The Inevitability of Alternative Possibilities

Diana Mertz Hsieh (diana@dianahsieh.com)
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Free Will and Determinism

As the debate about free will now stands in philosophy, one central issue concerns the compatibility of determinism with free will and/or moral responsibility. Compatibilists claim that even if determinism is true, such that "every event is causally necessitated by antecedent events" or "the facts of the past, in conjunction with the laws of nature, entail every truth about the future," a person may still be in control of and morally responsible for his actions.[1] Incompatibilists argue the opposite: that determinism necessarily conflicts with both free will and moral responsibility.

The meaning and status of the traditional "control condition" for moral responsibility developed by Aristotle is of particular concern to both sides of the debate. It states that a person must exert control over an action, in the sense that he could do otherwise, to be morally responsible for it. By the standard reading, that means that a morally responsible agent must freely choose between performing some action or not, e.g. between eating another potato chip or not, between sending that nasty e-mail or not, between lying about the stolen money or not. On its face, such freedom seems deeply incompatible with the unfolding of a single future envisioned by determinism. So while classical compatibilists (such as Hobbes) accepted the control condition in the abstract, they re-interpreted it via a conditional analysis of desire. By that analysis, a person controls his actions (as required for moral responsibility) so long as he acts in accordance with his desires, such that he could do otherwise if he desired otherwise. The freedom required for moral responsibility is then just "the unencumbered ability of an agent to do what she wants," whether that means eating a pint of ice cream or running five miles.[2] This compatibilist conception of freedom within a deterministic universe fails, however. Its apparent plausibility stems from an illicit presumption that a person exercises some measure of free choice in his desires. Yet in a deterministic universe, a person's desires would be beyond their control; they could not be otherwise. And without alternative possibilities in desires, a person who acted on his desires would have no freedom to do otherwise. The problem is particularly clear in examples of psychological disorders affecting desire: If I am genuinely unable to even desire that I eat turkey due to a particularly traumatic Thanksgiving accident in childhood, then I am not a free and responsible agent in choosing between a plate of ham and a plate of turkey—even if I would eat turkey if I desired it.[3] The classical compatibilist conditional analysis of desire identifies the scope of our capacity to direct our bodies in accordance with our desires, whereas understanding moral responsibility requires us to inquire further into the sources of our desires. If those desires are determined, then the freedom of a person to do otherwise if he desires otherwise is indeed a "hollow freedom."[4] Absent some other plausible interpretation of "could

[1] Michael McKenna, *Compatibilism* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2004 [cited 5 May 2005]); available from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compatibilism/.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

have done otherwise," compatibilism seemed unable to show how a morally responsible agent controls her actions.

Compatibilism was largely resurrected as a contender in the free will debates by Harry Frankfurt's 1969 paper "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility."[5] His counterexamples to the requirement of alternative possibilities suggested that a person could be fully morally responsible for his actions despite being unable to do otherwise—meaning that the sort of control relevant to moral responsibility would not need to be of the "could have done otherwise" variety. Freed from the demands of the alternative possibilities model of control, compatibilists developed various other accounts, such as Frankfurt's own higher-order desires model. Perhaps the most compelling compatibilist account of control was developed in John Fischer and Mark Ravizza's *Responsibility and Control*.[6] There, they claim that moral responsibility requires only the "guidance control" of an actual action, not the "regulative control" of alternative possibilities in action. By such arguments, compatibilism has become a major player in contemporary debates about free will.

However, when carefully scrutinized, these contemporary compatibilist arguments against alternative possibilities reveal themselves as defective, in much the same way as the conditional analysis found in classical compatibilism. The plausibility of the analyses and examples of morally responsible control always depend upon vague characterizations which subtly shift between determinism and responsibility. More fundamentally, the problem with such arguments seems to be that alternative possibilities are fundamental to the differentiation between moral responsibility and mere causal responsibility, such that even the compatibilist cannot do without them, try as he might.

Since all discussion of the metaphysical conditions of moral responsibility occurs against the background provided by Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, let us begin by briefly surveying the control condition for moral responsibility, as first explicated by Aristotle.

