

ON THE VIABILITY OF SEMI-COMPATIBILISM

Acerca de la viabilidad del semicompatibilismo

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ABSTRACT

Semi-compatibilism regarding responsibility is the position according to which determinism is compatible with moral responsibility quite apart from whether determinism rules out the sort of freedom that involves access to alternative possibilities. I motivate the view that whether or not semi-compatibilism is viable turns on whether various *prima facie* attractive normative principles are true or false. I introduce a subset of these principles. I then map out some positions regarding the tenability of semi-compatibilism depending upon which of these principles, if any, is true. I conclude that for many, the price of maintaining semi-compatibilism may be too steep because maintaining semi-compatibilism requires abandoning one or more of the principles in this subset.

Keywords: Semi-compatibilism, moral responsibility, alternative possibilities, choice, normative principles.

RESUMEN

El semicompatibilismo respecto de la responsabilidad es la posición según la cual el determinismo es compatible con la responsabilidad moral, independientemente de si aquel excluye el tipo de libertad que requiere acceso a posibilidades alternativas. Sugiero que la respuesta a la pregunta acerca de si el semicompatibilismo es o no viable, descansa en si una variedad de principios normativos —atractivos *prima facie*— es verdadera o falsa. Presento un subconjunto de estos principios y, luego, rastreo algunas posiciones con respecto a la sostenibilidad del semicompatibilismo, dependiendo de cuál de estos principios, si acaso alguno, es verdadero. Concluyo que para muchos el precio de mantener el semicompatibilismo es demasiado alto porque hacerlo requiere abandonar uno o más principios de este subconjunto.

Palabras clave: semicompatibilismo, responsabilidad moral, posibilidades alternativas, elección, principios normativos.

1. Introduction

Understand determinism as the thesis that for any instant, there is exactly one physically possible future (*cf.* van Inwagen 3). The Consequence Argument, or at least a suitable variant of it, gives

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us strong reason to believe that if determinism is true, then our actions are not “up to us” in the sense that both we could have performed them and we could have refrained from performing them; determinism, if some variation of this argument is sound, precludes alternatives.¹ Peter van Inwagen summarizes the crux of his version of the Consequence Argument in this way:

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us. (16)

If, in turn, moral responsibility requires alternatives, in particular, if this principle is true:

The Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP-R): Persons are morally responsible for what they have done only if they could have done otherwise (see Frankfurt 829),

then determinism may well threaten responsibility by virtue of ruling out alternatives.

Whether this threat is a *bona fide* one depends crucially on the sorts of alternative at issue. Distinguish between strong and weak alternatives (or, alternatively, between a strong or incompatibilist sense of “can” and a weak or compatibilist sense of “can”). If you could have done other than what you in fact did consistent with holding fixed the past and the laws, then your alternative is a strong alternative. More carefully, suppose agent, *s*, does action, *a*, at time, *t*, in world, *w*. Agent *s* has a strong alternative at *t* if the combination of *w*'s past and *w*'s laws of nature is consistent with *s*'s not *a*-ing at *t*. Determinism effaces strong alternatives; no one has such alternatives in a deterministic world, or at least I take it that the Consequence Argument (or a suitable incarnation of it) establishes that this is so. Weak alternatives are alternatives that you can have despite determinism's being true. On one conception of weak alternatives, for instance, although some agent, Mary, does one thing —she protests against the use of pesticides— she would have refrained from protesting had she wanted, or tried, or chosen not to protest. If *PAP-R* is true, and responsibility requires only weak alternatives as some compatibilists have proposed, then the conclusion of the Consequence Argument —determinism effaces alternative— in conjunction with the principle of alternate possibilities does not commit us to the skeptical view that no one is ever morally responsible for anything that one does.

¹ On the Consequence Argument, see, for e. g., Ginet (1966, 1990, 2003); van Inwagen; Fischer (1994).

