1. Introduction

The thought that too much moral luck is unacceptable has led some to shrink the locus of our moral responsibility. For example, following the Kantian tradition of the “good will” as the only thing that has moral worth, some have suggested that all that we can be responsible for is mental acts like decisions, or for the character traits issuing in those decisions, given that these are less dependent on external influences and thus less vulnerable to certain forms of luck than other things (see, e.g., Richards 1986, Thomson 1989, Graham 2014, and Rivera-López 2016).

The literature on the free will problem contains a similar movement in support of shrinking the locus of our responsibility. On these views, what we are truly or ultimately responsible for is, not what we decide to do per se, but something more fine-grained and arguably even more immune to luck than our decisions: what we decide on our own to do. In what follows, I’ll refer to this view as the Triple O view. The Triple O view comes up in a defense of the classical model of freedom (which understands freedom in terms of alternative possibilities) from Frankfurt’s famous objection (Frankfurt 1969), as a version of the so-called “flickers of freedom” reply to that objection (see, e.g., van Inwagen 1983, Naylor 1984, O’Connor 2000, Speak 2002, Timpe 2006, Robinson 2012, and Capes and Swenson 2017).¹ Although the connection with the moral

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¹ The term “flickers of freedom” is from Fischer 1994: 137-47, and it refers to those alternative possibilities that allegedly remain open to agents in Frankfurt-style cases.
luck problem is somewhat hidden in these debates, there is clearly a connection, and one worth exploring in more detail.

The goal of this paper is to examine this issue, by looking at a series of interrelated questions. First of all, what might be meant by the central claim of the Triple O view: the claim that the ultimate locus of our responsibility is making decisions “on our own”? Also, what motivation could there be for this view, and how plausible is it, at the end of the day? In particular, how plausible is it as an application of the idea that our moral responsibility shouldn’t be too vulnerable to luck?

2. The Triple O View

Let’s start with a brief overview of how the Triple O view came into existence. van Inwagen first suggested a view of this kind in response to Frankfurt’s argument against the classical model of freedom (the conception that understands freedom in terms of alternative possibilities). Frankfurt’s argument appealed to specific counterexamples to that conception—examples that since then have been called “Frankfurt-style” cases. A Frankfurt-style case is a scenario where an agent seems to make a decision freely, completely on his own and on the basis of his own reasons, but it is a decision that he couldn’t have avoided making. The reason the agent couldn’t have avoided making the decision, the standard story goes, is that a neuroscientist who had been monitoring the agent’s brain would have ensured that he made the same decision (by manipulating his brain in the required way) if he hadn’t made it on his own. Frankfurt noted that scenarios of this kind seem to undermine the classical model of freedom
because they suggest that the kind of freedom relevant to responsibility doesn’t require having alternative possibilities.

In turn, van Inwagen (1983) responded to Frankfurt in defense of the classical model. His response is complex, but part of the response appealed to the idea that in certain cases where it might have seemed, at first, that agents are responsible for unavoidable behaviors or states of affairs, those agents are not actually responsible for those behaviors or states of affairs (since they were unavoidable); instead, they are responsible for having done them or brought them about on their own (where this is something that they could have avoided).

According to van Inwagen, one way to motivate this type of distinction is by reflecting on examples of the following kind:

**All roads lead to Rome:** Ryder is riding an out-of-control horse, Dobbin, when he gets to a fork in the path. Ryder cannot stop Dobbin but he can choose which direction he will go by using the bridle. Although he is sure that one of the paths leads to Rome, he is unsure about the other paths. Ryder hates Romans, and predicts that some Romans will get hurt by the passage of the horse, so he makes Dobbin go in the direction of the path he knows leads to Rome, and some Romans get hurt, as predicted. As it turns out, however, all paths led to Rome. (van Inwagen 1983: 176-7; the label is mine)

