

Let us take note of the facts:

- (1) *A* and *B* cannot justify their beliefs.
- (2) *A* and *B* buy a white powder from a chemist who is known to be untrustworthy.
- (3) *A* and *B* believe the white powder is arsenic.
- (4) *A*'s powder is sugar and *B*'s is arsenic.
- (5) *A* and *B* put their powders in *C*'s tea.
- (6) *C* dies of arsenic poisoning.

We note first that clearly, *B* and the chemist are *causally* responsible for *C*'s death. However, attributing moral responsibility is trickier. Let us consider each individual.

In the case of *A*, the *intention* to kill is clear. This is based on fact (3) above and the assumption that *A* acted with respect to this belief in putting the powder in *C*'s tea. That the powder turned out to be harmless is not relevant; neither, in fact, is the death of *C*. Had *C*'s tea contained only the sugar supplied by *A*, *A* would still be equally guilty.

However, *A* is not *causally* responsible for *C*'s death, and therefore I do not think he can be morally responsible for it either. I think that *A* is morally responsible for *attempted murder*. To my mind, the two are equally culpable, as the only difference is *outside the control of the accused*, and irrelevant to their charging. In this case, the difference is made by the chemist and *A*'s inability to justify his belief.

The difference in *B*'s case, of course, lies in that what *B* was in possession of was, in fact, arsenic. Presumably, this is the arsenic that ended up poisoning *C*, which makes *B* causally responsible, as noted above.

With regard to *intention*, however, *B*'s case is indistinguishable from *A*'s. She has a white powder she believes to be arsenic; she cannot justify this belief; she attempts to poison *C* with it. Thus she is morally responsible for the murder of *C*, although this is no more serious a charge than *A*'s (by my lights).

The third potentially morally responsible party is the chemist. Clearly, he is the source of all the arsenic here.

Note that we are proceeding on the assumption that the chemist is not selling arsenic in large quantities or in a form suitable for use as a poison (or if he is, it is occurring in a wholly legal manner). In this regard, the chemist may be likened to a seller of knives, whose wares might be anyone's murder weapon, but is not to be held responsible (in my opinion).

Thus the chemist has sold white powders, claiming that they were arsenic, to both *A* and *B*. He does not know if they are arsenic, but he assumes that *A* and *B* are using them for legitimate purposes. If it can be shown that our premise above holds, then I think that the chemist is morally absolved of *C*'s death. In fact, if *B* were not to have been there, he may even have been *causally* (not morally) responsible for *C*'s survival, by deceiving *A*.

Therefore, *A* and *B* are morally culpable to equal extents, but not on the same charges – *A* is guilty of *attempting* the murder of *C*, while *B* of actually murdering her. The fact can be made clearer by assuming a slightly different, but morally equivalent, scenario – *C* has two cups of tea; *A* puts his powder in the first cup, after which *C* is unaffected; *B* puts her powder in the second cup, after which *C* dies.

This alternate chain of circumstances shows the chain of causal responsibility from the chemist to *B* to *C*'s death, and how it is distinct from moral responsibility.

As for the implications on the epistemic condition, the second situation described above makes one thing clear – that *C*'s death had nothing to do with the magnitude of moral responsibility *A* and *B* bear. The fact that *C* died depended on the powder being arsenic, but (i) this was not in theirs, but the chemist's control, and (ii) they were incapable of appreciating this fact due to the biochips. Their intentions were, morally speaking, the same and therefore equally monstrous; it only bears on the actual count they would be charged on.

What matters for the assignment of moral responsibility, however, is the *belief* of the agent with respect to the consequences of the action. This is in contrast to their *knowledge*; it has been given to us that, for instance, *A*'s pertinent beliefs do *not* constitute knowledge. Thus, it may be necessary to restate the epistemic condition in terms of the beliefs of the agent, rather than their knowledge (which may even be absent).

Note. We are assuming throughout the above discussion that *A*'s and *B*'s biochips impede their beliefs with regard to the arsenic they purchased. It is also possible, however, that they *do not believe that arsenic is poisonous*; that they put it in *C*'s tea unaware of this fact. Naturally then they are not, by our version of the epistemic condition, morally responsible. It hinges entirely on what their intentions are.

In that case, part of the causal responsibility for *C*'s death goes to whoever is responsible for the biochips in *A*'s and *B*'s brains. Moral responsibility, however, is not so straightforward. I feel that they cannot be attributed moral responsibility *C*'s death specifically (unless of course they intended the implantation to lead to this sequence of events). They are, however, culpable of taking away a person's moral competence. This, I feel, should be *at least* as serious a charge as murder. Relieving a person of their capacity to morally discriminate can be the immediate cause of much worse things than the death of a human being, and so should be treated accordingly (inasmuch as it is meaningful to talk about magnitudes of moral charges).