MORAL LUCK AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Introduction

When we attribute moral responsibility to people, we are supposed to do so fairly. That is, we should only treat people differently if there is a “desert-entailing difference between them” (Levy 2011, 9). There must be some morally relevant factor in a given situation that enables us to hold a person morally responsible for an action. The existence of moral luck challenges the intuition that we can (and do) apply this fairness criterion in our moral judgments.

This paper will argue that we should take moral luck seriously. In Section 2, I explain the problem of moral luck and the assumptions on which it rests. In Section 3, I evaluate several proposed solutions to the problem of moral luck, arguing that none of these approaches is effective in resolving the problem. In Section 4, I consider the implications of moral luck on moral responsibility, concluding that ultimate moral responsibility does not exist. In Section 5, I return to the concept of control and how it influences our moral judgments.

Section 2: The Problem of Moral Luck

Williams and Nagel solidified the problem of moral luck in their 1979 exchange. Williams first introduced the concept, and Nagel fleshed out the problems that the apparent paradox posed\(^1\). Their combined exchange laid the groundwork for philosophical examination of the role of luck in moral evaluations. This section will highlight each philosopher’s contribution to the problem of moral luck.

Neither Williams nor Nagel give a complete definition of luck, assuming that our common conception of luck will be sufficient for understanding their arguments. Importantly, Williams (1981) clarifies that when he presents “something that is a matter of luck, this is not meant to carry any implication that it is uncaused” (Williams 1981, 22). In this sense, it is adequate to suppose that luck

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\(^1\) Williams and Nagel published their papers on moral luck in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society in 1979, with Nagel’s paper as a response to Williams’. However, to be charitable to their arguments, I use the revised versions of their papers that appear in their respective books. While Nagel’s book was published in 1979 and Williams’ book was published in 1981, it is important to note that Williams’ paper came first and should be addressed as such.
simply means any event or state of affairs that is out of an agent's control. Nagel will refine this definition in his paper, when he introduces what is referred to as the control principle. Even still, replacing "luck" with "lack of control" does not do much in terms of providing a full account of the phenomenon. The third part of this section will attempt to define the notion of control with more precision.

2.1 Williams

Williams points out two key components of our intuitions on morality. First, morality should be immune from luck: “Anything which is the product of happy or unhappy contingency is no proper object of moral assessment, and no proper determinant of it, either” (Williams 1981, 20). Second, we think of morality as having a unique status and significant role in our lives: “moral value has to possess some special, indeed supreme, kind of dignity or importance” (Williams 1981, 21). Williams challenges both of these statements in an attempt to show that morality cannot be saved from luck. Williams’ argument is complex and unconvincing. He does, however, introduce several important points that are relevant to the problem of moral luck.

First, Williams distinguishes between two types of luck, which he calls “incident luck” and “constitutive luck” (Williams 1981, 20). Incident luck refers to what we generally think of as luck—occurrences that either cause or result from our actions. Nagel (1979) will divide this concept into three new forms of luck. Constitutive luck, on the other hand, is the luck involved in who we are and what we have the capacity to achieve given our predispositions. However, according to Kant’s view, which Williams is directly attacking, the ability to lead a moral life is something which “all rational beings necessarily possess in the same degree” (Williams 1981, 21). Williams decides to put the notion of constitutive luck aside and instead works under the assumption that even if people have different personalities and characteristics based on chance alone, they are supposed to be on equal footing in terms of moral assessment. The debate about whether constitutive luck is threatening to morality is important, and many philosophers return to this question in their arguments. For now, it
suffices to say that defenders of Williams’ dismissal of constitutive luck must provide more reasons for denying its relevance.

Second, Williams raises the question of whether morality is supreme. He posits an artist named Gauguin (who bears some resemblance to the real Gauguin), who decides to abandon his family and obligations in order to move to an island and pursue painting. At the time of his decision, there is a degree of uncertainty—he does not know whether he will succeed. Williams claims that whether or not his decision is rationally justified is entirely based on the consequences: if Gauguin succeeds, he is justified in his decision; if Gauguin fails, he is not justified in his decision. The point here is that regardless of the outcome, Gauguin is morally wrong to abandon his family. However, if he succeeds (i.e., is rationally justified), we might be glad that he did it. This is supposed to be a case in which rational justification outweighs moral justification, showing that morality might not be supreme. Williams’ argument rests on the assumption that the benefit of Gauguin’s success (namely, his great works of art) offsets the immorality of his action. Yet, it is not clear that this intuition is correct. Despite doubts about Williams’ claim, the Gauguin thought experiment does prompt us to consider that there may be cases in which rationality trumps morality. If this is true, then supremacy might not be an essential feature of morality.

The importance of Williams’ paper does not lie in the argument he presents. Rather, the paper remains significant because of its moral skepticism. As he notes in the end of his paper, “Scepticism about the freedom of morality from luck cannot leave the concept of morality where it was” (Williams 1981, 39). If morality cannot escape luck, then it seems as though we will have to severely limit its scope and power. It certainly seems that it cannot continue to hold its spot as an ultimate, overpowering type of value if it susceptible to luck. Williams is successful in setting the stage for Nagel to give a thorough examination of the problem of moral luck.

2.2 Nagel
Nagel noted the importance of Williams’ contribution to our conception of morality. In his paper, “Moral luck” (1979), Nagel expands on the question posed by Williams. In the beginning of his paper, Nagel observes, “Prior to reflection it seems intuitively plausible that people cannot be morally assessed for what is not their fault, or for what is due to factors beyond their control” (Nagel 1979, 25). This observation gives rise to the control principle, which states that control is a necessary condition for moral assessment: If a person is morally responsible for an act, then that person had control over that act. In its contrapositive form, this means that if a person did not have control over an act, then the person cannot be morally responsible for that act. Thus, Nagel defines moral luck as occurring in situations “where a significant aspect of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him in that respect as an object of moral judgment” (Nagel 1979, 26). Nagel introduces various examples that can be classified into his four key categories of moral luck, each of which will be explained in turn.

Constitutive Luck

Nagel defines constitutive luck as luck in “the kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament” (Nagel 1979, 38). This is the type of luck Williams initially introduced and decided to put aside. Nagel, however, argues that constitutive luck cannot be disregarded. Though it is appealing to detach one’s deliberative actions from the predispositions that are beyond one’s control, it is impossible to separate the two. In short, Nagel demonstrates that “[people] are assessed for what they are like” (Nagel 1979, 33). Consider the example of envy. Some people have a natural tendency to feel jealous of others. Although this impulse is not within the person’s control, we still judge and blame them for possessing it—even if it does not translate into action. Similarly, we judge and praise people for having positive qualities that are just as much out of their control as envy is for the condemnable person.
Additionally, constitutive luck influences the decisions that people make. Suppose a person is highly prone to anger, perhaps due to a combination of genetics and poor parenting. This person is more likely to act immorally in a context which provokes his anger response. Yet, the fact that he lashes out is, in many ways, beyond his control. A person who happens to be more mild-mannered, again because of genetics and upbringing, will not have the same anger-based reaction that prompts and immoral act. It seems, then, that this second person is more morally commendable in virtue of the fact that he lacks a natural tendency towards anger. Actions are influenced by a person’s makeup—and many qualities which individuals possess are beyond their control.

*Circumstantial Luck*

Nagel also addresses circumstantial luck, which he defines as luck in “the kinds of problems and situations ones faces” (Nagel 1979, 28). He offers an example centered around Nazi Germany. On one hand, consider the man who becomes a guard in a concentration camp. He made an immoral choice given his circumstances. If the circumstances had been different—if, for instance, the Nazis never rose to power in Germany—he would have lived a typical and upstanding life. However, in this situation largely out of his control, he made an immoral choice. On the other hand, consider another German man who is transferred to Argentina on business in 1930. Had he stayed in Germany, he would have become a concentration camp officer. However, because of a circumstance beyond his control—namely, his company’s decision to transfer him—he avoids the outcome and is thus not morally blameworthy.

In Nagel’s words, “We judge people for what they actually do or fail to do, not just for what they would have done if the circumstances were different” (Nagel 1979, 34). One potential response to this apparent fact about our moral judgments is that we should morally assess people for not only what they do, but also what they would have done in various other circumstances. However, this theory of moral judgment would be too broad. First, it runs into the epistemic problem of evaluating counterfactual claims. While we may be able to predict with some confidence how a person may act
in a counterfactual situation in a close possible world that is similar to the actual world, we usually
cannot reach a high level of predictive accuracy. The question then arises of how sure we must be in
our counterfactual judgments to assign moral judgment. The second problem with this view is that it
poses a large—if not infinite—number of assessments to be made in order to judge someone’s moral
character. An evaluation of one’s moral character would require an absurd number of evaluations of
what one would do in various possible scenarios.

Lastly, and most importantly, this view would significantly damage our views on reward and
punishment. If the man who moves from Germany to Argentina before the rise of the Nazis truly
would have become a concentration camp guard, should we morally condemn him as such? Should
we imprison him and try him for the war crimes that he did not, in fact, commit, but would have
committed? Even more counterintuitive is the parallel consideration of moral praise. Consider a
devoted father who is on a business trip. While is away, his house burns down and his family dies.
Should we praise him in virtue of the fact that if he were home, he would have saved his family?

As Nagel summarizes, “A person can be morally responsible only for what he does; but what
he does results from a great deal that he does not do” (Nagel 1979, 34). In this passage, Nagel points
out the general problem that responsibility, even though it should only concern what we do, has a
scope that goes beyond what we can control. We cannot escape the sense that one’s actions are
morally important regardless of their lack of control over the situation in which their actions are
made—and especially regardless of what they would have done if they were faced with different
circumstances. In other words, we seem to be considered morally responsible for our circumstantial
luck.