Given these two types of alternative, it is not surprising that in the free will debate, different parties have frequently found themselves at an impasse over whether determinism does indeed undermine moral responsibility by way of ruling out alternatives. These parties have arrived at this impasse because, often (but not always), concurring that responsibility requires alternatives, they have disagreed on whether the alternatives are weak or strong.² An alluring feature of semi-compatibilism is that it promises to break this impasse.

Take “Compatibilism-R” to be the thesis that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility, and take “Incompatibilism-R” to be the denial of Compatibilism-R. John Fischer explains that semi-compatibilism (or what we may label “semi-compatibilism regarding responsibility”) is the position that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility quite apart from whether determinism rules out the sort of freedom that involves access to alternative possibilities (Fischer & Ravizza 52-53; Fischer 2006 76-78; Fischer 2007 56). The semi-compatibilist does not deny that responsibility presupposes our having freedom or control; rather, she denies that this control is of the type that requires our having access to alternatives, *irrespective of the alternatives being strong or weak*.

Fischer and other semi-compatibilists have relied heavily (though not exclusively) on Frankfurt examples to energize semi-compatibilism. These examples, directed against the principle of alternate possibilities, purport to show that a person can, for instance, be morally praiseworthy for doing something despite not being able to do otherwise, as long as the conditions that render her unable to do otherwise play no role in bringing about her action (see Frankfurt).

How viable is semi-compatibilism? To make tackling this difficult issue more manageable, let’s provisionally assume that Frankfurt examples do indeed impugn the principle of alternate possibilities. We will revisit this assumption later. My modest aim in this paper is to motivate the view that the rational credentials of semi-compatibilism turn on whether various *other* normative principles are true or false. I introduce some (certainly not all) of these principles. I then map out three positions regarding the viability of semi-compatibilism, the tenability of each depending upon whether a subset of these principles is true.

2. Reason and Responsibility

A. Responsibility, Obligation, and Reason

Many theorists believe that the following principles that, they claim, expose conceptual connections between moral obligation and moral responsibility are true:

2 A highly informative summary of some of the relevant issues concerning such an impasse can be found in Kane (ch. 4).

Praiseworthiness presupposes Obligation (PO): An agent, *s*, is morally praiseworthy for doing something, *a*, only if it is overall morally obligatory or overall morally permissible for *s* to do *a*.

Blameworthiness presupposes Wrongness (BO): An agent, *s*, is morally blameworthy for doing something, *a*, only if it is overall morally wrong for *s* to do *a*.³

Should there be a requirement of alternative possibilities for the truth of judgments of moral obligation, right, or wrong (or, in short, should there be such a requirement for the truth of morally deontic judgments), then if *PO* and *BO* are true, semi-compatibilism is not viable. I believe that moral obligation does, indeed, require alternatives. The gist of my argument for this view crystallizes to this:

(P1) *Obligations are tied to reasons (OR):* If an agent has a moral obligation to do something, *a*, then the agent has an objective *pro tanto* reason to do *a*.

(P2) *Reasons are tied to alternatives:* If an agent has an objective *pro tanto* reason to do something, *a*, then the agent could have done other than *a*.

Therefore:

(C) If an agent has a moral obligation to do something, *a*, then the agent could have done other than *a*.

As I have explained this argument in detail elsewhere (Haji forthcoming), my commentary here will be relatively brief.

Regarding the first premise, I offer little on the concept of obligation save that as it occurs in principle *OR*, ‘obligation’ refers to “objective” *all in* moral obligation. *All in* or overall moral obligation is opposed to *prima facie* obligation. Objective obligation is meant to contrast with subjective obligation: an agent has a subjective obligation to do something if and only if she believes that she has an (objective) obligation to do this thing.