As van Inwagen points out, Ryder seems not to be responsible for Dobbin’s passing through Rome or for the Romans getting hurt. These are both outcomes that Ryder couldn’t have avoided. What Ryder *is* clearly responsible for is the horse’s taking a particular route or for the
Romans getting hurt as a result of the horse taking that particular route. But these are more fine-grained outcomes that he could have avoided. So this example suggests that, at least in some cases where agents could have avoided only the more fine-grained outcome, what they are in fact responsible for is the more fine-grained outcome (the one that they could have avoided), and not the more coarse-grained outcome (the one that they couldn’t have avoided).

van Inwagen then suggests that this generalizes to other kinds of cases. For example, the same goes, he suggests, for a case like this:

**Gunnar and Ridley:** Gunnar decides on his own to shoot Ridley, but if he hadn’t decided that on his own, some external force would have forced him to shoot Ridley, and so he would have ended up shooting him anyway. (van Inwagen 1983: 181; the label is mine)

van Inwagen suggests that a similar analysis should be offered of this case: what Gunnar is clearly responsible for is, not the fact that he shot Ridley, which is something that he couldn’t have avoided, but the fact that he shot Ridley *on his own*, or without having been caused to do so by an external force outside his control (which is something that he could have avoided).

After van Inwagen, several others have made suggestions along similar lines. In particular, Naylor (1984) offered a similar analysis of the following case:

**Honest child:** A child decides to tell the truth on his own, but his parents would have forced him to tell the truth if he had chosen to lie. (Naylor 1984: 251; the label is mine)
Naylor suggested that, whereas it is obvious that the child deserves moral credit for telling the truth on his own, it is much less obvious that in those circumstances he deserves moral credit for telling the truth simpliciter. In particular, Naylor noted that the child can be responsible for the manner in which he told the truth (for doing it “willingly”, or “by choice”, or “just because he wanted to”) without thereby being responsible for telling the truth, which he couldn’t have avoided.

In turn, Robinson (2012) gives a similar analysis of the following case:

**Box:** An evil demon creates a world in which all that exists is a large box containing a single human being, Jack. It is physically impossible for Jack to leave the box. However, Jack never attempts to leave the box and spends his whole life happily inside the box.

(Robinson 2012: 181)

Robinson suggests that Jack is not responsible for staying in the box; what he is responsible for is deciding on his own to stay in the box, not trying to leave the box, or the particular way in which he stays inside the box.

And Capes and Swenson (2017: 976) offer a similar analysis of a case discussed in Fischer and Ravizza (1998: 125):

**Sharks:** John sees a child drowning in the sea and decides not to jump in to save him. The child drowns. Unbeknownst to John, some hungry sharks would have attacked him and prevented him from saving the child if he had tried.
Capes and Swenson suggest that, although John is not responsible for not saving the child in this case, he is responsible for failing on his own to save the child—that is to say, without having been forced to do so by the sharks.

The common idea behind all of these responses seems to be the thought that, once one distinguishes having done something (a more coarse-grained behavior or fact) from having done it on our own (a more fine-grained behavior or fact), it becomes much less clear that agents can be responsible for inevitable behaviors. On that basis, then, we can build a defense of the classical model of freedom from Frankfurt’s attack by arguing that Frankfurt hasn’t successfully shown that we can act freely while lacking alternative possibilities. What is sufficiently clear about Frankfurt-style cases, the argument goes, is that the agents in those cases are responsible for having made the decision on their own, or without the help of the intervener (which is something that they could have avoided). It is much less clear, however, that they are responsible for having made the decision simpliciter. Thus, it is much less clear that they are responsible for any unavoidable behaviors.

Actually, there are different ways of cashing this idea out more precisely, and thus different versions or formulations of the Triple O view. These are all ways of expressing the thought that the “ultimate locus” of our responsibility, at least in cases of this kind, is making decisions on our own, not making decisions simpliciter. In the first place, the original and simplest version of the view, suggested by both van Inwagen and Naylor, is that an agent in a Frankfurt-style case is only responsible for making the decision on his own, and not at all for making the decision, since he couldn’t have avoided making it. The response to Frankfurt’s
argument offered by this view is simply that Frankfurt is wrong in thinking that an agent in a Frankfurt-style case is responsible for his unavoidable behavior; what he is responsible for is a more fine-grained state of affairs or fact that he could have avoided: having made the decision on his own.

