Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores the relationship between an agent's moral responsibility for their actions and the situations in which an agent acts. Decades of research in psychology are sometimes thought to support situationism, the view that features of an agent's situation greatly influence their behavior in powerful and surprising ways. Such situational features might therefore be thought to threaten agents' abilities to act freely and responsibly. This chapter begins by discussing some relevant empirical literature on situationism. It then surveys several ways of construing the situationist threat to moral responsibility as reducible to worries about determinism, manipulation, or luck. It is then argued that the best way to understand the situationist challenge is as a threat to reasons-responsiveness. A common strategy for responding to the situationist threat to reasons-responsiveness—the so-called modal response—is discussed. The chapter then defends a view called pessimistic realism: While the situationist literature puts human agency in an unflattering light, it does not show that agents' reasons-responsiveness capacities are generally undermined by situational features. Several objections both to the modal strategy and to pessimistic realism are discussed. The chapter concludes with three thoughts concerning future directions.

Keywords: responsibility, situationism, psychology, determinism, manipulation, luck, reasons-responsiveness

1. You and Your Situations: Three Pictures

HERE is a truism: Human action requires being in some situation or other. Cracking open a can of beans requires being around a can of beans. Here is another truism: Being *morally responsible* for what you do requires being in some situation or other. You cannot be morally praiseworthy for pulling a drowning child from a pond unless you are near a pond. You cannot be morally blameworthy for stealing your neighbor's rake unless you are close enough to a rake. Situations play an ineliminable role in our being responsible for what we do. What kind of role? How should we picture the relationship between ourselves and the situations in which we act?

Responsibility and Situationism

Here is one picture: Situations are a *stage*. They provide the setting for our agency to unfold. Being temporally and spatially located near a can of beans enables me to open it. Furthermore, our situations provide reasons for action. A child drowning nearby gives me reason to act.

This first picture is not true to life. Our situations are not mere stages because they aren't always so cooperative. Features of our environment sometimes undermine our ability to act freely and responsibly. For one thing, our situations often include other agents who deceive us, coerce us, and manipulate us. Situations also conspire against us "naturally," without the intervention of other agents. You act on an optical illusion. A hallucinogenic herb falls from a tree into your coffee while camping. While piloting a plane, you suffer from hypoxia, a condition in which your brain becomes deprived of sufficient oxygen, resulting in a deterioration in mental clarity. To correct course, you need the ability to recognize that something has gone wrong, an ability itself compromised by (p. 469) your hypoxia.[1] Our situations are therefore not as benign as the first picture suggests. According to a second picture, our situations are *occasional traps*. Generally, we are free and responsible, but sometimes our situations trip us up. While this second picture may not be the happiest of arrangements, it is some consolation that these impediments to free and responsible agency are few and far between.

Or perhaps not. In recent decades, the so-called situationist research program in psychology and philosophy has revealed an uncomfortable fact about us: Situations affect our behavior in surprising and powerful ways.

Initially, these "situationists" used empirical studies in psychology to argue that human behavior is highly sensitive to apparently insignificant situational features. Therefore, some concluded, we do not have robust moral character traits.[2] The basic idea was that whether you do the honest or compassionate thing has little if anything to do with whether you are an honest or compassionate person, and much to do with what kinds of situation you happen to encounter.[3] We lack stable moral character traits that we "carry around" with us across situations. Instead, these situationists claimed, our behavior is highly dependent on how we are affected by situational features.

To see why they thought this, let's look at a few classic studies from the situationist literature.

In the most famous of Milgram's "shock" experiments, researchers told subjects they were testing a teaching strategy: that learning is most effective when incorrect responses are punished (1969). Subjects were asked to administer shocks when the "learner" (a confederate) gave the wrong answer to a question. (No real shocks were administered, though the subjects didn't know this.) Starting with 15V, each successive incorrect answer was to be greeted with an increased shock. Prerecorded reactions to the shocks ranged from a surprised "Ouch!" to screaming and banging on the wall. At 330V, the confederate ceased to respond. Sixty-five percent (26 of 40) of subjects administered shocks

up through 450V, long after the confederate stopped responding. Many normal people will apparently be willing to harm others significantly when put in the right situation.

In one part of Darley and Batson's 1973 "Good Samaritan" study, seminary students were asked to walk across campus to deliver a talk on Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan.[4] In their path, they encountered a man slumped in an alleyway (a (p. 470) confederate). Overall, 40% offered to help. However, whether someone helped appeared to depend largely on the extent to which they were told to hurry to give the talk. In "low" hurry situations, 63% helped; in "medium" hurry situations, 45% helped; and in "high" hurry situations, only 10% stopped to help. Being asked to hurry apparently makes a big difference as to whether you stop to help on the way to give a talk about stopping to help.

In Latané and Rodin's 1969 "Lady in Distress" experiment, participants in a room were tested to see if they would help someone next door upon hearing a loud crash and screaming in the next room. ("Oh, my god, my foot . . . I . . . I . . . can't move it. Oh my ankle, I can't get this thing off me!" the confederate moaned and cried for a minute, gradually getting more subdued.) Seventy percent of those who had been in the room alone helped. Only 7% helped if they had been in the room with a confederate who was also not helping (cf. Latané and Darley 1968). Apparently, the mere presence of another person who doesn't help leads us to not help, too.

In Isen and Levin's 1972 study of mood effects, those who found a dime in the return slot of a phone booth were much more likely to help a confederate pick up dropped papers (88%) than those who had not found a dime (4%).[5] In another study of such mood effects, Isen and Reeve (2005) found that subjects who were given a $2 box of chocolates worked more quickly and accurately on a task than those who didn't. They also reported enjoying the task more. Apparently, little mood boosts lead many to do acts of kindness they wouldn't have otherwise done.

Matthews and Canon (1975) concluded that ambient noise can affect helping behavior. While a subject sat in a waiting room, a confederate would drop a stack of books and papers. With 48db of normal background noise, 72% helped. When "white noise" was introduced, helping behavior decreased. At 65db of white noise, 67% helped. When the white noise was increased to 85db, 37% helped. They ran a similar study outdoors with a confederate who, while wearing a cast, dropped a stack of books getting out of a car. Eighty percent of subjects stopped to help with normal background noise. Sixteen percent stopped to help with a loud lawnmower running in the background. Apparently, the sound of a lawnmower makes us less helpful.

Baron (1997) found that you could affect people's behavior by changing the smells in the air. When asked to make change for a dollar bill, 22% of males and 17% of females did so when passing a clothing store. When passing a Cinnabon (cinnamon rolls) or Mrs. (p. 471) Fields (cookies), however, rates of helping behavior shot up: 45% of males and 61% of females made change.[6] The smell of sweet treats apparently makes us more helpful.

The results are surprising.[7] Why would something as morally insignificant as finding a dime, or being asked to hurry, or being in a room with someone else make such a large impact on whether we do right the right thing? As John Doris and Dominic Murphy put it, our situations apparently "affect how circumstances are observed, interpreted, and evaluated, thereby powerfully affecting our moral behavior" (2007: 36).

