FISCHER’S SEMICOMPATIBILISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that the symmetric approach to moral responsibility, proposed by John Martin Fischer, should be focused merely on the consequence-particular. Fischer employs the symmetric approach with the intention to solve the asymmetric problems on moral responsibility. The problem arises from Frankfurt’s case, which rejects the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP), and relies on the action, rather than omission resulting in asymmetric problems. Fischer solves the problem by using his guidance control and returns the symmetry the idea of moral responsibility. I am convinced by his idea of guidance control that moral responsibility for an omission is the same as moral responsibility for an action. Notwithstanding, I found that Fischer appears to broaden his conclusion from the consequence-particular to the consequence-universal. This issue becomes more explicit when he argues against the case of “direct argument”. But I contend that this argument is unnecessary. The attempt to stretch out responsibility to the consequence-universal is only designed to address a certain kind of problem in his moral responsibility’s theory. This can also be seen when Fischer tries to solve other problem by using his overdetermination example.
I believe that his theory of moral responsibility and guidance control should limit itself merely to the consequence-particular.

Introduction

In order to develop my argument, I will clarify some relevant terms. I will start by briefly explaining the Principle of Alternate Possibilities, which is repudiated by Harry G. Frankfurt. I will then go on to explain Fischer’s Theory of Moral Responsibility and his concept of “guidance control.” After that I will demonstrate that even if the Principle of Alternate Possibilities is rejected, there are by all accounts some complications with the cases of non-action or omission. Although moral responsibility for an action does not require the ability to do otherwise, moral responsibility by omission does seem to require the ability to do the action in question. At this point, I will show how Fischer employs his concept of guidance control to solve the problem and restore symmetry to Frankfurt’s rejection of alternate possibilities. I will then raise my concerns on his use of the consequence universal, and I will argue that Fischer’s approach to moral responsibility should limit itself to the consequence-particular. I will conclude by giving suggestions on how to more properly use Fischer’s theory of moral responsibility.

Section 1: Frankfurt’s Type Example

Often it seems that when we are making a decision, we are standing on a forking path. A path that indicates our freedom to choose whether to do right or wrong action. This leads us to judge somebody to be praiseworthy or blameworthy for his actions because we believe that he could have chosen differently or could have done otherwise.

Harry G. Frankfurt named the principle as “The Principle of Alternate Possibilities” or PAP for short. PAP states that a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise. However, Frankfurt shows problems with this principle. He contends that a person is morally responsible for what he has done