entertain reactive attitudes toward any and all individuals who are morally incapacitated and that we are capable of ceasing altogether to engage or entertain reactive attitudes insofar as we have reason to believe that *everyone* is incapacitated in the relevant ways. If the thesis of determinism is true, the Pessimist argues, then we are, indeed, all morally incapacitated.[10] It is important to note that the Pessimist may be wrong in claiming or supposing that determinism implies that we are all so incapacitated and yet, nevertheless, still right in maintaining that if the truth of determinism does have these implications, then we are capable of ceasing altogether to entertain or engage our reactive attitudes. In order to assess independently Strawson's (distinct) rationalistic and naturalistic arguments, it is crucial that we distinguish these issues. The Pessimist, then, should be interpreted as claiming only that if the thesis of determinism is true, then (disposed as we may be to reactive attitudes) the fact is that our circumstances are such that we are never justified in entertaining or feeling (tokens

10. The relevant capacity, according to libertarian-Pessimists at any rate, is "free will" or "contra-causal freedom" (see n. 4 above). Strawson objects to this aspect of the (libertarian) Pessimist's position on the ground that it involves "obscure and panicky metaphysics" (FR, p. 25; cf. sec. 6, passim). I will return to this issue below.

of our) reactive attitudes. Moreover, in these circumstances, the Pessimist claims, we both can and must cease altogether to entertain such emotions. Clearly, then, so interpreted, the Pessimist is a token-Pessimist.

This analysis indicates that, from any perspective, Strawson's naturalistic reply to the Pessimist is seriously flawed. That is to say, if Strawson is embracing type-naturalism, then he does nothing to refute or discredit the Pessimist. If, on the other hand, he is embracing token-naturalism, then, worse still, he is embracing a position that is committed to suspect and disturbing factual claims and which, moreover, does not even address itself to the (legitimate) concerns of the Pessimist. The most plausible interpretation of Strawson's remarks in "Freedom and Resentment" (and *Skepticism and Naturalism*), I suggest, is that Strawson is putting forward both type- and token-naturalism (but fails entirely to distinguish adequately between them). Indeed, it seems clear that Strawson has to be arguing for (stronger) token-naturalism given his objectives. Strawson is fundamentally concerned to deny the Pessimist's supposition that we are capable of adopting the "objective attitude" toward everyone all of the time. To take up the objective attitude, as Strawson understands it, involves ceasing to entertain (tokens of) reactive attitudes toward some or all individuals. It does not, clearly, involve giving up our disposition or proneness to such attitudes (i.e., objectivity does involve giving up our "commitment" to this type of emotion). Only token-naturalism, therefore, stands opposed to the Pessimist's claim that we are capable of taking up the "objective attitude" toward everyone. That is to say, while a universal objectivity of attitude is compatible with type-naturalism, it is not compatible with token-naturalism. Strawson, then, can discredit the Pessimist's position by means of token-naturalism alone. If he withdraws from his token-naturalist claims, then he has no effective naturalistic reply to the Pessimist at all (keeping in mind that the Pessimist can readily embrace type-naturalism). In this way, we may conclude that Strawson is constrained by the nature of his own objectives to embrace token-naturalism and that this approach to the problem of responsibility entirely misfires.

In light of these observations it seems clear why the Pessimist finds Strawson's naturalistic reply both misguided and disturbing. What is particularly disturbing about Strawson's naturalistic strategy, expressed in more general terms, is that it casts doubt on our ability or capacity to curb or control our emotional life according to the dictates of reason. More specifically, it seems clear that, despite disclaimers to the contrary, Strawson's naturalistic strategy invites us to accept or reconcile ourselves to reactive attitudes (and their associated retributive practices) even in circumstances when we have reason to repudiate them.[11] Given

11. According to Strawson, our reactive attitudes and retributive practices are intimately (i.e., naturally or "humanly") connected. In FR, however, Strawson has very little to say about the problem of punishment as it arises within the framework of his

this, it seems evident that we have good reason to reject Strawson's suggestion that we dismiss the Pessimist and refuse to take his arguments seriously. We have, on the contrary, every reason to take the Pessimist seriously, and this puts greater weight on Strawson's rationalistic strategy. I will argue, however, that Strawson's rationalistic strategy, as he presents it, cannot bear this weight.

III

Strawson's effort to discredit Pessimism by means of naturalistic claims leads, or compels, him, I maintain, to embrace an implausibly strong form of naturalism. The Pessimist cannot, I have argued, be refuted or discredited by means of a strategy or approach of this nature. It may be, however, that it is possible to refute or discredit the Pessimist's position by means of the rationalistic strategy which Strawson independently advances. More specifically, it may be argued that the Pessimist is mistaken in claiming that if the thesis of determinism is true, then we are all morally incapacitated. If this can be established, and the Pessimist's anxieties can be shown to be groundless, then there is no reason to accept the related claim which the Pessimist puts forward to the effect that if determinism is true, our reactive attitudes are never justified or appropriate. Strawson believes that the rationalistic arguments which he puts forward serve to discredit and refute Pessimism in just this way.

