Philosophy and Phenomenological Research
Vol. LXI, No. 2, September 2000

Précis of *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*[*]

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The leading idea of our theory of moral responsibility is that responsibility is associated with control. But we contend that there are two distinct kinds of control. Regulative control involves alternative possibilities: it is a kind of *dual* power of free action. In contrast, guidance control does not, by its nature, involve alternative possibilities. Whereas typically it might be thought that regulative and guidance control go together, the Frankfurt-type cases show that they are separate and distinct sorts of control. And, whereas typically it is thought that moral responsibility requires regulative control, we claim that moral responsibility—for actions, omissions, and consequences—simply requires guidance control.[1] Thus, although we do not believe that moral responsibility requires alternative possibilities, we preserve the traditional association of moral responsibility with control.

But what, exactly, does guidance control consist in? On our view, guidance control should be understood in terms of two elements: the agent's "ownership" of the mechanism that actually issues in the relevant behavior, and the "reasons-responsiveness" of that mechanism. So, for example, an agent is morally responsible for an action, on our account, to the extent that this action issues from the agent's own, reasons-responsive mechanism.

We contend that individuals *make* certain kinds of mechanisms *their own* by *taking responsibility* for them. (When we speak of taking responsibility for a kind of mechanism, we understand this as "shorthand" for taking responsibility for behavior that issues from that kind of mechanism.) It is useful to distinguish two kinds of context in which an agent might take responsibility for the kind of mechanism that leads to his behavior. The typical case is one

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[*] John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998; paperback 1999).

[1] That is, guidance control is the freedom-relevant condition necessary and sufficient for moral responsibility.

in which the individual does *not* explicitly engage in deep philosophical reflection on the relationship between causal determinism and moral responsibility. But there is also the possibility that an individual does precisely this—and thus calls into question many of his pre-reflective attitudes. We begin with the nonreflective case, and proceed to the reflective case.

As a child grows up, he is subject to moral education (imperfect as it may be). The child's parents—and others—react to the child in ways designed (in part) to get the child to take certain attitudes toward himself: to view himself in certain ways. Partly as a result of moral education, the child typically acquires the view of himself as an *agent*, in at least a minimal sense. That is, he sees that upshots in the world depend on his choices and bodily movements. Further, the child comes to believe that he is a fair target of certain responses—the "reactive attitudes" and certain practices, such as punishment—as a result of the way in which he exercises his agency. We claim that it is in virtue of acquiring these views of himself (as a result of his moral education) that the child *takes responsibility*. More specifically, it is in virtue of acquiring these views that the child takes responsibility for *certain kinds of mechanisms*: practical reasoning, non-reflective habits, and so forth. Ordinarily, people would not characterize a child's taking responsibility in exactly this way, but this theoretical characterization gives more precise expression to the idea that the child takes responsibility for actions which spring from certain sources (and not from others).

In a more reflective moment, an individual may ask whether he is indeed a "fair" target for the reactive attitudes and associated practices. For example, he may worry that, if causal determinism is true, then he would not, on balance, be an appropriate target for the reactive attutudes, even though the actual social practices involve the application of such attitudes. It should not be expected that knockdown arguments can be provided to force even the staunchest incompatibilist to put his doubts about the fairness of the reactive attitudes aside. Nevertheless, we have suggested that certain considerations should persuade many that, for practical purposes, they can accept that they are apt candidates (all things considered) for the reactive attitudes, even if causal determinism is true. If an individual is persuaded to take this sort of stance, then this is enough (together with the satisfaction of the other relevant conditions) for the individual to take responsibility in the reflective case.[2]

When one takes responsibility, at a certain point in one's life, for a certain kind of mechanism, this functions as a kind of "standing policy" with respect to that kind of mechanism. So, for example, if one has in the past taken

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[2] That this sort of stance is *required* for moral responsibility, on our view, follows from the fact that our theory is a "subjectivist" approach (in Galen Strawson's terms), according to which being free and morally responsible requires one to see oneself as free and morally responsible.

responsibility for the mechanism of ordinary practical reasoning (and in the absence of reconsideration of this mechanism), it follows that one takes responsibility for the currently-operating mechanism of ordinary practical reasoning: taking responsibility is, as it were, *transferred* via the medium of "sameness of kind of mechanism." Of course, as with other kinds of policies, this policy can be reevaluated periodically, and kinds of mechanisms not previously considered can be addressed at any time.

An individual, then, makes the mechanism that issues in his behavior his own by taking responsibility for it. This element in the account of moral responsibility—taking responsibility—renders our approach to moral responsibility *genuinely historical.* That is, it is necessary, in order for an individual to be morally responsibile for his behavior, that a process of taking responsibility—as defined above—have taken place at some point prior to the behavior. We hasten to say that the process need not be explicit, conscious, or reflective (although, of course, it can be). And we emphasize that our notion of taking responsibility differs from some ordinary understandings of this notion: it is not, for example, simply a matter of uttering statements, or performing certain actions. Rather, taking responsibility, on our view, is a matter of having certain (dispositional) beliefs about oneself (and having acquired those beliefs in appropriate ways).

