

Deep Control

ESSAYS ON FREE WILL AND VALUE



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Deep Control

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Deep Control: The Middle Way

In work over the last three decades I have sought to present what I have called a “general framework for moral responsibility.”¹ In this introductory essay, I shall sketch some of the leading ideas in my overall framework and draw out a few implications. I hope that this will help to situate the essays in the current volume within a larger context. I shall also highlight some of the important themes I address in this book.²

I. A Framework for Moral Responsibility

I.1. MOTIVATION AND THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY

The framework I have presented for moral responsibility involves a portfolio of different ideas in a certain arrangement. I start by presenting some basic “motivating ideas”—some considerations that render my overall approach attractive. Perhaps the key idea here stems from the appeal of a certain sort of “resiliency.” I believe that our fundamental status as agents—our being deeply different from mere nonhuman animals insofar as we engage in practical reasoning and are morally responsible for

¹ See John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and *Our Stories: Essays on Life, Death, and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Also see John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2007).

² The material in the first two sections of this essay is a lightly revised version of John Martin Fischer, “Precis of My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility” (part of a book symposium on *My Way*) *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80 (2010): 229–241. I am deeply thankful to Patrick Todd, Neal Tognazzini, and Justin Coates for extremely helpful comments on previous versions of this essay.

our behavior—should not depend on certain subtle ruminations of theoretical physicists. That is, I do not think that our status as genuine *agents* should hang on a thread—that it should depend on whether natural laws have associated with them (say) probabilities of 0.99 or 1.0. In my view, *that sort* of empirical difference should not *make a difference* as to our moral responsibility.

So, for example, if in the future I am convinced that the fundamental laws of nature are—or can be regimented as—(among other things) universally generalized conditionals with probabilities of 1.0 rather than similar conditionals with probabilities of 0.99, this would not issue in any inclination on my part to give up my view of myself and others as genuine agents and legitimate participants in the practices constitutive of moral responsibility. Now this is simply one consideration, and it specifies a *desideratum* of an adequate theory of moral responsibility. In my view, it counts in favor of a theory of moral responsibility—it is a reason to accept such a theory—if the theory does not conceptualize moral responsibility as hanging on a thread (in the indicated way). Of course, the proponent of such a theory must still address the difficult skeptical worries about the relationship between causal determinism, free will, and moral responsibility, as well as do some sort of philosophical cost-benefit analysis that considers all relevant factors.

Note that, insofar as I take it that it would be desirable to have an account of moral responsibility according to which our fundamental status as morally responsible agents does not “hang on a thread,” it would follow that we should not give up our views of ourselves as morally responsible and deeply different from nonhuman animals (in the relevant ways) if we are convinced (in the future) that the fundamental laws of nature have irreducible *indeterminacies* associated with them. Suppose, for example, that we discover that these laws are or can be conceptualized as (among other things) universally quantified conditionals with 0.99 probabilities. In my view, this in itself should not issue in any inclination to discard or revise our views of ourselves and others as genuine agents and subject to moral responsibility. Again, I am simply articulating what I take to be a *desideratum* of an adequate theory of moral responsibility—that it be suitably resilient to certain sorts of empirical discoveries.³ A proponent of such a theory still needs to address the difficult skeptical worries about the relationship between causal indeterminism and *control* (and moral responsibility).

A second element in the overall framework for moral responsibility consists in an articulation of the “concept” of moral responsibility. I accept some sort of distinction between the concept and its conditions of application; I, of course, recognize that the legitimacy of this sort of distinction has been called into question. And yet

³In sketching the “resiliency desideratum” in this introductory essay, I have simply tried to lay out my view. This is perhaps not the appropriate venue to address difficulties and objections—of which there are (lamentably) many. Indeed, I am grateful to Helen Steward, Kevin Timpe, Randolph Clarke, Dan Speak, Chris Franklin, Michael Nelson, and Patrick Todd for discussions of these issues in their written work and also in many probing conversations. I hope further to explore these issues in future work.

I continue to think that there is *some* reasonable way (or ways) of making the relevant kind of distinction, even if it is not straightforwardly a matter of distinguishing “analytic” from “synthetic” truths, or matters of meaning from empirical matters. I simply presuppose that there is some tolerably clear way of distinguishing (roughly speaking) the concept of moral responsibility from the conditions in which moral responsibility actually obtains (or, in a slightly different vocabulary, the *concept* of moral responsibility from various *conceptions* of moral responsibility).

