

Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility

Abstract

Philosophical problems of freedom and responsibility are among the most recalcitrant philosophical problems that we have, and are connected to a range of important issues in our understanding of agency, autonomy, blame, and the grounds of moral assessment. *Freedom, Fairness and Responsibility* argues for a 'Hybrid View' on these issues: that is, a view that combines the insights of more traditional compatibilist and incompatibilist theories into a unified solution to this set of closely connected philosophical problems.

Part One, 'Agency, Autonomy and Desire: Or, Rescuing the Rational Wanton', is based around an examination of the views of Harry Frankfurt. In this part of the dissertation, I argue that the sort of "volitional hierarchy" described in Frankfurt's work can generate neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for personhood or for freedom of the will. I also critically examine Frankfurt's conception of desire, and his account of the conditions for moral responsibility. This Part concludes that the shortcomings of Frankfurt's view should lead us to seek an alternative 'pluralist' account of the conditions for autonomy.

Part Two, 'Freedom without Resentment: Responsibility and the Reactive Attitudes', undertakes a careful investigation of the influential views of P. F. Strawson. Here, I critically investigate Strawson's account of the relationship between the moral attitudes and reactive interpersonal attitudes such as resentment, and give reasons why we should reject the sort of 'naturalistic compatibilism' that Strawson's approach embodies. I conclude that Strawson has failed to show that our practices of using desert-entailing reactive and moral attitudes are outside the scope of rational criticism.

Part Three, 'Freedom, Fairness, Responsibility and Blame: A Hybrid View' presents and defends my own positive view regarding freedom and responsibility. I argue that the standards of fairness that govern 'responsibility-as-blameworthiness' differ significantly from those standards of fairness that govern 'responsibility-as-assessability'. I conclude that we should therefore endorse a view that is broadly incompatibilist about the former kind of responsibility, but compatibilist with regard to the latter variety, and I further support this Hybrid view by appeal to some general considerations of philosophical methodology.