*Causal Luck*

Nagel introduces a third type of luck, referred to as causal luck, he he defines along the
following lines: “If one cannot be responsible for...antecedents of one’s acts that are properties of
temperament not subject to one’s will, or for the circumstances that pose one’s moral choices, then
how can one be responsible even for the stripped-down acts of the will itself, if they are the product of antecedent circumstances outside of the will's control?" (Nagel 1979, 35). This explanation provides good reason to accept that causal luck can be relegated to a combination of constitutive and circumstantial luck. Thus, it is not necessary to further address this type of luck, as its analysis would be redundant.

Resultant Luck

The last type of luck Nagel addresses is that which Williams considered in the case of Gauguin. Nagel defines resultant luck as “luck in the way one's actions and projects turns out” (Nagel 1979, 28). Another way of defining this would be luck in the outcomes or consequences of one's actions. To illustrate this case of luck, Nagel points to the fact that our judgments indicate a "morally significant difference between reckless driving and manslaughter. But whether a reckless driver hits a pedestrian depends on the presence of the pedestrian at the point where he recklessly passes a red light" (Nagel 1979, 25). The same distinction applies—in both our moral and judgments and our legal system—in the difference between murder and attempted murder where the only difference in these cases is a matter of luck.

In this discussion, Nagel also sheds light on the question of evaluation at the time of the decision versus evaluation after the consequences have unfolded. He notes, “One kind of assessment of the choice is possible in advance, but another kind must await the outcome, because the outcome determines what has been done” (Nagel 1979, 30). This second judgment is one of moral responsibility, and we cannot escape making those types of judgments. A risky usurpation of a powerful dictatorship is morally praiseworthy only if it succeeds—otherwise, the usurpers are blamed for the worthless loss of life in the unsuccessful coup. Nagel agrees that outcome-based judgments can be expressed at the time of the decision as hypotheticals, but this does not change the fact that the outcome influences the moral assessment of an action.

Nagel's Conclusion
One potential response to this view that Nagel considers is acceptance of luck in our moral assessments. While it may be true that many factors related to our actions are out of our control, what matters is what did, in fact, happen. Counterfactuals about what would have happened do not matter; all that is relevant is what an agent actually did and what actually resulted from his actions. Thus, we are responsible for what we do regardless of whether we have adequate control over our actions.

Nagel notes that this response “would leave room for the ordinary conditions of responsibility—the absence of coercion, ignorance, or involuntary movement—as part of the determination of what someone has done—but it is understood not to exclude the influence of a great deal that he has not done” (Nagel 1979, 35-36). However, the defender of the view must explain why the lack of control over circumstances, constitution, and results are morally different from the lack of control that is present when one is coerced or forced to act.

The source of the problem of moral luck, Nagel identifies, is our desire not to be “swallowed up by the order of mere events” (Nagel 1979, 36). But this view is unavoidable because, through understanding the external events that shape our decisions and their consequences, we slowly chip away at any notion of a responsible moral self until it disappears completely. Ultimately, “we are left with nothing but a portion of the larger sequence of events, which can be deplored or celebrated, but not blamed or praised” (Nagel 1979, 37). But, simultaneously, we are unable to escape the internal view that we are moral agents. We cannot passively look at ourselves as a mere conglomerate of events and interactions. The acts that we perform “remain ours and we remain ourselves, despite the persuasiveness of the reasons that seem to argue us out of existence” (Nagel 1979, 37). This essential first-person view that stems from our inherent illusion of control translates into how we view others, as well. If we are moral agents, then others must be viewed as moral agents.

Thus, Nagel offers no way out moral luck. He concludes, “The inclusion of consequences in the conception of what we have done is an acknowledgement that we are parts of the world, but the
paradoxical character of moral luck which emerges from this acknowledgement shows that we are unable to operate within such a view, for it leaves us with no one to be” (Nagel 1979, 38). The importance of moral luck lies in the fact that it shows us that we are not in control of most, if not all, of our actions. From there, we can see that the sense we have of ourselves as active agents whose choices determine our moral character is deeply threatened. It raises the question of how a mere cog in a machine, constrained to act in a certain way and in certain circumstances, can possibly be worthy of evaluations like moral blame and praise.

2.3 Defining Control

When Nagel introduces the control principle, he does not define the key term. He writes, “Without being able to explain exactly why, we feel that the appropriateness of moral assessment is easily undermined by the discovery that the act or attribute, no matter how good or bad, is not under the person’s control” (Nagel 1979, 37). Throughout his paper, Nagel relies on an intuitive sense of control to support his claims. The closest he gets to defining a lack of control is as “partly determined by external factors” (Nagel 1979, 36). Other philosophers similarly neglect the need to define control, assuming that readers will intuitively agree regarding which factors are outside of our control.

Several definitions have been proposed for lack of control accounts of luck. Broncano-Berrocal suggests that one type of agential control we can exercise is effective control, stated as follows:

Effective Control: A has effective control over B if and only if (i) it is A’s aim that B is in a certain state S, (ii) A has a disposition to cause B to be in S and (iii) B is in S because of A’s disposition to cause B to be in S. (Broncano-Berrocal 2015, 18)

This definition of control comes close to capturing the intuitive meaning of control that is relevant to the problem of moral luck. However, control in this sense requires that an agent has the power to bring about something other than what happened. Thus, an adequate definition of control must also allow for alternate possibilities—whether an agent can cause a different possible outcome to occur than that which the actual world has brought about. An addition should be made to the definition of
effective control to also include the ability for $A$ to prevent $B$ from being in $S$. This definition of control would be consistent with the way Nagel applies the control principle. It is important to note that this view is stronger than a notion of control as mere alignment of motivations and actions. My definition of control requires that the agent is able to change or influence the state of affairs.

This lack of control account maps onto Nagel’s categories of moral luck. In the case of resultant luck, the agent performs an action and is unable to cause one outcome of that particular action rather than another. Neither the lucky reckless driver nor the unlucky reckless driver can bring about the presence or absence of a pedestrian in the street which would turn the crime into manslaughter. In the case of circumstantial luck, the agent cannot change the circumstances with which he is faced. Because the German businessman is transferred by his company to Argentina, he is unable to bring about a different state of affairs in which he would have to stay in Germany. Similarly, the concentration camp guard cannot cause his assignment or Germany’s stance in World War II to change. Most importantly, the lack of control applies to constitutive luck by definition. Because traits are inherited and conditioned by many external environmental factors (genetics, parenting, schooling, socioeconomic status, etc.), agents do not have the ability to change these inherent characteristics.

One important question to address is whether the lack of control is transitive. In other words, if an agent lacks control over $X$, and as a result of $X$ the agent causes $Y$, does the agent lack control over $Y$? This question is important if there is no solution to the problem of constitutive luck: If a person’s constitution is beyond his control, and all of a person’s acts are due to his constitution, then the transitivity of control would have us conclude that the person lacks control over all of his acts. The same applies to circumstantial luck: If a person’s circumstances are beyond his control, and all of a person’s acts are due to his circumstances, then the transitivity of control again implies that the person lacks control over all of his acts. This paper need not assume that a lack of control is transitive (although I do believe that the transitivity of control is a plausible view).
However, it does assume that the lack of control is the same for all four categories of moral luck in terms of degree and importance. This means that if people want to argue for different thresholds of control for different types of luck, they must illustrate how the definition of a lack of control provides reason to think that the categories are distinct.

2.4 Connection to the Free Will Debate

The problem of moral luck clearly relates to the problem of free will. Questions arise not only regarding how different conceptions of free will interact with the problem of moral luck, but also about whether moral luck can be separated from the free will debate. An analysis of the connection between free will and moral luck is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, I will only be concerned with the problem of moral luck itself, acknowledging that different views on free will might influence one’s view on moral luck. More specifically, alternative definitions of control from compatibilism might help some moral theorists attempt to get around the problem of moral luck.

Section 3: Responses to Moral Luck

As indicated by Nagel’s categories, moral luck can exist in various forms. The unifying element in all of these kinds of luck is the lack of control the agent has over the morally relevant factors. The problem of moral luck can be summarized as an apparent contradiction between two claims:

(1) We should not morally judge agents for what is not within their control, and

(2) We do morally judge agents for what is not within their control.

Another way of conceptualizing this problem is in a differential sense, often employed to evaluate instances of moral luck in particular scenarios:

(1) We should not morally judge two agents differently when the only difference in what is being assessed is not within their control, and

(2) We do morally judge two agents differently when the only difference in what is being assessed is not within their control.
It is important to note that this is not a strict contradiction, as (1) presents a view of what ought to be the case and (2) presents a fact about what is the case. In this regard, the contradiction is between the normative view and the practice.

Philosophers have responded to the problem of moral luck in several ways. Williams and Nagel accept (1) and (2), and they conclude that this indicates something wrong with our view of morality. More specifically, they argue that the contradiction points to a serious problem with morality—and thus our current moral framework should be reconsidered. If Williams and Nagel are correct in that the threat of moral luck is sufficiently strong, it is clear that our conception of morality must be revised, replaced, or abandoned.

Critics of this skeptical conclusion, however, have responded in three ways. Some deny (1), arguing that we should allow for luck to play a role in our moral judgments. Others deny (2), claiming that upon reflection, we do not think that luck makes a moral difference. Still others accept both (1) and (2) but deny that this forms a paradox or a need for a change in our moral reasoning.