As I said before, my overall framework for moral responsibility is a suite of ideas in a certain arrangement. Part of this structured portfolio is a set of options in regard to the concept of moral responsibility; but I do not take a firm stand on these options. That is, I chart out different ways of articulating our inchoate concept of moral responsibility, but I do not argue that one (rather than the others) is the correct specification. I am not even sure that there is one unique specification. Rather, I focus most of my attention on specifying the conditions of application of the concept of moral responsibility, and I contend that accepting these conditions is completely *compatible* with accepting any of the specific options with respect to the *concept* of moral responsibility.

To be a bit more specific about the concept of moral responsibility, perhaps the most salient view might be called the “Strawsonian” view, following the classic presentation by Peter Strawson in “Freedom and Resentment.”⁴ In this view, being morally responsible is a matter of being an appropriate target of a set of distinctive attitudes Strawson dubbed the “reactive attitudes,” such as gratitude, love, respect, hatred, and resentment. In the Strawsonian approach, moral responsibility also involves being appropriate participants in activities, such as moral praise and blame and punishment, which presuppose the application of the relevant attitudes. It was important to Strawson that the “appropriateness” of the attitudes does not depend on the target agent’s meeting some “theoretical condition,” such as possessing the freedom to do otherwise (or, as I interpret him, *any* sort of freedom); additionally, it does not depend (for Strawson) on the world’s meeting certain specific conditions, such as that causal determinism is false (or, for that matter, true).

Another account of the concept of moral responsibility is associated with the metaphor of a “moral ledger.” On the moral ledger view, we are morally responsible insofar as we are apt targets of specifically *moral* judgments. In this view, we are deeply different from nonhuman animals in that we can have *moral* properties—we can act rightly or wrongly, we can be good or bad, courageous or cowardly, and so forth. In yet another view, we are morally responsible insofar as we can legitimately be asked to provide *explanations* or *accounts* of our behavior. As I said, I do not know whether there is a *single* correct specification of our shared concept of moral responsibility. It is plausible to me that “moral responsibility” is what Wittgenstein called a “family-resemblance” term or what we might call a “syndrome.” In any case,

⁴ *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1–25.

I contend that my account of the conditions in which moral responsibility obtains is compatible with *any* of the plausible attempts to specify the concept.

1.2. CONTROL AND THE CONDITIONS FOR MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

I accept the traditional view (stemming perhaps from Aristotle's discussion of voluntariness) that moral responsibility involves a *freedom* or *control* component and an *epistemic* component. But whereas I agree that moral responsibility requires control, I distinguish two kinds of control: guidance and regulative control. The two kinds of control can be pried apart analytically through the use of certain thought-experiments (the "Frankfurt-style examples," to which I return shortly). One kind of control involves access to alternative possibilities (freedom to choose and do otherwise); I call this "regulative control." The other kind of control does not require such access. It is a distinctive kind of control that does not involve freedom to choose or do otherwise; I call this "guidance control." My claim is that guidance control is the freedom-relevant or control component of moral responsibility. Thus, an agent can legitimately be held morally responsible for his behavior, even though he lacks regulative control (or freedom to choose and do otherwise). The freedom-relevant condition is combined with an "epistemic" condition to get a full theory of moral responsibility.

To develop these notions of control (and their relationship), let us consider the following cases.⁵ Suppose that I am driving my car. It is functioning well, and I wish to make a right turn. (We assume that the gas pedal is working properly and that I am depressing it to give the car gas.) As a result of my intention to turn right, I signal, turn the steering wheel, and carefully guide the car to the right. Further, I here assume that I was able to form the intention not to turn the car to the right but to turn the car to the left instead. In this ordinary case, I guide the car to the right, but I could have guided it to the left. I control the car, and also I have a certain sort of control *over* the car's movements. Insofar as I actually guide the car in a certain way, I shall say that I have "guidance control." Further, insofar as I have the power to guide the car in a different way, I shall say that I have "regulative control." (Of course, here we are not making any "special assumptions," such as that causal determinism obtains or God exists and foreknows our future behavior.)⁶

Consider, now, a second case. Here I again guide my car in the normal way to the right. The car's steering apparatus *works properly* when I steer the car to the right (as does the gas pedal). But unknown to me, the car's steering apparatus is broken in such a way that, if I were to try to turn it in some other direction, the car would veer off to the right in precisely the way it actually goes to the right. Since

⁵I take these cases from Fischer, *My Way*: 39.