The concept of *something’s being a reason* is more involved. Understand ‘a reason’ in the principle to denote an objective *pro tanto* practical reason. Practical reasons, roughly, are reasons to have our desires and goals, and to do what might secure these goals. *Pro tanto* reasons are reasons that can be outweighed by other reasons, as opposed to all-things considered reasons (or “oughts”), which cannot be outweighed. If the term ‘reason’ means *pro tanto* reason, each reason has a certain weight. Suppose that, on a particular occasion, you have several different alternatives. Suppose, further, that your *pro tanto* reasons to act in some way are stronger — perhaps far more so — than your reasons to act in any other way. Then you have

3 See, for instance, Smith (1991 279); Widerker (1991 223); Fields (408-09); Copp (1997); Copp (2003 286-287); Fischer (2006 218).

most reason to act in this way; the reasons you have to act in this way outweigh the reasons you have not to act in this way. We may say that acting in this way is reasons-wise obligatory for you; you reasons-wise ought to act in this way. (In more common parlance, we might say that you have decisive reason to act in this way.) Suppose that, on a different occasion, you have sufficient or enough *pro tanto* reason to act in two or more ways, and no better reason to act in any other way. Then we may say that it is reasons-wise permissible or right for you to act in either of these ways. Finally, suppose you have most *pro tanto* reason not to act in a certain way. Then we may say that acting in this way is reasons-wise wrong or forbidden for you (or that you have decisive reason not to act in this way).⁴ In what follows, departing from common usage and unless otherwise specified, I take *pro tanto* reasons to denote “agent external” objective reasons.

Objective *pro tanto* reasons contrast with subjective *pro tanto* reasons: as ‘subjective *pro tanto* reason’ is to be interpreted in the remainder of this paper, an agent has such a reason to do something if and only if the agent believes that she has an objective *pro tanto* reason to do that thing. To bring out the distinction between objective *pro tanto* reasons and subjective *pro tanto* reasons, imagine that you nonculpably believe that you have most *pro tanto* reason to take some pills that are in the experimental stage of development because you (nonculpably) believe, on the advice of the medical team, that the pills will assuage your pain. But in fact you reasons-wise ought not to take these pills because (unbeknown to the doctors) taking the pills will kill you. Though you have no (objective) *pro tanto* reason to take the pills, you have subjective reason to do so. *Pro tanto* reasons are also to be differentiated from what may be dubbed “Davidsonian reasons”; these are, roughly, complexes of desires and beliefs.

Why believe, though, that obligations are tied to objective *pro tanto* reasons and not either to subjective reasons or to Davidsonian reasons? The crux of the matter is that the view that some things are morally wrong or morally obligatory for an agent irrespective, roughly, of what desires or beliefs that agent has is compelling.⁵ You may believe, on the evidence available to you, that giving medicine M to a sick patient will cure the patient. But if giving M will in fact kill the patient, you do wrong in giving M. You do wrong despite your subjective reason: you believe (let’s assume) that you have a *pro tanto* reason to give M, whereas in fact you have no such reason. Indeed, you have decisive *pro tanto* reason *not* to give M. Similarly, you do wrong despite your pertinent Davidsonian reasons:

4 An instructive paper on, among other things, *pro tanto* reasons is Broome.

5 I realize that this claim would be rejected by those people —Bernard Williams, for example, and more recently Mark Schroeder— who think that *pro tanto* reasons in some way depend on desires.

you desire to cure the patient and you believe that you can cure the patient by administering M; your having of this desire and belief (in conjunction with other pertinent antecedents of action) causally (and non-deviantly) issues in your giving M. None of this, though, need tell against your act not being wrong for you.⁶

B. Reason and Alternative Possibilities

Turning, next, to the second premise, the premise that there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for the truth of judgments of *pro tanto* reasons, if you have most moral reason to do something, *a*, and, thus, if morality *requires* that you do *a*, then you can do *a*. In other words, the moral “ought” implies “can.” Suppose, now, that you have *most (practical) reason* to do *a*; as we said, you ought to do *a* from the point of view of reason. Then it seems that you *can* do *a*. You cannot have an “obligation” —it cannot be necessary— from the point of view of reason, for you to do something if you cannot do that thing.

