

# A Relational Theory of Moral Responsibility

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper introduces a new theory of moral responsibility that does not rely on any concept of human control. Since an understanding of determinism shapes the possible set of views one can take regarding control, and there is no account of control that could be held simultaneously by both compatibilists and libertarians, the “relational theory of responsibility” is meant to create a common ground between compatibilism and libertarianism which are held to be mutually exclusive. Since the relational account of responsibility is to be a common ground, it must be neutral regarding the truth of determinism and indeterminism. Thus, it must also be indifferent concerning different concepts of control formed by compatibilists and libertarians. I argue that my view can be accepted by both compatibilists and incompatibilists. It makes the claim that, in order for a person to be responsible, she has to act in a certain type of situation that needs to be such that there is at least one relevantly similar situation in which the agent (be she the same person or not) refrains from performing the action that was executed in the original case. A person cannot be held responsible for doing what she does if no person (including herself) refrains from performing that action in a relevantly similar situation. I claim that the relational theory of responsibility itself is sufficient for grounding responsibility. Since the relational account expresses responsibility without relying on any concept of control, a choice between determinism and indeterminism does not have to be made in order to establish a proper concept of moral responsibility.

**KEYWORDS:** Compatibilism, control, determinism, free will, moral responsibility.

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## Introduction

Philosophers concerned with moral responsibility believe that an agent is responsible for her act if and only if she has control over her action.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> See Fischer and Ravizza (1993, 1998); Haji (1998); Mele (1995); McKenna (2008); Ginet (2002, 2007); McCann (1998); O'Connor (2000, 2002); Ekstrom (2003); Pereboom (2001; 2004; 2014).

philosophers of moral responsibility aim to describe whether a certain kind of control is sufficient for moral responsibility and whether it is compatible with a certain metaphysical structure of the world. One's understanding of control determines the view she can take on determinism and indeterminism and *vice versa*. Fischer (2012: 122), for example, says that concepts of control mark the difference between compatibilists and libertarians. Hence, these views on agency are committed to theories of certain casual structures of the world, having led these philosophers to disagree on what kind of control is required for moral responsibility.

The account of moral responsibility that I shall argue for is a theory expressing conditions for being morally responsible that can be a common ground between compatibilists and libertarians. It is an intersection of compatibilism and libertarianism. I argue that there is a sense of responsibility that can be shared by compatibilists and libertarians. Both camps can connect their own view to the theory on relational responsibility. Compatibilist and libertarian theories shed light of agency by defining a concept of control (in accordance with a certain casual structure of the world) but responsibility can be expressed by the theory of relational responsibility without committing to the causal structure of the world. What my theory offers is a concept of moral responsibility, having an additional advantage that it is compatible with both compatibilism and libertarian views. The main aim of the theory is to provide a concept of responsibility.

Being a common ground between compatibilism and libertarianism, relational responsibility must not be committed to either determinism or indeterminism and therefore, it must not define a concept of control for responsibility.<sup>2</sup> If so, moral responsibility does not depend on the truth or falsity of determinism and control must not play a role in establishing moral responsibility. What depends on the problem of determinism and indeterminism is the concept of agency grasped by compatibilist or libertarian theories. Although I argue that relational responsibility is compatible with both compatibilism and libertarianism in general, but how particular theories of agency and responsibility are related to my view in details has not been seen yet.

The theory of relational responsibility was inspired by the debate over the manipulation argument which is relevant to the compatibilist-incom-

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<sup>2</sup> Hard-determinists deny the existence of free will, hence responsibility, because there can be no concept of control establishing responsibility in a deterministic world and they hold that determinism is true. Hence, hard-determinists deny responsibility *on the ground* that a specific concept of control is incompatible with determinism. However, if no specific control is necessary for moral responsibility then my notion of responsibility can be accepted by hard determinism. Relational responsibility establishes responsibility without referring to any specific concept of control. Therefore, the challenge of hard-determinism has nothing to do with my theory.