As I mentioned before, the conclusions initially drawn from this empirical literature were, to varying degrees, forms of skepticism about the existence or efficacy of moral character traits. Surely, a truly compassionate or honest person would do the compassionate or honest thing *across* situations, not just when the smells and sounds were right. Because our behavior is so *inconsistent* across situations, it was alleged that "global" or "cross-situationally stable" character traits are rare, if they exist at all. This "first-wave" situationism relied on the empirical research to raise doubts about the existence of moral character traits.[8]

More recently (though these "waves" have some chronological overlap), philosophers have again drawn upon these studies to challenge another common way of thinking of ourselves. Whereas first-wave situationism raised doubts about the existence of moral character traits, second-wave situationism draws upon the situationist literature to motivate skepticism about free and morally responsible agency.[9] The second-wave challenge, which I develop in more detail later, alleges that if our behavior can be so easily "pushed around" by morally irrelevant situational features, then we often do not act freely and therefore are often not morally responsible for what we do.[10] So we have:

> First-wave situationism: challenges the manifest image of morally mature adults as having robust moral character traits. (p. 472)

> Second-wave situationism: challenges the manifest image of morally mature adults as typically acting freely and responsibly.

To get an initial grip on the situationist threat to moral responsibility, consider Leigh, who stops to make change for someone at the mall. You might have thought that she saw she could help someone and consequently freely and responsibly did so. But then you learn not only that Leigh was in front of a Cinnabon store when this happened, but that studies show people are much more likely to make change near a Cinnabon. It is likely that she wouldn't have helped if she had been in front of J. Crew. Leigh's helping behavior appears to be in no small measure due to the smells in the air, a fact about her environment that, let us suppose, she didn't even notice. The smell of sweet treats gave her a "boost" to do a good thing. And just like situational features may provide boosts to do the right thing, they may also "boost" us in the other direction. Add white noise to the mix and voilà, she will be less likely to help.

This is unsettling. If ambient smells and sounds secretly push us around, who is really in charge? Just how much of the springs of action are due to situational features affecting us in certain ways? It is especially worrying that the boosts happen below the level of awareness. If the smell of Mrs. Fields "moves" us to help others, this is not because we *con-*

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sciously act compassionately because of the smell in the air. We would not cite the smell of sweet treats as part of our reason for helping. In fact, we would likely deny that this played any role in our behavior at all. Furthermore, these situational features are not the kinds of things that make a difference as to what we *should* do. The smell of cookies is not a reason to help. White noise is not a reason not to help. These situational features are, as Carolina Sartorio puts it, "external factors of the environment that don't make a difference to what we should do in the circumstances, but that still tend to have an effect on what we actually do" (2018: 796).

Now recall the question with which we began: How should we understand our relationship to our situations? We saw that picture one—situations as stage—is not true to life. The situationist literature now casts doubt on the accuracy of picture two, the view that our situations are, except for occasional "traps," benign. Much more might be happening "below the surface" than we realize. Perhaps so much is going on behind the scenes that we lack the necessary control over our behavior to be morally responsible for it. Perfectly ordinary features of our world might conspire against us—either constantly or intermittently—to prevent us from exercising the agency required to be morally responsible for our conduct.

We are then faced with the possibility that we must accept a *third* picture of our situations: that our morally responsible agency is compromised much more often than we had thought, by perfectly "innocent" and ubiquitous features of life: our normal environments. On this third picture, our situations are perpetual *threats.* The very (p. 473) things—our situations—that enable us to act may also threaten our ability to act as morally responsible agents.

2. What Is the Threat?

Situational features affect us in ways that appear to threaten our ability to be morally responsible for our conduct. But what exactly is the nature of the threat? This is not obvious. The empirical results are no doubt surprising. But this fact itself does not, at least in any straightforward way, impugn morally responsible agency. In this section, I explore how we should understand the claim that the situationist literature threatens moral responsibility. One way to do this is to see whether the situationist threat reduces to some other alleged threat to moral responsibility.[11] Let's consider a few candidates.

2.1 Determinism

Incompatibilists think that determinism threatens moral responsibility. If our actions are the necessary result of the laws of nature and the facts of the past—facts outside of our control—then we cannot be responsible for our behavior because it too is out of our control. Perhaps situational features undermine responsibility by determining our behavior. On this construal of the threat of situationism, the situationist threat is just a specific instance of the threat of determinism.[12] These studies reveal that situational features like the smell of cookies affect us by determining how we respond to them. And since deter-

minism is a threat to moral responsibility, these situational features, when they affect us deterministically, also threaten moral responsibility. We can put the situationist threat as follows:

> **1.** The situationist literature shows that situational features outside our control determine (much of) our behavior.[13]
>
> (p. 474) **2.** Behavior that is determined by factors outside our control is not free and we cannot be responsible for it.
>
> **3.** Therefore, the situationist literature shows that we are not free and responsible for (much of) our behavior.

On this way of framing the situationist threat, perfectly ordinary features of the world outside our control determine much of our behavior, even though we have no idea this is going on. This is reminiscent of Spinoza's reason for denying free will and responsibility, more recently developed by Derk Pereboom (2001, 2014). As Spinoza put it, "men believe themselves to be free, because they are conscious of their own actions and are ignorant of the causes by which they are determined" (1766/1985: 496). The situationist literature, it is alleged, vindicates Spinoza.

However, two considerations count against reducing the situationist threat to the threat of determinism. First, situational features need not be taken to affect us *deterministically*. Perhaps they affect us this way. But this conclusion is not required by the current empirical evidence. The evidence does not show that agents in these studies could not have done otherwise. If situational features affect us indeterministically, the threat cannot be determinism.

Second, notice that even though compatibilists do not think determinism as such threatens freedom and responsibility, this does not mean they must think that *any* way our behavior could be determined is compatible with determinism. In other words, the compatibilist is not committed to the claim that *any* deterministic production of action counts as free and responsible. Compatibilists typically regard action resulting from coercion, compulsion, or ignorance as unfree, even if such action is produced deterministically. So even if we assume situational features affect us deterministically, there may be some fact about *how* situational features affect us that threatens free and responsible agency. The threat would not be determinism as such. The threat could therefore be in principle something recognized by both compatibilists and incompatibilists. Tentatively, then, we can conclude that if the present situationist literature reveals a threat to free and responsible agency, that threat is not simply determinism.

2.2 Coercion or Manipulation

Perhaps the situationist literature reveals that we are often manipulated or coerced to act. Consider David Brink's (2013) notion of "situational control." To have situational control is to be free from a kind of manipulation or coercion that would leave one without any (p. 475) reasonable alternative courses of action. Although a lack of situational control does not itself compromise one's status as a morally responsible agent, it does provide an

excuse that challenges whether one is responsible for what one does. Perhaps the way to think about the situationist threat, then, is as revealing that we often lack situational control: Situational features manipulate or coerce us so that we lack any reasonable alternatives.