So it seems that just as there is an association between the “ought” of morality and “can,” there is a similar association between the “ought” of reason and “can.” Indeed, the moral “ought” implies “can” principle appears just to be a more restricted version of the following general principle:

Reasons-Wise “Ought” Implies “Can” (KR): If one has most reason to do something, *a*, and, thus, if one reasons-wise ought to do *a*, then one can do *a*.

If reasons-wise “ought” implies “can,” I see no reason to deny that reasons-wise “wrong” (and reasons-wise “right”) imply “can” as well. As a preliminary remark regarding what may be provided as support for this view, the moral “ought” implies “can” principle, where “ought” expresses all in moral obligation, can be put in this way:

(MK): If it is morally obligatory for one to do something, then one can do it; and if it is morally obligatory for one to refrain from doing something, then one can refrain from doing it.

It has been emphasized that moral *responsibility* requires control; if you are morally praiseworthy or morally blameworthy for an action, then you have responsibility-relevant control

6 Some may, of course, say that if a doctor gives a medicine to a patient that the doctor sincerely and responsibly believes will cure the patient, what the doctor does is not wrong even if it turns out that the medicine unexpectedly kills the patient. Intuitions about these sorts of cases can conflict. I’m inclined to claim that the doctor does objective wrong (but is not blameworthy); and that the doctor fulfils his subjective obligation: she does what she believes she has an objective obligation to do. Insightful discussion on this issue is to be found in Zimmerman (2008).

in performing this action. Similarly, think of principle *MK* as a control principle for moral *obligation*; if you have a moral obligation to perform an action, then you have obligation-relevant control in performing it.

If we conceive of the moral “ought” implies “can” principle in this way—as a principle of control—then barring persuasive reasons to believe otherwise, there is little reason not to assume, too, that moral “wrong” (and moral “right”) imply “can.” I advance, specifically, two considerations in favor of this view. First, as we have registered, just as moral praiseworthiness and moral blameworthiness require control (or freedom), so does moral obligation, moral wrong, and moral right. The control requirements of blameworthiness, unless we have sound reason to believe the contrary, mirror those of praiseworthiness: both have the same freedom requirements. An essential element of the freedom requirement of these responsibility appraisals is captured by these principles: one is morally praiseworthy for doing something only if one could have done that thing; and, similarly, one is morally blameworthy for doing something only if one could have done that thing. These principles highlight a link between moral responsibility and freedom, a link that holds of conceptual necessity. Similarly, it would seem that the control or freedom requirements of moral obligation, *unless we have strong reason to think otherwise* (and I know of no such reason), should also be the very ones of moral wrong and moral right. If the “ought” implies “can” principle expresses just one more incarnation of the association between morality and freedom, then, again, *in the absence of special reason to believe otherwise*, it should also be the case that the principles that “wrong” implies “can” and that “right” implies “can” express two other instances of this association.

Second, this symmetry in the freedom or control requirements of obligation, wrong, and right is validated by a powerful *analysis* of the concept of moral obligation, an analysis informed largely by the work of Fred Feldman (1986) and Michael Zimmerman (1996) on the morally deontic “ought.” The analysis provides a plausible treatment of a wide array of deontic puzzles, sometimes partly in virtue of implying that “wrong” implies “can” (see, for e.g., Feldman 1990; Zimmerman 1996). The account builds on the idea that at each time of moral choice, there are several possible worlds accessible to a person as of that time: there are, at the time, various ways in which a person might live out her life. For each of these complete “life histories,” there is a possible world—the one that would exist if she were to live out her life in that way. Roughly, a possible world is accessible to a person at a time if and only if it is still possible, at that time, for the person to see to the occurrence of that world. A world may be accessible to a person at a time, but once the person behaves in some way other than the way in which he behaves in that world, it is no longer accessible; it has been

“bypassed.” Once bypassed, a world never again becomes accessible. As a person moves through life, she inexorably pares down the stock of worlds accessible to her.