⁶For discussions of the relationship between God's omniscience and human freedom, see John Martin Fischer, ed., *God, Foreknowledge, and Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); and Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*: 111–130.

I actually do not try to do anything but turn to the right, the apparatus functions normally, and the car's movements are precisely as they would have been if there had been no problem with the steering apparatus. Indeed, my guidance of the car to the right is precisely the same in this case and the first car case.

Here, as in the first car case, it appears that I control the movement of the car in the sense of guiding it in a certain way to the right. I do not simply cause it to go to the right (say, as a result of sneezing or having an epileptic seizure or involuntary spasm). Thus, I exhibit guidance control of the car. (I control the car and I have control *of* the car, but I do not have control *over* the car's movements; the different prepositions typically indicate the different kinds of control.) Generally, we assume that guidance control and regulative control go together. But this case (which has some of the salient structural features of a Frankfurt-type case) helps to show that they can at least in principle pull apart: one can have guidance control without regulative control.

The second car case should elicit the intuition that we do not need regulative control (genuine access to alternative possibilities) in order to have the kind of control involved in moral responsibility. The second car case is rather like John Locke's famous example of a man who is in a room that, unknown to him, is locked; the man thinks about whether to leave the room, but decides to stay in the room for his own reasons. The fact that the door is locked plays no role in the man's practical reasoning. Locke says that the man stays in the room voluntarily, although he could not have left the room. Similarly, it seems that I exhibit guidance control of the car, although I could not have caused the car to go to the left.

But in Locke's case the man *did* have various options available to him. After all, he could have decided to open the door, he could have tried to open it, and so forth; and similarly, in the second car example I could have decided to steer the car to the left, I could have tried to do so, and so forth. Some philosophers might then insist that it is *in virtue of the existence of these alternative possibilities* that the agent is morally responsible. And it must be conceded that we have not yet produced an example in which an agent is intuitively thought to be morally responsible and yet has *no* alternative possibilities (*no* regulative control).

This is precisely the point at which Harry Frankfurt offers a remedy for the gap in the original cases.⁷ In Frankfurt's examples, a "counterfactual intervener" stands by ready to intervene in the relevant agent's brain processes, if he shows even an inclination to choose to do otherwise. Although Frankfurt was rather vague about exactly how the counterfactual intervener can succeed in expunging all access to alternative possibilities, Frankfurt's followers have filled in the template in various ways. Here is my favorite version of a Frankfurt case:⁸

⁷ Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 829–839.

⁸ For such an example, see John Martin Fischer, "Responsibility and Control," *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982): 24–40.

Because Black dares to hope that the Democrats finally have a good chance of winning the White House, the benevolent but elderly neurosurgeon, Black, has come out of retirement to participate in yet another philosophical example. (After all, what would these thought-experiments be without the venerable *eminence grise*—or should it be *noir*?) He has secretly inserted a chip in Jones's brain which enables Black to monitor and control Jones's activities. Black can exercise this control through a sophisticated computer that he has programmed so that, among other things, it monitors Jones's voting behavior. If Jones were to show any inclination to vote for McCain (or, let us say, anyone other than Obama), then the computer, through the chip in Jones's brain, would intervene to assure that he actually decides to vote for Obama and does so vote. But if Jones decides on his own to vote for Obama (as Black, the old progressive, would prefer), the computer does nothing but continue to monitor—without affecting—the goings-on in Jones's head.

Now suppose that Jones decides to vote for Obama on his own, just as he would have if Black had not inserted the chip in his head. It seems, upon first thinking about this case, that Jones can be held morally responsible for this choice and act of voting for Obama, although he could not have chosen otherwise and he could not have done otherwise.⁹

Over the years I have offered a sustained argument that the Frankfurt examples provide a strong plausibility argument for the conclusion that moral responsibility does not require genuine metaphysical access to alternative possibilities (regulative control). The leading idea in my argument is that any proponent of the regulative control requirement should say that the alternative possibilities in question must be *robust* and not *mere flickers of freedom*. That is, if the basis of moral responsibility is access to at least one alternative possibility, the alternative possibility in question cannot be *any old sort of possibility* of something different happening; such an alternative possibility might be a mere flicker of freedom and thus too thin a reed to support the superstructure of moral responsibility.