The Aristotelian Background

Aristotle opens his discussion in Book III, Chapter 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by motivating inquiry into the topic: he observes that properly bestowing "praise and blame" on "voluntary passions and actions" and "pardon [and] pity" on involuntary passions and actions presupposes that we can "distinguish the voluntary and the involuntary."[7] He identifies the central features distinguishing voluntary and involuntary action through an examination of cases. Obvious examples of involuntary action include a man "carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power."[8] These cases are involuntary because "the moving principle is outside" the agent.[9] Less obvious is the status of actions done "from fear of greater evils or for some noble object," such as when a tyrant orders evil acts upon pain of death of family or when goods are thrown overboard in a storm to save the ship.[10] At first glance, these actions may seem involuntary because the motive for action lies in circumstances external to the agent, perhaps

[5] Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[6] John Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998).
[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III:1 ([cited 4 May 2005]); available from http://www.non-contradiction.com/ac_works_b26.asp.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

even in circumstances thrust upon him involuntarily and/or unexpectedly. Yet Aristotle regards such actions as voluntary because they are "worthy of choice at the time when they are done" and "the end of an action is relative to the occasion."[11] The fact that actions are always performed in some thoroughly particular context implies that we must judge them as voluntary or not within that context, not against the standard of the most desired action in the best of all possible worlds.

Based upon his analysis of these two kinds of cases, Aristotle proposes a two-part control condition necessary for morally responsible action by an agent. First, "the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions [must be] in him."[12] Second, "the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself [must be] in his power to do or not to do."[13] The first requirement excludes actions imposed upon the agent by external forces (such as kidnappers or the wind) from the realm of the voluntary, while the second requirement does so with respect to actions generated by the agent but outside his control (such as hiccups or digestion). Notably, the second condition subsumes the first, in that a man must be the source of an action to have the power to perform it or not. That second condition is also obviously the source of the claim that moral responsibility requires alternative possibilities. In addition to the control condition, Aristotle imposes an epistemic condition for morally responsible action according to which the agent must be aware of "the particular circumstances of the action."[14]

Frankfurt's Counterexamples to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities

As already indicated, Frankfurt's seminal paper arguing against the standard Aristotelian view that moral responsibility requires alternative possibilities was a watershed moment for compatibilism, in that his arguments strongly suggested that the compatibilist need not accept the "could have done otherwise" model of control at all. As a result, the basic compatibilist claim that determinism need not conflict with free will and/or moral responsibility seemed far more plausible.

Frankfurt's particular target was the "principle of alternate possibilities," i.e. the claim "a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise."[15] So for John to be justly praised for keeping his promise to Mary, he must have been capable of breaking that promise, even if not at all inclined or likely to do so. Conversely, if breaking the promise was genuinely impossible for John, perhaps due to strong hypnosis or a brain lesion, then he warrants no moral praise for keeping it. As a restatement of the second aspect of Aristotle's control condition, the principle of alternate possibilities identifies the availability of alternative actions to the agent as a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of that agent bearing moral responsibility for his actual actions.

Frankfurt undercut the principle of alternate possibilities by developing a type of counterexample in which a person is morally responsible for his actions even though he could not have done otherwise. In these "Frankfurt-style" cases, a person is moved to action by his own internal reasons and desires, blissfully unaware that he was actually unable to do otherwise due to the presence an alert causal intervener prepared to force performance of the action if necessary. In the cases not requiring any intervention, the person seems fully responsible for his

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," 167.

action, even though he could not have done otherwise. Instead of following the tradition of inventing new fanciful "Frankfurt-style" cases, consider Frankfurt's own original example:

> Suppose someone—Black, let's say—wants Jones to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So he waits until Jones is about to make up his mind what to do, and he does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of such things) that Jones is going to decide to do something *other* than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones decides to do, and that he does do, what he wants him to do. Whatever Jones' initial preferences and inclinations, then, Black will have his way.[16]

This particular example of Jones and Black is just one instance of a general class of "Frankfurt-style" cases in which "there [are] circumstances that constitute sufficient conditions for a certain action to be performed by someone and that therefore make it impossible for the person to do otherwise, but that do not actually impel the person to act or in any way produce his action."[17] So the person still freely and responsibly chooses some action, even though the circumstances leave him no other course. If any such cases are genuinely possible, then the principle of alternate possibilities is false.

Before considering the difficulties with Frankfurt's argument, let us pause to clarify the requirements of a genuine counterexample to the principle of alternate possibilities. Given the simple if-then structure of the principle (i.e. if morally responsible then could have done otherwise), a counterexample to the principle must both affirm the antecedent and deny the consequent. It must meet the following two conditions:

- Condition #1: The person is morally responsible for the action performed.
- Condition #2: The person could not have done otherwise.