Making use of the notion of accessibility, one can say that a state of affairs is possible for a person as of a time if and only if it occurs in some world still accessible to the person at that time. Let ‘ $K_{s,t,p}$ ’ abbreviate ‘there is a world accessible to s as of t in which state of affairs p occurs.’ ‘ $K_{s,t,p}$ ’ is equivalent to ‘as of t , s can still see to the occurrence of p .’

On this analysis, actions are morally judged not by appeal to the value of their outcomes, but by appeal to the values of the accessible possible worlds in which they are performed. Worlds may be ranked in accordance to a value-relation; each world is as good as, or better than, or worse than, each other world. A world is best if no world is better than it is. For purposes of “value-wise” ranking worlds, one can supply one’s favorite axiology. I simply label the relevant value “deontic value.” Some may opt for the view that deontic value consists in intrinsic value; others might claim that such value is tied to compliance with the categorical imperative; still others might offer yet another view. The analysis can now be stated in this way:

(MO): A person, s , ought, as of t , to see to the occurrence of a state of affairs, p , if and only if p occurs in some world, w , accessible to s at t , and it’s false that *not- p* occurs in any accessible world deontically as good as or deontically better than w .⁷

More intuitively (and simplifying somewhat), according to (MO), as of some time, an act is morally obligatory for you, if and only if you can do it and it occurs in all the bests accessible to you at this time. As of some time, an act is morally permissible for you if and only if you can do it and it occurs in some but not all the bests accessible to you as of this time. And, as of some time, an act is wrong for you if and only if you can do it and it does not occur in any of the bests accessible to you as of this time.

(MO) verifies a version of “ought” implies “can.” Allowing K to express the relevant sort of possibility, this implication relation can be stated as follows: $MO_{s,t,p}$ implies $K_{s,t,p}$. $MO_{s,t,p}$ means that there is an accessible p -world such that there is no as good accessible *not- p* world. Hence, there is an accessible p -world. This means that K_{stp} is true as well. Similarly, given (MO), if as of some time p is wrong for you, p occurs in some world that is accessible to you but not in any of the best worlds accessible to you. So, on (MO), “wrong” implies “can” as well.

7 Zimmerman constructs and defends an analysis similar to Feldman’s in his 1996, ch. 2. In his recent book (2008), he advances a different analysis but one which still validates the “wrong” implies “can” thesis.

In sum we have good reason to believe that each of “moral ought,” “moral right,” and “moral wrong” implies “can.”

Reverting, now, to reasons-wise obligation, the reasons-wise “ought” implies “can” principle, just like the moral “ought” implies “can” principle expresses the control that “obligations” of reason require. There is, it seems, no reason to believe that the control requirements of the moral “ought” differ from those of the reasons “ought.” As I previously ventured, the moral “ought” implies “can” principle *is* just a special case of the general principle that reasons-wise “ought” implies “can.” And, again, *precluding compelling reasons to think otherwise*, if reasons-wise “ought” requires a species of control, reasons-wise “right” and reasons-wise “wrong” require this very species of control as well: if it is reasons-wise right (or reasons-wise wrong) for you to do something, then you can do it.

We may now proceed to show that there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for reasons-wise right, reasons-wise wrong, and reasons-wise obligation. Recall principle *KR*:

(*KR*): If one has most reason to do something, *a*, and, thus, if one reasons-wise ought to do *a*, then one can do *a*.

KR's corollary is:

Reasons-Wise “Ought Not” Implies “Can Refrain From”
(*KRC*): If one reasons-wise ought not to do something, *a*, then one can refrain from doing *a*.