That moral responsibility is a genuinely historical phenomenon is important. Consider an analogy. Being a genuine Picasso—and not a fake—is a historical phenomenon. That is, two paintings can be identical in all their "snapshot properties", and still it may be that one is a genuine Picasso, and one is not. Similarly, two individuals can be identical in all their snapshot properties, and still it may be that one is morally responsibile for the relevant behavior, and one is not. For example, if one individual has had his brain manipulated in certain ways, and has not had the opportunity to become aware of this manipulation and reflect on it, then he has *not* taken responsbility for the kind of mechanism that issues in his behavior. The brain-manipulation mechanism is a *different* kind of mechanism from ordinary practical reasoning; thus, even if the agent has taken responsibility for ordinary practical reasoning, it does *not* follow that he has taken responsibility for the brain-manipulation mechanism. Responsibility is genuinely historical; it requires the process of taking responsibility (at some point in the past) for the kind of mechanism that actually issues in the relevant behavior.

As we said above, guidance control has two components: the mechanism that issues in (say) the action must be the agent's own, and it must be suitably reasons-responsive. We now turn to the second component: reasons-responsiveness. It is important to distinguish different kinds of responsiveness to reasons. Strong reasons-responsiveness of the mechanism issuing in action requires a *tight* fit between sufficient reason and action; this is too much to demand for moral responsibility. Weak reasons-responsiveness

requires a *loose* fit between sufficient reason and action; this is too little to demand for moral responsibility.

We defend the idea that the appropriate notion of responsiveness is somewhere "in between" strong and weak reasons-responsiveness: moderate reasons-responsiveness. A mechanism of kind *K* is moderately responsive to reason to the extent that, holding fixed the operation of a *K*-type mechanism, the agent would *recognize* reasons (some of which are moral) in such a way as to give rise to an understandable pattern (from the viewpoint of a third party who understands the agent's values and beliefs), and would *react* to at least one sufficient reason to do otherwise (in some possible scenario). That is, a mechanism is moderately responsive to reason insofar as it is "regularly" receptive to reasons (some of which are moral), and at least weakly reactive to reasons.[3]

We contend that our account of guidance control of action has plausible results in a wide range of cases. In the Frankfurt-type cases, the agent cannot do (or choose) otherwise. But he nevertheless exercises guidance control. In the alternative scenario—in which the counterfactual intervener intervenes—the mechanism is *not* the agent's own, and presumably it is *not* moderately responsive to reasons. Of course, this doubly-defective mechanism is *different* from the kind of mechanism that *actually* produces the action; and what is relevant to the agent's moral responsibility is the *actual-sequence mechanism.*

We hold individuals morally responsible not only for their actions, but for their failures to act as well. In addition, we hold people responsible for the consequences of their actions and omissions. Our account of guidance control of actions—and thus moral responsibility for actions—provides the basis for accounts of guidance control of failures to act (omissions) and consequences.

Traditionally, philosophers have been inclined to associate moral responsibility with the sort of control that involves alternative possibilities. In certain cases, it seems that the lack of alternative possibilities is what renders an agent inaccessible to the attitudes (and activities) constitutive of moral responsibility. But we argue that it is *not* the lack of alternative possibilities *in itself* that makes it the case that an agent is not morally responsible. Rather, in those cases in which it appears that the lack of alternative possibilities is playing this role, we contend that some factor makes it the case *both* that the agent lacks alternative possiblities *and* that he lacks guidance control; further, we contend that it is the lack of guidance control that rules out moral responsibility.

The association of guidance control with moral responsibility, and the attendant claim that moral responsibility does not require alternative possibil-

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[3] When the mechanism that issues in action is appropriately reasons-responsive, it does *not* follow that the *agent* could have responded differently to the actual reasons. Rather, when the mechanism is reasons-responsive, *it* has the general capacity to respond differently to the actual reasons for doing otherwise.

ities, implies that, if causal determinism threatens moral responsibility, it does *not* do so in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilties. Thus, the indirect argument for the incompatibility of causal determinism and moral responsibility—the argument which proceeds *via* considerations pertinent to alternative possibilities—fails. We also argue that a potent *direct* challenge to moral responsibility from causal determinism does not succeed. We thus defend the doctrine of "semi-compatibilism": causal determinism is compatible with moral responsibility, even if causal determinism rules out alternative possibilities.[4]

[4] This précis is a slightly revised version of material on pages 240–44, and 249 of *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility.*