The situation here is precisely like the problem faced by proponents of indeterministic accounts of moral responsibility; how can the mere addition of a certain sort of alternative possibility—say an event the happening or not-happening of which is entirely arbitrary or accidental, from the agent's point of view—render it true that the agent has the control associated with moral responsibility, given that the agent lacks such control in the absence of *any* alternative possibilities? (I return to this question below.) In previous work, I have asked the proponent of regulative control a similar question: "Given (for the sake of discussion) that an agent without *any* alternative possibilities cannot be deemed morally

⁹ Whew! Black was right. I began writing this paper before the elections of 2008; obviously, the specifics of the case are now out of date, but what matters is the structure of the example.

responsible, how can the mere addition of an *exiguous* alternative possibility in the Frankfurt cases—say an event the happening or not-happening of which is entirely arbitrary or accidental from the agent’s point of view—render it true that the agent has the control associated with moral responsibility?” Note that the worry behind this question is exactly why the prominent libertarian philosopher Robert Kane has essentially agreed with me on this point, positing the “dual voluntariness” requirement for moral responsibility.

My claim, then, is that versions of the Frankfurt cases can be given in which it is very plausible to say that the agent in question is morally responsible for his behavior, and yet he has no access to the *relevant sort* of alternative possibility—a sufficiently robust alternative possibility. In addition to presenting a systematic defense of the contention that the Frankfurt cases show moral responsibility not to require regulative control, I have pointed out that the rejection of the requirement of regulative control does not depend on the Frankfurt cases. There are various other routes to the same conclusion, including the Strawsonian contention that our ordinary responsibility practices do not presuppose the requirement of regulative control.¹⁰ Also, Daniel Dennett has presented various arguments against the requirement of regulative control.¹¹ I believe that the fact that there are various different routes to the same conclusion helps to establish the plausibility of the conclusion; if one finds thought-experiments such as the Frankfurt cases unattractive, or if one finds the Frankfurt cases unconvincing, there are still good reasons to accept that moral responsibility does not require regulative control.

So my preliminary conclusion is that *if* causal determinism rules out moral responsibility, this is *not* in virtue of its eliminating regulative control (if it does indeed eliminate regulative control). This is an important point; I believe it is the “moral of the Frankfurt stories,” no matter how they are told and retold. Further, if this point is correct, it allows us to sidestep the traditional debates about the relationship between such doctrines as God’s omniscience and causal determinism, on the one hand, and “freedom to do otherwise” or regulative control, on the other. That is, we can sidestep these debates if we are simply interested in moral responsibility. Insofar as these traditional debates have issued in what I have called Dialectical Stalemates—black holes in Dialectical Spacetime—avoiding them may open the possibility of real philosophical progress.

This having been said, I have never suggested that the *mere fact* that regulative control is not required for moral responsibility would allow us to conclude *straightaway* that causal determinism is compatible with moral responsibility. Indeed, in my 1982 paper, “Responsibility and Control,” I emphasized that causal determinism

¹⁰ For a version of this sort of strategy, see R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹¹ Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); and *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Viking, 2003). For a discussion, see John Martin Fischer, “Dennett on the Basic Argument,” (part of a book symposium on Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*) *Metaphilosophy* 36 (2005): 427–435.

might rule out moral responsibility *directly* (and not in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilities). I thus identified what has come to be called “Source Incompatibilism,” and I pointed out that it must be taken seriously. I concluded that theorists of moral responsibility should adopt a laserlike focus on the *actual sequence* that issues in any particular choice or behavior and should, in particular, consider whether causal determination in the actual sequence crowds out moral responsibility.

In subsequent work, I identified and evaluated a number of different factors that might be invoked to explain why causal determination rules out moral responsibility directly (i.e., in virtue of their presence in the actual sequence, and *not* in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilities). I concluded that none of these factors provides a good reason to suppose that causal determination *in itself and apart from ruling out alternative possibilities* is incompatible with moral responsibility. I believe that when one shifts from consideration of the relationship between causal determination and regulative control to a focus on actual-sequence features of causally deterministic processes, the philosophical terrain becomes significantly more hospitable to compatibilism.

Given that I do not think that causal determinism rules out moral responsibility by threatening regulative control, and I also do not think that there are other good reasons to suppose that causal determinism rules out moral responsibility, I present an account of moral responsibility that is compatible with causal determinism. More precisely, I present an account of “guidance control,” the freedom-relevant condition necessary and sufficient for moral responsibility (in my view).