In turn, a second and more recent version of this view, one suggested by Capes and Swenson (2017), agrees with these judgments, but at the same time draws on a distinction that is familiar in the literature on moral luck: the distinction between the scope and the degree of one’s responsibility (see, e.g., Zimmerman 2002). According to this view, even though the agent in a Frankfurt-style case is, again, not responsible for making the decision that he made, for it was inevitable, this is compatible with claiming that he is just as blameworthy as he would have been in the absence of the intervener. The underlying thought is that luck can affect what you are responsible for without affecting the degree of your responsibility, which would remain the same to the extent that you made the decision on your own. This view has the potential advantage that it allows a proponent of the Triple O view to capture more of Frankfurt’s original intuitions about Frankfurt-style cases, which many people have found convincing. For it allows us to say that there is a sense in which agents in Frankfurt-style cases are just as blameworthy as if they had been in ordinary circumstances, although they are responsible for fewer things.

Finally, a third and in some ways importantly different version of the Triple O view, which is formulated and defended in Robinson (2012, 2014, and Forthcoming), is the view that an agent in a Frankfurt-style case is in fact responsible both for making the decision and for making it on his own, but he is only basically responsible for making it on his own, and only
derivatively responsible for making the decision. As Robinson notes, the most plausible interpretation of the principle of alternative possibilities (the principle according to which responsibility requires alternative possibilities of action) is one that takes it to be a principle about basic responsibility only. Otherwise, for example, drunk drivers would be off the hook for causing an accident simply on the grounds that they couldn’t have avoided causing it at the time of the accident, when they were already drunk. By restricting the principle of alternative possibilities to basic responsibility, we avoid this unacceptable result (for, even if drunk drivers couldn’t have done otherwise at the time of the accident, they can still be derivatively responsible for the harm they caused because of their earlier decision to drink and drive, if they could have avoided making that decision). Given this, Robinson suggests, if what an agent in a Frankfurt-style case is basically responsible for is only having made the decision on his own, it follows that Frankfurt-style cases don’t undermine the principle of alternative possibilities thus understood (since those agents could have avoided making the decision on their own). Notice that this view has the added potential advantage that it allows proponents of the Triple O view to capture even more of Frankfurt’s original intuitions about Frankfurt-style cases, as compared to the versions suggested by van Inwagen and Naylor, and by Capes and Swenson. For it allows them to agree with Frankfurt concerning the agents’ responsibility for their decisions; the disagreement only concerns the locus of their basic responsibility.

The central tenet of the Triple O view, then, is the claim that, at least in these kinds of cases, the ultimate locus of our responsibility is not making decisions but making them on our own. As we have seen, this can be interpreted either as the claim that (at least in these kinds of cases) making decisions on our own is the only thing that we can be responsible for, or as the
claim that this is what fixes the *degree of our responsibility*, or as the claim that this is what we are *basically* responsible for. Our focus, then, is a family of views rather than a single view.

Note that all of the authors that we have reviewed are specifically concerned with responsibility in scenarios with inevitable outcomes (Frankfurt-style cases being just one type of example of that kind). One natural question that arises, then, is whether those authors would want to extend their claims to other kinds of scenarios. That is to say, are we supposed to conclude from their analyses that it is *in general* the case that all that we can be truly responsible for is making decisions on our own, and not making decisions? Or that this is what fixes the degree of our responsibility? Or that this is what we are basically responsible for? Of course, if these claims hold generally, the position on Frankfurt-style cases just follows as a special case. As a result, if the general claim were sufficiently well motivated, this could help reinforce the plausibility of this style of response to Frankfurt’s argument.

Now, I am not claiming that all of these authors would necessarily be tempted to embrace the more general claims. But, as suggested above, it is interesting to note that the general claim can at least be motivated by moral luck considerations. Frankfurt-style cases seem to suggest that we can sometimes be more in control of whether we will make a decision on our own than over whether we will make that decision. So, by limiting the ultimate locus of our responsibility to what we decide on our own to do, as the Triple O view does, we can

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2 In fact, Capes and Swenson (personal communication) reject the generalization of at least some of their views to other cases.