In addition, Frankfurt's analysis of the various cases of ordinary coercion suggest an additional constraint, as mentioned above:

- Condition #3: The person's action is not determined by the circumstances that make him unable to do otherwise.

Obviously, this last condition is not strictly required for a given case to be a counterexample to the principle of alternate possibilities, although it is necessary for it to be a "Frankfurt-style" case. Nonetheless, it seems to identify the only plausible overlap between Conditions #1 and #2, at least for someone not already committed to compatibilism. After all, if the circumstances which rendered a person unable to do otherwise also determined his action, then he would no longer seem to be morally responsible for his action. So when Black intervenes with Jones, such that Jones' actions are determined by the very same circumstances that render him unable to do otherwise, we regard Black, not Jones, as morally responsible for the ensuing action. (Of course, if the compatibilist wishes to offer other types of cases in which Condition #1 and Condition #2 are satisfied without Condition #3, he may do so. However, for the moment, our concern lies with Frankfurt's arguments against the principle of alternate possibilities.)

The explicit identification of these three conditions of a genuine Frankfurt-style counterexample to the principle of alternate possibilities clarifies the debate over the relevance of alternative possibilities to ascriptions of moral responsibility. Careful and detailed inspection of the standard Frankfurt-style scenarios, particularly of the role of the prior sign, reveals a failure to meet one of the first two conditions, however the scenario might be tweaked by the

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[16] Ibid., 172-3.
[17] Ibid., 168.

compatibilist. As we shall see, a failure in the third condition reduces to a failure in one of the other two. So either the person is not plausibly morally responsible for his action or he is faced with significant alternative possibilities. Either way, the principle of alternate possibilities stands.

The Dilemma Defense of the Principle of Alternate Possibilities

The "dilemma defense" of the principle of alternate possibilities developed by David Widerker in "Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities" focuses on the precise nature of the relationship between the sign observed by the causal intervener (Black) and the action taken by the moral agent (Jones) in Frankfurt-style counterexamples.[18] Widerker persuasively argues that, whatever the proposed relationship between sign and action, these cases are not genuine counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities. How so? First, imagine that the sign is "causally sufficient" for the action or "indicative of a state that is causally sufficient" for the action. In that case, the example is not a genuine Frankfurt-style case because "the factor that makes it impossible for Jones to avoid [the action, i.e. the sign] *does* bring about that decision."[19] Condition #3 (not same cause) has been violated. Next, imagine that the sign merely reliably predicts Jones' future action such that Jones still freely decides how to act. In that case, Jones is still free to do otherwise after displaying the sign: he might act out of character.[20] Condition #2 (no alternative possibilities) has been violated. Frankfurt and his defenders are thus caught on the horns of a dilemma in which no Frankfurt-style case can satisfy its own conditions as a counterexample the principle of alternative possibilities.

The compatibilist might seem to have some wiggle room, however, in that Condition #3 (not same cause) is not strictly required for any counterexample to the principle of alternative possibilities, but only for a Frankfurt-style counterexample. So perhaps cases on the first horn of the dilemma, i.e. those in which the prior sign is causally sufficient for the later action, are still viable. Yet when the cases are specified in adequate detail, it seems that every one violates Condition #3 (not same cause) either by violating Condition #1 (moral responsibility) or by violating Condition #2 (no alternative possibilities).

Consider a case in which Jones' quivering is inexorably followed by his punching his wife two minutes later. If both events were the result of a single underlying cause beyond his control, such as the firing of neurons around a lesion in Jones' brain, then he is not plausibly regarded as morally responsible for his violence. Condition #2 (no alternative possibilities) would be satisfied, but Condition #1 (moral responsibility) would not. However, if both events were the result of a single underlying cause within his control, such as earlier brooding over feelings of jealousy, then the case is significantly more complicated. The libertarian might argue that Jones was capable of doing otherwise, i.e. of brooding or not, such that Condition #2 (no alternative possibilities) would not be satisfied. That interpretation is dangerous, however, in that Jones' freedom is quickly reduced to a dim and distant flicker irrelevant to moral responsibility. He would be responsible for punching his wife solely because he might have refrained from an earlier action seemingly wholly unconnected it. (The two actions would seem wholly unconnected to Jones, whatever the clever Black may know.) Widerker himself suggests

[18] David Widerker, "Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities," in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[19] Ibid., 181.
[20] Ibid., 180.

that a libertarian ought not accept the sort of causal necessitation found in this sort of case, perhaps on the grounds that it undermines moral responsibility.[21] However, such might seem to beg the question against the compatibilist. Instead, the incompatibilist ought to simply observe that such a case violates the epistemic condition for moral responsibility: Jones could not be reasonably expected to know that his choice to brood or not is really a choice to punch his wife or not. If he does know that, then he would be morally responsible, but he would also face the genuine alternative possibility of brooding or not. Either way, the two (individual necessary and jointly sufficient) conditions of a counterexample to the principle of alternate possibilities are not simultaneously met.

