

# Intro to Human Sciences - Assignment 2 regarding Morality

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To answer this question, I think it's imperative that we tackle it "backwards". There's a conversation regarding moral responsibility but also there's a conversation regarding the reasons and inclination our society has towards assigning moral responsibility. The question of "Why do we assign blame and praise for people's actions?" becomes the backbone of the answer to the dilemma of assigning blame correctly to the murderer of Charu.

So, why do we assign blame and praise to people's actions? Take a look at this statement: <sup>1</sup>

*Judges and courts exist to protect our liberties and our most fundamental and sacred rights as set forth in the Bill of Rights, as well as to protect us from unlawful and unwarranted intrusion into our lives from the government.*

This quote makes it seem like the reasons behind our disposition towards enforcing accountability, in short, is to ensure the functioning of a proper society. There would be no rhyme or reason, no limit and no negative consequence to people's actions if there was no assignment of blame or praise. If someone breaks a law (assuming the law to be an objectively moral one) then wouldn't punishing the perpetrator be the logical next step if one were to be a part of a functioning, well-formed and peaceful society. Similarly, if a person undertakes and completes an action that benefits society and is morally good, then rewarding that person with at least praise would be a wise step towards the aforementioned kind of society. Now, we can clearly establish that the goal of assigning moral responsibility is to promote the functioning of a proper society.

Onto the question of Charu's Murder - As mentioned before, to promote the functioning of a proper society is our goal. And keeping the epistemic conditions for moral responsibility<sup>2</sup> in mind, to that extent we can blame as follows:

- Bipasha wanted to put arsenic in the tea and succeeded in doing so. She knew that Charu would die on ingesting the arsenic. She also had the freedom to not do such a thing and is thus squarely responsible for the death of Charu.
- Anshu put the sugar in the tea believing that it was arsenic and with full intent to kill Charu. The intention to kill Charu is not characteristic of a proper society. She both knew the consequences of putting arsenic in the tea and, like Bipasha, was freely able to simply not go through with it. The case for Anshu being responsible is a little easier to explain away in, say a court of law. After all, she didn't put arsenic in Charu's tea. But the attempt on Charu's life is inexcusable considering the two conditions under which she made the attempt.
- The chemist might be exempt from this particular incident but is not at all a moral character in terms of being a dishonest person. Disregarding the question of whether freely selling arsenic should be allowed, trying to cheat his customers by substituting arsenic for a cheaper far cry from the real thing shouldn't be encouraged.

Consider that the murder of Charu could have been prevented if the chemist had sold both Anshu and Bipasha the sugar. This, regardless of being a possibility, had it happened and if Charu were still alive, the chemist cannot be attributed with preventing the murder of Charu. Recalling that the conditions for someone to be morally responsible for an action<sup>2</sup> are that they are both aware of the consequences and in control of their actions. The chemist was neither in that, he was not in control of where the arsenic, or sugar for that matter, he sells goes and ends up. The chemist is also not in the least aware of the events that transpired with the sugar he sold to Anusha and Bipasha in our hypothetical situation where Charu lives.

Therein lies the apex of the epistemic conditions. There are only reasons to blame someone for an action and only that particular action if a moral agent is both free to do what they wish and if they know the effects and consequences of their actions.

## References

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1. Weisenberg, W. (2018, February 1). Why our judges and courts are important. *ABA Journal*. [www.abajournal.com/news/article/why\\_our\\_judges\\_and\\_courts\\_are\\_important](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/why_our_judges_and_courts_are_important) ↗
  2. Rudy-Hiller, Fernando. (Fall 2018). The Epistemic Condition for Moral Responsibility. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/moral-responsibility-epistemic/> ↗ ↗