3 The moral luck considerations I have in mind are discussed in Robinson 2012: 187, Capes and Swenson 2017: 974-5, and Robinson Forthcoming: n. 16.
protect our responsibility from certain forms of luck that some may find problematic. This is the kind of motivation for the Triple O view that I am interested in examining here.

3. Responsibility for deciding “on our own”

Now, how exactly should we understand the proposal that the ultimate locus of our responsibility is not making decisions but making decisions on our own? What are the conditions for being responsible for making a decision on our own?

The “on our own” locution might mean different things in different cases.4 But note that, on a very natural interpretation, in this context doing something on your own has to do with your doing it as a result of a certain set of motivations or causal influences. When you do something on your own, your act has a particular kind of causal history: one that contains your own deliberation and reasons, and one that doesn’t contain external forces or manipulators of a certain sort. For example, in Naylor’s example of the honest child, the child tells the truth “on his own” in the sense that he is motivated by his own reasons to tell the truth, and is not forced by his parents to do so. That is to say, he tells the truth on his own in the sense that his telling the truth has the relevant kind of causal history. Arguably, the same goes for the other examples we have reviewed and that were discussed by the proponents of the Triple O view: in van Inwagen’s Gunnar and Ridley example, Gunnar decides to shoot Ridley “on his own” in the sense that he is motivated by his own reasons to shoot him and not by external coercive forces; in Robinson’s Box example, Jack decides to stay in the box motivated by his own reasons to stay

4 For example, in some contexts it seems to mean something like “alone, or unaccompanied by others”, as when we say of a shy person that what she likes most is spending time on her own.
and not caused to do so by external physical forces; etc. This is in line with what most of the advocates of the Triple O view explicitly say. For example, Capes and Swenson identify the claim that the agent makes the decision on her own with “an observation about the etiology of [the agent’s] decision, viz., that it was not the result of outside coercion or force” (Capes and Swenson 2017: 978; see also Capes 2014: 433). And Robinson says that what it means to say that an agent decides on his own to A is “simply that he decides to A and that he does so without being causally forced or interfered with” (Robinson Forthcoming: n. 31).

Arguably, then, the claim that the ultimate locus of our responsibility is making decisions on our own (instead of making decisions simpliciter) has to be interpreted as the claim that what we are ultimately responsible for is (not our decisions but) a fact about the causal history of our decisions: the fact that our decisions were (or were not) caused in a certain way. This seems to be, at least, the most natural interpretation of the suggestion made by Triple O views, and the best way I see to make sense of it. So, in what follows, I’ll adopt this interpretation and examine its prospects of success. (Of course, if I’m wrong and this is not what some of these

5 Naylor seems to be explicitly embracing this interpretation when she says: “If someone is morally responsible for doing something on his own, then even if he is not morally responsible for doing what he did, he can still be morally responsible for the manner in which he did it.” (Naylor 1983: 257). Capes also seems to be embracing this interpretation when he claims that what the agent is responsible for is not a decision but a more precise or more fine-grained fact: the fact that he does it on his own (Capes 2014: 433). Robinson says he wants to remain neutral on the issue of “just what it means here for an agent to decide on his own to A”, but one of the possible interpretations he mentions is the interpretation according to which deciding on one’s own to A is “just a way of deciding to A” (Robinson Forthcoming: n. 14). van Inwagen is a special case, I think, in that he embraces a form of causal essentialism about events that entails that your decision would have been a different event if it had been caused in a different way (van Inwagen 1983: 169). On this view, your deciding on your own could just be the actual event of your decision. (This view is also suggested in the first part of Robinson 2012.) But most people find causal essentialism about events to be highly implausible, and I agree. (Capes makes this point too in his 2014: section 3.)
authors have in mind, this should be taken as an invitation to say more about how we should
interpret the central claim of the Triple O views.)

Let’s start by asking: Could we be responsible for facts about the causal history of our
decisions? And, if so, how?