Ultimately then, Frankfurt's proposed counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities fail. When the details of the case are adequately drawn, it becomes clear that the moral agent (Jones) is either not morally responsible or faces genuine alternative possibilities. Given the strength of this dilemma defense, Frankfurt's comments on that problematic relationship between the sign and the action of the agent are worth considering. In a footnote, he writes:

> The assumption that Black can predict what Jones will decide to do does not beg the question of determinism. We can imagine that Jones has often confronted the alternative—A and B—that he now confronts, and that his face has invariably twitched when he was about to decide to do A and never when he was about to decide to do B. Knowing this, and observing the twitch, Black would have a basis for prediction. This does, to be sure, suppose that there is some sort of causal relation between Jones's state at the time of the twitch and his subsequent states. But any plausible view of the decision or action will allow that reaching a decision and performing an action both involve earlier and later phases, with causal relations between them, and such that the earlier phases are not themselves part of the decision or the action. The example does not require that these earlier phases be deterministically related to still earlier events.[22]

When scrutinized in the light of the dilemma defense, these remarks clearly show that Frankfurt is straddling the fence between determinism and probability in the relationship between the sign and the action to make his example plausible. Imagine that Black, knowing Jones' history of twitching all and only when about to decide to eat apples, will intervene to force Jones to eat berries instead only if Jones twitches. So if Jones doesn't twitch, then Black won't intervene to force him to eat berries. For the scenario to work, Jones must never, ever fail to twitch before deciding to eat apples. If he ever did not-twitch-then-eat-apples, then Black would not intervene and Jones would reveal his freedom to do otherwise by eating apples rather than berries. The mere fact of Jones' up-until-now perfect history of twitch-then-eat-apples and not-twitch-then-eat-berries does not guarantee that pattern in the future; only some deterministic relationship between the sign and the action can eliminate the confounding sequence of not-twitch-then-eat-apples. Yet Frankfurt explicitly denies such a deterministic relationship in the passage above—and so he must, since such determinism would beg the question against his libertarian critic, violate his own Condition #3 by making Jones determined by the same circumstances that rendered him unable to do otherwise, and likely violate the epistemic condition for moral responsibility. So for such scenarios to function as a counterexamples to the principle of alternate possibilities, the relationship between the sign and the action (1) cannot be deterministic

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," 172n3.

(to satisfy Condition #3) and (2) must be deterministic (to satisfy Condition #2). Obviously, such is impossible.

In general then, the prior-sign scenarios are only plausible as counterexamples to the extent that they straddle the fence between determinism and indeterminism, vaguely implying each at various times. Widerker's dilemma defense shows that any use of a prior sign to satisfy Condition #3, i.e. to carve out some space in which Condition #1 and Condition #2 do not conflict, is untenable: the details of the scenario always reveal some violation of those necessary conditions. For this reason, Frankfurt's counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities are inadequate to the task.

Guidance Control as Sufficient for Moral Responsibility

Given the failure of Frankfurt's proposed counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities, any compatibilist attempt to develop an alternative model of control might seem premature. Nonetheless, the difficulties faced by John Fischer and Mark Ravizza's argument for "guidance control" as the only form of control necessary for moral responsibility is instructive because it suggests, yet again, that moral responsibility fundamentally depends upon alternative possibilities.