patibilist debate as being manipulated is a paradigmatic case of acting under determined conditions. The manipulation argument (Mele 2006: 189; Pereboom 2001: 113) emphasises that the deliberative mechanisms created by various deterministic processes are no different from those seen in cases of manipulation. The argument then appeals to the intuition that just as manipulated agents cannot be held responsible for their actions, nor can agents in deterministic worlds. Some compatibilists that adopt an externalist position challenge this argument by arguing that all cases of manipulation are genuinely different from normal, causally deterministic courses of events, and that morally responsible agency is an essentially historical notion – i.e. determinism requires a causal history of agents that explains why an agent acts in the way she does. McKenna summarises externalist compatibilism as follows:

Two agents who are nonhistorical duplicates at a time might very well differ with respect to their status as free and morally responsible depending upon differences in their respective histories – that is, depending upon differences in their “historical properties”. Hence, for the historical compatibilists, the concept of moral responsibility is historical in the same way that the property of being a sunburn or a genuine dollar bill is historical. (McKenna 2012: 154)

Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (1998: 208, 210–1, 238), for example, argue that a deliberative mechanism leading the agent to act in a certain way grounds his responsibility only if the mechanism has the *right history or causal origins*. The right causal history differentiates cases of manipulated actions for which agents cannot be responsible with actions in a deterministic world for which agents are responsible (Fischer 2006: 230). Historical externalist theories attach importance to external or causal features of an agent’s deliberative mechanism for responsibility. The circumstances within which an agent developed her deliberative mechanism, and through which she came to perform her acts, can have an impact on the status of her responsibility for those acts. Externalism is a broader position than historical compatibilism, and it does not imply history-sensitive compatibilism. Although history is external to the agent, I will argue that it is not the only possible external factor that can be relevant to responsibility ascriptions. I will suggest a different one, a contrastive factor that is compatible with not only deterministic but indeterministic accounts of reality. The theory of relational responsibility I propose is thus an externalist (but not necessarily compatibilist) account of moral responsibility because it investigates features external to the agent in order to establish moral responsibility. It suggests that an agent’s moral responsibility can be understood only through an interpersonal context – that is, in relation to others’ behaviours in relevantly similar circumstances. *Its central idea is that in order for an agent to be responsible for her actions, she has*

*to be in a situation such that there is at least one relevantly similar situation in which someone refrains from performing the same type of action.* (This someone, as already noted, could be the same person on another occasion.) That is, one cannot be held responsible for doing what one does if there is no person (including oneself) who refrains from performing that action in a relevantly similar situation. Relational responsibility does not intend to revolutionise the discourse on moral responsibility. I only argue that the relational view of responsibility provides a unified, conceptual framework that can be accepted by compatibilists and incompatibilists. Since it is a common ground for contrary views on responsibility, relational responsibility provides the same relational schema for attributing responsibility irrespective of the causal structure of the world. Since different views on control are committed to the causal structure of the world, relational responsibility is a view that has nothing to do with control. Traditional compatibilist and libertarian views reveal crucial features of the concept of agency, they suppose a complex causal structure (Ginet 2002; O'Connor 2000), philosophical miracles (Lewis 1981; Beebe 2003) and describe significantly different structures of human agency. For human freedom to exist, libertarians demand that the world must be indeterministic, but some compatibilists argue that indeterminism is not compatible with freedom. They argue that if agents just probabilistically determine their actions then they cannot be the authors of their actions in any meaningful sense (Nelkin 2001). Due to the structure of their theories, both compatibilists and incompatibilists must take sides in the debate over the metaphysical structure of the world. Grounding responsibility in relational conditions ensures its independence from considerations regarding the causal structure of the world (determinism or indeterminism). In my view, responsibility is a relation that holds between agents' actions irrespective of whether they are determined or not.

In what follows, I shall begin with describing the general idea of a relational theory of responsibility which, I will argue, accurately captures a widely accepted sense of responsibility by showing that my theory fits to common practices of ascribing responsibility. In the following section, I will show that relational responsibility can be accepted by both compatibilists and incompatibilists.