But as Brink himself notes, none of the situationist studies involve coercion or threats that leave an agent without a reasonable alternative. The closest are the requests of the confederates in the Milgram studies. But even here, there is no reasonable interpretation of coercion such that the requests of the Milgram confederates count as coercive. Further, their requests certainly left open reasonable and permissible alternatives.

Even if the Milgram subjects were not coerced, might they still have been manipulated? We can think of coercion and manipulation as external forces that lie along a continuum.[14] Like coercion, manipulation undermines moral responsibility for conduct. As Allen Wood puts it, manipulation "influences people's choices in ways that circumvent or subvert their rational decision-making processes, and that undermine or disrupt the ways of choosing that they would themselves would critically endorse if they considered the matter in a way that is lucid and free of error" (2014: 35).

Does the threat of situationism reduce to the threat of manipulation? You might think so. Manipulation often involves various forms of deception, pressures to acquiesce, and playing upon emotions, emotional needs, or weaknesses of character (Baron 2003). The Milgram experiments involve all these. Insofar as manipulative influence can undermine free and morally responsible agency, perhaps the threat of situationism is just the threat of manipulation. So consider:

> **1.** The situationist literature shows that (much of) our behavior is the result of manipulative situational influences.
> **2.** Behavior that is the result of manipulative situational influences is not free and we cannot be responsible for it.
> **3.** Therefore, the situationist literature shows that we are not free and are not responsible for (much of) our behavior.

There are at least two problems with this reduction of the situationist threat. The first concerns premise 1: Not all situationist studies involve manipulation, at least if by "manipulation" we mean something done by agents. Though it's true that the situational features in the experiments are designed by agents, there is nothing about those designs that is inherently artificial—qualitatively similar situations can and do arise in (p. 476) non-experimental settings. The second and more serious problem concerns premise 2. Recall Wood's remark that manipulation characteristically involves circumventing or subverting one's rational decision-making processes and undermining or disrupting the ways of choosing. This suggests that the situationist threat is something more fundamental than manipulation as such: Situational features, whether the result of manipulative interference or not, appear to undermine or degrade our ability to make decisions in accord with the good reasons there are. We will return to this thought later.

2.3 Luck

One situationist study found that subjects were twice as likely to help deliver documents to someone 40 meters away if the request was made after the subject exited a public bathroom (Cann and Blackwelder 1984: 224). It might appear, then, that whether someone engages in helping behavior is largely a matter of luck. Helping appears highly correlated with whether you were asked to help after leaving the bathroom. Whether you are asked to help after leaving the bathroom is a matter of luck. How, then, could someone be morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for helping when so much depends on whether you had just left the bathroom? Whether you help is largely, if not wholly, a matter of situational luck.

To make matters worse, situational luck, much like situations themselves, is impossible to eliminate. As Michael Zimmerman puts the point:

> One is never in complete control of the situations that one faces, either with respect to "external" matters such as being born, being of a certain physical constitution, being distracted by a loud noise, being in a certain geographical location, and so on, or with respect to "internal" matters such as being irascible, suffering from an Oedipus complex, having a kindly disposition, and so on. And all of these matters affect what one does. It is against them as a background that one makes the decisions that one does; indeed, without such a background, no decisions could be made. (1987: 384)

So consider:

1. The situationist literature shows that (much of) our behavior is the result of situational luck.
2. Behavior that is the result of situational luck is not free and therefore we cannot be responsible for it.
3. Therefore, the situationist literature shows that we are not free and responsible for (much of) our behavior.

However, there are problems with this reduction, too. Even if we grant premise 1, premise 2 is too quick. While it may be true that whether one *is faced* with a certain situation is often largely a matter of luck, this does not straightforwardly entail that one's action in (p. 477) such a situation is not an exercise of free and responsible agency. Zimmerman himself makes this point, for he follows up the above passage immediately by noting that:

> Nevertheless, as long as the decision, for example, to collaborate [in wrongdoing] is made freely, then one is surely, ceteris paribus, to blame for such collaboration. (1987: 384)

What we want to know, then, is whether subjects in situationist studies (and their counterparts in real-life situations) are acting freely and responsibly. The *mere fact* of situational luck does not obviously settle that question.

3. Situationism and Reasons-Responsiveness

I have challenged the claim that the situationist threat to moral responsibility can be reduced to the threat of determinism, coercion and manipulation, or luck. How, then, are we to understand it? To be frank, I am not entirely sure. One response is to conclude that there is no situationist threat and move along with our day. Or we might explore the thought that there is no *single* way of reducing the situationist threat. If situational features threaten free will and responsibility, they do so in a diverse and piecemeal way: sometimes via determinism, sometimes via luck, and so on, perhaps even in combination with one another. In the rest of this chapter, however, I will continue to proceed on the assumption that situational features pose a threat to free and responsible agency, and that this threat can be reduced to a more fundamental threat. Like others who have written on this issue, I understand the situationist threat as targeting our capacities of reasons-responsiveness.[15] So first let me say a few words about what reasons-responsiveness is and its importance for free and responsible agency. Then we will move on to see how situational features might threaten our ability to respond to reasons.[16]

3.1 Reasons-Responsiveness: The Basics

Many philosophers writing on free will and moral responsibility account for freedom at least partly in terms of an agent's responsiveness to reasons.[17] That is, to be free and morally responsible requires an ability to respond to reasons in certain kinds of ways.

(p. 478) Crucially, on most reasons-responsive theories, for an agent to be morally responsible for what she does, she must, in some sense of "able," be able to respond to specifically *moral* reasons (Wolf 1990; Fischer and Ravizza 1998; and Nelkin 2011). Because many theorists understand free will in terms of the control condition(s) necessary for moral responsibility, reasons-responsiveness theories are also frequently framed in terms of theories of (at least part of) the control condition for moral responsibility. Therefore, if situational features undermine or degrade one's ability to be reasons-responsive, then, according to these views, those features would also undermine or degrade one's freedom and responsibility.

What does reasons-responsiveness require? This is a bit contentious, but many theorists agree that reasons-responsiveness has two components: one cognitive, one volitional (Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Brink and Nelkin 2013; and McKenna 2013). One way to flesh this out is to say, as Fischer and Ravizza (1998) put it, that reasons-responsiveness has a *receptivity* component and a *reactivity* component.[18] An agent must first be able to recognize what good reasons there are and assess them for whether they are sufficient for pursing a course of action. This is the cognitive dimension whereby reasons are "received." We are, for example, inclined to excuse an agent who cannot distinguish right from wrong, or who cannot recognize sufficient moral reasons for action at all. One's cognitive abilities to recognize such reasons may simply be underdeveloped (as in very young children) or degraded (temporarily or permanently) because one is suffering from a delusional disorder.