After undermining the standard "must be able to do otherwise to be morally responsible" intuitions with a Frankfurt-type case, Fischer and Ravizza claim that "moral responsibility does not require the sort of control that involves the existence of genuinely open alternative possibilities."[23] Moral responsibility still requires some form of control by the agent, but the relevant form is "guidance control" rather than "regulative control." They explain the difference between these two forms of control through a normal and a variant case of Sally driving. First comes the normal case:

> Let us suppose that Sally is driving her car. It is functioning well, and Sally wishes to make a right turn. As a result of her intention to turn right, she signals, turns the steering wheel, and carefully guides the car to the right. Further, we here assume that Sally was able to form the intention *not* to turn the car to the right but to turn to the car to the left instead. (We are thus not making any special assumption, such as that causal determinism is true.) Also, we assume that, had she formed such an intention, she would have turned the steering wheel to the left and the car would have gone left. In this ordinary case, Sally guides the car to the right, but should could have guided it to the left. She controls the car, and also she has a certain control *over* the car's movements. Insofar as Sally actually guides the car in a certain way, we shall say that she has "guidance control." Further, insofar as Sally also has the power to guide the car in a different way, we shall say that she has "regulative control."[24]

Fischer and Ravizza then explain that "guidance control of an action involves an agent's freely performing that action," whereas "regulative control involves a *dual* power: …the power to freely do some act A, and the power freely to do something else instead."[25] As such, regulative control is just the dual power to exercise guidance control; it is "the power to exercise guidance control of A, and the power to exercise guidance control of something else (instead of A)."[26] In the normal driving case, Sally has both guidance and regulative control of the car. However,

[23] Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, 30.
[24] Ibid., 30-1.
[25] Ibid., 31.
[26] Ibid.

Fischer and Ravizza claim that such coupling of control is not necessary, for although regulative control always requires (two forms of) guidance control, guidance control does not require regulative control. The variant driving case aims to illustrate that:

> Sally again guides her car in the normal way to the right. But here, Sally's car is a "driver instruction" automobile with dual controls. We can further imagine that the instructor is quite happy to allow Sally to steer the car to the right, but that if Sally shows any inclination to cause the car to go in some other direction, the instruction would have intervened and caused the car to go to the right (just as it actually goes)… Here, as in the first car case, it appears that Sally controls the movement of the car in the sense of guiding it (in a certain way) to the right. Thus, she has guidance control of the car. But she cannot cause it to anywhere other than where it actually goes. Thus, she lacks regulative control over the car… Sally controls the car, but she does not have control *over* the car (or the car's movements)."[27]

According to Fischer and Ravizza, this variant driving case shows that guidance control and regulative control can "at least in principle pull apart," meaning that "one can have a certain sort of control without having the sort of control that involves alternative possibilities."[28]

Fischer and Ravizza go on to explain guidance control in terms of responsiveness to reasons, meaning that "an agent exhibits guidance control of an action insofar as the mechanism that actually issues in the action is his own, reason-responsive mechanism"[29] The details of this account need not concern us here, as the more basic question at hand is whether any reasonable distinction may be drawn between "guidance control" and "regulative control."

The Illusion of Guidance Control

Fischer and Ravizza's distinction between "guidance control" and "regulative control" seems to suffer from a similar dilemma as Frankfurt's proposed counterexamples to the principle of alternate possibilities, in that all proposed cases of guidance control are actually either limited forms of regulative control or merely the illusion thereof. Once the details are properly specified, the whole category of guidance control simply disappears.

Consider the normal case of Sally driving her normal car. She drives the car as she pleases—within the bounds of the laws of physics, the nature of the car, and the conditions of the road. She can turn the car in different directions, but not with "perfect" freedom to do whatever her heart desires. Her turning radius is limited by the car's steering mechanism. Her trajectory may be stopped by buildings, lampposts, pedestrians, other cars, and the like. And she can only turn left/right, not up/down or forward/back. Similarly, she can change her speed by applying the brake or the gas, but her maximum acceleration and deceleration is fairly slow. So Sally has the power to do or not do—but only within certain limits imposed by the facts.

Now compare that normal case with a more detailed, but still realistic version of the variant case of Sally driving the driver's education car. She still regulates her speed, accelerating and decelerating as she sees fit. She can go straight, turn slightly right, moderately right, or hard right. Of course, student driver Sally is subject to greater limits on her driving than independent driver Sally, since the instructor will intervene if she commits a sufficiently serious error, such as turning left. Nonetheless, until he intervenes, she exercises a great deal of regulative control over the car. And when he intervenes, she loses all control over the car. Even if the instructor

[27] Ibid., 32.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 39.

allowed her just to go straight, such requires constant adjustment in steering and speed to stay properly in the lane at the right pace. So contrary to the claims of Fischer and Ravizza, the normal driving case and the variant driving case do not differ in the kind of control exercised by Sally, but only in the boundaries of that control. It's all regulative control; guidance control is nowhere to be found.