### 3.1 The Epistemic Response

Rescher and Richards deny premise (2). They claim that we do not morally assess people differently when luck is the only relevant difference between cases—even if we do have intuitions that luck plays a role in our moral judgments, we revise those intuitions once we understand how luck factored into the equation. On this view, we do not morally judge people differently based on luck in the outcomes of their actions or the circumstances in which they must act. However, we treat people differently because in viewing those outcomes or how agents act in certain circumstances, we are merely gaining epistemic information.

*Rescher*

To make his argument, Rescher attempts to show that we do not morally judge based on luck. Then, he appeals to epistemic differences in order to explain why we seem to allow luck into our moral appraisals.
Rescher breaks down moral luck into three levels. First, there is the level of "particular actions" (Rescher 1993, 152). Here, he presents the example of a burglar who steals from his grandfather’s house while he knows that his grandfather is away. But, unbeknownst to the burglar, his grandfather has died (an occurrence beyond the burglar's control) and left the burglar all of his possessions in his will. Thus, the grandson had bad intentions, but he technically did not do anything wrong because he did not steal—after all, the items were his. In this case, Rescher argues that we judge the burglar for his bad intentions, and our view of him is no different than it would have been if his grandfather had not died. Rescher then introduces a second level of moral luck, namely “courses of action” (Rescher 1993, 153). He does not, however, elaborate much on this level, as he believes that the response to the next level will explain both.

Third, Rescher addresses the level of “moral qualities” (Rescher 1993, 153). Here, Rescher is referring to character traits and dispositions that prompt people to act in certain ways in given situations. Rescher argues that we judge people equally if they have the same moral character traits, regardless of whether they are ever put in situations that reveal those traits. In his example, “The difference between the would-be thief who lacks the opportunity [to steal] and his cousin who gets and seizes it is not one of moral condition (which, by hypothesis, is the same on both sides); their moral record may differ, but their moral standing does not” (Rescher 1993, 154). On this view, we treat the actual thief as a bad person because we have evidence that he has bad intentions. The only reason we do not treat the would-be thief similarly is because we do not know that he has bad intentions, for he never had the opportunity to reveal them. In these cases, “the luck involved relates not to our moral condition but only to our image: it relates not to what we are but to how people (ourselves included) will regard us. The difference at issue is not moral but merely epistemic” (Rescher 1993, 155). In other words, the difference in our assessment lies not in moral character, but instead in our knowledge of the agent’s moral character given his revealed actions.

*Richards*
Richards echoes Rescher's argument against the problem of moral luck. However, Richards takes an additional step by arguing that the epistemic response justifies differential treatment based on luck. Richards adheres to the claim that people of equal moral character deserve equal treatment. Yet, he observes, we are extremely constrained epistemically by the observable actions of agents. Thus, the role of luck in our treatment of people is simply due to the fact that we do not “pretend omniscience” (Richards 1993, 169). In other words, luck does not affect one’s moral desert—it only affects our knowledge of one’s moral desert.

According to Richards, our lack of omniscience forces us to use the available evidence to attempt to piece together an understanding of one’s moral character. This evidence takes the form of actions and their results, not of true intentions and counterfactuals. Richards proceeds, “In short, we ought to treat a certain driver differently from one whose identical recklessness ends in manslaughter, that will not be because the two deserve equal treatment. It will be because (a) their behavior does not make their equal deserts equally clear and (b) our treatment should reflect our understanding of those deserts” (Richards 1993, 171-172). Here, Richards argues that this epistemic difference not only explains our differential treatment of the lucky versus the unlucky, but also that it justifies this differential treatment.

However, it is important to note that Richards' account of unequal treatment is insufficient for justifying our system of reward and punishment. There are many cases in which we treat people differently despite an understanding of their equal moral character. Consider the case of drunk driver A, who unluckily kills a child who happens to be in the road, and drunk driver B, who does not kill a child because there is no child in the road. Suppose further that B is pulled over and given a DUI. In this case, we know that B would have killed a child if there were a child in the road. Although it didn’t happen, we can evaluate the counterfactual given B’s blood alcohol content. Yet, we do not treat him the same way that we treat A. Their punishment is different in virtue of the outcome of their actions. Of course, there might be other ways to justify such unequal treatment—perhaps in nonmoral
consequentialist terms. Richards’ account must address some other, non-epistemic reason for differential treatment of agents with knowingly equal moral character. Perhaps the explanation might be based on pragmatism, as it is difficult to ascertain equal moral character for most cases in the legal system.

3.2 The Epistemic Argument and Constitutive Luck

The epistemic arguments offered above face a more serious difficulty. Suppose we grant that the epistemic reasoning is correct with respect to resultant luck and circumstantial luck—in all cases, lucky and unlucky agents are equal in moral character but merely different in treatment due to our knowledge of their moral character. This account fails to address constitutive luck. We lack control of our genetics and various environmental factors that shape our personality traits, including our morally relevant characteristics. It is unclear how an epistemic argument could apply to this type of moral luck. This is because the epistemic argument relies on our actions providing information about our moral characters. Yet, the point of constitutive luck is that our moral characters themselves are formed via luck. Defenders of the epistemic argument have taken several approaches to address this issue.

Rejecting Constitutive Luck

Rescher denies that constitutive luck is a coherent concept. This argument is reminiscent of Williams, who took constitutive luck as irrelevant to the supposed equal opportunity for morality. Rescher argues, “One cannot meaningfully be said to be lucky in regard to who one is, but only with respect to what happens to one. Identity must precede luck” (Rescher 1993, 155). This account assumes too much because it holds individuals responsible for all of their moral characteristics. While some notion of identity must “precede luck,” it is not clear that one’s entire identity must do so in a specific way. It might be true that a person must have some set of characteristics to be a particular person and have a particular identity, but these qualities do not necessarily need to be moral
characteristics. After all, an agent who commits a crime of passion due to the presence of some anger gene would hardly be a different person had he not possessed that single character trait.

Rescher continues, “Holding people responsible for their moral character (rather than seeing this as something added fortuitously \textit{ab extra}) is an inherent part of the fundamental moral presumption involving treating a person as a person” (Rescher 1993, 155-156). Even if some characteristics are necessary for a person’s identity, we would still need to have control over them in order to be held morally responsible for what we do. Rescher is assuming some totalistic sense of self, and if he wants to reject constitutive luck, he must provide reasons for doing so.

Furthermore, Rescher’s denial of constitutive luck seems, at least in some regard, ad hoc. He rejects constitutive luck because it would imply a lack of moral character. However, this is not a sufficient reason for separating this type of luck from other types of luck. If Rescher still upholds the control principle, he must either deny that our identity is based on luck or find a way to separate this type of luck from other types of luck. In short, he must answer the question of what makes constitutive luck different from resultant luck such that we can reasonably embrace the former and fight against the latter.

\textit{Partial Constitutive Control}

Richards takes a slightly weaker view on constitutive luck. While he does accept that luck can play a role in one’s character, he asserts that the moral luck argument only succeeds “if one’s character is \textit{to no extent} one’s own artefact. But if the individual makes any contribution whatever to the sort of person he is, that contribution can be the basis for his deserving praise or blame for what he does” (Richards 1993, 172). In other words, constitutive luck only appears in some of our character traits. But some parts of our personality are within our control, and those qualities are morally assessable.

Here, Richards seems to assume some view of a coherent self in which voluntary additions extend responsibility to involuntary components. For example, if a person is predisposed to anger
yet makes choices to embrace this trait (for instance, by acting out repeatedly) rather than to suppress it (for instance, by attending anger management classes), the person becomes responsible for the results of his anger. So long as individuals have some form of control over their moral selves, they can be held responsible for those qualities. Richards argues that his epistemic view is flexible because it would apply to cases of constitutive luck. He holds that two agents with the same moral character might have different deserts depending on how much of their moral character was based on luck and how much was controlled by the agent. Thus, he does not see a problem regarding moral luck in this domain.

Zimmerman’s view echoes this explanation of constitutive luck. He defines two senses of character. First, he defines “given character” as those traits which we are born with and we have no control over (Zimmerman 1993, 223). Second, he defines “character as so far formed” as the combination of our given character and the traits that we have contributed through our actions (Zimmerman 1993, 223-224). In this regard, there is room for control over one’s character as so far formed. As Zimmerman explains:

“it is not obviously preposterous to praise (or blame) me as much as Mother Teresa (or Hitler) if I would have done what she (or he) did only if I had had her (or his) given character. What is preposterous is to accord me the same credit or discredit if I would have done what they did, but only if, I had their character as so far formed (insofar as it differs, as it presumably does, from their given character)” (Zimmerman 1993, 224).

However, the problem in these explanations is in trying to isolate that part of a person’s character which is not a matter of luck of contingency. The problem is not merely epistemic. There is a metaphysical question of to what extent we can shape our moral selves through voluntary actions. Moreover, examples of partial constitutive control tend to merely push the problem back. Let us reconsider the example of the person who is genetically predisposed to anger. Some might claim that the has control in shaping his moral character in the sense that he can choose to minimize this tendency or embrace it. Suppose that he decides to attend anger management classes in order to mold his moral self. This simply raises the question of moral luck again: Did he really have control in
the relevant sense regarding his decision to undergo anger management training? In answering this question, we will return to the fact that biology, upbringing, and circumstances—factors beyond his control—strongly (if not completely) influenced this decision as well.