## **1. The General Idea of Relational Responsibility**

The general idea of relational responsibility is that one is responsible for his or her action in a certain type of situation if there is a person who refrains from performing the same type of action in the same type of situation. Let us suppose that Steve cheats on an exam. He is responsible for cheating on this

exam if there is, was or will be at least one person, Cecilia<sup>3</sup>, who refrains from cheating on an exam. Their<sup>4</sup> particular situations might be quite different in some irrelevant details, yet both situations fall into the same type. From the fact that Cecilia did not cheat, it follows that in that type of situation, it was possible not to cheat.<sup>5</sup> Cecilia's case, being a contrast pair to Steve's, offers a ground for making Steve responsible for not doing the same in that type of situation. This can lead us to articulating the following concept of moral responsibility:

RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: An agent P is responsible for performing an action a in an s-type situation<sup>6</sup> at t iff an agent R refrains from performing an action of a-type in a situation s-type *anytime (even after t) and anywhere in the universe.* (P and R can refer to the same person on different occasions.)

Accordingly, if an agent ever performs an action of type a in a type of situation s then the responsibility ascribed to agents who fail to perform the same type of action in the same type of situation is *different* from the responsibility ascribed to the agent who did perform it.

Instead of defining a concept of agency and control, relational responsibility thus contrasts agents' actions in the same situation types in order to establish moral responsibility. Steve's action can be contrasted with Cecilia's behaviour in the same type of situation. It can be inferred that it is possible to act differently in that type of situation, therefore they are both responsible for their actions. Compatibilists and libertarians can connect the relational view to their theory. In a compatibilist way, with regards to Cecilia's and Steve's moral character (Watson 1996), Steve is *a kind of person* who tends to cheat on exams, resulting in his cheating on the exam. For libertarians, with regards to alternate possibilities, Steve and Cecilia were both in a type of situation in which cheating was possible, with Steve choosing to cheat and Cecilia refraining from doing so. Either way, it seems that moral responsibil-

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the members of the contrasted agent pairs need not be different persons. You may be responsible for your action if you yourself refrain from it in the same type of situation.

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<sup>5</sup> Analogously, regularity theories (i.e. Lewis 1994) hold that laws of nature supervene on events of the universe. Hence, laws are not independent metaphysical agents – they do not govern events, rather events determine laws. This means that (in the case of determinism), if an event never happens throughout the history of the universe, there is no law governing the non-occurrent (possible) event. Similarly, according to relational responsibility, if determinism is true, from the fact that no one ever does otherwise (in a type of situation), it follows that it was impossible to do otherwise (in that type of situation).

<sup>6</sup> Later in my paper, I shall explain the function of action and situation types.

ity can be established without any reference to a concept of control as the only ground required for establishing it is a contrast pair to which a given case can be related.

Now it is the time to specify cases in which agents are not responsible. According to the relational theory, agents cannot be responsible if and only if all agents perform the same type of action in a certain type of situation anytime and anywhere in the universe. Nonetheless, it can be supposed that all agents perform the same type of action (in a certain type of situation anytime and anywhere in the universe) but we still hold them responsible. For example, say that numerous people are offered one million US dollars in return for touching their nose with their fingers, and it so happens that nobody refuses the offer. The amount of money offered is so huge, and the effort to perform the action is so trivial that nobody resists in the history of the universe.

If all agents do the same type of action in the same type of situation, determinism and indeterminism imply different consequences. In a deterministic world, if everybody does the same type of act in a type of situation through the history of the universe, nobody can do otherwise – in my contrastive sense of alternatives – in that particular type of situation and, as a consequence, nobody is responsible.

In an indeterministic world, it is still reasonable to suppose that even if everybody accepted the offer in the history of the universe, refusing it was nonetheless an open possibility all along. Therefore, those who accepted the offer are responsible even though nobody refused the offer in the history of the universe. This line of reasoning works only if the world is indeterministic. Later in my paper, I shall deal with the question of alternate possibilities that are provided only in indeterministic worlds when I discuss relational responsibility in relation to libertarian and two-way<sup>7</sup> compatibilist views.

Now, I argue that accounts of control in fact rely on a comparative method. Most philosophers contend that an agent is not responsible for her actions if and only if she has no control over them. On such accounts, Peter is not responsible for the actions that he performed when he was drugged (secretly by another person) because he did not have control over his actions. In such cases, we need to ask what the basis of the claim that drugged Peter had no control over his actions is, or what *indicates*, if anything, his lack of control. In this case, the basis for ascribing a lack of control to Peter is a comparison: the behaviour of other drugged people. Even cognitive scientists, when they scan a drugged person's brain, compare that person's brain pattern to brain patterns of non-drugged persons (Stone, Calhoun and Klopfenstein

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<sup>7</sup> I use “two-way compatibilism” to refer to compatibilists who think that “the ability to do otherwise” can be consistent with determinism. See, for instance, Hume (2008: 73), Ayer (1954), Hobart (1934), Lewis (1981), Vihvelin (2008).