The second, volitional, component says that an agent must also be able to guide her actions in light of her recognition of the good reasons that there are. This is the dimension whereby an agent reacts to the reasons after she receives them. Irresistible desires, paralyzing fears, severe clinical depression, and certain kinds of brain damage are examples of obstacles that can eliminate or severely impair one's ability to conform one's behavior to one's judgments (Brink 2013). Again, in these cases we are inclined not to hold such agents morally responsible for their conduct.

I have described the situationist threat as potentially "undermining or degrading" one's free and responsible agency. This is because one's morally responsible agency—and therefore one's ability to respond to good moral reasons—is not an all or nothing affair. To have one's reasons-responsive capacities fully undermined would render one wholly incapable of responding to moral reasons. Such a person is not free and responsible. But one might instead retain the ability to be receptive and reactive to some good moral reasons while still falling below the threshold of responsiveness required for moral responsibility. Although not fully undermined, one's capacities would still be severely impaired. A person rendered unfree and not responsible for an act of compulsive handwashing might still be responsive to some range of reasons while being unresponsive to many good reasons for not handwashing. If, for instance, she was told not to (p. 479) wash her hands while being threatened at gun point, she might respond to this reason by refraining from washing.

On the other hand, one might be receptive and reactive to many, but not all the good moral reasons in some situations, and still meet the requirements for free and responsible agency, whatever those happen to be. For example, a person who is praiseworthy for giving to a charity for starving children might be moved by many equally weighty moral reasons to give to different kinds of charities. And yet she might be blind to some similarly weighty moral reasons. Perhaps she doesn't see helping victims of AIDS as a similarly weighty moral reason and so wouldn't give to such charities. That she would not respond to all good (and sufficient) reasons to give to a worthy charity does not mean that she fails to act freely when she actually gives to a charity for starving children. The point is that one need not be able to be perfectly responsive to reasons to be morally responsible, and one need not be wholly unresponsive to reasons to fail to be morally responsible.[19]

What is required, then, on a reasons-responsive account of freedom is the specification of a *spectrum* of responsiveness to a sufficiently rich range of reasons. Doing so establishes that the agent is a sane, morally competent person. What determines the relevant spectrum? This is a vexed question to which we will return. For now, we can simply say that there is *some* spectrum of relevant reasons to which one must be responsive to meet the threshold for free and responsible agency. We could say much more, but this is enough to see how situational features might undermine or degrade reasons-responsiveness.[20]

3.2 The Threat to Reasons-Responsiveness

With the notion of reasons-responsiveness in hand, let's turn to how situational features might affect this capacity. Here is how Dana Nelkin frames the potential threat:

> One way of seeing the situationist cases—or at least some of them—as troubling is this: simply put, the subjects seem to be acting for bad reasons, or at least not acting for good reasons, and they seem stuck doing so. . . the way in which the subjects (p. 480) seem to proceed raises a question about whether they *can* act for good reasons—in some important sense of "can." (2005: 199, 201)

Nelkin's point is not just that subjects in these studies act for bad reasons—this is nothing new and is not much of a reason for thinking one is not free and responsible. Rather, the worry is that the subjects appear to be "stuck"—*prevented* from acting on the good moral reasons. Carolina Sartorio uses similar language: "the situationist threat arises from the fact that we can apparently be 'gripped' by some aspects of the actual circumstances (in many cases, without our even realizing this) in ways that can undermine our control and responsibility" (2018: 798).

Even so, *how exactly* are situational features supposed to undermine one's ability to respond to good reasons? How are we gripped or stuck? Here is one way:

> T1. A situational feature prevents you, in some way, from becoming aware of a fact that provides a reason to act.

Consider, for example, the Darley and Batson Good Samaritan study. Let us suppose that a sense of urgency does degrade certain of the seminarian's capacities, such as the ability to notice certain things in her environment that she might otherwise notice. The seminarian therefore fails to recognize a person slumped in a doorway, seemingly in need of medical attention. (Of course, there may be lots of other things she doesn't notice either, such as the marching band in the distance playing themes from Thelonious Monk.) According to this construal of the threat, situational features shield you from becoming aware of some fact that provides a moral reason to act in a particular way.

Even if situational features can degrade one's perceptive capacities in this way, this does not obviously threaten one's *reasons-responsiveness*. However, this is complicated. On the one hand, if you build into reason-responsiveness certain capacities to perceive your environment, and if those capacities are undermined or degraded in scenarios like Good Samaritan, then there may be some reasons-responsive-relevant capacity that is impaired.

On the other hand, reasons-responsiveness should not require that one have the ability to be aware of all the facts that provide reasons in any given situation. It does not, I think, count against your reasons-responsive capacities that you don't dig the gold bar out of your bathroom wall because it is covered by drywall that prevents you from seeing it. Similarly, suppose that a large metal shield prevented you from seeing (or otherwise becoming aware of) a man slumped, hurting in a doorway. The fact that he is hurting is a reason to stop and help, but you are shielded from seeing this fact. It would be odd to see this as a threat to your free and responsible agency. Naturally, you are excused for not stopping to help, but this is not because your morally responsible *agency* has been undermined or degraded. It is because a situational feature prevented you from seeing a rea-

son to help. Why, then, would your reasons-responsiveness be threatened by other, less obvious kinds of situational "shields?"

The point is that if situationist studies involve subjects who, like in Good Samaritan, do not help hurting strangers, they may not be responsible for failing to do so, but not (p. 481) because of any failure of reasons-responsiveness, even though there is a sense in which they do not receive or react to the sufficient reasons there are.[21] Rather, one plausible reason why they are not responsible for not helping is simply that they were not aware (non-culpably, let us assume) of the fact that provided sufficient reason to help.

But suppose situationist studies are threatening in a less innocent way. One way they might do so is by degrading our powers of receptivity. Consider:

> T2. A situational feature prevents you, in some way, from recognizing a fact (of which you are aware) as a reason to act.

On this construal of the threat, one is aware of the relevant reason-providing fact, but cannot see it or register it *as* a reason. Recall that reasons-responsive theorists typically require that an agent be able to recognize good moral reasons, or to see what is right or wrong. If situational features operated in the manner of T2, they would affect reasons-responsiveness by undermining or degrading one's receptivity capabilities. Perhaps in the Milgram experiments, the "teachers" saw that the "students" were in pain, but due to situational pressures, they did not see this as reason to stop shocking the students.

The second component of reasons-responsiveness gives us another way of construing the situationist threat:

> T3. A situational feature prevents you, in some way, from reacting to a reason that you recognize.

On T3, one is aware of the fact that provides a reason and one recognizes this as a reason, but yet one is unable to translate this recognition into action. If situational features operated in this manner, they would affect reasons-responsiveness by virtue of undermining or degrading one's reactivity capabilities. In the Milgram studies, for example, it is not unlikely that the subjects saw that they should stop giving "shocks," but that the situational pressures to obey authority undermined or degraded their capacities to translate that knowledge into action. There are other ways of construing the situationist threat to reasons-responsiveness (and more precise ways of stating the ones we have discussed), but like life, this chapter is short.[22] These will do for our purposes. Since (p. 482) T1 need not be understood as a threat to reasons-responsiveness as such, we will focus our attention on T2 and T3.