The first thing to note is that a fact about the causal history of a decision (a mental act)
is not, itself, an act (of any kind). It is not something that we do, but a fact about something that
we do: a fact about why it is that we do what we do. But a pretty standard assumption of
theories of responsibility is that what we are basically responsible for is (if anything) certain acts
of ours (perhaps including acts of omission); most commonly, these are taken to be mental acts
such as decisions. As a result, there is a potentially serious problem here. The problem is that
the Triple O view wants to situate the ultimate locus of our responsibility in things that are not
acts (of any kind), but “features” of acts, or facts concerning the causal history of acts. And
these are not typically regarded as the kinds of things that we can be basically responsible for.
As a result, it is hard to see how they can be the ultimate locus of our responsibility, as the
Triple O view says.6

To clarify, I am not denying that we can be responsible for things that aren’t acts. In
particular, I am not denying that we can sometimes be responsible for facts about the causal

6 For a related objection, see Stump 1999: 301-2. Stump suggests that the Triple O view could
only work if doing an act on one’s own were an act, and one that is different from the act that
the agent would have performed otherwise (she is skeptical of these assumptions). For a
response to Stump, see Capes (2014). There are some views according to which we can be
basically responsible for things like character traits or mental states that are not acts (see, e.g.,
Adams 1985, Smith 2005, and Graham 2014). Note, however, that facts about the causal history
of our decisions are very different from things of that kind. So, whatever motivation there could
be for accepting character traits and the like as things that we can be basically responsible for
wouldn’t obviously carry over to causal-history facts.
histories of our acts. It certainly seems that we can be, in the same way we can be responsible for other more ordinary events having the causal histories that they do. But the point is that these don’t tend to be things that we are basically responsible for; rather, our responsibility in those cases is inherited from other things for which we are responsible.

van Inwagen’s “All roads lead to Rome” case is a good illustration of how we can be responsible for a fact about the causal history of an ordinary event. In this case, as van Inwagen notes, Ryder is not responsible for the event of the Romans being hurt. But he is responsible for the Romans having been hurt as a result of the horse taking a certain path (the only one he recognized as leading to Rome). So Ryder is responsible for a fact about the causal history of the event consisting in the Romans being hurt. But, of course, in this case, his responsibility for this fact is not basic, but inherited from the earlier decision to turn the horse in that direction. Sharks is a similar case: the agent, John, is not responsible for failing to save the drowning child, and he is responsible for the fact that the sharks were not part of the causal history of his failure to save the child. But this is because he is responsible for his decision not to attempt a rescue, which in turn resulted in the sharks not preventing the rescue.\(^7\)

Similarly, there could be cases where we are responsible for a fact about the causal history of our decisions. But, in those cases too, our responsibility would have to be derived from other things we did (or failed to do) and for which we are basically responsible. For example, a thief could be responsible for the fact that his desire to steal caused his decision to

\(^7\) In my view, examples like van Inwagen’s Gunnar and Ridley case are different, in that I think Gunnar is responsible for Ridley’s death, and not just for a fact about the causal history of Ridley’s death. The basic difference is that Gunnar causes Ridley’s death; in contrast, the agent in Sharks doesn’t cause the child’s death, and Ryder doesn’t cause the harm to the Romans. I discuss the significance of differences of this kind in Sartorio 2016, chapter 2.
steal, but this could be because he failed to resist that (resistible) desire. In that case, I submit, he is basically responsible for his failure to resist the desire to steal, and only derivatively for the fact about the causal history of his decision. As an illustration, imagine that the thief knows that he is generally able to resist the urge to steal if he looks at a passage on Kantian philosophy from a moral philosophy textbook, and on that particular occasion he decided not to look at the passage, which resulted in his stealing act. Clearly, what he is basically responsible for in this case is his decision not to look at the passage. He also seems responsible for the fact that his desire to steal was causally efficacious; however, his responsibility for this fact is inherited from his responsibility for the decision not to look at the passage.