1958). Scientists, in this way, can infer that the drug modifies a person's thoughts and control – in science, there is always a control group. Therefore, a lack of control is explained by a comparison of people's acts in the same type of situation. If a comparison here explains the lack of control, and the lack of control explains non-responsibility then comparison itself explains non-responsibility.

Relational responsibility requires the philosophical term of action types to be contrasted with each other. This idea is not unfamiliar for philosophers (Vendler 1957; Davidson 1967; Parsons 1990). The concept of action types is meant to enable particular actions to be categorised as being relevantly similar. We clearly understand action categories like stealing, running, eating and cheating. Although different causal structures lead to different actions, these actions are categorised as belonging to the same type. For example, two goals in two different football matches have radically different causal antecedents – the players of the matches caused their goals in a very different way – yet both goals are considered to be a particular type of action, namely, scoring a goal. Their causal antecedent is irrelevant – what matters is what they did when we compare the actions of one with the other.

In my view, the attribution of responsibility presupposes that, at some point, other people are in the same type of situation. Every situation in which people act is unrepeatable, but this does not mean that situations cannot be typified. It helps, here, if we shall introduce the concept of *situation types*,<sup>8</sup> which can be determined by a finite list of conditions. For instance, in my “cheating” example, an exam is a type of situation that is characterised by certain relevant factors, like the examiner, questions, students, time-limit, etc. But there are irrelevant factors to any value judgments made about this situation as well, like the colour of the wall and the weather on that day. The exam in which Steve cheated was an unrepeatable event, as was Cecilia's exam. Nevertheless, it is very reasonable to think that both Steve and Cecilia were present in the same type of situation, even if some particular factors were different.

Situation types and action types must be identified neither too narrowly nor too broadly. That is, a level of elaboration that divides events of the world into reasonably narrow categories is needed. This system of categories is used in our everyday life even when we understand the sentence “Steven cheated in his exam last Friday”. The commonly understood term “cheated” identifies a certain type of action. Furthermore, “exam” also designates a particular type of situation. However, if situations are identified too broadly, almost every event will fall into the same type of situation. If the list of factors determin-

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<sup>8</sup> For the concept of situation types, see Austin (1950).

ing situation types are not sufficiently detailed, then different events will be counter-intuitively categorised as the same type of situation. For instance, if I categorised the event of an exam purely in terms of working whilst sitting in a room then when I just work in my office while sitting in a room, this would also be erroneously considered as an exam type of situation. However, individuating situations too narrowly falsely implies that every event forms an individual type. If too high a number of factors are used for identifying grounds for a proper comparison, then there is possibly no room for situation types at all. However, we do think that there are similar situations. I do not wish to define a complete and universal system of criteria for categorising events and actions here. Contrasting suitably similar cases to each other is sufficient for a relational account of responsibility.

These criteria might be understood in terms of a universal or a relativistic theory of morality. Situation types – as later will be specified – are determined by moral norms. If moral norms are universal then situation types are also but if moral norms are relative, types of situations are also relativistic. Categorisation requires considering social, cultural and scientific theories and conceptual schemes for dividing the world into morally understandable blocks. After having investigated a case, we (try to) find other similar cases, based on the social, cultural and scientific criteria considered to be relevantly comparable. All might play a role in structuring the actions of people and their conditions in order to ascribe moral responsibility.

Legal systems, both common and civil law, ascribe responsibility in a similar way to the theory of relational responsibility. In legal practice, systems of criteria are created for categorising cases as of the same type. In order to apply laws, certain predefined conditions called *elements of crime* must be satisfied. The concept of “elements of crime” is used to define certain types of situations and actions by which courts decide if a law is applicable to a case by precedents or a referable system of codified core principles. Hence law defines situation types and action types according to which legal responsibility can be imposed.