4. Responding to the Situationist Threat

4.1 The Modal Strategy

We now have an initial grip on how situational features could undermine or degrade one's responsiveness to reasons and therefore one's free and responsible agency. We are "stuck" in these situations responding to bad reasons, or no reasons at all, because situational features (like the smell in the room or the presence of a confederate) prevent us from receiving (T2) or reacting (T3) to good moral reasons. Must we therefore concede that agents are generally unfree and so not responsible? Of those who have weighed in on the issue, many have argued that the evidence does not in fact show this. One common strategy for deflecting the situationist threat to reasons-responsiveness has been defended by Brink (2013), Herdova and Kearns (2017), and McKenna and Warmke (2017). Call it the modal strategy. It proceeds in two steps.[23]

The first step brings to the fore a feature of many theories of reasons-responsiveness that we have so far largely ignored: their modal dimension. In many cases, an agent's acting from reasons-responsive resources will involve her *actually* responding to pertinent reasons. If, for instance, she is blameworthy and acts wrongly from a motive of selfishness, this might involve her responding to a reason that some course of action will increase her wealth. Nevertheless, according to many reasons-responsiveness theorists, it is not a requirement of an agent being reasons-responsive in acting as she does that she *in fact* respond to any reasons at all. She might be acting from pure impulse or brute desire.[24] Crucially, on most reasons-responsive theories, for an agent to be morally responsible for what she does, she must be able, in some sense of "able," to respond to moral reasons, regardless of whether she actually does so respond. In this way, a free agent will be *able* to respond to reasons even if, when she acts, she does not actually do so.[25] An agent *incapable* of responding to moral reasons is not free to act in ways that would make her morally responsible for her conduct.[26]

(p. 483) Because of this modal aspect of reasons-responsiveness, an agent's being reasons-responsive supports the truth of counterfactuals regarding how an agent *would* respond in a range of non-actual but possible scenarios that are relevantly like the actual scenarios in which she finds herself. Suppose an agent acts on impulse when she responds hurtfully to a friend. She might nevertheless be reasons-responsive if there is a range of similar conditions in which, were different reasons present, she would alter her conduct and not respond hurtfully. For instance, if she saw the friend was injured or depressed at the time, or if she was prompted by something in her environment to consider the likely effects of a hurtful remark, she would respond suitably.

The second step of the modal response uses this distinction between one's capacity for reason-responsiveness and one's actual exercise of that capacity to show that while situational features may affect the *exercise* of one's capacity to respond to reasons, they need not affect the capacity itself (or at least they need not degrade that capacity below the threshold for responsibility). And since the capacity is what is required for free and re-

sponsible agency, situational features, so construed, do not undermine responsibility. Brink explains:

> It is important to frame this approach to responsibility in terms of normative competence and the possession of these capacities for reasons-responsiveness. In particular, responsibility must be predicated on the possession, rather than the use, of such capacities. We do excuse for lack of competence. We do not excuse for failures to exercise these capacities properly. Provided the agent had the relevant cognitive and volitional capacities, we do not excuse the weak-willed or the willful wrongdoer for failing to recognize or respond appropriately to reasons. (2013)

While it might be true that situational features make a crucial causal contribution to *how* a pertinent capacity is exercised, we cannot take this as a basis for exculpation, at least as it concerns threats to reasons-responsiveness. What is required is that the contribution causally undermines or bypasses the pertinent cognitive and volitional (receptive and reactive) capacities. *That* is what is really at issue.

4.2 Pessimistic Realism

This is the modal strategy for responding to the situationist threat. To what conclusion does the modal strategy lead us? I think we are led to a view called *pessimistic realism*.[27] This view has two parts, the realism and the pessimism. Let's take each in turn.

First, the modal strategist concludes that situationist literature does *not* show that agents' capacities are generally undermined or degraded, thereby rendering one unfree. (p. 484) How could we know this? Part of the problem is that in *actual* cases, it is very difficult (perhaps humanly impossible) to know what is truly going on with one's underlying capacities. However, on the modal strategy, we can point to a spectrum of counterfactual scenarios where it seems likely that the agent in question would respond to sufficiently good reasons.

For example, we can ask, would the seminarians in the Good Samaritan study have stopped to help a person with an axe in their skull? What about one who was set ablaze or instead holding a child bleeding from the mouth? Likewise, what about the Milgram experiments? Would the "teachers" have treated the "students" so badly if the students were given the same first names as the teachers' parents, or if the suggested forms of punishment were degrading in even more extreme ways? White noise appears to make one less likely to help someone pick up papers. But what if the confederate who dropped the papers was visibly disabled and in desperate need of help? The smell of sweet treats boosts the likelihood of helping make change. But would that smell have had such an effect if the person needed, not four quarters, but someone to call 911? Thinking through these studies, it appears that we have very little evidence that situational factors eliminate competence, and pretty good reason to think that sufficient competence is actually retained.

These counterfactual scenarios reveal an important difference between an agent's *capacity* for responding to a suitable pattern of reasons and the agent's *actual* behavior. That situational features play a crucial role in an agent's not actually responding to the good moral reasons does not show that an agent loses a more general capacity to respond to good reasons. And it is this general capacity, the modal strategist claims, that is required for free and responsible agency. We lack sufficient evidence that subjects in the situationist studies lose the capacity to respond to a large and reasonable range of moral reasons. Absent this evidence, we don't have good reason to think that situational features like those identified in the studies undermine or degrade our reasons-responsive capacities.

The first conclusion drawn by the modal strategist, then, is that at present, the situationist literature does not show that situational features generally render agents unfree and not responsible. Since these modal strategists (like myself) typically affirm that we have free will in the first place, we can call this the *realist* part of the conclusion, since the modal strategist remains a realist about free will and moral responsibility in the face of the situationist threat.[28]

(p. 485) While the current situationist literature doesn't show that situational features generally undermine our freedom and responsibility, these studies do cast what agency we do have in a relatively unflattering light. This is the *pessimistic* part of the view. The pessimism is induced in one of two ways (and perhaps both). First, even if our reasons-responsive capabilities are not regularly affected by situational features, the power of our own agency is considerably diminished if, for example, as it happens our moral concern for others can so easily be shifted about depending on utterly trivial alterations in conditions, say, involving colors or smells in the room. The pessimistic realist concedes that situational features can affect how we *exercise* our reasons-responsiveness capacities. Situational features may distract us, or otherwise shift our attention or priorities in ways that influence us away from acting on the good reasons there are. We retain the relevant capacities, but fail to exercise them properly. This is Brink's (2013) view. Yet simply failing to exercise properly one's normative capacities does not entail that one does not act freely and responsibly. Failures to act on good reasons are common. The situationist challenge shows these failures may be more common than supposed.