An insight from the Frankfurt cases helps to shape the account of guidance control: moral responsibility is a matter of the history of an action (or behavior)—of how the actual sequence unfolds—rather than the genuine availability of alternative possibilities.¹² In this view, alternative scenarios or non-actual possible worlds might be relevant to moral responsibility in virtue of helping to specify or analyze modal or dispositional properties of the actual sequence, but not in virtue of indicating or providing an analysis of *access* to alternative possibilities.

Note that, in a Frankfurt-type case, the actual sequence proceeds “in the normal way” or via the “normal” process of practical reasoning. In contrast, in the alternative scenario (which never actually gets triggered and thus never becomes part of the actual sequence of events in our world), there is (say) direct electronic stimulation of the brain—intuitively, a different way or a different kind of mechanism. (By “mechanism” I simply mean, roughly speaking, “process”—I do not

¹²Of course, it might be that the availability of alternative possibilities is in some sense “part of the actual sequence”; I am indebted to both Carl Ginet and Patrick Todd for this point. My contention in the text relies on the intuitive notion that we can separate “actual-sequence” from “alternative-sequence” facts, but this might be too quick. In any case, my view is that moral responsibility attributions should not depend on the actual-sequence facts leaving it open that the agent in question has alternative possibilities. For a very interesting recent discussion of the contention that moral responsibility supervenes on the actual sequence, see: Carolina Sartorio, “Actuality and Responsibility,” *Mind*, (forthcoming).

mean to reify anything.) I assume that we have intuitions at least about clear cases of “same mechanism,” and “different mechanism.” The actually operating mechanism (in a Frankfurt-type case)—ordinary human practical reasoning, unimpaired by direct stimulation by neurosurgeons, and so forth—is in a salient and natural sense “responsive to reasons.” That is, holding fixed that mechanism (the kind of process that actually unfolds), the agent would presumably choose and act differently in a range of scenarios in which he or she is presented with sufficient reasons to do so.

This suggests the rudiments of an account of guidance control of action.¹³ In this account, we hold fixed the kind of mechanism that actually issues in the choice and action, and we see whether the agent responds suitably to reasons (some of which are moral reasons). My account presupposes that the agent can recognize reasons, and, in particular, recognize certain reasons as moral reasons. The account distinguishes between reasons-recognition (the ability to recognize the reasons that exist) and reasons-reactivity (choice in accordance with reasons that are recognized as good and sufficient), and it makes different demands on reasons-recognition and reasons-reactivity. The sort of reasons-responsiveness linked to moral responsibility, in my view, is “moderate reasons-responsiveness.”

But one could exhibit the right sort of reasons-responsiveness as a result (say) of clandestine, unconsented-to electronic stimulation of the brain (or hypnosis, brainwashing, etc.). So moderate reasons-responsiveness of the actual-sequence mechanism is necessary but insufficient for the control linked to moral responsibility. I contend that there are two elements of guidance control: reasons-sensitivity of the appropriate sort and mechanism-ownership. That is, the mechanism that issues in the behavior must (in an appropriate sense) be the *agent's own* mechanism. (When one is secretly manipulated through clandestine mind control as in *The Manchurian Candidate*, one's practical reasoning is not *one's own*.)

I have argued for a “subjective” approach to mechanism-ownership. In this approach, a mechanism becomes one's own in virtue of one having certain beliefs about one's own agency and its effects in the world, that is, in virtue of *seeing oneself in a certain way*. (Of course, it is *not* simply a matter of saying certain things—one actually has to have the relevant constellation of beliefs.) In my view, an individual becomes morally responsible in part at least by taking responsibility; he makes his mechanism his own by taking responsibility for acting from that kind of mechanism. In a sense, then, one acquires control by *taking control*. When I act on *my own* suitably reasons-responsive mechanism, I do it *my way*.¹⁴

¹³ Again, I borrow from the introduction to *My Way*: 17–19.

¹⁴ In the Philippines, there is a lamentably high incidence of what has come to be called “*My Way* killings.” This is the phenomenon described in the following excerpt from an article in *The New York Times*:

After a day of barbering, Rodolfo Gregorio went to his neighborhood karaoke bar still smelling of talcum powder. Putting aside his glass of Red Horse Extra Strong beer, he grasped a microphone with a habitué's self-assuredness and briefly stilled the room with the Platters' “My Prayer.”

