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Introduction

WHEN P. F. STRAWSON'S "Freedom and Resentment" first appeared, nearly sixty years ago, it forced a profound shift in the debate about free will and moral responsibility.¹ For decades since, it has inspired views on wide-ranging topics.² Most of the ongoing attention has focused on Strawson's fascinating and fecund notion of "reactive attitudes." In contrast, the central argument of the paper has received relatively little attention.³

The central argument claims that, because determinism is an entirely *general* thesis, true of everyone at all times, its truth would not show that we are not, in fact, morally responsible. It is a startling claim. The neglect given to the argument for it would be surprising, if that argument were not so difficult to discern.

1. Peter F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1–25. Page numbers refer to the reprint of the essay in this volume.

2. Recent titles on further-ranging topics include Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and Akeel Bilgrami, *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Recent Strawson-inspired work on free will and moral responsibility is legion.

3. Some attention has been given to the argument in the (considerable) time this book has been in preparation. See, e.g., the papers collected in David Shoemaker and Neal Tognazzini, eds., *Freedom and Resentment at 50*, Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

When the argument is considered, it is often interpreted as relying on a thought about our psychological capacities: we are simply not capable of abandoning the reactive attitudes, across the board, in something like the way we are simply not capable of remembering everything we are told. We do not have the right equipment. Given our psychological limitations, we are stuck treating one another *as if* we are morally responsible—we are incapable of doing otherwise. Therefore, according to this interpretation, we should rest content in the thought that we *are* morally responsible—asking whether we ought to treat one another differently is useless. I will call this “the simple Humean interpretation” and the thought on which it relies “the simple Humean thought.”

A different line interprets Strawson as relying on something like a conceptual point: you can neither support nor call into question the whole of a practice using notions that are, themselves, constituted by that practice. Thus, you cannot ask whether our moral practices, taken as a whole, are, themselves, morally just, right, appropriate, or fair. Doing so would be like asking whether the game of baseball is, itself, “fair” or “foul” in the sense of those words established by the game—“fair” or “foul,” in *that* sense, can be rightly asked of batted balls or of territory in the baseball field, but the question cannot be sensibly asked of the game itself, taken as a whole. On this second interpretation, Strawson accuses his opponent of a sophisticated kind of confusion. I will call this “the broadly Wittgensteinian interpretation” and the thought on which it relies “the broadly Wittgensteinian thought.”

Both the simple Humean thought and the broadly Wittgensteinian thought can be found in Strawson’s paper, and he makes use of each. But neither interpretation would lead you to expect what you will find, looking at the central text: Strawson twice accuses his opponent of being caught in some kind of contradiction. So neither interpretation, on its own, is correct.

By providing a close reading of the central text, I will do my best to articulate Strawson’s more interesting, and more powerful, argument. The argument depends on an underlying picture of the nature of moral demands and moral relationships—a picture that has gone largely unnoticed, that is naturalistic without being reductionistic,

and that is worthy of careful consideration. Having drawn out this underlying metaethical picture, I will begin to subject it to some philosophical scrutiny. I hope to show that it can withstand the objections that are both the most obvious and the most serious, leaving it a worthy contender.

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