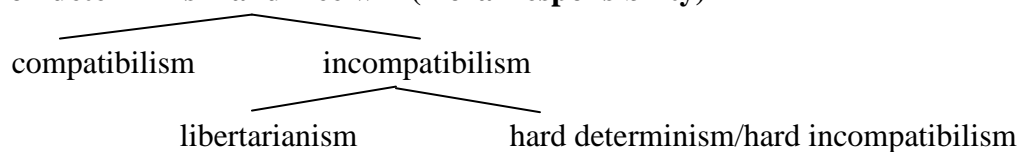


Moral Shallowness, Metaphysical Megalomania, and Compatibilist-Fatalism

A. Content

1. Introduction
2. The Objection from Moral Shallowness
3. Fischer's Response
 - 3.1 *Ultimate Origination and Metaphysical Megalomania*
 - 3.2 *Zooming-Out Arguments and Perspectivism*
4. Compatibilist-Fatalism
 - 4.1 *Determinism and Origination-Fatalism*
 - 4.2 *The Seriousness of Contingency*
5. Conclusion

B. Debate on determinism and free will (moral responsibility)



- leeway views (alternative possibilities) versus source views (origination)

C. Smilansky's objection from moral shallowness

Quote 1 ..., however sophisticated the compatibilist formulation of control in the broad sense, and whether it focuses on character, reflection, ability to follow reasons, or anything else available at the compatibilist level, in the end *no one can have ultimate control over that for which one is being judged*. ... All that takes place on the compatibilist level, irrespective of the local distinctions in respect of control, becomes on the ultimate level 'what was merely *there*', ultimately deriving from causes beyond the control of the participants. ... / ...

People are not from the ultimate perspective responsible for their choices and actions. ... We cannot shirk the perspective from which all that happens is ultimately a matter of *luck*, and hence in one way morally arbitrary and an unfit basis for fair differentiation among people. Compatibilism is, in itself, *morally shallow*... (Smilansky 2000, pp. 47-8; 284-5)

- Smilansky's (loosely formulated) *modus tollens*:
 - (1) Fair attribution of moral responsibility (non-arbitrary blaming) requires ultimate control.
 - (2) But, compatibilism lacks a conception of ultimate control.
 - (3) Therefore, compatibilism is unfair or morally shallow.

D. Ultimate origination

Q2 (i) The cause, or at least a causal antecedent, of the free action must be a component of the type of cause that plays a salient role in the production of *action* or *free action* (such as the having of a suitable belief or desire). The cause could not be something like the beating of an agent's heart. (ii) This cause (or part of it) must, in some obvious sense, be internal to its agent. (iii) The cause must be at least partly constitutive of the agent in a way in which, in virtue of being so constitutive, it would be correct to say that the action (or the free action) "truly" issues *from the agent*, or is the "*agent's own*," or is one over which *the agent has control*. It is something like (iii) that conceptions of ultimate origination seek to capture. (Haji 2009, p. 41)

- Fischer's conception in terms of *reasons-responsive* and *taking responsibility control*: moral responsibility requires only *guidance control*; guidance control has two components: (1) the reasons-responsiveness component requires that the mechanism that actually causes the action be appropriately sensitive to reasons, and (2) the ownership component requires that the mechanism be the agent's own; and an agent makes a mechanism "truly his own" by taking responsibility.

E. Zooming-Out Arguments

Q3 In general, I believe that we should ask various questions when we are invited to take up a perspective "from a distance" for the purposes of evaluation of something (the meaning of life, the nature of moral responsibility, and so forth). The first question is about what can in fact be seen from the commended perspective. The second question is why this perspective should be taken at all—and [the third question is] why it should be deemed hegemonic, if indeed it is putatively so. (Fischer 2008, p. 177)

- Fischer's conclusion:
[I deny that] zooming out and apprehending that causal determinism is true will lead us to believe that we are relevantly similar to robots or marionettes; it will only do so if the view from afar obscures the features of certain causally deterministic sequences that ground moral responsibility: mechanism ownership and reasons-responsiveness. These features can be present in a causally deterministic sequence, and they are in no way vitiated or etiolated when one sees them as embedded in a larger context. (Fischer, 2008, p. 179)

F. Compatibilist-Fatalism

- division between optimistic orthodox-compatibilists and pessimistic compatibilist-fatalists
- distinction between contributory-fatalism and origination-fatalism

Q4 *Optimistic orthodoxy* [S]emicompatibilism allows us to track commonsense ... in making distinctions between those factors that operate in such a way as to undermine responsibility and those that do not. And a semicompatibilist need not give up the idea that sometimes individuals robustly deserve punishment for their behavior, whereas on other occasions they robustly deserve moral commendation and reward. That is, a semicompatibilist need not etiolate or reconfigure the widespread and natural idea that individuals *morally deserve* to be treated harshly in certain circumstances, and kindly in others. We need not in any way damp down our revulsion at heinous deeds, or our admiration for human goodness and even heroism. (Fischer 2007, pp. 81-2)

Q5 *Pessimistic fatalism* ..., however incoherent and unattractive the ideal of pure (unconditioned) agency may be, what is troubling about origination-fatalism is that it confronts us with the limits of human agency—the inescapable fact that the ultimate source of our character and conduct lies beyond us. Our finitude and place in the order of nature has implications for our conception of ourselves as genuine agents. ... To insist on (easy) optimism in face of such thoughts about the human condition is a form of 'superficiality' to which (orthodox) compatibilists are much too prone. (Paul Russell, 2000, p. 214)

G. The mystery of free will

The second premise of Smilansky's *modus tollens* is false, for, given origination-fatalism, (2*) compatibilism contains "morally non-shallow" conceptions of ultimate control.