

Knowledge, Ignorance and Moral Responsibility

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The topic:

Philosophers take it for granted that for an agent to be morally responsible for an action they must not only possess a certain degree of freedom but also fulfil an *epistemic condition*, they must be *aware* of what they are doing and of the moral parameters of their action. While the epistemic condition has largely been seen as unproblematic for the majority of the 20th century, recent discussions have sparked interest in a variety of questions and issues:

- What is the content of the awareness required for moral responsibility? Suitable candidates have included awareness of the kind of action an agent is committing, its moral status, its consequences, and suitable alternatives.
- What kind of awareness does the epistemic condition presuppose? While most of the discussions surrounding this question have focussed on whether actual knowledge is required or whether justified or reasonable belief is sufficient for moral responsibility, other philosophers have argued that in order for an agent to be blameworthy for their action, they need not even possess *true* beliefs concerning that action. Additionally, it has been debated whether the mental states in question need to be *occurrent*, or whether it is sufficient to have *dispositions* towards said beliefs.
- To what extent are agents themselves responsible for fulfilling the epistemic condition? Recent contributions have largely focussed on finding a way to hold agents accountable for acquiring at least a certain degree of awareness concerning their actions without falling victim to a *regressus* concerning responsibility.
- When is an agent culpably ignorant of their actions, meaning when is ignorance itself blameworthy?
- Is it possible to be responsible for an action without fulfilling the epistemic condition?

The topic of the epistemic condition of moral responsibility is a good fit for this year's WFAP for a variety of reasons: First, it is a fairly recent topic as most relevant contributions were made during the last two decades or so. Second, it spans multiple areas of philosophy (moral philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of mind, action theory) while at the same time focussing on a specific issue and question, thereby allowing participants to further their competence in various areas of contemporary analytic philosophy while at the same time becoming familiar with a specific strand of research. Third, the topic is flexible enough for us to adapt our focus to the specific interests of the participants; while discussions surrounding epistemic states and responsibility can be had on a

very abstract theoretical level they can also be linked to recent topics in social and political philosophy.

Possible keynote speakers:

Gunnar Björnsson (Stockholm)

Elizabeth Harman (Princeton)

Angela Smith (Washington)

Jan Willem Wieland (Amsterdam)

Possible readings:

Ginet, Carl (2000): “The Epistemic Requirements for Moral Responsibility”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 14: 267–277.

Harman, Elizabeth (2011): “Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?” *Ratio*, 24(4): 443–468.

Rosen, Gideon (2004): “Skepticism about Moral Responsibility”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18: 295–313.

Sartorio, Carolina (2017): “Ignorance, Alternative Possibilities, and the Epistemic Conditions for Responsibility”, in Peels: *Perspectives on Ignorance from Moral and Social Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 15–29.

Talbert, Matthew, “Moral Competence, Moral Blame, and Protest”, *Journal of Ethics*, 16(1): 89–109.