

THE BASIC ARGUMENT

THE ARGUMENT

1. Nothing can be the cause of itself
2. In order to be truly morally responsible for one's actions one would have to be the cause of oneself in some crucial respects
3. \therefore No one can be truly morally responsible

WHAT IS 'TRUE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY'?

As I understand it, true moral responsibility is responsibility of such a kind that, if we have it, then it makes sense, at least, to suppose that it could be just to punish some of us with (eternal) torment in hell and reward others with (eternal) bliss in heaven...The story of heaven and hell is useful simply because it illustrates, in a particularly vivid way, the kind of absolute or ultimate accountability or responsibility that many have supposed themselves to have, and that many do still suppose themselves to have. (Strawson, 9-10)

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BASIC ARGUMENT

- Why does being morally responsible require being self-caused?
- What 'crucial respects' must be caused?
 - character
 - evaluative dispositions & preferences
- Why can't we be self-caused in these respects?

STRAWSON'S REVISED ARGUMENT

1. You do what you do because of the way you are.
2. To be morally responsible for what you do you must be truly morally responsible for the way you are – at least in certain crucial mental respects.
3. To be truly responsible for the way you are, you must have intentionally brought it about that you are the way you are
4. It is impossible to have intentionally brought about how one is
5. \therefore You cannot be truly morally responsible for what you do, because you cannot be truly responsible for the way you are

- Is the argument valid? Sound?

STRAWSON'S ARGUMENT (VALIDITY)

1. $D \rightarrow A$
2. $MD \rightarrow MA$
3. $MA \rightarrow IA$
4. $\neg IA$
5. $\therefore \neg MA$ (3, 4, *Modus Tollens*)
6. $\therefore \neg MD$ (2, 5, *Modus Tollens*)

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRAWSON'S ARGUMENT (SOUNDNESS)

Premise 2:

Why think that if one cannot be morally responsible for the way one is, one cannot be morally responsible for what one does?

Premise 4:

Why is it impossible to have intentionally brought about how one is?

DEFENDING PREMISE 2

Why think that if one cannot be morally responsible for the way one is, one cannot be morally responsible for what one does?

- We aren't responsible for those aspects of ourselves over which we have no control
 - hair color
 - skin color
 - social-economic class

- Our control over what decisions we make depends in part on our character and evaluative dispositions
- If we have no control over our character and evaluative dispositions then we have no ultimate control over the decisions we make which depend on them

DEFENDING PREMISE 4

Why is it impossible to have intentionally brought about how one is?

- Intentionally bringing about how one is entails an absurdity

1. Suppose that you have intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are, and in a manner that makes you truly responsible for being the way you now are
2. Your intentional act, for which you are responsible, is due to some nature N
3. If you are truly responsible for this act you must be truly responsible for having the nature N in virtue of which you intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are
4. \therefore You must have intentionally brought about N, which requires that you have some further nature N1, in virtue of which you brought about your nature N... (absurd infinite regress ensues)
5. \therefore (1) is false: It is impossible for you to have intentionally brought it about that you are as you are now

