



MONASH University

The School of Philosophy & Bioethics
presents

Conference on Free Will and Moral Responsibility

November 3 & 4, 2005

Room E365
Level 3, Menzies Building
(Building 11)
Monash University
Clayton campus

PROGRAM

Thursday, November 3

9.30 – 11.00: **Daniel Russell, “Responsibility for Traits: Views from Rawls and Aristotle”**

11.00 – 11.15: Morning Tea

11.15 – 12.45: **John Bishop, “Exercising Moral Responsibility in Relation to Beliefs”**

12.45 – 2.00: Lunch

2.00 – 3.30: **Neil Levy, “Are Zombies Responsible? The Role of Consciousness in Moral Responsibility”**

3.30 – 3.45: Afternoon Tea

3.45 – 5.15: **Daniel Cohen, “The Irrationality of Responsibility”**

Friday, November 4

9.30 – 11.00: **Trevor Pisciotta, “Meaningfulness, Hard Determinism and Objectivity”**

11.00 – 11.15: Morning Tea

11.15 – 12.45: **J.J.C. Smart, “The Illusion of Libertarian Free Will”**

12.45 – 2.00: Lunch

2.00 – 4.00: **Derk Pereboom, “A Case Against Free Will”**

4.00 – 4.15: Afternoon Tea

4.15 – 5.30: **Nick Trakakis, “Does Determinism Render the Problem of Evil Insoluble?”**

Dinner: 7pm, Samsara Restaurant, Pinewood

Registration Fees

\$20 – waged (employed full-time)
\$10 – students, concession card holders
(or half the amount if attending for one day only)

Registration fees will be collected outside Room E365, from 9am to 9.30am, on each day of the Conference.

Food

- * Morning tea and afternoon tea will be provided.
- * Lunch can be purchased through the various food outlets in the Campus Centre building (Building 10).
- * *Dinner*: Samsara Restaurant, Pinewood Shopping Centre, Mt Waverley. Ph: (03) 9887 6666. Banquet, \$38 p/person (excluding drinks).
7pm, Friday November 4.
If you wish to come along, please RSVP to Nick Trakakis by noon on Friday November 4.
(Please also indicate if you would like a vegetarian meal.)

Parking

Free parking is available in any of the blue parking zones.

ABSTRACTS

Daniel Russell (Monash University)

Responsibility for Traits: Views from Rawls and Aristotle

When Aristotle looks at indolent people, he sees people who are responsible for having become who they are. By contrast, when John Rawls looks at “dolent” people, he sees people who are merely lucky to have been socialized well. And since “dolence” is necessary for developing all positive traits – talents, skills, character traits – Rawls concludes that none of us is sufficiently responsible for the traits that he or she has. Aristotle seems to find something in how adults develop through their choices that he thinks stops conversation about responsibility for traits, while for Rawls conversation stops with a look at how traits begin with childhood socialization beyond one’s control. Why does Aristotle’s seemingly short-sighted argument look back only as far as earlier stages of adulthood? In this paper I argue that Aristotle’s focus on adulthood is in fact more germane than Rawls’ focus on childhood. I develop an Aristotelian account of mature practical reasoning that reveals why it is with the adult capacity for practical reflection on reasons for acting that responsibility for one’s traits becomes a forceful and applicable notion.

John Bishop (University of Auckland)