There is a philosophical debate between moral generalists and particularists over the question whether the moral status of an action is determined by general moral principles. The parties understand similarity between situations in different ways but both are suitable for my purposes. Moral generalists hold that the moral status of an act is determined by its falling under a general moral principle. They assume that cases can be described in terms of general features: “Features of such acts as promise-keeping, lying, inflicting pain, being kind are building blocks of everyday morality that entertain an intimate connection with their moral import. Those are genuinely explanatory features for the moral status of acts and may be captured into defeasible generalizations.” (Strahovnik 2008: 4) Moral generalism, thus, applies genera-



lised principles to different but relevantly similar cases that constitute types of situations. The principle “do not steal”, for example, applies to types of situations in which one is exposed to steal something. Moral generalists rely on the concept of situation types to which generalised principles can be applied.

Moral particularists criticise generalists by arguing that moral principles are not suitable for capturing the moral status of actions in different cases because the moral status is always context-dependent. Particularists argue that there are always exceptions to moral principles which are not sensitive to contexts. (Dancy 2004: 73). In practice, particularists contrast different situations in a way that their relevant features resemble each other. In doing so they typically accept the so-called “rule-following considerations”:

What counts as going on in the same way, and the kind of necessity that binds previous instances to a new one. Competence with a moral concept (e.g. generosity) is knowledge of a rule, not a moral rule but a rule whose grasp is simply the ability to carry on using the word “generous” correctly in new instances. Someone who comes to a new situation knowing what generosity is is someone who has learnt a rule (here the importance of experience) and his knowledge of the rule is manifested now in his decision that this situation is another of *the same sort* (here again the importance of past cases). But there need be nothing one can point to in the past cases which can determine or even guide his choice; what makes his choice right is not that it is dictated or even made probable by principles created by the past instances, but simply our acceptance of the choice as an instance of carrying on as before. (Dancy 1983: 545 – italics added)

Unlike generalists, Dancy, for example, requires a “contentless ability” (1993: 50) “to drive us in what may seem a very simple-minded way from one case [...] to another which happens to resemble the first in some limited way.” (1993: 82) This resemblance, however, supposes a loose connection between cases. The good moral judge “perceives” the moral relevance of the particular features of an individual case due to “having undergone a successful moral education.” (Dancy 1993: 50) So even here we find a commitment to situation types, though they cannot be described in terms of general features. They are characterised rather by intricate similarities between cases which the good moral judge perceives. One might perhaps hesitate to acknowledge that the set of morally similar cases constitute a genuine “type”, but the relational theory of responsibility does not have to insist on the term “situation type”. What really matters is the possibility to identify relevantly similar cases and contrast pairs, and the particularist stance does provide that.

Generalism and particularism rely on sorting out relevant and irrelevant features of cases. The theory of relational responsibility is indifferent on the issues between generalism and particularism, it is compatible with both views, both assume the kind of classification of situations the relational theory requires. The theory of relational responsibility can use either generalist

or particularist accounts for individuating morally relevant features of cases determining contrast pairs.

Suppose that there are two situations in both of which there is a suffocating person in water. Now, it is a moral obligation for somebody near to there, he or she should try to rescue the suffocating person. However, if in one situation the rescuer cannot swim, for him another moral norm or another case pair shall be applied. For the non-swimmer, he has to save the suffocating one only if he can do it safely. Thus, the non-swimmer rescuer is in a different type of situation from the swimmer rescuer.

## **2. Relational Responsibility in Deterministic and Indeterministic Worlds**

The general idea of relational responsibility can be applied in both deterministic and indeterministic worlds because it holds no metaphysical commitments about determinism. The relational theory is compatible with both models of the world. In this section, I will show how the relational theory of responsibility applies to these two different accounts.

### *2.1 Relational Responsibility in a Deterministic World*

If the world is deterministic, the relational theory of responsibility should be applied to actions of the actual world alone. The reason is that, in this case, there can be no alternate possibilities. In this section I argue that relational responsibility can be accepted by compatibilists who hold that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility. A definition of relational responsibility in a deterministic world runs as follows:

RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: An agent P is responsible for necessarily performing an action a in an s-type situation iff an agent R necessarily refrains from performing an action of a type in a situation s-type *anytime (even after t) and anywhere in the universe.* (P and R can refer to the same person on different occasions.)