I ended my 1982 paper, “Responsibility and Control,” by saying that we must “decode the information in the actual sequence” leading to behavior for which the agent can legitimately be held morally responsible and ascertain whether it is compatible with causal determination. The account of guidance control—with the two chief ingredients, moderate reasons-responsiveness and mechanism ownership—are the “secrets” revealed by close scrutiny of the actual sequence, and I have argued that they are entirely compatible with causal determination. (As I point out below, they are also entirely compatible with causal indeterminism; thus, in my approach, moral responsibility does *not* hang on a thread.)

Further, I have shown how we can build a *comprehensive* account of guidance control from an account of guidance control of *actions*. That is, we can develop an account of guidance control of omissions, consequence-particulars, consequence-universals, and perhaps even emotions and character traits by invoking certain basic ingredients contained in the account of guidance control of actions. I argue that it is a point in favor of my account of moral responsibility that it can give a comprehensive account that builds on simple, basic ingredients. Additionally, I contend that this comprehensive account systematizes our intuitive judgments

Next, he belted out crowd-pleasers by Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck. But Mr. Gregorio, 63, a witness to countless fistfights and occasional stabbings erupting from disputes over karaoke singing, did not dare choose one beloved classic: Frank Sinatra’s version of “My Way.”

“I used to like ‘My Way,’ but after all the trouble, I stopped singing it,” he said. “You can get killed.”

The authorities do not know exactly how many people have been killed warbling “My Way” in karaoke bars over the years in the Philippines, or how many fatal fights it has fueled. But the news media have recorded at least half a dozen victims in the past decade and includes them in a subcategory of crime dubbed the “My Way Killings.”

The killings have produced urban legends about the song and left Filipinos groping for answers. Are the killings the natural by-product of the country’s culture of violence, drinking, and machismo? Or is there something inherently sinister in the song?

Whatever the reason, many karaoke bars have removed the song from their playbooks. And the country’s many Sinatra lovers, like Mr. Gregorio here in this city in the southernmost Philippines, are practicing self-censorship out of perceived self-preservation.

“The trouble with ‘My Way,’” said Mr. Gregorio, “is that everyone knows it and everyone has an opinion.”

Others, noting that other equally popular tunes have not provoked killings, point to the song itself. The lyrics, written by Paul Anka for Mr. Sinatra as an unapologetic summing up of his career, are about a tough guy who “when there was doubt,” simply “ate it up and spit it out.” Butch Albarracin, the owner of Center for Pop, a Manila-based singing school that has propelled the careers of many famous singers, was partial to what he called the “existential explanation.”

“I did it my way’—it’s so arrogant,” Mr. Albarracin said. “The lyrics evoke feelings of pride and arrogance in the singer, as if you’re somebody when you’re really nobody. It covers up your failures. That’s why it leads to fights.” (“Sinatra Song Often Strikes Deadly Chord,” *The New York Times* [New York Edition], February 6, 2010: A6.)

There are additional curmudgeonly animadversions on *My Way* in Sarah Vowell’s amusing essay, “Ixnay on the *My Way*,” in Sarah Vowell, *Take the Cannoli* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000): 159–166. And the author of an entry on the “EGR Weblog,” (http://www.rageboy.com/2003_05_25_bloggerarchive.html), accessed April 17, 2006, compares the lyrics of “My Way” to the definition of “narcissistic personality disorder.” Here is a brief quotation from the (lengthy) diatribe:

about a wide range of examples involving moral responsibility. It thus helps us to achieve a philosophical homeostasis, or, in John Rawls's famous term, a reflective equilibrium.¹⁵

1.3. THE VALUE OF ACTING FREELY

In addition to presenting the motivation for the account of guidance control and the specifics of the account, I have sought to articulate the nature of the *value* we place on exhibiting guidance control (and thus acting so that we can legitimately be held morally responsible). In my essay, "Responsibility and Self-Expression," I claimed that the value of acting so as to be morally responsible is the value of a certain sort of

I did it my way, the guy says. Your sleek self-confident blue-eyed boy, and underneath, an arrogant urbane brutality. Swingin. Cool. As cold as they come. Where's the love in Sinatra's love songs, I'm wondering... I wonder how he treated his women in Vegas. Like a gentleman, no doubt. Like one-a the guys. Like Luciano and Giancana. Smooth operators all. Made in the shade.