When the epistemic argument attempts to get around constitutive luck, it risks losing the fairness criterion. If we assume responsibility for our constitutive luck, then accomplishing moral goodness becomes much more difficult for some people than for others—and this achievement is supposed to be equally accessible to everyone. If we evaluate people differently based on their constitutive luck, then we are not treating them fairly in terms of the moral standards we hold them to and the judgments we make about them.

3.3 The Epistemic Argument and Differential Treatment

On the epistemic views, one’s moral character consists of not only their revealed moral records, but also in a large, if not infinite, set of counterfactual assessments of what one would have done in a variety of different situations. Zimmerman argues that the unfairness associated with differential treatment of lucky versus unlucky agents “does not consist in ascribing moral responsibility to one of the parties involved, but, rather, in not ascribing it to the other” (Zimmerman 1993, 226). This means that we should be morally responsible for not only all of our decisions and their outcomes, but also all of the decisions we would have made and the outcomes that would have resulted from them.

Noticing a potential weakness in his view (and in that of any view that removes luck from moral judgment), Zimmerman asks the question: “what is it that we are to hold…the unsuccessful reckless driver responsible for?” (Zimmerman 1993, 226). Here, several responses are possible. First, we can claim that neither the successful nor the unsuccessful driver is responsible for the child’s death. However, this seems implausible since the successful driver did cause the child’s death. Second, we can claim that both the successful driver and the unsuccessful driver are responsible for the child’s death. This also seems absurd, as the unsuccessful driver did not actually kill the child.
Third, we can claim that the unsuccessful driver is to blame, but not for anything. However, this response is unsatisfying because it leads to a potentially problematic view of blame. If we allow people to be blameworthy, but not for anything, it is unclear how exactly we would determine blame and what we mean by blame.

Fourth, we can claim that the unsuccessful driver is blameworthy for his decision. Furthermore, we would claim that although the successful driver is blameworthy for more in scope (the decision plus the child’s death), he is not more blameworthy in degree. This response is compelling because it allows us to maintain the control principle. However, this approach only seems to work in cases of resultant luck—it gets more complicated when it comes to circumstantial and constitutive luck because these types of luck do not rely on an agent’s decisions. Still, even if we could redefine responsibility with reference to counterfactuals, it is impossible to actually evaluate these counterfactuals (though this is an epistemological constraint, and for some this does not pose a problem).

Jensen argues, along similar lines, that Nagel is missing “the distinction between actual results which are in every sense beyond the control of the agent and actual results which are within the risk created by the faulty character of the agent’s act, but are beyond his control in the qualified sense that, among the results within the risk, whether one result occurs rather than some other is beyond his control” (Jensen 1993, 135). In short, Jensen rejects that the control principle is being violated. Consider the case of two negligent truck drivers where one ends up killing a child and the other does not. According to Jensen, these drivers are equally morally responsible. However, the unlucky truck driver does deserve harsher treatment. This deserved blame is in virtue of the fact that in being negligent, he took a risk in which one of the possible outcomes was accidentally killing someone. So, while he was not in control of the fact that an unlucky outcome did occur, he was in some relevant sense in control of the outcome because he chose to take that risk. On this view,
treating the unlucky driver more harshly is justified because the driver made himself liable for this potential outcome when he made his decision and accepted the risk it entailed.

In the case of drunk driving, this response appears appropriate because both drivers took on a serious risk when choosing to get in their vehicles. However, we seem to assign equal blame (in degree) because drunk driving reliably leads to reckless driving. The decision itself was wrong in the first place. But in a case where the risk is not as significant, this line of reasoning is threatened. Most of our actions have some level of uncertainty regarding the outcome, and we must take some risks all the time. The conclusion that we are responsible for the results of our actions in virtue of accepting the associated risk seems absurd in cases with small probabilities of harm, and every action we take as at least some small likelihood of causing harm.

Supporters of Jensen’s argument might claim that there is some standard degree of risk and we can only be blameworthy for choices above this threshold. The problem for these philosophers would be that they then have to define what constitutes an acceptable degree of risk. Moreover, if this line is supposed to indicate moral responsibility, it must not be ad hoc or pragmatic—there must be a morally relevant reason for allowing risk up to, but not beyond, that specific point. The difficulty is more than just an issue of vagueness: there is an important question that proponents of Jensen’s view must answer about how risk influences control.

Jensen further argues that “in cases in which we subject an agent to more blame when a harmful result follows from the faulty character of his act or to less blame if no such result occurs, our justification for doing so lies ultimately in a concern for the integrity of persons and their ability to function as moral agents” (Jensen 1993, 136). On this view, Jensen accepts that there will be instances in which actual outcomes of our decisions influence the degree of blame we endure compared to a similar situation in which our luck was different. However, this would simply be the result of “plain luck, not moral luck” (Jensen 1993, 139). The problem with this view is that it falsely assumes that moral luck can be separated from plain luck in these cases. Whenever a moral judgment
must be made, any luck that influenced the decision should be considered moral luck. In these cases, Jensen is arbitrarily deciding not to apply the control principle.

3.4 Allowing Luck to Influence Moral Judgments

Walker rejects premise (1) of moral luck. She believes that luck should play a role in moral judgments. Walker argues that the presence of luck in the world gives humans “impure agency: agency situated within the causal order in such ways as to be variably conditioned by and conditioning parts of that order, without being able to draw for all purposes a unitary boundary to its exercise at either end nor always for particular purposes a sharp one” (Walker 1993, 243). This definition, though vague, allows agency to represent both our choices and our luck. On this view, we can be responsible for things beyond our control. In other words, exposing ourselves to risk (something we all must do) enables and requires us to claim responsibility even for unforeseen consequences of this risk.

Walker considers the implications of making morality immune to luck—subscribing to a notion of “pure agency”—and determines that it is better to allow luck to play a role in moral considerations than to restrict morality to only what is within our control. She notes, “Pure agents will not only be responsible for less, but will bear a special kind of relationship to their responsibilities: they will unilaterally control and constitute them” (Walker 1993, 246). Thus, pure agents become morally responsible only for the limited actions they intend to take and the foreseen consequences of those actions. Walker depicts a world of pure agents as dismal. Because people will have such specific and restricted responsibilities, our network of social obligations and interactions will fall apart: “[Pure agents’] unilateral control of responsibility and their exemption from reparative demands in all areas beyond strict control make clear that such agents may not reasonably be looked to for much” (Walker 1993, 246).

Because we value the interdependent nature of our world with obligations that sometimes extend beyond explicit and complete control, Walker proposes that we opt for a view of impure
agency. She concludes, “Impure agents are saddled with weighty responsibilities and the open-ended possibility of acquiring more due to circumstances beyond their control. Yet agents who recognize their vulnerability to fortune are primed for dependability of humanly invaluable sorts” (Walker 1993, 247). Integrity, as she defines it, is a highly valued virtue that emerges from impure agency—it is the respectable quality of taking responsibility for the outcomes of bad moral luck. This characteristic is supposed to be central to our moral character, providing another reason for allowing luck to make a moral difference.

Walker’s argument remains unconvincing. It is unclear that a world of pure agents would be so awful. Walker’s view of pure agents is that they would only act in limited ways because they are not morally obligated to act beyond their control. However, people often perform acts that are not morally obligatory for a myriad of reasons. Though a pure agent might not be morally required to help a friend beyond the extent to which she specifically promised to help, she will most likely continue to help because she cares for her friend and wants to help. We often distinguish between moral obligations and morally permissible actions, and the tendency to act in morally permissible ways will not necessarily disappear by reducing the number of moral obligations.

Walker’s account also seems to equate moral responsibility with deserved treatment in the case of pure agents. Yet, as indicated by the epistemic argument, there may still be reasons for treating people differently if there is no difference in moral character. However, some limited form of Walker’s argument may be useful in addressing constitutive luck. A world in which no one is morally responsible for anything because their characteristics are beyond their control may well turn out to be worse than Walker’s description of pure agency. Although, a fear of the implications of rejecting moral responsibility is not a good reason for preserving moral responsibility. Accepting Walker’s solution to constitutive luck would leave us with, at best, a pragmatic justification for moral responsibility.

3.5 Accepting Moral Luck
If the previous arguments are not convincing enough to deny (1) or (2), we are left with the apparent contradiction outlined by Williams and Nagel. Andre notes that there is still a remaining response: “to admit that we do justify actions partially on the basis of luck, accept the conclusion that we are not consistent Kantians, but reject the implication that our moral scheme is therefore incoherent” (Andre 1993, 124). In other words, Andre wants to argue that there is no paradox of moral luck: the two premises merely reflect the hybrid nature of morality.

According to Andre, we do have some Kantian element in the way we make moral judgments. This explains our belief that luck should not play a role in our moral judgments. After all, we do try to separate intentions of actions from outcomes of those actions. These judgments are linked to the notion that some omniscient judge could know a moral agent’s true character and reward or punish them accordingly. As Andre notes, this view does not require a commitment to a godlike judge—it merely requires that we could imagine what this type of being would do and would be justified doing (Andre 1993, 126). For this reason, upon reflection we tend to view two careful drivers as equally good in moral terms, even if one accidentally ran over a child through no fault of his own.

On the other hand, there is an Aristotelian element in the way we make moral judgments as well. As Andre explains, “Part of being moral, for most of us, is being virtuous; and being virtuous involves more than doing the right thing. It involves as well the ability to see what the right thing to do is, and the desire to do that right thing” (Andre 1993, 126). This type of reasoning leads us to make some moral judgments based on luck. On her explanation, it seems that constitutive luck is the primary target of Aristotelian judgments. This element in our moral evaluations does not link to punishment and reward in the same way that the Kantian component does. Moral judgments in this sense are character evaluations which are independent of one’s control over their moral character.