But the situationist literature may lead us to be pessimistic in another way. Situational features may indeed shrink the spectrum of reasons to which an agent is reasons-responsive, just not below the threshold required for morally responsible agency. On this view, our capacities are sometimes negatively affected, but not to the point that we generally lack free will (McKenna and Warmke 2017). Because reasons-responsiveness capacities are not all or nothing, a mere negative effect on our capacities need not undermine free will if those capacities remain responsive to a sufficiently large set of moral reasons.

The pessimistic realist continues to affirm that morally mature adults are generally free and responsible. And yet situational features sometimes either (1) "gum up" the proper exercise of those capacities in accordance with the good moral reasons there are, or (2) slightly shrink the spectrum of reasons to which we are capable of being reasons-respon-

sive. Although this should not generally lead us to regard agents as unfree, these facts should perhaps lead us to mitigate our blame and praise, knowing how susceptible we can be to irrelevant situational features. The situationist challenge may also provide reasons to be more forgiving to those who fail to treat us rightly. Their situations may have made it more difficult for them to do the right thing.[29]

(p. 486) 5. Objections to the Modal Strategy

I have claimed that the modal strategy outlined earlier should lead us to respond to the situationist threat with pessimistic realism. I'll now register some objections to this proposal.

Crucial to the modal strategy is the claim that a failure to exercise a capacity to respond to reasons due to situational influence does not mean that one's reasons-responsive capacities have been degraded by situational influence. The modal strategy must therefore be able to distinguish:

(1) an agent's retaining the requisite capacity for reasons-responsiveness yet failing to properly exercise that capacity due to situational influence

from

(2) an agent's failing to respond to good reasons due to situational influence that degrades or undermines one's capacity for reasons-responsiveness.

In Brink's terminology, (1) describes a performance error and (2) describes a competence error. Yet how do we determine whether situational features have negatively affected one's reasons-responsive capacities, or instead negatively affected only how those capacities are exercised? Brink appears committed to the view that we can distinguish performance errors from competence errors. But how?

Here is a proposal. First, we ask this: Did the situational features in the actual scenario negatively affect the functioning of a relevant reasons-responsive capacity? If not, situational features do not threaten reasons-responsiveness. If, conversely, the situational features have negatively affected the capacity, then we identify the situationally affected capacity for responsiveness, hold it fixed, and then look at the relevant set of counterfactual scenarios where the agent is presented with diverse sets of good reasons to act and see if the agent reveals a sufficiently sane and understandable pattern of responses with those affected capacities. If she does reveal such a pattern, then the situational features, even if they have negatively affected the capacity, have not done so in a freedom and responsibility-undermining way. If she does not reveal such a pattern, then (presumably) the situational factors have sufficiently undermined her reasons-responsive capacity so as to render her unfree and not responsible.

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This response is sound so far as it goes. But problems remain. One is that we may have just kicked the bump in the rug. We wanted to know what distinguishes a competence error from a performance error. Our answer began by determining whether a situational feature affected the relevant capacities. But we may now ask this: *How* do we know when a situational feature has affected the capacity or instead affected only its exercise? We must know this before we can hold the relevant capacities fixed and look (p. 487) upon the counterfactual scenarios. It will be difficult enough to answer this question as a theoretical exercise. It will be even more difficult to discern how exactly situations affect us in real-world cases. Consider, for example, the difficult question whether soldiers in wartime situations are morally responsible and blameworthy for war crimes or other immoral acts committed under the stress and pressure of combat.[30] How do we determine whether such agents have had their capacities undermined or instead only failed to exercise those capacities appropriately?

Here's another objection to the modal response to the situationist threat. Suppose we discovered that situational features rarely undermine the relevant capacity, but that such features very often play a crucial role in the agent's conduct. In other words, suppose we found that situational features were commonly causally contributing to our performance errors, and yet our underlying capacities remained intact (whatever that might mean). In such a scenario, morally irrelevant situational features constantly contribute to the production of conduct that is not a response to good reasons. Smells in the room, colors on the wall, and the mere presence of others often play a crucial role in producing our behavior. What should the modal theorist say?

She *could* say that since the capacity is preserved, there is no situationist threat to reasons-responsiveness, full stop. But this strikes me as tin-eared. At a certain point, it strains credulity to say that an agent remains reasons-responsiveness even though she very often fails to respond to good reasons because of how those situational features affect her exercise of those capacities. How many "performance errors" must we tolerate before we admit that a capacity itself has been undermined? Here's another case. Suppose, unbeknown to me, someone slips me a drug that for half an hour makes me much less attentive to others, but not completely inattentive. In an ordinary sense, I still possess my usual capacities. But couldn't the fact that I was slipped the drug still count as an excuse?[31] Adverting to the preserved capacities is not sufficiently responsive to the objection.

Suppose the modal theorist maintains that in the scenario just envisioned, the agent retains reason-responsive capacities. It bears pointing out that she need not conclude that the situationist threat is therefore totally dissolved. She may deny that the situationist threat generally challenges agents' reasons-responsiveness, but then point out that there are other ways to undermine morally responsible agency. However, if the situationist threat is not to reasons-responsiveness as the modal theorist construes it, what is the threat? Here, the modal theorist might suggest that the threat is determinism: The situational features operate in such a way as to deterministically bring us to fail to act on good reasons. Or instead, she might suggest that the threat is situational luck. Given the out-

sized role that irrelevant and largely unpredictable situational features play in the production of action, whether we act in a (p. 488) certain way is largely a matter of luck: A kind of luck that agents situated in the world cannot easily escape, if at all.[32] But to construe the situationist threat in this way is to go back on our earlier claim that the best way to understand it is as a challenge to reasons-responsiveness. On the kind of scenario we are imagining, one's reasons-responsiveness is still intact because the relevant capacities have not been undermined. So if there still looks to be a threat to morally responsible agency, what is it? I leave this question for others.

Carolina Sartorio and Manuel Vargas offer a different objection to the modal strategy. Sartorio (2018) argues that modalist responses are subject to a "demarcation problem." The problem arises once we ask the following: To what counterfactual scenarios do we look to assess whether an agent is properly responsive? On the one hand, if we want to know whether someone in a hurry is appropriately reasons-responsive, we should not assess their responsiveness in, for example, counterfactual situations where one is not in a hurry. Those situations are irrelevant because ostensibly, what we want to know is whether *given being hurried*, one is morally responsible for failing to help. This suggests that we must hold fixed at least some of the situational features, otherwise those possible scenarios look irrelevant. On the other hand, we cannot simply take the relevant capacities and then reinsert them back into the actual situation. That is, we cannot hold *all* of the situational features fixed. This would tell us nothing about the *spectrum* of reasons to which the agent with those capacities would respond. Here is the puzzle, as Sartorio herself puts it: "we need some principled criterion to set apart, in each case, the aspects of the circumstances that we should hold fixed from those that we can legitimately vary. Unless we can offer such a criterion, reasons-responsiveness views rest on shaky foundations" (2018: 800).

