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Elements in Ethics

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MORAL RESPONSIBILITY RECONSIDERED

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Moral Responsibility Reconsidered

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Abstract: This Element examines the concept of moral responsibility as it is used in contemporary philosophical debates and explores the justifiability of the moral practices associated with it, including moral praise/blame, retributive punishment, and the reactive attitudes of resentment and indignation. After identifying and discussing several different varieties of responsibility – including *causal responsibility*, *take-charge responsibility*, *role responsibility*, *liability responsibility*, and the kinds of responsibility associated with *attributability*, *answerability*, and *accountability* – it distinguishes between *basic* and *non-basic desert* conceptions of moral responsibility and considers a number of skeptical arguments against each. It then outlines an alternative forward-looking account of moral responsibility grounded in non-desert-invoking desiderata such as protection, reconciliation, and moral formation. It concludes by addressing concerns about the practical implications of skepticism about desert-based moral responsibility and explains how *optimistic skeptics* can preserve most of what we care about when it comes to our interpersonal relationships, morality, and meaning in life.

Keywords: moral responsibility, free will, free will skepticism, basic desert, forward-looking moral responsibility

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