The theory of relational responsibility accounts for responsibility in a deterministic world. If an agent ever does something (or refrains from doing so) in a type of situation but some people do not, it shows that at least one agent can do that thing in that particular type of situation.<sup>9</sup> If it is *possible* for an

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<sup>9</sup> Note that I do not wish to convince libertarians about the truth of compatibilism. In this section, I merely aimed to establish that relational responsibility is compatible with the compatibilists' conditions of moral responsibility, and hence that compatibilists do not need to worry about metaphysical possibilities, but can simply look to actions performed by agents differently in the same type of situation.

agent to do something in a particular type of situation, agents in that type of situation are responsible for their actions in that type of situation. The appeal of relational responsibility derives from the intuition that a person is obliged to do something if any agent ever does that thing in that type of situation. An agent acting otherwise (in a type of situation) is the proof that it is possible to act otherwise (in that type of situation) with respect to others' action what I call a contrastive sense of alternatives.

In fact, particular agents in particular situations cannot do otherwise metaphysically because they are determined to perform the acts they do. Yet, in the same type of situation, agents perform their actions differently because they are determined to do so. Thus, in a certain situation type, it is possible to act differently. Note that I am not talking about a metaphysical possibility here, but a contrastive sense of alternative. This says that if one person performs a particular action, it is a possibility for others to either carry out or avoid the same type of action under similar circumstances. I argue that the contrastive sense of possibility is compatible with compatibilist accounts of moral responsibility.

Compatibilists assume that if determinism is true then every action in the course of the universe is unavoidable. For a one-way compatibilist, if agents are the (mediated) sources of actions, they bear responsibility. Accordingly, we praise or blame an agent not because "she could have done otherwise" but for the personality she has. One-way compatibilism holds that persons are judged on the basis of their (moral) character – that is to say that a person can only be responsible for her actions if her will is determined by her reasons, motives, and desires. Contemporary accounts of compatibilism – e.g. reason-responsiveness theories (Fischer and Ravizza 1998; Haji 1998), hierarchy theories (Frankfurt 1971) or action-autonomy theories (Mele 1995) – are different versions of source or one-way compatibilism. Such authors generally distinguish particular concepts of control to shed light on what they mean by responsible agency. However, the theory of relational responsibility provides an alternative to the attribution of control for ascribing moral responsibility in a deterministic world.

Now, if I attach compatibilist commitments to the theory of relational responsibility, we get the following: if determinism is true, compatibilist theories account for agency in deterministic worlds, and my relational condition accounts for responsibility. Consequently, if there is an agent (as described by compatibilism) who does something because of the personality or reasons that she necessarily has then others necessarily failing to do the same (type of) thing (in the same type of situation) can be subject of moral evaluation. If there was, is, or will be a person who does something, it means that one can have the personality that determines the performance of that thing.

According to contemporary compatibilism, either moral character or the integrity of reasons can be subject to moral evaluation. The reasons determining the action are different from the reasons of others who fail to do that thing. For example, according to the reason-responsiveness theory, the thief in the grocery store is responsible for stealing because he displays rational considerations about his possibilities (to steal or not) even though he could never avoid stealing as a result of determinism. This account, however, does not contradict my view because, if there is a person who avoids stealing in this type of situation then the thief is responsible. When we combine (source) compatibilism with the relational view, compatibilist theories account for agency (bodies that can be subjects of responsibility ascriptions), whilst my view attributes responsibility to them. However, if everybody performs an (type of) action (in a type of situation), or all failing to refrain from doing the same (type of) action (in the same type of situation) then they cannot be subject of moral evaluation. It means that they cannot have the personality or reasons that determine the performance of a certain action (in the same type of situation). If no personality determines an agent to do a certain type of action, it would be unfair to hold agents to have an obligation to do that certain type of action. Consequently, relational responsibility can be applied to compatibilist theories.

