MORAL RESPONSIBILITY RECONSIDERED

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Moral Responsibility Reconsidered

Elements in Ethics

DOI: 10.1017/9781009219730
First published online: November 2022

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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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ISBNs: 9781009219754 (PB), 9781009219730 (OC)
ISSNs: 2516-4031 (online), 2516-4023 (print)
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