The rationalistic strategy, as I have noted, distinguishes between two different sorts of excusing considerations: specific and global considerations. Strawson maintains that the truth of the thesis of determinism does not, as such, imply that either specific or global excusing considerations apply universally. I am concerned with Strawson's specific argument(s) purporting to show that the truth of the thesis of determinism cannot lead to the conclusion that global excusing considerations apply to everyone. Strawson states: "The participant attitudes, and personal [and moral] reactive attitudes in general, tend to give place, and it is judged by the civilized *should* give place, to objective attitudes, just in so far as the agent is seen as excluded from ordinary adult human relationships by deep-rooted psychological abnormality—or simply by being a child. *But it cannot be a consequence of any thesis which is not itself self-contradictory that abnormality is the universal condition*" (FR,

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naturalistic account of responsibility. (See FR, p. 22). More specifically, Strawson does not consider in any detail to what extent, or in what way, our retributive practices are a "given" of human nature. Nor does he explain the relationship between justificatory issues as they arise for our reactive attitudes and as they arise for our retributive practices. Suffice it to say that I believe that Strawson's position encounters a number of (further) difficulties in this area. These matters are explored and discussed in some detail in my "Hume on Responsibility and Punishment," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1990): 539–64 (esp. sec. 3).

p. 11; my emphasis).[12] This argument is crucial to the success of Strawson's rationalistic strategy. Strawson, that is, must establish, against the Pessimist, that determinism does not (or cannot) imply that everyone is "abnormal." Failing this, the rationalistic strategy would collapse. Nevertheless, the argument which Strawson puts forward is wholly inadequate. Throughout these crucial sections Strawson's argument turns (repeatedly) on a conflation or equivocation between being "abnormal" and being "incapacitated." Contrary to the general drift of Strawson's remarks, it is not abnormality, as such, which excuses but, rather, incapacity. Strawson appears to be aware of the difficulty: "Now it is certainly true that in the case of the abnormal, though not in the case of the normal, our adoption of the objective attitude is a consequence of our viewing the agent as *incapacitated* in some or all respects for ordinary inter-personal relationship" (FR, p. 12; Strawson's emphasis).[13] While it is incapacity that lies at the heart of our concerns in these circumstances, Strawson has, nevertheless, developed his reply to the Pessimist in terms of the language of "abnormality" (see esp. FR, pp. 8, 11, where Strawson places particular emphasis on this terminology). This terminology, as I will show, has considerable significance for Strawson's argument.

If we replace Strawson's references to "the abnormal" and "abnormality" with references to "the incapacitated" and "incapacity," his reply to the Pessimist, quite simply, collapses. Obviously, it is not inconceivable or self-contradictory to suggest that there could be a world, or things might develop, such that everyone is or becomes incapacitated. Imagine, for example, the spread of some terrible disease or genetic mutation which affects the brain and thereby destroys our relevant capacities. Clearly, in this situation there is no correspondence or extensional equivalence between the "abnormal" and the "incapacitated." On the contrary, the "normal" person will be incapacitated and the "abnormal" person (if there is one) will have the requisite capacities. Given this, our reactive attitudes will be inappropriate in the normal case and appropriate in the abnormal case. These observations plainly indicate that it is misleading and mistaken to place any emphasis on considerations of "abnormality" and the like in this context. Strawson has identified the wrong grounds on which global excuses are founded.

12. Strawson seems to be aware that these remarks are not altogether satisfactory. He continues: "Now this dismissal might seem altogether too facile; and so in a sense it is."

13. The inappropriate and misleading nature of Strawson's talk of "abnormality" in the context is revealed by its awkward coupling with references to children and those who are "morally underdeveloped." What is relevant here, clearly, is incapacity and not "abnormality."

In light of this, let us consider the Pessimist's position once again. The Pessimist, clearly, should not be understood as claiming that if determinism is true, we are all (psychologically) abnormal. Rather, the Pessimist claims only that if the thesis is true, then we are all morally incapacitated (and thus inappropriate objects of reactive attitudes). There is, I have pointed out, nothing self-contradictory about a thesis which suggests that incapacity is the universal condition. The relevant capacity, according to the (libertarian) Pessimist, is "free will" or "contra-causal freedom." Against this aspect of the (libertarian) Pessimist's position, Strawson repeats a charge often heard: that is, that libertarian notions of "free will" and "contra-causal freedom" involve "obscure and panicky metaphysics." The force of these remarks, in other words, is that (libertarian) Pessimists are insisting on a condition of responsibility "which cannot be coherently described."[14] I have considerable sympathy with these claims. Moreover, observations of this general nature certainly succeed in casting doubt on one interpretation of what the relevant capacities are supposed to be. It is far from obvious, however, that in itself this establishes that the truth of the thesis of determinism poses no threat to our moral capacities and hence to our reactive attitudes. On the contrary, no conclusion of this nature can be drawn until we have some alternative characterization of the relevant capacities in question. Strawson has suggested what these capacities do not involve (i.e., free will, etc.), but he has little or nothing to say about what they do involve, or how they should be understood. The reason for this is that he thinks that he can circumvent this difficult and complicated issue by showing, simply, that no thesis can imply that we are all morally incapacitated (and hence determinism cannot pose a threat of this nature to our moral capacities and reactive attitudes). The specific argument that Strawson puts forward in this direction fails and, hence, as things stand, he has not established that it is impossible that we are all morally incapacitated.[15] Given this, we obviously need