Andre asserts that we often use moral concepts that are hybrids of the Kantian and Aristotelian frameworks. She provides an example, “Someone may be sadistic because of the way he was raised—but he’s still sadistic, and it is not a contradiction to say this is a moral fault for which he
is not to blame.” (Andre 1993, 126). Here, the Aristotelian component allows us to classify the sadist as morally bad. Yet, the Kantian element enables us to remove the blame judgment when we realize that his sadistic tendencies are not his fault. If it is the case that our understanding of morality includes both Kantian and Aristotelian elements, Andre argues, then the problem of moral luck is not necessarily contradictory because the hybrid view separates character judgments (Aristotelian) from blame judgments (Kantian) when the two conflict.

However, we still must ask whether the hybrid characterization of moral luck is satisfying. Andre criticizes Nagel and Williams on the following grounds:

“the appearance of [contradiction in moral luck] results from assuming that ‘moral’ can only have a Kantian sense, and then discovering cases where its application depends on circumstances beyond the agent’s control. In its central sense, I contend, morality refers to excellence of character. Whenever we praise people as moral we mean they are worthy of praise and emulation; but only sometimes do we mean that they are worthy of reward.” (Andre 1993, 127)

Given this explanation, we must ask what remains of the Kantian element of morality in Andre’s view. Her description of the false assumption of Kantianism avoids situations in which we do believe that the Kantian judgment is appropriate. Andre’s solution misses the point that whenever we make a Kantian judgment, circumstantial and constitutive luck diminish—or even destroy—its power. Andre succeeds in separating character evaluations from moral desert. However, this view does not help us in justifying Kantian judgments about blame and punishment. More work must be done to explain how moral luck allows us to make any judgments about this category.

### 3.6 Taking Stock

Attempts to immunize morality from luck are unsuccessful. The epistemic argument comes close; however, its inability to deal with constitutive luck is a problem. On one hand, if constitutive luck is incoherent, then defenders of this argument must provide reasons for why the lack of control over one’s constitution is significantly different from lack of control over one’s circumstances or the results of one’s actions. On the other hand, if constitutive luck is accounted for due to our partial control over our constitution, then similar concerns arise over applications to other types of luck. If
partial control is sufficient for moral responsibility in the case of one’s character traits, the question arises of why partial control over circumstances or results does not have similar implications. The problem of constitutive luck is in answering the question of whether one’s given constitution can be adequately separated from voluntary components—and, if it can, is the resulting “self” sufficient for moral responsibility?

A more general concern with the epistemic argument is that it assumes that every person has an underlying moral character that is slowly uncovered through different moral tests. However, the nature of this moral self is unclear. Moreover, devoid of some strong conception of the afterlife in which our true moral characters are judged by an omniscient being who knows how we would act in all possible counterfactuals, positing a deep moral self is largely unhelpful. Furthermore, problems may arise if supporters of the epistemic argument adopt (as they may be bound to) the argument that people should be responsible for not only what they do, but also what they would have done if the circumstances or results or (or potentially constitution) were different. This means that if we could predict with enough confidence how people would act in various situations, we would be justified in holding them accountable for actions that they never committed. Similarly worrisome is the fact that if our moral selves consist of these giant sets of counterfactual judgments, any implications of an immoral act we perform that is supposed to provide epistemic evidence of our moral character would be fallacious—every moral judgment would be a hasty generalization, as one act in a set of billions of actions and counterfactuals is insufficient to draw a reliable conclusion about one’s moral character.

So long as we define luck in terms of a lack of control, morality cannot avoid the influence of luck. The next question is whether we should allow moral responsibility to extend to factors beyond our control. Walker responds affirmatively by appealing to a notion of impure agency. She argues that we should prefer a world in which agency is defined widely (including elements beyond our control) than one in which agency is defined narrowly. However, Walker’s argument is largely
speculative. It is not convincing that we should abandon the intuition that people should not be treated differently in moral terms for things that they cannot control.

At this point, it seems appealing to use Walker’s argument for allowing impure agency in the sense of constitutive luck while adopting another argument (for instance, an epistemic argument) against other types of luck. Yet, allowing for a different response depending on the type of luck again raises the question of what makes these forms of luck so different as to warrant different solutions. Moreover, this strategy prompts us to return to the question of whether the loss of control is transitive. If we do not have control over our character due to constitutive luck, it might logically follow that we also lack control over our circumstantial and resultant luck. If this is the case, then all types of luck are threatened by constitutive luck and must be addressed in the same manner.

Ultimately, the reasons for rejecting either component of moral luck remain unconvincing. Once we accept the premises, two options remain: reconciling the two seemingly contradictory claims by showing that they are not paradoxical or adopting moral skepticism.

**Section 4: Moral Responsibility**

In the free will debate, an important question arises: Do we have the kind of freedom (if we have any freedom at all) necessary for moral responsibility? Yet this question goes beyond the context of free will. In the domain of moral luck, we are talking about freedom in the sense of control. A modified question can be asked more broadly: Do we have the kind of control necessary for moral responsibility? Given the pervasiveness of moral luck, we must answer “no.”

The problem with accepting this view is that it seems to contradict our intuitions and feelings. Even if we accept that we do not have control over our constitutions, circumstances, actions, and their outcomes, it is difficult—if not impossible—to get rid of the psychological feeling that we do have at least partial control over some of these things. It seems as though we cannot even conceive of fully accepting a lack of control because every time we are faced with a choice, we feel some sense
of control over the outcome. Similarly, even if we accept that we do not have ultimate moral responsibility over anything, it is difficult—if not impossible—to get rid of the internal feeling that we are moral agents with moral responsibility.

4.1 Resentment

P.F. Strawson focuses on the attitudes we take towards other people when we evaluate their characters and their actions. He begins by separating two groups of reactions we have to cases of resentment. In the first group, responses such as “he didn’t mean to” and “he couldn’t help it” prompt us to mitigate our feeling of resentment because they reduce the extent to which the agent was responsible for the harmful outcome (P.F. Strawson 1974, 7). As P.F. Strawson explains, “They do not invite us to see the agent as other than a fully responsible agent. They invite us to see the injury as one for which he was not fully, or at all, responsible” (P.F. Strawson 1974, 7). In these cases, we can appropriately feel resentment, even though this feeling might be reduced when we consider the broader circumstances.

In the second group, responses such as “he’s only a child” and “he’s a hopeless schizophrenic” mitigate our feeling of resentment because they reduce the extent to which the agent is a morally responsible agent at all (P.F. Strawson 1974, 8). P.F. Strawson notes, these types of excuses “invite us to view the agent himself in a different light from the light in which we should normally view one who has acted as he has acted” (P.F. Strawson 1974, 8). In these cases, we suspend our feelings of resentment because it would not be appropriate to attach them to the agent. The key difference between these two groups, according to P.F. Strawson, is essentially whether the additional considerations influence a single action or a larger set of actions. In the first class of reactions, our feelings of resentment are altered because we view the agent as generally morally responsible, but we might excuse him in this one instance because he was not responsible for a particular outcome. In the second class of reactions, our feelings of resentment become misplaced because we excuse the agent from moral judgment altogether.
From here, P.F. Strawson contrasts two types of perspectives we take towards others. On one hand, he defines reactive attitudes as “essentially human reactions to the good or ill will or indifference of others towards us, as displayed in their attitudes and actions” (P.F. Strawson 1974, 10). These include feelings of resentment, gratitude, and forgiveness. On the other hand, he defines objective attitudes as when we view another person as “an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment” (P.F. Strawson 1974, 9). These assessments are supposed to lie beyond our personal feelings towards the individual. When we view someone as psychologically abnormal and therefore not a proper object of reactive attitudes, we adopt a wholly objective view.

P.F. Strawson is attempting to reject the claim that determinism (although we can apply this more broadly to moral luck) requires us to adopt solely objective attitudes. The first part of his argument is pragmatic: “A sustained objectivity of inter-personal attitude, and the human isolation which that would entail, does not seem to be something of which human beings would be capable, even if some general truth were a theoretical ground for it” (P.F. Strawson 1974, 11). In other words, he doubts that we could actually live in such a way where we discard or avoid reactive attitudes such as resentment—they are too ingrained in the way we live and interact with others.

To this point, there are several viable objections. First, P.F. Strawson may be overestimating the extent to which we cannot overcome reactive feelings such as resentment. Many deeply ingrained feelings can be significantly reduced even if they are not fully eradicated. Anger, for instance, can be modulated internally—and even if we cannot stop ourselves from feeling initial anger, we can train ourselves to combat our anger and the influence it has over our actions. Second, even if reactive attitudes are uncontrollably present, this is not a reason for embracing the moral theory that they point to. Moral judgment can still be objective regardless of our feelings. A homophobic person, for instance, may feel disgust towards same-sex couples, but his feeling of disgust (or even resentment) does not imply that he is morally right in condemning them.
Shun, a Confucian scholar, argues that resentment is an attitude that we can and should overcome. In doing so, he rejects two assumptions grounding a common contemporary view of resentment: that resentment protects self-respect and that resentment cannot (or should not) be eliminated. According to the contemporary Western view, resentment arises when some wrongful injury challenges one’s standing—and failing to respond with resentment indicates a deficiency of self-respect. On this view, self-respect “[focuses] on what is due to oneself, and the commitment involved is a commitment to not allow oneself to be treated in violation of such standards” (Shun 2014, 30). Thus, failure to resent the offender in a case of wrongful injury shows a lack of self-respect.