Now consider a more detailed but less realistic version of the variant case of Sally driving the driver's education car. Sally seems to be driving the car: she is depressing the pedals, steering the wheel, and so on. However, unbeknownst to her, the instructor is actually controlling the movements of the car. She just happens to be performing the same actions at the very same moment, such that she does not realize that she is not the real driver. In that case, Sally does not control the car at all, whether in the sense of guidance control or regulative control. She is merely deluded by the illusion of control. She is, we might say, just along for the ride. In fact, Sally here violates the often-overlooked first aspect of control identified by Aristotle, namely that "the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in [voluntary] actions is in [the agent]."[30] In Sally's case, her bodily movements do not drive the car; those of the instructor do. So once again, guidance control is nowhere to be found.

Ultimately, Fischer and Ravizza fail to carve out any conceptual space for their notion of "guidance control." Like with the Frankfurt cases, the seeming instances of guidance control disappear once the requisite detail is added. The initial plausibility of the concept is largely due to fuzziness in its details. More generally, Fischer and Ravizza's claim that our ordinary notion of control (i.e. regulative control) is a composite of two instances of another form of control (i.e. guidance control) is incoherent. If we break down (regulative) control into its constituent lines of alternative possibility, the result is mere causal chains, not forms of control at all. (Those causal chains may present further opportunities for regulative control, but they are not themselves a form a control.) The (regulative) control exerted by an agent is the choice of which causal chain to enact. All control is regulative control; all the rest is mere causal contribution.

Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility

The failures of both Frankfurt's objections to the requirement of alternative possibilities for moral responsibility and Fischer and Ravizza's distinction between guidance control and regulative control are instructive. They suggest that alternative possibilities are somehow fundamental to moral responsibility, so much so that even the compatibilist cannot live with moral responsibility but without alternative possibilities, try as he might. Of course, the burden of offering a positive defense of the necessary connection between alternative possibilities and moral responsibilities lies with the incompatibilist; he cannot merely win the day by pointing out the failures of the various compatibilist arguments so far offered.

Tentatively, I would suggest that understanding the necessary connection between choice of alternative possibilities and moral responsibility requires understanding how we differentiate the special category of moral responsibility from the broader class of mere causal contribution. There must be some fundamental difference between them; cases of moral responsibility must possess some special features not found in the broader class of causal contribution. But what it is? Or, more concretely, what is it that makes me, as a moral agent, responsible for eating all of the ice cream—as opposed to merely being part of the causal process of ice cream eating?

The basic difference between the morally responsible actions of an agent and the actions in a mere causal sequence seems to be a fundamental difference in the sort of causation involved.

[30] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

A morally responsible agent acts purposefully, i.e. by final causation. He regulates his course toward the achievement of some goal by choosing between alternative courses of action. Moreover, he does so intentionally, consciously, and often deliberately—with respect to both means and ends. In other words, human beings are capable of a fundamentally different mode of action in comparison to inanimate matter and other living creatures. Human beings do not merely passively respond to the stimuli in their environment according to the laws of motion, as rocks and rivers are. (Although, when they are limited to that mode of action, they are not morally responsible for their actions.) Human beings do not even just actively respond to their environment by innate drives and automatized learning, as animals do. (Although when they are limited to that mode of action, they are not morally responsible for their actions.) Rather, human beings are capable of responding to their environment deliberately and self-consciously, directing their capacity for rational thought as they see fit, according to their chosen goals. That we have such a power of mental self-direction—of choosing this action rather than that one, of choosing this line of thought rather than that one, and even of choosing to think about the world or remain in a blind stupor—is evident from simple introspection. (The compatibilist who argues that such is all an illusion is likely to be guilty of begging the question, at least.)

So the basic suggestion is that the great divide between morally responsible action and mere causal contribution is based upon the human capacity for a fundamentally different mode of action than is found elsewhere (as far as we know) in the natural world. As self-conscious form of final causation, this human mode of action necessarily involves choice between alternative possibilities. So it is my capacity to reflect upon whether I am really hungry or not, whether I am in the mood for ice cream or not, whether I will feel ill after eating a pint of ice cream or not, whether my husband will be annoyed with me for doing so or not, and so on that makes me, as a moral agent, responsible for eating all of the ice cream—as opposed to merely being part of the causal process of ice cream eating. At least to me, such seems to be a potentially promising beginning of a defense of the necessity of choice of alternative possibilities to moral responsibility.

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