In general, then, it is hard to see how we could be basically responsible for facts about the causal histories of our decisions, since these are facts that we tend to be responsible for in a derivative way. But this makes trouble for the Triple O view. For imagine that we wanted to say that the agent in a Frankfurt-style case is not responsible, or not basically responsible, for having made the decision that he made, but only for having made it on his own. How could this be, if this is a fact about the causal history of his decision? Presumably, if he were responsible for that fact, his responsibility would have to be inherited, as in the examples above, from other things for which he is basically responsible. But there isn’t any such thing; after all, these are supposed to be cases of basic moral responsibility. (Recall that they have to be; otherwise they would have no bearing on the principle of alternative possibilities, since this principle is restricted to basic responsibility only.)

At this point, the proponent of the Triple O view might protest: But, surely, the agent in a Frankfurt-style case is responsible for making the decision on his own! This much seems clear.
So, given that my reasoning above suggests that he is not (given that there is nothing from which that responsibility could be derived), there must be a flaw in that reasoning.

It is, indeed, tempting to think in this way. But, as I go on to suggest in the next section, this way of thinking relies on a confusion. Uncovering that confusion will allow us to come up with a diagnosis that will help us see more clearly both why the Triple O view fails, and also why it may have seemed attractive.

4. A diagnosis

The root of the confusion, it seems to me, could be that in these cases of basic responsibility it’s easy to conflate what we are responsible for with why we are responsible—that is to say, with the grounds of our responsibility. Recall that, on what seems to be the most natural interpretation of the “on our own” locution, being responsible for making a decision on our own amounts to being responsible for a fact about the causal history of the decision. The causal history of the decision made by agents in Frankfurt-style cases is one that includes their own deliberation and their own reasons. So, in order for agents in Frankfurt-style cases to be responsible for making the decision on their own, they would have to be responsible for the fact that their decision had that causal history. But, do we really think that agents in Frankfurt-style cases are responsible for this fact? That is, do we really think that they are responsible for the fact that their own reasons and deliberation brought about their decision?

It’s not at all clear that we do. What most people would certainly want to say is not this but, instead, that the agent is responsible for his decision because his own reasons and deliberation brought about his decision. That is to say, the fact about the causal history of the
agent’s decision is not something that the agent is responsible for but, instead, something that
grounds his responsibility for the decision. If an agent in a Frankfurt-style case may have
seemed responsible for making the decision on his own, then, perhaps this was just the result
of conflating the grounds of his responsibility with something that he is responsible for.

In a couple of recent papers, Robinson offered an argument that is relevant for our
purposes here (see Robinson 2012 and Forthcoming). This is an argument for the third version
of the Triple O view discussed above: the view that, although agents in Frankfurt-style cases are
responsible both for making the decision and for making the decision on their own, they are
only basically responsible for making the decision on their own. That is to say, although they are
responsible for making the decision, their responsibility for the decision is derived from their
responsibility for making the decision on their own, which is the “ultimate locus” of their
responsibility. Robinson notes that, if those agents are responsible for both things, making the
decision and making it on their own, then these facts must be either unrelated or one must
explain the other (he doesn’t consider the possibility that they may both be explained by the
agent’s being responsible for a third thing, probably because it’s unclear what that third thing
could be). As Robinson notes, it seems implausible to suggest that they are unrelated. So that
leaves two possibilities: either (i) the agent’s responsibility for the decision explains his
responsibility for making the decision on his own, or it’s the other way around: (ii) the agent’s
responsibility for making the decision on his own explains his responsibility for the decision.

But, Robinson argues, (ii) is much more plausible than (i). For deciding on our own seems to be
more basic, or more within our control, than deciding simpliciter. So, in the same way that our
responsibility for overt bodily actions is derived from our more basic responsibility for our
antecedent decisions or mental actions (which are more within our control), it seems that we would have to conclude that our responsibility for our decisions, too, is derived from our more basic responsibility for making decisions on our own. (According to Robinson, this goes at least for Frankfurt-style cases, if not more generally, for any case where we are responsible for a decision.)