We must, however, consider a possible objection to the combination of relational responsibility and compatibilism just described. It may be held that relational responsibility (applied to the actual world only) makes it impossible to ascribe responsibility to totally unique actions as unique actions do not have contrast pairs, and this result seems counterintuitive. However, the total history of the universe is so rich in actions that it is at least difficult to find any example of a morally unique action. Our world is complex enough to serve contrast pairs for most actions. However, there are unique actions, to which there is no contrast action to be found by which the moral content of the action could be determined. For example, discovering the special theory of relativity was a unique and praiseworthy (not in a moral but in a scientific sense) action and it is difficult to find a contrast pair for such a discovery. The answer to this objection is that we praise Einstein for his discovery because other physicists failed to discover (or refrained from discovering) the special theory of relativity although they were situated in the same type of situation. All the relevant scientific evidence was available in the time of Einstein's discovery, yet Lorentz, Poincaré and Minkowski, for example, all missed performing a step that Einstein did not. Now we have a contrastive relational pair of actions: the praiseworthy act of Einstein who discovered the special theory of relativity in contrast with the scientifically neutral actions/omissions of other physicists who did not. In cases of unique actions, there is a contrast pair – namely performing the unique action on the one hand, and refraining from it in a type of situation on the other hand. Unique situation

types that can occur only one time in the total course of the universe might be a serious counterexample for my view in a deterministic world. However, a situation type so unique that it does not have any morally relevant feature by which it could be contrasted with any other cases has almost no probability. Thus, relational responsibility accounts for unique actions by contrasting situations of the same type in which a (unique) action was performed with omitting the action in a same type of situation.

Some might find it intuitive to think that, in the actual world, one is still responsible for not doing *x*, even though no one ever happened to perform *x*, because performing *x* was open for all agents in the history of the actual universe. (Note that this intuition does not make any sense in a deterministic world because if, in a type of situation, a type of action never happened in the whole history of that universe then its non-performance was necessary. Therefore, this intuition can only emerge from an incompatibilist framework in an indeterministic world.) This is the case in the example of accepting one million dollars to touch one's nose in which everybody accepted the deal (in that type of situation through the history of the universe), where libertarians think that it was possible to refuse it all along. This intuition runs against compatibilism, but not against my theory of relational responsibility. Unperformed alternative actions (refusing one million dollars for touching one's nose) submit open possibilities given only in indeterministic worlds. In order to respond to this intuition, I will now extend the theory of relational responsibility to modal relational responsibility that accounts for alternate possibilities. Importantly, I will argue that the modally extended form of relational responsibility accounts for responsibility in indeterministic worlds as well. The question of unperformed actions can be easily answered if relational responsibility is modally interpreted.

## *2.2 Relational Responsibility in Indeterministic Worlds*

I will now argue that by modally extending relational responsibility it can be applied to libertarian commitments to freedom and responsibility. Libertarians generally believe that alternate possibilities are necessary conditions for freedom, and hence responsibility. For libertarians and two-way compatibilists, an agent *S* is free at time *t* to make a decision *J* or do otherwise. "Given all past circumstances relative to *t* and all laws of nature, (i) it can be the case that *S* makes *J* at *t*, and (ii) it can be the case that *S* does other than make *J* at *t*" (Kane 1985: 33). This can be put in modal terms. Accordingly, if there is a possible world in which the counterpart<sup>10</sup> of the actual person acts differently

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<sup>10</sup> I use a Lewisian concept on counterparts according to which there is no transworld identity – counterparts are just similar to each other. But this concept is not an essential part of my relational view, hence any kind of understanding of counterparts is compatible with my view.

than the person in the actual world then the actual person is responsible for what he has done. Note that such libertarian views imply that the agent in the actual world is compared with his counterpart in a possible world, and recall that a comparison of the agents' actions is one of the key elements of my relational view. And indeed, this is because philosophers analysing responsibility in modal terms in fact adopt a similar account to my relational view.

However, there is a difference between libertarian theories and my view. Libertarians contrast the control of the actual and the counterpart agent over their actions, whilst according to the theory of relational responsibility, the actions of any agents (actual or counterfactual) can be contrasted. Nonetheless, the contrasting method is used in both kinds of theories. I shall argue that the theory of relational responsibility can be extended modally over possible worlds. Agents can do otherwise if there are alternate possibilities exemplified by possible worlds, and by extending the definitions of relational responsibility to modal semantics, my theory can account for alternate possibilities. Doing so generates the following account of modal relational responsibility.

