

Introduction to Human Sciences (HS8.102)

Spring 2022, IIIT Hyderabad
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Moral Luck

The Absurdity of Moral Luck

Consider the following thought experiment – two people are driving drunk, at the same time, at the same place and having consumed the same amount of alcohol. Both are driving equally rashly, but driver 1 kills someone and driver 2 does not. Whom do we judge more harshly?

As in this situation, *moral luck* occurs when an agent can correctly be treated as an object of moral judgment despite a significant aspect of what the agent is assessed for depending on factors beyond the agent's control.

There are different kinds of moral luck: resultant (luck based on how the consequences of one's actions turn out), circumstantial (luck in being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time), constitutive (luck in being the kind of person one is, w.r.t. inclinations, capacities and temperament), and causal (luck in prior factors).

Ultimately, almost nothing of what a person does seems to be under their control.

The Epistemic Condition

If Frank pushes a button which activates a treadmill on which Mary is standing (which he didn't know), causing her to fall and break her arm, is he responsible for her injury?

It can be claimed that Frank should not be considered responsible because of his ignorance. But now we need to answer the question – what kind of ignorance is culpable? Is it lack of awareness of the action itself, of the alternatives to the action, of the moral significance of the action, of the consequences of the action?

The Competence Condition

The competence condition asks if the agent was *morally competent* when they performed the action. It is about whether they possess the ability to recognise and respond to moral considerations.

Consider the case of a person brought up by an evil dictator, who turns into an evil dictator as well. Their upbringing was such that they cannot fully appreciate the wrongfulness of their behaviour. Are they responsible?

To be truly morally responsible for what you do, you must be truly responsible for the way you are. This, however, leads to a regress of responsibility: if S is responsible for S , S is responsible for bringing about A ; then S is responsible for having the mental disposition to do so; but then S is responsible for bringing about that mental disposition.