

### Two Conceptions of Moral Responsibility (Handout)

- (S) Subject S is responsible for action A, if and only if, and because, it is (or would be) appropriate to adopt some reactive attitude toward S in respect of A.
- (L) Subject S is responsible for action A, if and only if, and because, A is a part of S's moral record.
- (1) Subject S is responsible for action A, if and only if, it is (or would be) appropriate to adopt some reactive attitude toward S in respect of A.

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- (1') An action is right, if and only if, it is what a virtuous person would characteristically do in the circumstances (i.e. acting in character).
- (V) An action is right, if and only if, and because, it is what a virtuous person would characteristically do in the circumstances (i.e. acting in character).
- (U) An action is right, if and only if, and because, it maximizes well-being.

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- (S') It is (or would be) appropriate to adopt some reactive attitude toward S in respect of A, if and only if, S has no excuse in respect of A and S him- or herself cannot be exempted (as abnormal or undeveloped).
- (S'+) It is (or would be) appropriate to adopt some reactive attitude toward S in respect of A, only if, S is capable of having and understanding reactive attitudes (moral sentiments), i.e. S is capable of seeing her- or himself and others as targets of the reactive attitudes.
- (S\*) Subject S is responsible for action A, if and only if, and because, a normal member of S's community would hold S responsible for A, barring excuses in respect of A and exemptions in respect of S.

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- (L\*) Subject S is responsible for action A, if and only if, and because, it is (or would be) correct to judge inwardly S having a debit (or credit) on S's moral record in respect of A.
- (L') It is (or would be) correct to judge S having a debit (or credit) on S's moral record in respect of A, if and only if, S knows that A is wrong (or right) and S has control in A-ing.

**Q1:** First, we care deeply (and “for its own sake”) about how people regard one another. Second, this concern manifests itself in a demand or expectation to be treated with regard and good will. Following Strawson, let’s call these the *basic concern* and the *basic demand* respectively. (Watson 2014, 17)

**Q2:** Moral [responsibility qua] appraisability has to do with that type of *inward* moral praising and blaming that constitutes making a private judgment about a person. ... Praising someone may be said to constitute judging that there is a “credit” in his “ledger of life,” ... Blaming someone may be said to constitute judging that there is a “discredit” or “debit” in his “ledger,” ... Someone is praiseworthy if he is deserving of such praise; that is, if it is correct, or true to the facts, to judge that there is a “credit” in his “ledger” [...]. Someone is blameworthy if he is deserving of such blame; that is, if it is correct, or true to the facts, to judge that there is a “debit” in his “ledger”. It is important to note that, in the context of *inward* moral praise and blame, *worthiness* of such praise or blame is a strictly nonmoral type of worthiness; it is a matter of the truth or accuracy of judgments. (Zimmerman 1988, 38)

**Q3:** There are no ledgers, ..., or records of the sort mentioned—unless some vault in the heavens, guarded by God, contains them, and this is certainly *not* something that I am presupposing here. But even if there are no such records, it remains a fact that certain events occur and that a person’s moral worth is a function of these events. A person can be praiseworthy or blameworthy without anyone’s being aware of this, without anyone’s taking note of it, without anyone’s actually praising or blaming him. Indeed, the metaphor of the ledger can be misleading unless it is handled very carefully. Normally, when an ordinary person keeps a ledger, *he* makes the entries and he has a *purpose* in doing so; the entries are not somehow automatically recorded in the ledger, he being simply its custodian. But, if there were a ledger of life, its entries would not be made by anyone, nor would there be a purpose to the entries. (In saying this, I am again ignoring theological issues.) Rather, the entries would be automatically recorded; they would appear simply by virtue of certain events occurring (events of which the person’s moral worth is a function). In this connection, we must particularly guard against thinking that inward praising and blaming are analogous to the *making* of entries in the ledger; on the contrary, they are analogous to *judging there to be* such entries. (Zimmerman 1988, 39)

**Q4:** To the first group belong all those which might give occasion for the employment of such expressions as “He didn’t mean to”, “He hadn’t realized”, “He didn’t know”, and also all those which might give occasion for the use of the phrase “*He couldn’t help it*”, when this is supported by such phrases as “*He was pushed*”, “*He had to do it*”, “*It was the only way*”, “*They left him no alternative*” etc. (Strawson 1962, 64; my italics)

**Q5:** ..., in my view, for an agent to be *morally responsible for an action* is for this action to belong to the agent in such a way that she would deserve blame if the action were morally wrong, and she would deserve credit or perhaps praise if it were morally exemplary. ... I oppose the idea that to judge a person morally responsible essentially involves having an attitude toward her. Rather, I think that to make a judgment of this sort is most fundamentally to make a factual claim. ... It is of course consistent with the view that judgments about moral responsibility are factual that such judgments are typically accompanied by attitudes. (Pereboom 2001, xx)

### S’s ledger

actions	marks (“credits”/“debits”)
A	– 3 [a lie]
B	+ 9 [a lifesaving]
C	– 10 [a murder]
D	+ 5 [a self-sacrifice]
E	– 7 [a treason]
F	+ 1 [a donation]
⋮	⋮