PREFACE

The topic of this book is responsibility. Its point of departure is the debate on responsibility of recent decades, particularly on the key issues of "free will," "determinism," and their (in)compatibility with one another. It distinguishes itself from other contributions in this field in focusing on an important function served by our everyday ascriptions of responsibility: the communication (and determination) of our normative expectations of one another (the expectations regarding the appropriate way to behave in certain circumstances).

If we blame one another, resent, or are morally indignant about one another's behavior, this communicates not only that we believe the agents to be responsible human beings, but also that we believe the normative expectations transgressed to be legitimate and important. In reaction to these moral sentiments, the agents who are confronted with our resentment, blame, or moral indignation might explain their action to us in terms of excusing or exempting conditions, and/or communicate their agreement or disagreement with the normative expectations transgressed.

I investigate what this function implies for the assumption of free will often thought to be necessary for our ascriptions of responsibility to one another to be warranted.

I argue that the condition of responsibility that most adequately accounts for our practices is the condition of reflective self-control. This ability of reflective self-control consists in our ability to track the norms and values relevant in a certain situation and to act in accordance with them. Contrary to those who currently defend a condition of reflective self-control, I argue that this condition cannot completely avoid the problematic issue of free will. Accepting the condition does not necessarily amount to a so-called compatibilist position. Nevertheless, as I also argue, once we realize that the most important function of our ascriptions of responsibility is to communicate (and determine) our normative expectations of one another, the condition of reflective self-control enables us to establish that our practices of responsibility, as a whole, are warranted.

Crucial to my argument is the claim that transgressions of normative expectations (commonly discussed under the label of "wrong actions") can actually be understood in two quite distinct ways:

> (1) as disclosing a failure of the agent to track and/or to act corresponding to the relevant norms, and
> (2) as disclosing what could be called "a normative disagreement of the agent with the normative expectations transgressed by the action."

In the second case, the people who act contrary to our expectations do not believe that they act wrongly. I argue that whereas the issue of free will proves

problematic on a practical level only on the basis of the first understanding of wrong actions, the second understanding should be (and often is) definitive of our practices of responsibility. It is not the question of free will that worries us—or should worry us—on a regular basis, it is the fact that the people who act in ways we disapprove of might do so because they disagree with us.

I conclude that the thesis of determinism commonly used by philosophers to argue that the assumption of free will might not be warranted, does not threaten to undermine our practices of responsibility as a whole (even though it might be true that we are never fully responsible for our occasional failures to track and/or to act in accordance with the relevant norms unless we possess the ability to act otherwise). The reason for this is that the assumption that we possess reflective self-control even though we transgress certain normative expectations, prevalently is not a counterfactual one: Actions that disclose a normative disagreement with the normative expectations transgressed are a token of our ability of reflective self-control.

In articulating these claims I am indebted to many contemporary contributions to the debate on responsibility, especially to the works of the two main contemporary defenders of the condition of reflective self-control I discuss: Susan Wolf's *Freedom within Reason* (1990) and R. Jay Wallace's *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (1994). Although this book is set up as a criticism of these two works, my choice to discuss them first and foremost expresses my great affinity with their aim to understand and do justice to the so-called (in)compatibility issue without allowing its premises to undermine our daily practices of moral responsibility.

The decision to discuss their works is also a decision not to deal with other approaches. It is a decision, for instance, not to deal with so-called incompatibilist theories of responsibility that explore the possibility of developing a libertarian account of responsibility, such as that of Robert Kane (Kane, 1996), or with most contemporary compatibilist theories that follow in the hierarchical footsteps of Harry G. Frankfurt (Frankfurt, 1969, 1971, 1976), such as the view of John Martin Fischer (Fischer, 1994). It is also a choice against theories such as that of Christine Korsgaard, which solve the conflict between determinism and responsibility by drawing a very sharp distinction between the theoretical domain—for which determinism is relevant—and the practical domain, for which both responsibility and freedom are relevant (Korsgaard, 1996, chs. 6 and 7). It is also a decision not to deal with those theories that view the (in)compatibilist debate as the expression of a merely psychological conflict, as for instance Gary Watson (Watson, 1987b) understands it, or which deny that free will is a coherent notion, as for instance Richard Double does (Double, 1988, p. 191). These theories, although interesting in their own right, do not get an equal airing in this book.

This is not the only restriction I have imposed on myself. Those who are familiar with such philosophers as Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Benedictus de

Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer—to name but a few—will recognize many of the issues and arguments discussed throughout this book, and will wonder, perhaps even be annoyed, why I do not discuss even one of them. This is not out of disrespect for these philosophers; on the contrary, it is due to the realization that I am not qualified to do full justice to these thinkers or the use made of their work by those whom I do discuss. Instead of making some random and imprecise remarks and comments, I have chosen to restrict myself exclusively to the contemporary discussion in English-language philosophy. I can only hope that the arguments I provide are convincing enough to stand on their own.

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