DEFINITION OF MODAL RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: An agent P is responsible for performing an action a in an s-type situation iff there is an agent R *in a possible world* who refrains from performing an action of a-type in a situation of s-type *anytime and anywhere in that world*. (P and R can refer to the same person on different occasions.)

The idea is that if, in any possible world, an agent (who is not necessarily a counterpart<sup>11</sup> of the actual person) avoids action a (in an s-type of situation<sup>12</sup>) then the agent in question is responsible for performing a (in an s-type situation). Therefore, it was an open alternative for all agents to perform action a (in s-type situations), and the fact that no one ever happened to perform a in the history of the actual universe does not excuse them for this omission, since an agent who performs the a-type action (in an s-type situation) is possible. As we have seen, libertarians compare the actual agent and her counterpart's actions in order to establish her responsibility, and the relational theory of responsibility requires the comparison of agents' actions in the same type of situation. Thus, libertarian and two-way compatibilist views are not merely consistent with relational responsibility, but in fact rely on the comparative method of my relational view. Libertarian and two-way compatibilist theories focus on a subclass of modally extended versions of relational responsibility. They compare an actual agent's action with a counterpart's action to establish

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<sup>11</sup> In the case of the modal interpretation of relational responsibility, it is not only one agent and her counterparts that are considered in the same type of situation. Rather other agents in the same type of situation in a different possible world are contrasted with the actual agent.

<sup>12</sup> In this case, situation types ensure that we consider a close possible world.

the concept of “could have done otherwise”. According to my theory, however, the actions of *any* two agents and counterparts who are in a relevantly similar situation can be compared.

Libertarians can thus accept modal relational responsibility. Since the libertarian world is indeterministic, the performance of an action can be determined by the agent’s free will. However, libertarians agree that free agents who cannot avoid an action lack responsibility for that action. From modal relational responsibility it follows that, if no one refrains from action type *a* in any possible world, then no one is responsible for performing *a*. Moreover, if no one refrains from action type *a* in the relevant type of situation in any possible world, performing *a* is necessary in that type of situation. Libertarians hold that nobody can be responsible for necessary actions. What libertarians argue for is that *if* alternative courses of actions are provided – with other conditions also being met, depending on the particular libertarian theory – then agents are responsible. According to my view, if indeterminism is true, libertarian theories account for agency in indeterministic worlds, and my relational condition accounts for responsibility. Relational responsibility is not about control, and it is neutral to libertarian commitments regarding the causal structure of the world. Libertarian views also can be coherently attached to my view.

Therefore, if a free agent (under libertarian theories) ever performs a certain type of action in the relevant type of situation then performing that action is an open possibility for other free agents, so they ought to do it (or no).

The only difference between the theory of relational responsibility in a deterministic world and the modally extended version of it is that in the deterministic world, the theory quantifies over the actual world only, whereas the modally extended theory quantifies over possible worlds. However, modally extended relational responsibility also accounts for responsibility in deterministic universes, except that here we should consider an agent’s actions in the actual world only in examining her responsibility. Therefore, modally extended relational responsibility is a comprehensive concept of responsibility which also accounts for deterministic worlds.

## Conclusion

The central thesis of relational responsibility is that a particular relation among agents’ actions defines responsibility. This account itself is sufficient for grounding moral responsibility. The aim of the theory of relational responsibility is to provide a unified relational schema for attributing responsibility that does not rely on any specific apparatus concerning the metaphysical

commitments of determinism or indeterminism. Hence, any concept of agency – be it compatibilist or libertarian – can be coherently attached to my view. Therefore, the theory of relational responsibility establishes a common ground between compatibilists and libertarians. In my paper, I have also argued that libertarian and two-way compatibilist views use a very similar comparative method to the one my relational view relies on. That is, libertarian and two-way compatibilist theories use a subclass of the modally extended version of relational responsibility. Finally, I arrived at the conclusion that modally extended relational responsibility can account for responsibility in deterministic universes, except that when applied here to ground responsibility, we should consider only agents' actions of the actual world. I claim that once we accept the concept of relational responsibility – which is independent of concepts of control and their metaphysical requirements – then no metaphysical consideration of the causal structure of the universe is relevant for moral responsibility.

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