14. Strawson, "Replies," p. 265.

15. It is certainly true that were we to find ourselves in circumstances where everyone were morally incapacitated, and thus our reactive attitudes were never called for or in order, then, as Strawson suggests, in these circumstances we may well have an overwhelming sense of "human isolation" (FR, p. 11). Contrary to what is implied by Strawson's remarks (FR, pp. 13, 18), however, forward-looking considerations concerning "the gains and losses to human life, its enrichment or impoverishment" cannot serve to justify us in treating the incapacitated as if they were not incapacitated. In this respect I find myself in particular disagreement with Bennett. He states: "If we try to imagine our lives without reactive feelings we find ourselves . . . confronted by bleak desolation. We cannot be obliged to give up something whose loss would gravely worsen the human condition, *and so reactive feelings cannot be made impermissible by any facts*" (Bennett, p. 29; my emphasis). If the force of these remarks is that no facts of any sort can render our reactive attitudes altogether inappropriate or uncalled for, then Bennett is, I believe, clearly mistaken.

to identify and describe the nature of the capacities in question so that the Pessimist's claims (i.e., that the truth of the thesis of determinism would leave us all morally incapacitated, etc.) can be properly evaluated. In other words, without some (more plausible) alternative characterization of the nature of these moral capacities, we cannot say with any assurance whether the truth of determinism would or would not affect their functioning. While it may be that something of an appropriate nature can be said on behalf of the rationalistic strategy in this regard, we cannot find it in Strawson's remarks on this subject.[16] In short, while Strawson claims to have shown that determinism cannot (logically) imply that we are all morally incapacitated, he has failed to do so. He has, rather, succeeded only in repeating the standard objection that libertarian notions of "free will" and "contra-causal freedom" are obscure and unhelpful accounts of the capacities required of moral agents. In light of this, I think that we must conclude that Strawson's rationalistic reply to the Pessimist is, as it stands, at best incomplete. No satisfactory reply to the Pessimist can avoid addressing itself to the question regarding the nature of the moral capacities required of individuals who are deemed appropriate objects of reactive attitudes.[17]

IV

Throughout this article my principal concern has been Strawson's naturalistic reply to the Pessimist.[18] Strawson, I point out, fails to

16. The sorts of (alternative) capacities that I am thinking of have been widely discussed in more recent literature. See, in particular, papers by Harry Frankfurt, Gary Watson, and Charles Taylor in Watson, ed. (n. 1 above); and also Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), esp. chaps. 2–5. All these authors, in different ways, emphasize our capacity to reflect upon our desires and restructure our will (i.e., those desires that lead to action) on this basis.

17. Throughout FR Strawson tends to assume that all Pessimists are libertarians and that they are, accordingly, motivated by libertarian metaphysical assumptions (FR, pp. 3, 20, 23–24, 25). It is not evident, however, that this needs to be the case. A Pessimist who accepts the two principal theses that Strawson is attacking (as described in Sec. I above) may also be what Strawson describes as a "moral skeptic": i.e., someone who believes that the attitudes and practices associated with moral responsibility are "inherently confused and that we can see this to be so if we consider the consequences either of the truth of determinism or its falsity" (FR, p. 1; cf. Ayer's position in "Free Will and Rationality"). Clearly, in dealing with the moral skeptic's claim that our reactive attitudes are never appropriate or called for, it will not suffice to argue that libertarian notions of "free will" are obscure and unhelpful. This is a point which the moral skeptic will readily concede.

18. It is worth emphasizing the point that in this article I have not been concerned with each and every (controversial) aspect of Strawson's discussion and approach. There remain, therefore, a number of interesting matters which I have not pursued in this context. Some critics of Strawson's may argue that there are (other) weaknesses or shortcomings of FR which require further attention and discussion. In contrast with this, those who are more sympathetic with Strawson's approach will no doubt argue

distinguish between type- and token-naturalism. Token-naturalism is implausibly strong in both its nature and intent, and it serves only to discredit the naturalistic approach. The plausible and valuable element in the naturalistic approach is to be found in type-naturalism. Given his commitment to token-naturalism, we cannot naturalize responsibility along the lines that Strawson suggests. Nevertheless, when all vestiges of token-naturalism are removed, it is possible that we can construct a coherent and plausible (type) naturalistic framework within which some relevant rationalistic reply to the Pessimist may be developed. An approach of this nature does not encourage us to accept or reconcile ourselves to reactive attitudes (and their associated practices) irrespective of whether or not we have reason to repudiate them. On the contrary, this approach leaves our reactive attitudes where we want them: within the bounds of reason.

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that, criticism aside, there is more to be said for Strawson's approach than my criticisms suggest. I believe that there is some truth in both these views. Nevertheless, for our present purposes the important point to note is that both critic and sympathizer alike will have to take note of the specific objections which I have raised against Strawson's line(s) of argument.