Further, we should, I believe, accept this principle (*Reason-1*):

Reasons-Wise “Ought Not” amounts to Reasons-Wise “Wrong” (*Reason-1*): One reasons-wise ought not to do *a* if and only if it is reasons-wise wrong for one to do *a*.

One would think that to say that some action is reasons-wise wrong (or reasons-wise forbidden) for you is just to say that you reasons-wise ought —you have decisive reason— not to do it (or reason requires that you not do it). But then it would seem that it is reasons-wise obligatory for you not to do an act —reason *requires* that you not do it— if and only if it is reasons-wise wrong for you to do it; this is just what *Reason-1* says.

From *KRC* and *Reasons-1*, we derive:

Reasons-Wise Wrongness Requires Alternatives (*Reason-2*):
If it is reasons-wise wrong for one to do *a*, then one can refrain from doing *a*.

Reason-2, in conjunction with the claim that reasons-wise “wrong” implies “can,” establishes that there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for *reasons-wise* wrongness.

Consider, next, reasons-wise obligation. If it is reasons-wise obligatory for one to refrain from doing something, *a*, then it is reasons-wise wrong for one to do *a* (from *Reason-1*). Further, if it is reasons-wise wrong for one to do *a*, then one can do *a* (from the reasons-wise “wrong” implies “can” analogue of (κR): *if it is reasons-wise wrong for one to do a, then one can do a.*) Therefore, if it is reasons-wise obligatory for one to refrain from doing *a*, then one can do *a*. But it is also true that if it is reasons-wise obligatory for one to refrain from doing *a*, then one can refrain from doing *a*. In other words, just as there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for *reasons-wise* wrongness, so there is such a requirement for reasons-wise obligation.

If reasons-wise wrongness and reasons-wise obligation require alternative possibilities, then I see little reason to deny that reasons-why rightness, too, requires alternative possibilities. We conclude that there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for the truth of judgments of objective *pro tanto* reasons.

c. Frankfurt Examples

We may now briefly comment on the assumption, previously made, that Frankfurt examples cast doubt on the principle of alternate possibilities. We may conceive of such an example as unfolding in two stages. In Stage 1, an agent, Mary, decides to do something, *x*, and intentionally *x*-s. (For instance, she decides to protest against the use of pesticides in lawn fertilizers and intentionally protests). We are to assume that whether you are a libertarian or a compatibilist, on your account of free action and moral responsibility, Stage 1 Mary *is* morally responsible for deciding to *x* (and for *x*-ing). In Stage 2, the scenario is developed in a way in which something ensures that Mary (Stage 2 Mary) decides to *x*—this thing supposedly precludes Mary from deciding to do other than *x*— *without* in any way interfering in Mary’s deciding to *x*. We are meant to draw the conclusion that since Stage 1 Mary is morally responsible for deciding to *x*, and since Stage 2 Mary does not differ relevantly from Stage 1 Mary with respect to deciding to *x*, Stage 2 Mary is also morally responsible for deciding to *x* even though she could not have refrained from deciding to *x* (*cf.* Frankfurt 835-36).⁸

Regarding such examples, two points merit emphasis. First, Mary protests for reasons in Stage 1. Assume (though I think this assumption is open to doubt) that these reasons are objective *pro tanto* reasons. If it is such reasons that causally issue in her deciding to protest, then owing to there being a requirement of alternative possibilities for the having of *pro tanto* reasons, she could have

8 The literature on Frankfurt examples is voluminous. An excellent collection of papers on Frankfurt examples is to be found in Widerker & McKenna (2003).

done other than decide to protest. Provided all (relevant) alternatives are expunged in Stage 2, Mary's deciding to protest in Stage 2 could not have causally issued from her having of objective *pro tanto* reasons. Some theorists who are inclined toward the view that all reasons are, in the end, objective *pro tanto* reasons, should not accept one alleged moral of Frankfurt examples to wit, the principle of alternate possibilities is false. Other theorists who accept the view that having (objective) *pro tanto* reasons requires having access to alternatives might argue that another lesson to be learned from Frankfurt examples (in addition, that is, to the lesson that responsibility does not require alternatives) is that although responsibility presupposes our having of reasons —if one is morally responsible for doing something, then one has a reason for doing this thing— responsibility does not presuppose our having (objective) *pro tanto* reasons; perhaps responsibility only presupposes possession of Davidsonian reasons.

