

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY - ANALYTIC APPROACHES

Tim K.A.M. de Mey & Tom Claes

Moral responsibility is inescapable. All the more vexing, then, is that the very notion of moral responsibility continues to puzzle us. The issue of moral responsibility is far from monolithic. Rather, the precise definition of the problem and the corresponding set of possible approaches vary with, e.g., the level of abstraction, the domain of application, the metaphilosophical context, the theoretical desiderata, etc.

Although moral responsibility is a mesmerizing philosophical problem in its own right, it has also played and continues to play a pivotal role in the debate on determinism and free will and in the debate on personal identity. As far as determinism and free will is concerned, one might even say that questions about moral responsibility actually define the problem. There is, of course, an alternative definition of the problem in terms of whether or not an action is really “up to” the agent. Moreover, some compatibilist solutions, like Frankfurt’s, differentiate between moral responsibility and free will in the end.

Similarly, the problem of moral responsibility has been one of the driving forces of the philosophical analysis of personal identity. For philosophers, like Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid, who develop and defend the view that personal identity is primitive and unanalysable, the issue of moral responsibility is what really sets questions about personal identity over time apart from the general, merely metaphysical questions

about the identity over time of complex objects (like Theseus's ship, Locke's sock and Trigger's broom). E.g., one of Read's reasons to adopt a "simple view" of personal identity is because of its foundational role in "accountableness" and so it is due to moral responsibility that questions about personal identity are not merely metaphysical questions about words:

[Identity] has no fixed nature when applied to bodies and very often questions about it are questions about words. But identity when applied to persons has no ambiguity and admits not of degrees or of more or less. It is the foundation of all rights and obligations and of all accountableness, and the notion of it is fixed and precise (Reid 1941, quoted in Noonan 2003, p. 16).

On 18 & 19 October 2010 the theme of moral responsibility and related philosophical problems was discussed in Ghent, Belgium, by some 40 delegates during the conference 'Moral Responsibility: Analytic Approaches, Substantive Accounts and Case Studies'. The explicit purpose of the conference was to encourage and facilitate the productive interaction between these very different approaches, especially between (1) conceptual analyses and explications of moral responsibility and related notions, (2) substantive accounts, often based on rival sets of, e.g., social, political and religious belief systems, and (3) case studies in, e.g., biomedical, business, environmental, sexual and research ethics, or, e.g., relating to crimes against humanity, international politics and intervention, etc.

The conference was organized and hosted by the *Center for Ethics & Value Inquiry* (CEVI), Ghent University, in collaboration with the *Centre for Research Ethics and Ethical Deliberation* (CREED, Edge Hill University) and the *Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics* (CAPPE, University of Brighton) and had the good fortune of the generous support of the *Research Foundation Flanders – FWO* and the *Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* (Royal

Academy for Dutch Language and Literature). Plenary speakers were Filip Buekens (Tilburg University), Arnold Burms (Catholic University of Louvain), Bob Brecher (University of Brighton), and Maureen Sie (Erasmus University Rotterdam).

It was the organizers' hope that bringing together a multidisciplinary group of researchers would generate a cross-fertilization of analytic and substantive approaches, thus transgressing classical and entrenched disciplinary boundaries. This was realized during the conference, albeit mainly during the animated discussions. But disciplinary and perspectival boundaries are hard to cross. The editors of this and forthcoming second volume of *Philosophica* on responsibility acknowledge that they have up to a certain point conceded to them by organizing the publication of these two volumes around the axis of analytic versus substantial perspectives. The articles in this volume are analytic in scope. The follow-up volume will focus more on the substantive accounts and case studies.

In "Revisiting Strawsonian Arguments from Inescapability", Andras Szigeti clarifies Strawson's arguments to the effect that since the practice of responsibility is inescapable, we may regard it as justified (Strawson 1985). He shows that there are two basic types of Strawsonian inescapability arguments, a descriptive kind and a normative one, that these conflict to a certain extent, and that none of the Strawsonian inescapability arguments is convincing. Finally, Szigeti considers whether the conflict of theoretical and practical considerations in the justification of the practice of responsibility, could be "inescapable" in yet another sense.

According to Derek Pereboom (2001), compatibilists accounts of free will cannot comply with "the origination principle O", i.e., that for an agent to be morally responsible, the agent has to be the ultimate source or cause of the action. In "On the Compatibilist Origination of Moral Responsibility", Stefaan Cuypers takes up Derek Pereboom's challenge and develops a compatibilist solution to the origination problem. Cuypers shows that by appealing to the "Authenticity Criterion", i.e., that an agent

is suitably “invested” in an action, only if the action causally stems from elements of an evaluative scheme of the agent that is authentic, the compatibilist can make the required distinction in principle between authentic-deterministic and alien-deterministic events.

In his paper “Morally Embedded Selves and Embedded Compatibilism”, Guy Pinku paves the way for what he calls “embedded compatibilism” by investigating the ramifications of the notions of “decentralized control” and of “morally embedded selves”. In line with, among others, Russell’s point that one cannot determine the kind of reason responsiveness mechanism that one owns (Russell 2002) and Clark’s notion of “ecological control” (Clark 2007), Pinku argues that the control people have over their conduct is embedded within prerequisites which they cannot control and hence are not responsible for having or lacking. Although weak self control allows for compatibilism, Pinku carefully considers how embedded compatibilism changes our understanding of moral responsibility. E.g., it uncovers the incomplete nature of guilt.

In “Giving Responsibility a Guilt-Trip: Virtue, Tragedy, and Privilege”, Kevin M. DeLapp focuses on the feeling of self-recrimination for doing harm even if it could not be prevented. According to DeLapp, the hallmark of “tragic-guilt” is that it is a normative response to situations of unavoidable, unintentional wrong-doing. Although merely feeling tragically responsible is not sufficient, DeLapp understands sensitivity to tragic-guilt as an admirable quality of the virtuous person’s emotional makeup and argues that it has significant motivational, theoretical and ethical benefits.

As editors we would like to thank the editorial board of *Philosophica*, the contributors to this volume, the anonymous referees, the participants in the conference, Erik Weber and Albrecht Heeffler, and, last but not least, the editorial assistants Ceciel Meiborg (Kingston University London) and Marijke de Pous (Erasmus University Rotterdam) for their much

appreciated help (and patience). Although theme volumes of journals are rarely dedicated, this one is, and it's dedicated to Eva Mae Dickinson.

Erasmus University Rotterdam & Ghent University
Email: demey@fwb.eur.nl & Tom.Claes@ugent.be

REFERENCES

- Clark, A., 2007, "Soft Selves and Ecological Control", In *Distributed Cognition and the Will*, Ross, D., Spurrett, D., Kincaid, H. & Stephens, G.L., 101-122, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Noonan, H., 2003, *Personal Identity*, Routledge, London.
- Pereboom, D., 2001, *Living Without Free Will*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Russell, P., 2002, "Critical Notice of Responsibility and Control", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, **32**, 587-606.
- Reid, T., 1941, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (ed. A. Woozley), Macmillan, London.
- Strawson, P.F., 1985, *Skepticism and Naturalism. Some Varieties*, Methuen, London.