Exercising Moral Responsibility in Relation to Beliefs

Are people sometimes morally responsible for their beliefs? I identify a position that denies that there can be such a thing as an ‘ethics of belief’ by maintaining that the formation and revision of beliefs is open only to indirect forms of voluntary control, and that such exercises of control are subject only to epistemic responsibilities, with moral responsibilities properly attaching only to actions. A person might thus be epistemically irresponsible in forming a given belief; and he might, furthermore, be morally responsible for acting on that belief – but no moral responsibility *specifically in relation to his belief* could arise. I shall argue that this position is mistaken: there *is* such a thing as ‘the ethics of belief’. True, there can be moral responsibility only *for actions*. But those who deny that there is a meaningful ethics of belief have neglected an important category of *mental actions* in which, amongst other things, we exercise direct control *over how we employ what we believe in our practical reasoning*. I maintain that we may indeed be properly held morally (as well as epistemically) responsible for at least some mental actions of this kind. Doxastic control, I shall suggest, is thus of *two* kinds: first, we have indirect control over what beliefs we hold, and, second, we have direct control over whether (and with what weight) we take our beliefs to be true when we reason towards action. When acting on a given belief is morally significant, our exercise of control at this second locus is *itself* a matter of moral as well as epistemic responsibility – and it is an important question how those two kinds of responsibility are related. Furthermore, in the light of recognising that we may have moral responsibility for the exercise of doxastic control at the second locus, we may appreciate how moral as well as epistemic responsibility can attach to exercises of control at the first locus also.

Neil Levy (University of Melbourne)

Are Zombies Responsible? The Role of Consciousness in Moral Responsibility

Compatibilists often think they can afford to be complacent with regard to scientific findings. But there are apparent threats to free will besides determinism. Robert Kane has recently claimed that if consciousness does not initiate action, all accounts of free will go down, compatibilist and incompatibilist. Some cognitive scientists argue that in fact consciousness does not initiate action.

In this paper I argue that they are right (though not for the reasons they advance): as a matter of fact consciousness does not initiate action. But, I contend, Kane is wrong in thinking that it follows that we have no free will. I sketch how we might have free will in spite of the finding that consciousness does not initiate action, and remark on the implications for several well-known accounts of responsibility, include Clarke's agent-causal theory and Fischer and Ravizza's reasons-responsiveness account.

Daniel Cohen (Monash University)

The Irrationality of Responsibility

Judgments of responsibility are always irrational. When we expect accountable agents to do the right thing we believe them to be *constituted* to act rightly. So, to believe that an accountable agent does wrong is to believe the impossible. *Resentment* may thus be understood as a kind of cognitive dissonance at the metaphysical absurdity of responsible wrongdoing. Alternative, more flexible, accounts of our expectations fail to explain the phenomenology of responsibility attribution; moreover, they fail to explain why responsibility judgments are *condemnations* of wrongdoers' characters.

Trevor Pisciotta (University of Melbourne)

Meaningfulness, Hard Determinism and Objectivity

One group of philosophers who have looked beyond the compatibility of free will and moral responsibility with determinism is those philosophers who can broadly be classified as hard determinists. These philosophers generally claim that we lack free will, and therefore lack genuine moral responsibility, but that other important features of our lives remain largely intact. I am concerned with the issue of the compatibility, or otherwise, of determinism with meaningfulness in lives. In this paper I draw from the work of both Ted Honderich and Derk Pereboom to examine what a hard determinist might say about determinism and meaningfulness in lives. I contend that the hard determinist perspective focuses excessively on the subjective elements of meaningfulness and thus fails to capture all that is important to us. Moreover, I argue that the kind of objectivity that is relevant to considerations of meaningfulness in lives gives us reason to doubt the compatibility of determinism with meaningfulness.

J.J.C. Smart (Monash University)

The Illusion of Libertarian Free Will

I argue that libertarian free will and pure chance are contradictories and so there is no room for a third thing, libertarian free will. I argue that no clear account can be possible of this third thing. The libertarian will say that libertarian free will and pure chance are only contraries, but I would hunt him through a succession of obscurities and implausibilities. I believe in the reality of the future and would even defend a modest and harmless form of fatalism. I argue that libertarian free will is a metaphysical illusion, though perhaps a practically useful one.