Second, imagine that Mary is putatively morally praiseworthy for doing what she supposedly cannot, in her situation, avoid doing (deciding to protest). If *PO*, though, is true —if moral praiseworthiness requires moral obligation or moral permissibility— but there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for morally deontic judgments, then it would seem that Frankfurt-examples are not as decisive as one might initially have thought them to be.⁹

3. Hard Choices

Let's now collect a subset of the various principles that we have introduced in our discussion so far.

The Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP-R): Persons are morally responsible for what they have done only if they could have done otherwise.

Praiseworthiness presupposes Obligation (PO): An agent, *s*, is morally praiseworthy for doing something, *a*, only if it is overall morally obligatory or overall morally permissible for *s* to do *a*.

Blameworthiness presupposes Wrongness (BO): An agent, *s*, is morally blameworthy for doing something, *a*, only if it is overall morally wrong for *s* to do *a*.

The Moral "Ought" Implies "Can" (MK): If it is morally obligatory for an agent, *s*, to do something, *a*, then *s* can do *a*; and if it is morally obligatory for *s* to refrain from doing *a*, then *s* can refrain from doing *a*.

9 It might be ventured that if Frankfurt examples impugn the principle of alternate possibilities, they also impugn the principle that a person has a moral obligation to do something only if she could have done otherwise. I believe, though, that this charge can be met (cf. Haji 2002 46-47; Haji 2003; Haji forthcoming).

Obligations are tied to reasons (OR): If an agent, *s*, has a moral obligation to do something, *a*, then *s* has an objective *pro tanto* reason to do *a*.

The Reasons Cluster:

Reasons-Wise "Ought" Implies "Can" (KR): If an agent, *s*, has most reason to do something, *a*, and, thus, if *s* reasons-wise ought to do *a*, then *s* can do *a*. (There are parallel principles concerning reasons-wise "right" and reasons-wise "wrong.")

Reasons-Wise "Ought Not" Implies "Can Refrain From" (KRC): If an agent, *s*, reasons-wise ought not to do something, *a*, then *s* can refrain from doing *a*.

Reasons-Wise "Ought Not" amounts to Reasons-Wise "Wrong" (Reason-1): An agent, *s*, reasons-wise ought not to do *a* if and only if it is reasons-wise wrong for *s* to do *a*.

Reasons-Wise Wrongness Requires Alternatives (Reason-2): If it is reasons-wise wrong for an agent, *s*, to do *a*, then *s* can refrain from doing *a*. (Again, there are parallel principles concerning reasons-wise "wrong" and reasons-wise "obligation.")

To facilitate mapping out various positions concerning the viability of semi-compatibilism, assume that principle *OR* is true. It's hard to see how one can deny this principle. Here are three relevant options:

Position 1: Accept *PO*, *BO*, and the principles in the *Reasons Cluster*. This position implies that semi-compatibilism is not viable. (More circumspectly, if *PO*, *BO*, and the principles in the *Reasons Cluster* are true, then semi-compatibilism is in jeopardy.) To explain: if moral praiseworthiness is tied to moral obligation or moral right, moral blameworthiness is tied to moral wrong, these deontic evaluations are associated with *pro tanto* reasons in the manner explained in prior section 2B, and there is a requirement of alternative possibilities for the having of such reasons, then both moral praiseworthiness and moral blameworthiness presuppose our having access to alternatives. If one accepts *PO*, *BO*, and the principles in the *Reasons Cluster*, then one should accept the principle of alternate possibilities as well. (Or perhaps, more cautiously, if one accepts *PO*, *BO*, and the principles in the *Reasons Cluster*, then one should also accept the principle that persons are praiseworthy (or blameworthy) for what they have done only if they could have done otherwise.) One should, consequently, be suspicious about Frankfurt examples.¹⁰