However, the Confucian view rejects that the way in which one is treated by others should damage one’s self-respect. Instead, Confucians believe that self-respect “[concerns] the ethical standards that govern one’s way of life, and the commitment involved is a commitment to not fall below such standards in one’s qualities and actions” (Shun 2014, 30). On this view, failure to respond to a wrongful injury with resentment does not show a deficiency in self-respect. Rather, the focus is on how the person who is harmed responds to the situation. The proper basis for a person’s self-respect is his own behavior—not how others treat him.

Moreover, Shun challenges the idea that it is impossible for humans to overcome resentment. He explains:

If the sage or the virtuous person who is above resentment is held up as a moral exemplar, then it seems this is an ideal that humans should aspire to and seek to approximate. Even if resentment is part of the ordinary human condition, it is not a desirable kind of response to wrongful injury and we should strive to shift to a perspective from which we would no longer feel resentment” (Shun 2014, 32)

If Shun is correct and we should desire to eliminate feelings of resentment, then we should focus on changing this deficiency within ourselves when we are wrongfully injured rather than changing the way we view the offender.

A third argument against the use of reactive attitudes in morality is that they differ widely by person and thus are not reliable indicators of moral desert. If the same action causes resentment in
one person and indifference in another person, it is not clear whose reactive attitudes matter in the moral judgment of the offender. If reactive attitudes determine moral standing, then morality will be largely inconsistent. Thus, while may be difficult to imagine ourselves always taking the objective view in our reactive attitudes, it is not very difficult to imagine us taking an objective view when making moral judgments. It is okay to have feelings of resentment so long as they are not guiding moral evaluations.

P.F. Strawson’s second argument against the claim that determinism requires an objective attitude is that we already do take the objective attitude sometimes—and when we do, it is not because of determinism. This argument seems compelling when applied to determinism. Consider the case of a man who spills beer on a woman. Perhaps she is resentful. But, when learning that he has a medical condition that causes his hand to spasm at random times, she adopts the objective view and reduces her resentment. She does not do this because she accepts determinism; there is another reason. Interestingly, however, this reason that causes the mitigation of her resentment is that she learned about the man’s lack of control over his action. This is why P.F. Strawson’s argument does not hold up when applied to moral luck in general.

Moral luck rests on the idea of control. It seems that when we take the objective attitude towards and individual, we do so in light of reduced control. It is true that reactive attitudes are felt more strongly for certain types of control, and this observation is important in understanding how we make intuitive moral judgments. Yet when we acknowledge that we tend to adopt the objective view when there is a lack of control, it makes sense that we should always adopt the objective view when there is a lack of control. Moreover, as the problem of moral luck shows, there is always a lack of morally relevant control. Thus, we should always adopt the objective view when making moral evaluations. As Shun notes, we should seek to eliminate reactive attitudes such as resentment that indicate a deficiency in our ability to adhere to the objective attitude.

4.2 Morality Without Moral Responsibility
G. Strawson, on the other hand, accepts that “luck swallows everything” and that “there can be no ultimate moral responsibility” (G. Strawson 2011). He presents what he calls the Basic Argument against moral responsibility:

(1) Nothing can be *causa sui*—nothing can be the cause of itself.
(2) In order to be truly morally responsible for one’s actions one would have to be *causa sui*, at least in certain crucial mental respects.
(3) Therefore nothing can be morally responsible.

(G. Strawson 2008, 319)

The Basic Argument is striking in its simplicity, yet it is sound. Premise (1) seems admittedly controversial when taken as a general metaphysical principle. However, applied to humans with respect to their characters, this claim is essentially outlining constitutive and circumstantial luck. Genetic and environmental factors which are completely beyond our control shape who we are. More specifically, they shape our moral characters. In other words, we do not cause our own moral selves—we are influenced by a variety of factors beyond our control. Even if we do have some control, it is too small to outweigh the constitutive and circumstantial luck a morally relevant way. Premise (2) is true, at least when we are considering morality as tied to desert. For a person to deserve praise or blame, it is clear that they must have sufficient control over themselves and their actions.

Although the Basic Argument is a clear application of modus ponens, the conclusion still feels difficult to accept. The implication of accepting the argument is that praise, blame, reward, and punishment are not truly deserved or just in a strong moral sense. G. Strawson attributes the resistance to the Basic Argument to our psychological inability to give up the illusion of choice. Even if we admit that we lack relevant control in all of our decisions, whenever we face a situation with multiple options, we cannot escape the feeling that we are actively choosing by some internal force of our own. This is similar to P.F. Strawson’s claim that a theoretical acceptance of a lack of control is insufficient for changing our emotions and behaviors. Both philosophers agree that there is a strange gap between the theoretical commitment and the psychological reality. As G. Strawson notes, “the conviction that self-awareness of one’s situation can be a sufficient foundation of free will is very
powerful. It runs deeper than rational argument, and it survives untouched, in the everyday conduct of life, even after the validity of the Basic Argument has been admitted” (G. Strawson 2008, 331). In other words, even if we can see that we are making a mistake in an abstract sense, we are seemingly unable to translate this acceptance into how we live our lives at the pragmatic level.

Buddhists, however, deny that there is necessarily a gap between the theoretical and practical level surrounding the inexistence of moral responsibility. According to Goodman, early Buddhists view the world in a fundamentally different way than contemporary Westerners. He explains that these Buddhists believe that “the really existing entities are simple, momentary, localized things, interrelated by a web of causal connections... But nowhere in this universe of momentary things is there room for a soul, an enduring self, or a sentient being” (Goodman 2002, 362). On this view, it is a mistake to think of a person as a unified entity.

If the self is nonexistent, then the question arises of whether moral responsibility exists. One answer that Goodman provides is: “If you don't exist, then nothing is up to you. If there is no autonomous self, there is no autonomy. If there is no genuine boundary between self and other, there can be no genuine distinction between actions that flow from the self and motions imposed on the self from outside” (Goodman 2002, 362). Furthermore, according to Buddhists, everything is temporary, changing, and interconnected. Thus, it would be incomprehensible to attempt to locate the entity at which moral judgments like blame and praise are directed. The self does not persist through time, nor does it even exist as a single entity at any point in time.

Denying the existence of ultimate moral responsibility may seem like an absurd conclusion. However, we need not abandon morality altogether if we give up moral responsibility. We can still judge people, actions, and outcomes as good, bad, right, or wrong. A situation can be morally bad even if no one is responsible for it. Removing moral responsibility would leave these judgments intact. However, “rejecting moral responsibility would have affective consequence: it would render certain emotions, such as anger and resentment, irrational and inappropriate” (Goodman 2002, 366). These
emotions are analogous to what P.F. Strawson referred to as reactive attitudes. The Buddhist doctrine does not merely state that we ought to reduce these emotions and their influence, but it also provides a method for doing so: meditation. This technique is supposed to focus on the nonexistence of the self and the reasons for mitigating reactive emotions. Buddhist Śāntideva “compares the proper attitude toward other people with the one people are inclined to take toward such non-sentient things as bile, fire, or sticks” (Goodman 2002, 368). After all, we do not feel resentment towards these objects when they harm us. If autonomy in humans does not truly exist, then there is no more reason to resent people than there is to resent chairs.

4.3 Implications of Rejecting Moral Responsibility

Buddhist thought might be too extreme for some in its denial of the self. Accepting moral luck does not entail this type of claim; it merely prompts us to deny the existence of a morally responsible self. Initially, it seems intuitively problematic to accept such a view given the effects it might have on the way we conduct ourselves and shape our society—particularly with respect to punishment. However, the implications might not be so devastating.

It is important to once again note that eliminating moral responsibility does not threaten our ability to (justly) make certain types of moral judgments. We can still judge actions, events, and people as morally right, wrong, good, bad, desirable, and undesirable. To use an example from Pereboom, “Even if we came to believe that some perpetrator of genocide was not blameworthy in this sense due to a degenerative brain disease, we would still hold that his actions were morally wrong, and that it was very bad that he acted as he did. So, in general, denying blameworthiness of this type would not appear to threaten judgments of wrongness or badness” (Pereboom 2011, 417). We can still make value judgments because these are separate from judgments about responsibility. These types of moral evaluations are not threatened by moral luck.

If moral luck excludes moral responsibility, then blame is never deserved. On this view, any justification for punishment grounded on theories of retribution should be disregarded. No one
deserves to be punished because no one is blameworthy for their actions. There are, however, other viable theories of punishment. Pereboom considers several options that would be compatible with a commitment to denying moral responsibility. First, he considers theories of punishment based on educating criminals. Pereboom dismisses this option fairly quickly, noting the lack of empirical evidence for this claim as well as the assertion that there are likely methods that work better than punishment. While this may be true for large-scale punishment systems, the education justification may be useful for everyday punishment—particularly for parents attempting to morally educate their children. Moreover, the failure of existing education systems does not imply that education systems in general are ineffective. Perhaps with more time and resources devoted to educating criminals, we will be able to produce a method that is successful.