As explained above, I think that Robinson’s initial assumption is not quite right: it is not the case that agents in Frankfurt-style cases are responsible for both things, making a decision and making it on their own. Instead, they are only responsible for making the decision. Still, we can explain away the appearance that is arguably driving Robinson’s argument in the following way. It is true of Frankfurt-style cases that agents make the decisions that they make on their own. And it is true that, in some sense, this is a “more basic” or more fundamental fact than their responsibility for those decisions. It is a more basic or more fundamental fact in that it grounds their responsibility for the decisions. But it doesn’t follow from this that it is more basic or fundamental in the sense that the agents’ responsibility for their decisions is derived from their responsibility for those other things, which is what Robinson wants to say.

In other words, basic responsibility facts can (of course) be grounded in other facts. But those other facts are not, themselves, responsibility facts (otherwise they would not be basic responsibility facts but derivative responsibility facts). What kinds of facts are they? This is somewhat controversial but, at the very least, it is clear that they must include some causal history facts (since how you make a decision, or the causal history of your decision, is clearly
relevant to whether you are responsible for it). So, in particular, facts concerning the causal history of decisions will have an important role to play in grounding the agent’s basic responsibility for those decisions, without being facts that the agent is responsible for.

On the other hand, note that if one follows Robinson in saying that the agent’s responsibility for making the decision derives from her (basic) responsibility for making the decision on her own, then the question arises: What could possibly ground that basic responsibility fact? We seem to be left without an answer to this question. Which makes me think that we have gone too far: we should have stopped earlier, at the grounds of the agent’s responsibility for her decision. In other words, what we should have said is, again, that although the agent is responsible for her decision because of the way she made that decision, this isn’t an instance of derived responsibility, but a fact about the grounds of basic responsibility.

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8 On my view (developed in Sartorio 2016), causal history facts (together with the grounds of those causal history facts themselves) are actually the only facts that are relevant to the type of control that is relevant to an agent’s responsibility.

9 At one point Robinson raises the challenge: “If a person is not morally responsible for doing a thing on her own, it is difficult to see how she could be morally responsible for doing it simpliciter.” (Robinson 2012: 186-7). As I have argued, I think that the challenge can be answered by pointing out that she can still be morally responsible for doing it simpliciter, as long as her doing it on her own grounds her responsibility for doing it simpliciter.

10 Swenson (personal communication) notes that one possibility would be to say that the causal history fact itself (the fact that the agent made the decision on her own) grounds the basic responsibility fact (the fact that the agent is basically responsible for making the decision on her own). According to this suggestion, there are some facts concerning the way in which decisions are made, when they are made in the right way, that are such that simply by obtaining they can ground the agent’s basic responsibility for those very facts. Although this is an interesting suggestion, I remain unconvinced. For, again, although it’s very plausible to say that the fact about how the decision was made grounds the agent’s responsibility for the decision, it seems much less plausible to say that the fact about how the decision was made grounds the agent’s responsibility for that very fact about how the decision was made.
5. Conclusions

I have examined a family of views on responsibility that were originally proposed in response to Frankfurt’s argument, but that could also be motivated by general considerations of moral luck. Could it be that, as these views suggest, the ultimate locus of our responsibility is not making decisions but making them on our own? If so, this would help protect the sphere of our responsibility from certain forms of luck that some may find objectionable (in addition to protecting the classical model of freedom from Frankfurt’s objection). I have argued that those views fail in that, to the extent that we can make sense of the concept of being responsible for making decisions on our own, it is not something that can constitute the “ultimate locus” of our responsibility.

Still, I hope to have also shown that thinking about these views can be instructive in that it can help shed some light on the structure that a good theory of responsibility must have. One thing that came up in our discussion is the importance of drawing a clear distinction between two ways in which responsibility facts can be “rooted in” other facts: one is what happens when our responsibility is derived from other things that we are more basically responsible for, and another is what happens when our responsibility (in particular, our basic responsibility) is grounded in other things. Although this should be a relatively uncontroversial distinction, it is one that can easily be overlooked in some contexts and thus, paying close attention to it can help keep our theorizing about responsibility on the right track.11

11 In Sartorio Ms. I argue that focusing on the role played by the notion of ground in our theories of responsibility can help us avoid other important confusions concerning the concept of responsibility.
References


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