Manuel Vargas (2013b) raises a similar objection to standard modal responses like those inspired by the Fischer and Ravizza paradigm. It is not enough, Vargas argues, to just find *any* set of counterfactual scenarios where the agent in question responds to good reasons. Rather, one must find a suitable portion of worlds *relevantly similar* to the actual situation where the agent is responsive. After all, if you want to know whether being hurried undermines your responsiveness, what help would it do to go to scenarios in which you aren't in a hurry? Vargas argues for his own modal version of reasons-responsiveness that differs from the Fischer and Ravizza view. On his view, responsiveness to reasons is relativized to an agent's circumstance in the actual scenario. We test for responsiveness by looking at how the agent responds in *similar* other hurried situations. Fischer and Ravizza's version makes no such restriction. As Herdova and Kearns (2017) point out, this will have the result that situational features are more likely to undermine or degrade agency.[33]

(p. 489) 6. Concluding Remarks

Let's take stock. I have argued that while the situationist literature puts our agency in an unflattering light, it does not at present show that agents' capacities for responsiveness to reasons are generally undermined by situational features. If we are already free, our situations make us look bad, but they don't generally undermine free and responsible agency. This is pessimistic realism. We began the paper with three "pictures" of how situations could relate to our agency—as stage, as occasional trap, and as threat. Pessimistic realism, I think, places us somewhere between pictures two and three. I wish I had more to offer, but at present, I can't see the issues any clearer than this. In conclusion, I leave the reader with a few thoughts about future directions.

I have assumed that the right way to think of reasons-responsiveness is in modal terms. But suppose, as Sartorio (2016) argues, what matters for reasons-responsiveness is not whether some capacity, defined by a set of counterfactual responses to reasons, is retained. Rather, what matters is simply the *actual sequence* of events leading up to and involving the agent's acting and the *actual reasons* to which the agent does or does not respond. According to this *actualist* version of reasons-responsiveness, we need not advert to the possession of capacities and their operation in counterfactual scenarios. All we need to know is whether, in the actual scenario, the agent was appropriately sensitive to the reasons there were. If situational features prevent an agent from being sensitive to a sufficient spectrum of the good reasons in the actual sequence of events, then her responsiveness to reasons is compromised and so with it moral responsibility. We don't have to look at counterfactual scenarios to establish this.[34] So should we be modalists or actualists about reasons-responsiveness? Or should we adopt another framework, such as Vargas's? And if so, would this alter the picture of how situations affect our agency?

Second, are we right to construe the situationist threat as fundamentally one about reasons-responsiveness in the first place? I have proceeded, like many others, to think of matters this way. But as noted earlier, perhaps the problem really does fundamentally concern determinism or situational luck after all. Yet another possibility: Current empirical evidence underdetermines which, if any, way of construing the threat is fundamental. Depending on how the facts on the ground turn out, a different threat may be fundamental. Or perhaps there is no singular "situational" threat: depending on the case, the threat is determinism, luck, or something else.

Third, I have focused our attention on the *negative* effects that situational features have on our agency. Sometimes, however, situations apparently *improve* our agency. After all, smelling sweet treats made people *more* likely to respond to reasons to help. Recently, some philosophers have argued that knowing more about our situations (p. 490) and the agential boosts they provide can therefore *improve* our capacities for seeing and responding to good moral reasons.[35] How much can such knowledge help? And do these positive effects in any way counterbalance the negative situational influences? There may be room for a more optimistic realism, after all.[36]

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Notes:

(1) Ballantyne (2015).

(2) The *locus classicus* is Ross and Nisbett's *The Person and the Situation* (1991), although much of the "situationist" empirical research had been going on for decades. Flanagan (1991), Doris (1998, 2002), Harman (1999), and Merritt (2000) are credited with bringing this empirical work to the attention of philosophers.

(3) I say "the basic idea," but there are many different claims going by the name "situationism" as regards skepticism about character traits. I will not rehearse them here, but see Miller (2014: ch. 4) and McKenna and Warmke (2017) for a review. Hence it is helpful to distinguish, as Nelkin (2005) does, "situationism" as some specific empirical or philosophical thesis, from the "situationist literature," the empirical studies themselves.

(4) In this parable, a Jewish traveler is stripped of his clothing, beaten, and left to die on the side of the road. Both a priest and a Levite (likely an assistant to a priest) pass by before a Samaritan man (Samaritans were an ethnoreligious group widely despised by Jews) stops to help the traveler, bandage his wounds, and pays for him to convalesce at an inn (Luke 10:30–37).

(5) As is commonly pointed out, there were replication problems with this study, not to mention its small sample size (24 females, 17 males). But as Miller (2013: ch. 3) explains, other studies of mood effects vindicate their power. I should also say that for present purposes, I will set aside worries about the so-called replication crisis in psychological research. I do this for two reasons. First, whatever the status of individual studies, the broad "situationist" research program, buttressed by many kinds of studies, is robust.

Psychologist Matthew Lieberman writes, "If a social psychologist was going to be marooned on a deserted island and could only take one principle of social psychology with him it would undoubtedly be 'the power of the situation' " (2005: 746). Second, we can abstract from the specific empirical evidence and still ask a meaningful philosophical question: What kinds of situational influences on our agential capacities *would* undermine or degrade our capacities for free and morally responsible action?

(6) For further review, see Miller (2014: ch. 4).

(7) Hence Miller's (2017) use of the term "surprising dispositions" to describe the experimental results: We are disposed to respond to certain situational features with certain beliefs, desires, and emotions in ways that have an unexpected and significant impact on our behavior. As Miller notes, the observation that these results are surprising is a common one: Ross and Nisbett (1991: 46); Flanagan (1991: 292); Doris (2002: 63, fn. 5); Nahmias (2007: 4); Russell (2009: 253, 277).

(8) The literature is vast, but for starters, see discussions in Flanagan (1991), Kupperman (2001), Sreenivasan (2002), Annas (2003), Miller (2003; 2014), Montmarquet (2003), Kamtekar (2004), Tucker (2004), Sabini and Silver (2005), Vranas (2005), Webber (2006), Wielenberg (2006), Russell (2009), Sarkissian (2010), Slingerland (2011), Alfano (2013), and Rodgers and Warmke (2015).

(9) See discussions in Doris (2002), Nelkin (2005), Doris and Murphy (2007), Nahmias (2007), Talbert (2009), Brink (2013), Ciurria (2013), Mele and Shepherd (2013), Vargas (2013b), Herdova and Kearns (2015, 2017), McKenna and Warmke (2017), Miller (2017), Sartorio (2018), and Talbert and Wolfendale (2019).

(10) For the record, let's define some terms. By "free will" I mean the ability of a person to control her conduct in the strongest sense necessary for moral responsibility (Mele 2006). This freedom condition is one necessary condition on morally responsible agency (the other usually called the "epistemic condition"), an exercise of which is the gateway to moral responsibility for conduct (McKenna 2012). The kind of moral responsibility for conduct I have in mind involves basic desert: "For an agent to be morally responsible for an action in this sense is for it to be hers in a way that she would deserve to be blamed if she understood that it was morally wrong" (Pereboom 2014: 2). Desert is basic in that "the agent would deserve to be blamed . . . just because she has performed the action, given an understanding of its moral status, and not, for example, merely by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations" (Pereboom 2014: 2).