Pereboom also considers deterrence theories of punishment, since justifications based on preventing future crime are consistent with denying moral responsibility. Within the class of deterrence theories, he addresses the utilitarian view, which justifies punishment by appealing to its ability to maximize societal wellbeing. Pereboom dismisses this type of justification on the basis that it “would require punishing the innocent when doing so would maximize utility; in certain situations it would prescribe punishment that is unduly severe; and it would authorize harming people merely as means to the safety of others” (Pereboom 2011, 418). This concern is not about punishment per se, but a general objection to utilitarianism that can be applied to punishment. Utilitarians might not see a problem with biting the bullet and accepting that certain situations will warrant the punishment of innocent people. Moreover, if we remove desert from the justification of punishment, as accepting moral luck requires, then criminals and non-criminals are equally non-deserving of punishment and thus we are equally justified in punishing them for utilitarian purposes. Thus, it is not clear that utilitarian-based deterrence theories should be dismissed so quickly.

The key punishment model Pereboom considers is one that is analogous to quarantining people with diseases. As Pereboom explains, “Even if [a serial killer] is not morally responsible for
his crimes (for example, because no one is ever morally responsible), it would be as legitimate to isolate him as to quarantine a nonresponsible carrier of a serious communicable disease” (Pereboom 2011, 418). On this view, we are justified in separating criminals from society for similar reasons that we are justified in isolating diseased individuals from society. Neither justification relies on responsibility—the reason for removing these people from society is because they are a danger to others, not because they are blameworthy for the fact that they are a danger to others.

While the quarantine model of punishment would require changes to the way in which we structure our punishment system, these modifications are not necessarily bad. Treating punishment as we treat disease provides strong reasons for criminal justice reform. First, “just as moderately dangerous diseases may allow for only measures less intrusive than quarantine, so moderately serious criminal tendencies might only justify responses less intrusive than detention” (Pereboom 2011, 419). In practice, this would mean sending fewer people to prison and instead relying more on other interventions such as treatment programs or community service requirements. Additionally, adherence to this theory would likely translate to shorter sentences because we could only justify imprisoning people for a length of time that adequately corresponds with the need for the public to be protected from the perpetrator.

Second, accepting a quarantine theory of punishment would alter the prison system in that it would shift the focus from punishment for its own sake to rehabilitation. To draw on the medical analogy, “Just as society must seek to cure the diseased it quarantines, so it would be required to try to rehabilitate the criminals it detains” (Pereboom 2011, 419). Moreover, this theory of punishment would call for an increase in the standards of living for the prisoners who must remain in detention. If people are being imprisoned merely to separate them from society, then there is not a justifiable reason to make them suffer additionally. We would not quarantine a sick person in a tiny cell with minimal amenities, and so we should avoid this type of treatment for prisoners. In the current prison model, depriving prisoners of a certain standard of living relates to some notion of blame in which
inmates deserve to live in suboptimal conditions. But if we remove the blame judgment and assert that we are only isolating prisoners for the sake of society, then there is no reason to treat them more harshly than what is necessary to protect the public.

A potential objection to the quarantine view is that it could justify preemptive punishment: if someone is assessed as having a dangerous character but has not yet committed a crime, we might be justified nevertheless in quarantining this person. In response, defenders of the quarantine view will have to bite the bullet and accept that we may be justified in punishing people before they commit a crime. Of course, the caveat would be the necessity of reaching a sufficient threshold of certainty regarding whether a person will commit a crime. Because this ability is far from feasible with our current technology, we might be more comfortable biting the bullet. However, if we do reach a point of being able to correctly predict criminal activities, other theories of punishment will also have to address the justification and implications of preemptive punishment in their own right.

In addition to altering the way we view punishment, rejecting moral responsibility would invalidate many of the morally charged reactive attitudes that P.F. Strawson mentions. Pereboom contends that “Of all the attitudes associated with the belief that we are morally responsible, anger seems most closely connected with it” (Pereboom 2011, 423). This is certainly true of reactive attitudes like resentment and indignation. If we get rid of moral responsibility, these anger-based responses that rely on blameworthiness become unjustified. Eliminating the justifiability of these feelings need not threaten our interpersonal relationships. We might be better off without feelings of resentment and guilt, which can lead us to hold grudges and act irrationally. Furthermore, there are still many attitudes and emotions that are central to interpersonal relationships that are not threatened by removing moral responsibility. Pereboom offers thankfulness, joy, and love as examples of emotions that do not presuppose moral responsibility (Pereboom 2011, 423). Even some forms of anger can persist, so long as they are generalized or directed towards a state of affairs as opposed to a morally responsible party.
4.4 Nonmoral Responsibility

Pickard offers an interesting framework of “Responsibility without Blame” (Pickard 2014, 10). She separates the two terms as follows: “Responsibility is about whether someone meets various conditions that must hold for it to be true that they are responsible for their actions. Blame is about our emotions, judgments, and actions towards those who are responsible for harm or do wrong” (Pickard 2014, 13). Pickard criticizes blaming patients with personality disorders in clinical settings because blame is centered around “hostile feelings” and can involve “permanently stigmatizing and condemning [service users] as a bad or worthless person” (Pickard 2014, 14). These judgments, she notes, are unjustified because there are often factors resulting from upbringing and mental illness that reduce the extent to which the agents are at fault for their actions.

Pickard defines responsibility as resting on the control condition. More specifically, she states that “the core necessary conditions for responsibility are choice and at least a degree of control” (Pickard 2014, 13). The widespread nature of moral luck, however, reveals that people do not actually have responsibility in this sense. Because of this, Pickard’s distinction between responsibility and blame does not hold. Even if there were a theoretical distinction between the two, the conditions for responsibility would never be met, just as the conditions for blame would never be met. Yet, there may be an alternative way to think about responsibility that enables some semblance of the distinction Pickard is trying to make.

Importantly, Pickard notes that moral responsibility revolves around whether an agent meets certain standards of action. But responsibility exists in another, nonmoral form. Let us call this type of responsibility “matter-of-fact” responsibility. Claims about this type of responsibility revolve around whether an agent caused an event to happen. We often ascribe this kind of responsibility to inanimate objects. Suppose I am sitting in a chair. One of the chair legs breaks, and as a result I fall to the floor. We might say that my tumble is morally bad—after all, it involves unnecessary harm. Moreover, we can claim that the chair is matter-of-fact responsible for this harm: the chair caused
the harm. We do not hold the chair morally responsible, nor do we consider the chair morally blameworthy. Its responsibility is just a fact about the state of affairs. Given its matter-of-fact responsibility, we may be justified in altering the chair so that it does not cause harm again—perhaps by attempting to fix the broken chair, or if it cannot be fixed, by putting it aside or destroying it.

Like chairs, even if humans lack moral responsibility, they can still have matter-of-fact responsibility. Suppose a man commits murder. We can say (and hopefully, most of us would say) that this act is morally wrong. Given the pervasiveness of moral luck, however, he lacks the relevant control to have moral responsibility and to be blameworthy for his actions. Yet, it is a fact that this man caused the murder, and so he is matter-of-fact responsible for doing so. But, as with the chair, we should try to fix the deficiency—perhaps through therapy, anger management training, or other rehabilitation programs—to remedy this deficiency so that he does not commit morally bad acts again. If these attempts are unsuccessful, we would not destroy the man as we might do with a chair. This is not because the man is a moral agent, but rather because he meets some other standard of personhood which gives him the human right to life. So instead, consistent with the quarantine model of punishment, we can keep him away from the public to protect others from harm that can reasonably be expected to commit and be matter-of-fact responsible for. This view does require that there is a tendency or disposition that might continue to display itself in the future. If the responsibility is a one-shot causal responsibility, then there is no justification for attempting to fix the deficiency or punish the agent.

Towards the end of one of her papers, Pickard concludes that “Adopting the clinical stance of Responsibility without Blame within the criminal justice contexts allows us to re-conceive punishment as the imposition of serious or negative consequences in response to criminal responsibility, but with an attitude of concern, respect, and compassion for the offender” (Pickard 2014, 15). Even if we reject her notion of moral responsibility, this statement still applies well to matter-of-fact responsibility. This kind of responsibility can justify punishment for causing morally
wrong events, while denying moral responsibility and blame. Subsequently, this view can prompt a positive attitude towards the unlucky individual who turns out to be matter-of-fact responsible for the moral offense.

4.5 Motivation to Improve

While the denial of moral responsibility may be palatable in terms of theories of punishment, another potential problem arises regarding the motivation of people to improve their moral characters. In her discussion of addicts, Pickard lauds her Responsibility without Blame model because:

it does not achieve [an attitude of care towards addicts] by denying addicts their agency in order to exculpate them from responsibility, thereby making any improvement or recovery dependent on a medical ‘cure’. Rather, it aims to mobilize a sense of agency and empowerment in addicts, avoiding blame not through conceiving them as helpless victims of disease, but through acknowledging and working with their agency without adopting moralizing or stigmatizing attitudes and practices (Pickard 2017, 7).

The significant point in this passage is that without a sense of agency or control over one’s constitution, circumstances, actions, and results of these, there is not internal motivation to attempt to change one’s ways.

Denying moral responsibility might manifest itself in thinking about the future. Embracing a lack of control can lead to “resignation to whatever the future holds in store” (Pereboom 2011, 419). The intuitive question arises similarly in the case of accepting moral luck as it does in accepting determinism or fatalism: If everything is beyond my control, why should I do anything at all? We seem to have this knee-jerk reaction which tells us that nothing is worth doing if we have no control—the reasoning behind this intuition is that regardless of what we do or want, everything will happen in one given way that is shaped by external forces. This problem is initially daunting.

One interesting solution to this problem is an acknowledgement of our epistemic dearth. Because we do not know how these factors beyond our control will influence our lives, we might as well hope for the best. Pereboom uses the example of an aspiring politician who is afraid of public
speaking. He does not know if this predisposition will prohibit him from succeeding, or whether some additional characteristic or circumstance will override the first disposition. In this case “it may sometimes be important for us to lack complete knowledge of our dispositions and environmental conditions” (Pereboom 2011, 419). In this regard, ignorance is bliss in that it gives us the freedom to be optimistic.