Derk Pereboom (University of Vermont)

A Case Against Free Will

In *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge 2001) I develop and argue for a view according to which our being morally responsible would be ruled out if determinism were true, and also if indeterminism were true and the causes of our actions were exclusively events. Agent-causal libertarianism has not been ruled out as a coherent possibility, but it is not credible given our best physical theories. As a result, we need to take seriously the prospect that we are not free in the sense required for moral responsibility. I call the resulting view 'hard incompatibilism'. In this paper I set out two of the central arguments that support my version of hard incompatibilism – the argument against compatibilism, and the case against agent causation – and I address objections that have been raised against them.

Nick Trakakis (Monash University)

Does Determinism Render the Problem of Evil Insoluble?

Determinism, in theological dress, is the view that everything that happens in our world is necessitated to happen and that God is the sufficient active cause of everything that happens. It is surprising that, in the ever-growing literature on the problem of evil, very little attention has been paid to theodicies that adopt a determinist outlook. It is commonly thought that without the assumption that humans possess libertarian free will, or at least compatibilist free will, the theodical project is a non-starter. I challenge this long-held assumption by, firstly, developing a cumulative-style theodicy from within a framework that is consistent with both hard and soft determinism. I then show how an important challenge mounted by J.L. Mackie to determinist responses to the problem of evil can be met by invoking the traditional *O felix culpa!* doctrine. In the end, I argue, the theistic determinist has the resources to cast much light on the ways of God in relation to evil.

INTRODUCING THE SPEAKERS

John Bishop

John is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland. He has published extensively in the areas of the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of action, and has defended a 'causal theory of action' in his 1989 monograph, *Natural Agency*.

Daniel Cohen

Daniel is currently completing a dissertation on moral responsibility at the Australian National University. He has interests in various issues in moral psychology and has published in *Philosophical Studies*.

Neil Levy

Neil is a Senior Research Fellow in CAPPE (Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics) at the University of Melbourne. He has been working on the implications of recent work in cognitive science for accounts of moral responsibility, and in his recent book, *What Makes Us Moral? Crossing the Boundaries of Biology* (2004), he tackles the question of whether our motivation to be moral is entirely determined by our genes.

Derk Pereboom

Derk hails from the University of Vermont, where he is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Philosophy Department. In *Living Without Free Will* (2001), he argues against the existence of free will of the sort required for praise and blame. Derk has also published a series of articles on Kant's theory of mental representation, as well as a number of papers in philosophy of mind.

Trevor Pisciotta

Trevor completed his BA(Hons) at Monash in 2003, writing his Honours thesis on the role of virtue in Epicurean moral theory. Since then he has been undertaking a PhD at the University of Melbourne, under the supervision of Dr Karen Jones. He has a generally incompatibilist perspective regarding the problem of determinism, and his research focuses on the compatibility, or otherwise, of determinism with certain features of our lives in their entirety, and in particular meaningfulness in lives. Trevor's research interests also include moral philosophy, moral psychology, and the philosophy of action and agency.

Daniel Russell

Dan was awarded his PhD in philosophy from the University of Arizona, and he joined the faculty at Monash this year after holding a tenure-track position at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas. He specialises in ancient philosophy, particularly as it bears on ethical theory and moral psychology. In *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life* (published this year by OUP), Dan examines Plato's insightful analysis of pleasure and explores its intimate connections with Plato's discussions of value and human psychology.

J.J.C. (Jack) Smart

Jack, currently Honorary Research Fellow at Monash, is widely regarded as one of the leading philosophers of our time. He is best known for his scientific realism, his mind-brain identity theory, and his defence of utilitarianism in ethics. Among his many and influential publications are *Utilitarianism For and Against* (with Bernard Williams, 1973), *Essays Metaphysical and Moral* (1987), and *Our Place in the Universe* (1989).

Nick Trakakis

Nick recently completed his doctorate on the 'problem of evil' in the philosophy of religion, and he has published a number of papers on this vexing topic. He is in the process of editing a five-volume *History of Western Philosophy of Religion* (with Graham Oppy), as well as a collection of William Rowe's seminal papers in the philosophy of religion.