Regrets? Not me. F— you, Frank. ("Have It Your Way: DSM IV Meets Sid Vicious," May 27, 2003)

For a thoughtful and rather gentler development of the worry that a "My Way"-inspired approach to moral responsibility might be too atomistic or even narcissistic, see Angela Smith, "Making a Difference, Making a Statement, and Making a Conversation," (part of a book symposium on John Martin Fischer, *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility*) *Philosophical Books* 47 (2006): 213–221; I reply in John Martin Fischer, "A Reply to Pereboom, Zimmerman, and Smith," *Philosophical Books* 47 (2006): 235–244.

It is indisputable that moral responsibility is importantly a "social" notion. But it is perhaps a delicate issue how exactly to capture this point in one's conceptualization of moral responsibility. It should suffice to note that I have adopted as a working hypothesis a "Strawsonian" interpretation of the concept of moral responsibility, i.e., being morally responsible is understood as being an apt target for the reactive attitudes. And, as Gary Watson and others have pointed out, this way of understanding moral responsibility is essentially *communicative*: Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in Ferdinand David Schoeman, ed., *Responsibility, Character and the Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 256–286. Insofar as moral responsibility is modeled on a conversation, and assuming that one will not always simply talk to oneself, moral responsibility is construed as a social phenomenon.

¹⁵ For further reflections on various features of my account of guidance control (and thus the freedom-relevant component of moral responsibility), see John Martin Fischer, "The Free Will Revolution," (part of a book symposium on John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*) *Philosophical Explorations* 8 (2005): 145–156; and "The Free Will Revolution (Continued)," (part of a special issue on the work [pertaining to moral responsibility] of John Martin Fischer) *Journal of Ethics* 10 (2006): 315–345; and "My Way and Life's Highway: Replies to Steward, Smilansky, and Perry," *Journal of Ethics* 12 (2008): 167–189.

There are certain features of my account of guidance control that a disconcerting cohort of (otherwise!) thoughtful philosophers have found rather less than irresistible, especially the subjective element and the contention that "reactivity is all of a piece." In the trio of articles above, I argue (among other things) that (if need be) I could adjust my account so as to do without these contentious features while maintaining all of my major claims: that moral responsibility does not require regulative control, that causal determination is compatible with moral responsibility, that moral responsibility is an essentially historical notion, and so forth. Although I, of course, think that much can be said for the various particularly contentious elements of the account of guidance control, it is perhaps helpful to note that

artistic self-expression.¹⁶ I have gone on to argue that in acting freely, we transform our lives in such a way that the chronicles of our lives become genuine *stories* or *narratives*. That is, I argue that acting freely is the ingredient which, when added to others, makes it the case that our lives admit of distinctively *narrative* explanation and have irreducibly narrative dimensions of evaluation. Thus acting freely—exhibiting the signature freedom-relevant control, guidance control—makes us the authors of our narratives. As such, we are artists, and I contend that the value of acting freely is thus the value of artistic self-expression. When we act freely, we do not necessarily make a difference—but we do make a statement. That is, in acting freely, we are writing a sentence in the books of our lives, or a bit less metaphorically, we are doing something that corresponds to a sentence in the stories of our lives.¹⁷

We are thus artists in fashioning our lives. But it does not follow that we ought to treat aesthetic reasons as hegemonic in our practical reasoning. Nor does it follow from the fact that our free activity is a species of artistic self-expression that the *value* we place on such activity is primarily or exclusively aesthetic. To infer in this way from the essence of the activity to the nature of the value would be to commit what I have called “the aesthetic fallacy.”¹⁸

There is then an important discordance between the essential nature of our free activity (aesthetic) and the typical or primary sort of value we place on it (prudential or ethical, broadly speaking). I suggest that we can better understand the ways in which our lives are meaningful by conceptualizing free activity as at the “intersection” of the aesthetic and practical realms. I contend that we care especially about this particular *route* to moral and prudential evaluation—a route that is aesthetic in nature. And we care especially about aesthetic activities whose products are centrally evaluated along prudential and ethical dimensions.¹⁹

they are not essential to an adequate account of guidance control that achieves the main results at which I aim; thus, it will not be sufficient for many critics to attach what they might perceive to be easier targets (the low-hanging fruit, as it were).