Another concern is that denying moral responsibility might diminish “our sense of self-worth—our sense that we have value and that [our] lives are worth living” (Pereboom 2011, 420). However, we already allow factors beyond our control to influence our self-worth. Those of us who are naturally smart, athletic, and creative embrace these qualities and enable them to influence how we view ourselves, even when we admit that we were born with them. Moreover, as Pereboom notes, “We also value efforts that are voluntary in the sense that they are willed by us—in productive work, altruistic behavior, and the formation of moral character. But how much does it matter to us that these voluntary efforts are also freely willed?” (Pereboom 2011, 420). In terms of how we value ourselves and our lives, it does not matter that our moral wills are not within our control—it is sufficient that we are matter-of-fact responsible for moral decisions. This is enough to provide a healthy sense of self-worth while potentially helping us avoid being too self-aggrandizing or self-deprecating.

Along similar lines, we often admit that our sense of morality is shaped by our upbringing. We credit certain people and life experiences for teaching us how to be morally upstanding citizens. As a result, we might actually be open to admitting that we are not morally responsible or praiseworthy for our moral character. But acknowledging this does not lead to a negative outlook. Instead, it tends to humble us: “[we] come to feel more fortunate and thankful” (Pereboom 2011, 420). And, these are qualities that we value in people. We are turned off by people who brag about their accomplishments and overstate the extent to which they were responsible for their achievements. We prefer modesty and recognition of the luck, people, circumstances, and other
external factors which led to our accomplishments. Just as ridding ourselves of notions of moral responsibility eliminates blameworthiness and weakens justifications for punishment, so too does it remove praiseworthiness and limit reasons for reward. But these are not necessarily negative results.

**Section 5: Control**

Let us recall an assumption, originally introduced by Nagel, that fueled the discussion of moral luck: the control principle. This principle states that control is a necessary condition for moral responsibility, and I have argued that moral luck excludes control. However, it is important to address whether this condition can be denied and whether there are different types of control that can inform moral judgments.

**5.1 Quality of Will Theories**

Quality of will theories reject the control principle. These theories state that “attributions of responsibility are appropriate when the agent’s action is expressive of *who the agent is*” (Levy 2011, 158). On this view, control is irrelevant—what matters is whether an action aligns with an agent’s character, not whether the agent’s action or character is controlled by the agent. Because quality of will theories do not require control, they are seemingly unaffected by moral luck.

On the contrary, Levy argues that these theories are also susceptible to luck, particularly constitutive luck, for several reasons. First, quality of will theories focus on “judgment-sensitive attitudes,” which are “attitudes that, in ideally rational agents, are sensitive to reasons, such that these agents have them when, and only when, they judge there to be sufficient reason to have them” (Levy 2011, 183). Unconscious beliefs, specifically implicit attitudes, fit this definition. These attitudes are present based on socialization, but they are possible to actively overcome. But fighting implicit attitudes requires attentional effort. Whether cognitive load is present at the time of a decision is a matter of luck, and this will influence whether an action is influenced by the implicit attitude or the conscious effort to combat it. Thus, implicit attitudes are not necessarily sensitive. As
Levy notes, "in the absence of consciousness and the attentional resources it brings with it, we are at the mercy of automatic responses we are not responsible for acquiring, ones that we may consciously reject and even have worked hard to eradicate. It is therefore unfair to hold us responsible for the actions performed under these conditions" (Levy 2011, 287). This is because there is no morally relevant difference between the lucky person who can overcome the implicit bias because cognitive strain is absent and the unlucky person who cannot overcome the implicit bias because cognitive strain is present.

The second, and more daunting, problem with quality of will theories is that their acceptance of constitutive luck conflicts with common views of distributive justice. Levy explains, “Agents acquire their responsibility-relevant characteristics—their characters, their resources of self-control, their values and beliefs—as a consequence of their socialization” (Levy 2011, 195). These properties are the result of constitutive and circumstantial luck. However, from a societal perspective, the actions taken by these agents are “predictable consequences of social choices” (Levy 2011, 195). In other words, we can accurately foresee how certain individuals will act given their initial endowments. People who commit moral wrongs often do so as a result of failing to have the opportunities to learn the correct moral beliefs and acquire the relevant skills to apply them.

To illustrate this point, Levy introduces the example of Martha, who commits a crime due to (bad) luck: “the bad constitutive luck to be born in poverty and therefore to fail to acquire the resources of self-control, and the bad present luck to find herself in a situation in which her shallow reserves of self-control were easily exhausted” (Levy 2011, 196). According to quality of will theories, she can still be morally responsible even though she was the victim of bad luck. However, Levy argues, to blame Martha would be unjust because we would be compounding the unfairness she faces: “We blame her, now, for lacking resources she could not acquire because of the way in which she was treated unfairly in the past” (Levy 2011, 196). Moreover, given the unfair conditions she faced...
in the past, her current moral flaws are predictable. If we blame and punish her for her current crime, we are simply adding to the unfairness she already experienced.

Quality of will theories are unconvincing because in removing control, they force us to be responsible for too much. Historical and social injustices tend to perpetuate and even amplify bad constitutive luck. Eliminating the control condition would condemn the unlucky to further unfairness and undue blame while enabling the lucky to benefit from their equally underserved good constitutive luck. For the quality of will theorist, “the bullet of constitutive luck is one that she might be willing to bite. But is she willing to bite the bullet of injustice?” (Levy 2011, 196). The control principle is central to the notion of moral responsibility and should not be given up, even at the cost of denying moral responsibility altogether.

5.2 Types of Control

Insofar as we conceive of moral responsibility as an area of evaluation safe from contingency, we can allow luck to play into other types of moral judgments—specifically judgments about whether acts are morally good or morally bad. Moreover, there may be types of control that are relevant for some judgments but are not as strong as the kind of control relevant for moral responsibility.

According to Aristotelian thought, praise and blame are only appropriate if actions are voluntary. A voluntary act is one that aligns with an agent’s desires or intentions—even if those are not freely willed by the agent. According to Aristotle, actions qualify as involuntary only if they “take place under compulsion or owing to ignorance” (Aristotle III.1). Although moral luck rules out the kind of responsibility that is supposed to result from voluntary action, these Aristotelian distinctions can be useful in classifying what is morally desirable. Interestingly, for Aristotle, praise and blame served a pragmatic purpose in that they served as mechanisms to promote virtuous actions and prevent vicious action in society (“The Preconditions of Virtue,” 2). Acknowledging different levels of control can similarly help create practical guidelines for morality.
Consider a man who steals as a result of his own volition versus a man who steals because there is a gun to his head. According to the view that moral luck excludes moral responsibility, both of these men are equal in terms of moral desert (that is, neither is morally responsible, and neither is blameworthy). However, we may want to draw a distinction between these two cases. Moral responsibility aside, we can say that the first man’s action is morally wrong, while the second man’s action is morally permissible. The reason need not relate to desert. Rather, we may want to define morally bad actions as those which have bad results and bad intentions. Aristotle’s criterion of compulsion for involuntary action can be applied to value judgments instead of moral responsibility.

Along similar lines, the connection between intentions and actions is important for character evaluations, especially in the legal realm. When we punish people, moral character is important because although it does not reflect moral desert, it indicates the likelihood of future action and informs the rehabilitation process. The man who steals of his own volition has a morally significant character flaw. Without intervention, it is probable that he will continue to commit morally wrong acts. Thus, we are justified in punishing him. Moreover, we should focus our effort on promoting not only morally good actions, but also intentions that align with those actions. On the other hand, the man who steals because there is a gun to his head does not have a morally significant character flaw because he does not desire to steal in general. His action indicates only that he is responding to an external threat. So, we need not punish this man because his actions and volitions reliably indicate moral behavior in the future.

**Section 6: Conclusion**

Moral luck poses a serious problem for how we think about morality. Attempts to salvage moral responsibility are unsuccessful, particularly because they fail to account for constitutive luck. Once we accept that we lack control over our constitutions, circumstances, and the results of our actions, we must also deny the existence of ultimate moral responsibility. This view also requires that
we give up notions of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness as well as certain reactive attitudes such as resentment. Additionally, we must abandon theories of punishment that rely on retribution as justification.

However, rejecting moral responsibility need not drastically alter our practices—and if it does, it might change them for the better. Even if people cannot be morally responsible for their actions, they can be matter-of-fact responsible for their actions. We can still punish people so long as we have a valid justification (such as deterrence, education, or quarantine) and provide humane punishment aimed at bettering not only society as a whole, but also the individuals who committed crimes and can be rehabilitated. Furthermore, we can distinguish between different types of control to make informed decisions about how to treat criminals and how to promote morally good behavior.

Most importantly, the inexistence of moral responsibility does not imply the inexistence of morality altogether. Theories of what is morally good, bad, right, and wrong are still essential in shaping how we act and how we think about the world. We must simply be sure to separate these value judgments from judgments about praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. We might even find that some of the mechanisms we use for praise and blame can be useful in reinforcing morally good behavior while discouraging morally bad behavior—so long as we disentangle these conditioning tools from deep-seated conceptions of moral responsibility.

Rejecting moral responsibility may initially seem extreme. However, acknowledging moral luck and its implications will ensure that we treat agents equally and that we are fair in giving moral judgments.
References


