Moral Responsibility and Its Truthmakers

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The direct argument for the incompatibility of determinism and moral responsibility (whereby no one is responsible for anything in a deterministic universe) depends on two rules of inferences (or so has been argued in the literature, starting at least from van Inwagen, 1983): rule A says that if ϕ is necessary, then no one is, or ever has been, even partly morally responsible for ϕ (where not responsibile is abbreviated with $N\phi$); rule B is a more standard inheritance or closure principle, i.e. if $N\phi$, $N(\phi \rightarrow \psi)$, then $N\psi$.

The direct argument holds that a deterministic premise, which is taken to be necessary (usually in the form of a conjunctive statement of the laws of nature together with a full description of the world at a given moment), entails some (all) contingent propositions and, by rule A and rule B, no one is ever responsible for any (contingent) proposition: determinism and responsibility would then be incompatible.

Assuming that 'necessary' is interpreted pretty broadly, so that logical truths are necessary, Hermes, 2014 has proposed certain counterexamples to rule A involving logical truths of the form $p \vee \neg p$, whereby one, being responsible for one disjunct, is responsible for the whole disjunction. Suppose to the contrary that one is responsible for the disjunct but not for the disjunction. Since $p \vee \neg p$ is a logical truth, the features of world that make the case that p, and for which one is responsible, are also those that make the case that $p \vee \neg p$, for which one is not responsible. Thus one would be both responsible and not responsible for the same features of the world. Contradiction. (For other alleged counterexamples, see Kearns, 2011. For a contrary stance, Robinson, 2016.)

Rather than discussing single *ad hoc* examples, rule A fails because the correct logic of responsibility is best captured by the logic of truthmaking, rather than the logic of propositions (Hermes, 2013 argues) and the logic of truthmaking does not support rule A. This has serious consequences for the compatibilism debate, because the direct argument would be undermined.

In this paper I argue for three connected theses: (i) the logic of truthmaking as

per Hermes papers is not sufficient to deflect the direct argument for incompatibilism, which still stands; instead (ii) the logic of exact truthmaking deflects the direct argument; but (iii) since (I will argue that) responsibility is hyperintensional, and hyperintensionality requires exact truthmaking, there is still hope for the compatibilist.

Hermes's argument rests on the following principle "If a disjunction has only one true disjunct, and an agent is responsible for the truth of that disjunct, then the agent is responsible for the truth of the disjunction (§ 3)" since in the logic of truthmaking "if something makes a disjunction true, it must make at least one of the disjunct true (§ 1)."

Hermes seems to have in mind the inexact version of truthmaking semantics, whereby truthmakers need to be only partially relevant for the truth they ground (for the distinction between loose, inexact and exact truthmaking semantics, see Fine, forthcoming.)

Consider a disjunction of the form $p \lor (p \land q)$, such as "Alice murdered Bob or Alice murdered Bob and Charlie". Such a disjunction is obviously logically equivalent to p. But the exact truthmaking semantics discriminates between p and $p \lor (p \land q)$, since the exact verifiers for the disjunction are that Alice murdered Bob and that Alice murdered Bob and Charlie, whereas in the inexact semantics, that Alice murdered Bob is a(n inexact) verifier for both statements.

It is clear that Hermes's principle, when precisified in terms of inexact truthmaker semantics, is not enough to track responsibility correctly.

The situation further complicates when one considers (classical) logical tautologies, like $p \lor \neg p$. Here the situation is worse, first, because there are no well-developed and accepted versions of truthmaking logic for these cases, and second, because the most natural one, i.e. one where logical tautologies are verified by the empty state, licences inferences of the form of rule A. A finer-grained account could perhaps hold that there is a difference between logical truths, which are made true by nothing, thus making it irrelevant how the world is, and necessary truths, which are made true by everything, thus making it relevant how the world is.

Next, I argue that responsibility is hyperintensional in the following sense: if one is responsible for ϕ, it does not follow that one is responsible for everything that is logically or necessary equivalent to ϕ, i.e. I deny the following principle, common to all (also modal) familiar logics: If $R\phi$ and $\vdash \phi \leftrightarrow \psi$, then $R\psi$ (where $R\phi$ stands for "responsible for ϕ).

Beside abductive reasons (which I can't obviously invoke here), I put forward several counterxamples to this principle.

However, once we know responsibility is hyperintensional, we only know something negative: we are left without a logic for it, since familiar logics are not hyperintensional.

By far the most developed hyperintensional logic is the logic of *exact* truthmak-

ing (mainly developed by Fine and others): truthmakers need to be wholly relevant to the truth of what they ground. The correct logic of responsibility, I argue, is a logic where the following principle holds: If $R\phi$ and $\phi \approx \psi$, then $R\psi$, where $\approx$ is hyperintensional equivalence, i.e. sameness of exact verifiers (and, possibly, falsifiers). This hyperintensional approach discriminates between different necessary and logical truths and introduces a "relevance" requirement, thus invalidating rule A.

Now we are in a position to use the logic of exact truthmaking to track responsibility and therefore undermine the direct argument, thus restoring the hopes of the compatibilist.

References

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