¹⁶ “Responsibility and Self-Expression,” *The Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999): 277–297; reprinted in Fischer, *My Way*: 106–123.

¹⁷ John Martin Fischer, “Free Will, Death, and Immortality: The Role of Narrative,” *Philosophical Papers* (Special Issue: Meaning in Life) 34 (2005): 379–404; reprinted in Fischer, *Our Stories*: 145–164.

¹⁸ John Martin Fischer, “Stories and the Meaning of Life,” *Philosophic Exchange* 39 (2008–09): 2–16; reprinted in Fischer, *Our Stories*: 165–177.

¹⁹ Susan Wolf has argued that meaningfulness in life occurs at the intersection between the subjective and objective realms; that is, for Wolf meaningfulness arises from the intersection between the subjectively attractive and the objectively worthwhile: Susan Wolf, *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.)

Something—such as counting blades of grass—might be compelling to someone, but it is not objectively worthwhile, and thus it cannot give rise to meaningfulness. Similarly, no matter how objectively worthwhile a certain goal is, it cannot give meaningfulness to one’s life if one is indifferent to it.

If one combines Wolf’s point with mine, one gets to the idea that meaningfulness in life arises from a certain intersection of intersections. That is, meaningfulness occurs in contexts in which there is a linkage between subjective engagement and objective worth, as well as a linkage between the aesthetic and the moral/prudential realms. It is plausible that meaningfulness emerges from a certain kind of complexity, and thus it is not too far-fetched to suppose that meaningfulness distinctively emerges from this specific intersection of intersections, what I might dub *the nexus of meaningfulness*.

II. Some Features and Implications of My Overall Approach to Moral Responsibility

As I stated earlier, I believe that our status as morally responsible agents should not “hang on a thread”; specifically, neither the discovery that the laws of nature have associated with them probabilities of 1.0 nor the discovery that they have associated with them probabilities of 0.99 should incline us to give up our views of ourselves as deeply different from other creatures insofar as we can engage in practical reasoning and be morally responsible. Much of my work has focused on the deterministic side of the equation, so to speak. But note that my account of guidance control is entirely compatible with the *falsity* (as well as the truth) of causal determinism. Indeed, Carl Ginet has kindly suggested that an indeterminist should accept the core of my account of the responsibility-conferring kind of control (in my view, guidance control) and simply add a condition specifying that causal determinism must be false.²⁰ My account then is compatible with causal indeterminism.

It is, as I have emphasized, a considerable advantage of my approach that it renders agency and moral responsibility *resilient* to certain (although not all) empirical discoveries. Indeed, I consider it an important desideratum of an adequate account of moral responsibility that it does not *depend* on any contentious doctrine. So, for example, if one’s account of moral responsibility *depended* on (say) the existence of irreducible agent-causation or the falsity of “reductionism” (of a certain sort) in metaphysics or the falsity of materialism about the mind, this would be a strike against the account. Similarly, if one’s theory of moral responsibility depended on a particular view about *reasons*—their ontological status or their “logic” or even their specific content—this would count against the theory.

Although I cannot argue for these claims here, I contend that my accounts of guidance control (and moral responsibility) are compatible with a wide range of plausible views about these contentious empirical and philosophical matters. For example, my account of guidance control certainly does not presuppose that there

But perhaps the deepest, most compelling sort of meaning involves a kind of unity in diversity. Nozick called this sort of meaning, “the value of organic unity”: Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981): 415–422. This kind of meaning requires not just the presence of disparate elements, but their unification in a distinctive way. Perhaps one can think of our narratives—our stories—as precisely this unifying element (or, at least, as *providing* this element). After all, as Velleman and others have emphasized, narrative understanding involves some sort of unification—an “aha” moment that brings everything together in a certain characteristic way. Perhaps we can think of our stories as what unifies the diverse elements in the nexus of meaning. More specifically, perhaps our lives can have a distinctive kind of meaning—corresponding to Nozick’s notion of the value of organic unity—in virtue of the unification provided by our stories—a unification of diverse elements. Put metaphorically, our stories are (or provide) elements that mold and structure the “space” in the nexus of meaningfulness: the place where subjective and objective value intersects, and where we arrive at a product that is typically evaluated morally and prudentially via a distinctively aesthetic path.

²⁰ Carl Ginet, “Working with Fischer and Ravizza’s Account of Moral Responsibility,” *Journal of Ethics* 10 (2006): 229–253.

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