

More sloppy stuff about the importance of ideas about free will and individual MR

Assigning blame for bad stuff:

Theology: we talked about the idea of not blaming God for bad stuff b/c people are MR for the bad stuff since they have free will

But also politics and law and secular culture in general: Don't blame society, or parents, or poverty, or other external factors for bad behavior, b/c ....

Assigning honor for good stuff:

Pop theology (not mainstream, not Biblical): earn heaven, deserve heaven b/c you made good choices

Secular culture: if I'm doing well financially, it's b/c I made good choices, unlike poor people who don't work hard and are less responsible; so I deserve what I have and taxes are theft. Or, my achievements in bettering society are due to my good choices, so I deserve praise and I am proud of what I've accomplished.

Now become more careful.

### **Conceptual analysis**

Conceptual analysis of MR and its roles in our common ways of thinking. Does NOT mean these ways of thinking are correct or coherent. (Some argue that common ways of thinking HAVE to be coherent, since they DEFINE the concepts we use. I disagree.)

The phrase “moral responsibility” is a term of philosophical art. Not to be confused with “morally responsible” or “responsible person” in common use. But it’s intended to capture a common sense notion in contemporary Western and Asian cultures. (Are there subtle variations? Africa?)

Can analyze the notion and related notions even if you think in the end that it is bogus or confused.

NOT YET trying to figure out what FREE WILL is, and whether it’s real, and whether it’s required for MR. NOT YET looking at the philosophical arguments that claim MR does not actually exist, or that we need a new concept of MR.

### **The reading about MR and related concepts**

#### **Define MR (from reading)**

A person is morally responsible for something, when that thing truly reflects on the person’s “moral standing.”

#### **An objection (from Marion Smiley)**

The notion of moral standing when there is no all-knowing God to be the determiner one’s moral standing is incoherent. It is an attempt to create a property that is metaphysically impossible.

Reply: What about one’s talent standing in music? Or skill standing in marksmanship? Etc. (Not what one is *recognized* for, but what standing one truly has, whether anyone knows it or not. Even the individual whose standing is in focus may not have an automatically accurate reading on their own standing.)

#### **Don’t confuse one’s being MR with...**

Being *held* morally responsible (blamed, praised, punished, etc.)

Having responsibilities (as a student, as an accountant, as a human being, etc.)

Being a responsible person (or an irresponsible person)

Being causally responsible for something that has moral significance

Feeling proud, guilty, etc. Feelings about one’s morality.

**{We didn't get to all of this section. Some will be covered in the next class.} Concepts and practices that seem to depend on MR....**

Self-evaluation of moral standing, and accompanying feelings of guilt, pride, shame, honor--when these are feelings not about specific acts or omissions, but rather about one's overall "moral standing"

(Not = MR, but depends on assuming MR is real)

The idea that people DESERVE moral praise or blame, honor or punishment, for their morally significant behaviors and omissions. (Distinguish from praising or blaming the *behavior*.)

It's all about evaluating the person, the agent.

Certain ways of thinking about criminal punishment? Assume criminal law is conceptually grounded on moral ideas. Or maybe other social policies, like taxation??

More about this later. See Pereboom.

Certain ways of thinking about ourselves and others as "better" or "worse". Having aspirations to improve one's moral standing.

Human dignity???

E.g., the conceptual possibility of sinfulness or holiness distinguishes humans from animals on typical religious views. This makes humans "higher" or "not just animals".

Morality as a whole???

The issue: could actions, policies, omissions, be moral or immoral even though no one is MR?

If not, then giving up on MR means giving up on morality altogether.

Careful: NON-moral evaluation of people and actions seems not to depend on MR.

So, in theory, one could still evaluate someone as a talented actor even if one could not reasonably evaluate them as a good or bad person.

REGRET about the text omitting an important point:

The REASONS for giving up on MR could well undermine *all* evaluation of persons, b/c it might undermine *all* forms of personal responsibility, not just *moral* responsibility. For example, if MR requires free will of some strong sort, but no one has that kind of free will, since no one is a demi-god, then maybe *all* forms of personal responsibility become impossible. No one is responsible for being a talented actor, for example.