¹⁰ Both Widerker (1991) and Copp (1997; 2003) accept *BO*, and (it appears) the principle that "ought" implies "can." Partly on the basis of accepting these principles, Copp denies that Frankfurt examples undermine the principle that persons are morally blameworthy for what they have done only if they could have done otherwise

Position 2: Accept *PO* and *BO*; discard *KR*. Just as some have rejected the moral “ought” implies “can” principle (*MK*), so these persons may reject the reasons-wise “ought” implies “can” principle (*KR*). On this position, semi-compatibilism would be viable but at a cost some would deem too high.¹¹

It may be worth noting the following. What we may call the “*Obligation Cluster*” is a set of principles with these members:

Moral “Ought” Implies “Can” (MK): If it is morally obligatory for an agent, *s*, to do something, *a*, then *s* can do *a*; and if it is morally obligatory for *s* to refrain from doing something, *a*, then *s* can refrain from doing *a*. (There are parallel principles concerning moral “right” and moral “wrong.”)

Moral “Ought” Implies “Can Refrain From” (MCR): If it is morally obligatory for an agent, *s*, to do something, *a*, then *s* can refrain from doing *a*; and if it is morally obligatory for *s* to refrain from doing *a*, then *s* can do *a*. (There are similar principles concerning moral “right” and moral “wrong.”) An argument structurally parallel to the one for the conclusion that reasons-wise “ought” implies reasons-wise “can refrain from,” in which occurrences of ‘reasons-wise “ought”’, ‘reasons-wise “right”’, and ‘reasons-wise-wrong’ are replaced by ‘moral “ought”’, ‘moral “right”’, and ‘moral “wrong”’ establishes *MCR* (and the analogous principles concerning “right” and “wrong.”)

Should one accept *PO*, *BO*, and the principles in the *Obligation Cluster*, then again one should not accept semi-compatibilism. If one finds compelling the analysis of moral obligation that I adumbrated above, one would, of course, rationally have to accept the *Obligation Cluster*.

Position 3: Reject *PO* and *BO*; accept the *Reasons Cluster*, or the *Obligation Cluster*, or both these clusters). On this option, semi-compatibilism is still in the running. This is the option that I favor (and for which I have argued elsewhere, e.g. Haji 2002), but some may find the price of renouncing *PO* and *BO* exceedingly high. On my view, moral praiseworthiness and moral blameworthiness are conceptually tied to (nonculpable) belief in what is overall morally obligatory, overall morally right, or overall morally wrong, and not to what is in fact overall obligatory, right, or wrong.

Worthy of mention is the following. Paul McNamara has developed and defended a deontic system for modeling the logical structure of fundamental features of common sense morality

¹¹ John Fischer endorses this position. More carefully, he accepts *BO* and the view that Frankfurt examples undermine *PAP-R* but rejects the “ought” implies “can” principle. See, for e.g. Fischer (1999a; 1999b; 2003).

(2008; forthcoming). A distinctive feature of his fascinating model is that it represents among other deontic notions, those of right, wrong, obligation, exceeding the moral minimum (*cf.* “action beyond the call of duty” or “supererogation”), and permissible suboptimality (*cf.* “suberogation”); as well as hypological (*i. e.*, responsibility) notions such as praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. The model validates the moral “ought” implies “can” principle, the moral “right” implies “can” principle, as well as the falsity of *PO* and *BO*.

In conclusion, I shall not here attempt to settle which of these three positions has the upper hand. I, like many others, have been drawn to semi-compatibilism. But as I hope this discussion clarifies, for many (but not for all of us) the price of endorsing semi-compatibilism might be too high.¹²

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