(11) Nelkin (2005) explores the possibility that the situationist threat reduces to issues regarding (1) characterological views of freedom and responsibility; (2) the fundamental attribution error; (3) determinism; (4) weakness of will; and (5) real self views of freedom and responsibility. In my view, Nelkin persuasively argues that none of these accurately captures the situationist threat. I will discuss only one of these—determinism—in addition

to two new possible explanations. Miller (2017) also considers characterological views and determinism and rejects them as ways to understand the situationist threat.

(12) For present purposes, I understand determinism to be the thesis that at any time, the universe has only one possible physical future.

(13) Nelkin (2005) rightly notes that one need not think that situational features affect everyone *uniformly* to think that situational features undermine freedom and responsibility due to their determinative character (cf. Miller 2017). Nor would one need to think that such features operate on *everyone* deterministically to get the deterministic worry off the ground. Suppose that some but not all reactions to situational features are brought about deterministically. Knowing this might be enough to undermine our confidence that, in any given situation, we are acting freely (and so not deterministically, if being non-derivatively free and responsible for *x*-ing precludes *x*-ing being deterministically caused by factors outside one's control).

(14) Allen Wood observes: "Being manipulated into doing something is different from being coerced into doing it. The two seem to me to form a kind of continuum, with manipulation occupying the subtler end and coercion occupying the more heavy-handed end" (2014: 31). The notion of manipulation here differs from that commonly employed in the free will and responsibility literature, where moment by moment control by an intervener can count as manipulation (Pereboom 2001). Wood is working with a more colloquial sense of the term, as will I.

(15) See, e.g., Nelkin (2005), Doris and Murphy (2007), Herdova and Kearns (2017), Miller (2017), McKenna and Warmke (2017), Sartorio (2018).

(16) In this section, I draw from McKenna and Warmke (2017).

(17) See, for example, Gert and Duggan (1979), Dennett (1984), Wolf (1990), Fischer and Ravizza (1998), Haji (1998), Nelkin (2011), Brink and Nelkin (2013), McKenna (2013), Vargas (2013a), and Sartorio (2016).

(18) Brink identifies similar components. On his view, moral responsibility requires both "cognitive capacities to distinguish right from wrong" as well as "volitional capacities to conform one's conduct to that normative knowledge" (2013).

(19) Some writers correlate degrees of reasons-responsiveness with degrees of moral responsibility (at least once a certain threshold is met) (e.g., Brink 2013; Coates and Swenson 2013: 636; and Herdova and Kearns 2017: 3). But one need not do this. One can deny, as I do, that "being morally responsible for *x*" is something that can come in degrees. This does not entail denying one may be more or less deserving of blame or praise, or denying that one may deserve different kinds or blame or praise, or denying that one can be causally responsible for more or less of an action or a consequence. But this is perfectly compatible with thinking that one's moral agency can come in degrees of quality or robustness or whatever. Being morally responsible for *x* "gets one in the game" of our moral responsibility practices as they concern *x*-ing. Then it can be determined what, if any,

kind of praising or blaming response is appropriate. And at this latter state one's degree of responsiveness is relevant. This "gateway" theory of moral responsibility is inspired by Fischer (2006: 233).

(20) Fischer and Ravizza (1998) offer a specific proposal cast in terms of *moderate reasons-responsiveness*, MRR. Herdova and Kearns carefully discuss MRR with respect to the situationist threat in their (2017). For some reservations and qualifications about MRR in general, see McKenna (2013). I will pass over these more specific details.

(21) Nelkin (2005) make a similar observation. Here, it is tempting to say that such effects on our ability to recognize our surroundings are innocent and ungeneralizable as a threat to moral responsibility. While such effects on us *can* excuse a person by way of non-culpable ignorance, the excusing here is just a normal part of life. People are often excused for innocently not seeing something which, if they saw it, would give them reason to help another in need. In correspondence, however, Dana Nelkin asks that we suppose it turns out that situationist experiments show that such normal everyday excuses are just more widespread than we thought. If this is how things shake out, then we are responsible less often than many presume, but not because of any threat to morally responsible agency as such. Because I am presently focusing on situationist threats to reasons-responsiveness, I set this possibility aside, but note that this is one other line of inquiry for the situationist to pursue.

(22) For example, Herdova and Kearns (2017) suggest that situational features may cause agents to respond to non-reasons (as opposed to disabling a capacity to respond to good ones).

(23) Here I draw from McKenna and Warmke (2017).

(24) On certain theories of action all actions involve reasons as causes. On such a view this claim would need modifying.

(25) Accommodations must be made for actual-sequence theorists who contend that the ability to do otherwise is not required (e.g., Fischer and Ravizza 1998; McKenna 2013; and Sartorio 2016). For a brief explanation see McKenna (2017).

(26) See Talbert (2012) for an opposing view.

(27) McKenna and Warmke (2017). For more detailed discussion of a similar view, see Brink (2013), Herdova and Kearns (2017), and Miller (2017).

(28) As Dana Nelkin and Derk Pereboom both pointed out in correspondence, the term "realist" is potentially misleading when used to describe the *negative* claim that the situationist threat, as presently understood, does not undermine free and responsible agency. After all, a free will skeptic like Derk Pereboom could maintain that situationism doesn't undermine free and responsible agency, yet consistently deny that we are free and responsible, just for other reasons. Agnostics about free will could deny the situationist threat, too. A further problem with the label is that one might think that the situationist

threat alone does not undermine free and responsible agency, but that the situationist threat, along with other threats, pushes our agency below the threshold sufficient for moral responsibility. I concede these points. I use the term here, however, for two reasons. First, McKenna and I used it in our (2017) and even recent habits are hard to break. (I now regret using this label; I won't speak for McKenna.) Second, the label does capture the general consensus among those who have taken a stand on the situationist threat: We are generally free and responsible and the situationist literature doesn't (yet) show otherwise.

(29) Nelkin (2016).

(30) See, e.g., Doris and Murphy (2007) and Talbert and Wolfendale (2019).

(31) I thank Derk Pereboom for this example.

(32) See Herdova and Kearns (2015).

(33) See Herdova and Kearns (2017) for a defense of the Fischer and Ravizza paradigm against Vargas's critique.

(34) Crucial to Sartorio's actualist view is the metaphysical claim that agents respond to both reasons and absences of reasons. Response to absences of reasons replaces the relevance of counterfactual scenarios in standard modal theories. I'll set aside this complication here.

(35) See Mele and Shepherd (2013), Miller (2016), and McKenna and Warmke (2017).

(36) I thank Dana Nelkin and Derk Pereboom for their generous invitation to contribute to this fine volume and for their thoughtful comments on a previous draft. Remaining errors are not my fault and are to be explained by my neighbor's very annoying lawn mower.

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