



Moral Responsibility for Self-Deluding Beings

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Abstract

In this article, I argue for four theses. First, libertarian and compatibilist accounts of moral responsibility agree that the capability of practical reason is the central feature of moral responsibility. Second, this viewpoint leads to a reasons-focused account of human behavior. Examples of human action discussed in debates about moral responsibility suggest that typical human actions are driven primarily by the agent's subjective reasons and are sufficiently transparent for the agent. Third, this conception of self-transparent action is a questionable idealization. As shown by psychological research on self-assessment, motivated reasoning, and terror management theory, humans oftentimes have only a limited understanding of their conduct. Self-deception is rather the rule than the exception. Fourth, taking the limited self-transparency of practical reason seriously leads to a socially contextualized conception of moral responsibility.

Keywords Moral responsibility · Self-deception · Reasoning biases · Practical reasoning · Rationalization · Motivated reasoning

1 Introduction

Moral responsibility is surrounded by intricate philosophical questions: Why are humans morally responsible at all? Can there be moral responsibility in a deterministic universe? Philosophical debates about responsibility-related questions are far from being settled and there is a vast and growing variety of competing positions. However, despite all the persistent dissents, there is one central concept underlying many prominent accounts of moral responsibility: human rationality. Several

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scholars have pointed out that both compatibilist and libertarian accounts of moral responsibility converge on their emphasis on human rationality (Clarke, 2003a, pp. 15–16; Kane, 2005, p. 60; Keil, 2009, p. 60; Levy, 2011, pp. 44–45; Martin, 2014, pp. 23–24; Talbert, 2016, p. 29; Vargas, 2013, p. 66; Vierkant et al., 2013, 3). For many philosophers, the capability of practical reason is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. The crucial ability that separates humans from other animals is the ability to understand reasons and to act in accordance with them. Because humans are capable of evaluating reasons and transforming these reasons to actions, they can justifiably become the targets of ethical criticism.

In this article, I argue for four claims. First, despite all the numerous disagreements between compatibilists and libertarians, most responsibility accounts from both sides identify practical reason as the central human feature that guarantees moral responsibility. Second, this rationalistic conception of moral responsibility implies a one-sided account of human action. Defining human rationality as the core of moral responsibility suggests that subjective reasons are the main drivers of human behavior and that actions usually are sufficiently transparent for the agent. Third, this picture of human conduct is unrealistic. As suggested by different branches of research in psychology, sufficiently self-transparent actions are much more seldom than we think. Especially in cases in which moral norms and values are at stake, self-deception is the rule and not the exception. Fourth, since the social context shapes people's abilities for self-understanding, moral responsibility is to be conceptualized as a socially contextualized phenomenon.

2 The Common Denominator between Compatibilism and Libertarianism

Compatibilists and libertarians usually are in disagreement about at least two questions (Griffith, 2013; Kane, 2005, 2011; Keil, 2009, 2013; Talbert, 2016; Tiberius, 2015): First, is determinism true? Second, are determinism and moral responsibility compatible? Compatibilists hold that we are morally responsible in a deterministic universe, and they claim that our universe is deterministic or that it does not matter whether it is deterministic or not. Libertarians deny that moral responsibility and determinism can be reconciled and they argue that determinism is not true.

However, both sides of the debate agree that the human capacity of practical reason is the central feature of moral responsibility, as aptly pointed out by Randolph Clarke:

Several compatibilist accounts identify free will with a capacity to direct one's behavior by *reflective practical reasoning*. [...] Acting with such a capacity is, I believe, a *necessary* condition of acting with free will, and an adequate libertarian account will need to affirm this. (Clarke, 2003b, 295, Fn. 24, emphasis in original).

There is ample evidence proving Clarke right in his claim that many compatibilist accounts of moral responsibility (and free will) revolve around the capacity

of practical reason. For example, according to Fischer and Ravizza, for an agent to be morally responsible, actions have to be the result of the agent's "own, moderately reasons-responsive mechanism" (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, p. 1992). Details of Fischer and Ravizza's account aside, their fundamental point is that a morally responsible agent has to be able to understand reasons and to act in accordance with them. Other compatibilists have brought forward similar thoughts using differing terminology. Kadri Vihvelin identifies "some bundle of abilities in virtue of which we think and deliberate and make decisions and choices and form intentions about what to do" (Vihvelin, 2017, 58) as the guarantors of free will and moral responsibility. Susan Wolf calls the central features of moral responsibility "the ability to know what is in accordance with the True and the Good" and "the ability to convert one's knowledge into action" (Wolf, 1990, p. 87), while R. Jay Wallace talks about "the ability to grasp and apply moral reasons, and to govern one's behavior by the light of such reasons" (Wallace, 1994, p. 1). Even the compatibilist position of Harry Frankfurt, according to which human will is crucial for moral responsibility, acknowledges the central role of practical reason in moral responsibility:

In maintaining that the essence of being a person lies not in reason but in will, I am far from suggesting that a creature without reason may be a person. For it is only in virtue of these rational capacities that a person is capable of becoming critically aware of his own will and of forming volitions of the second order. The structure of a person's will presupposes, accordingly, that he is a rational being. (Frankfurt, 1988, p. 17).

Of course, all these compatibilist positions differ in various ways. Nonetheless, all are committed to the notion that practical reason is the central condition of moral responsibility.

On the libertarian side of the fence, characterizations of moral responsibility are very similar, inasmuch as reasons-talk is ubiquitous in libertarian philosophies. For example, according to Timothy O'Connor, "the prior presence of consciously considered reasons" (O'Connor, 2003, 276) is a necessary condition of libertarian free and responsible actions. Robert Kane lists the following conditions that ensure that choices are sufficiently under the control of an agent: "the choices were willed either way, were done for reasons and the agents endorsed them" (Kane, 2007, 29). For Laura Ekstrom, a "decision or other act is directly free just in case it is caused non-deviantly and indeterministically by reasons" (Ekstrom, 2019, p. 137). David Wiggins writes that "patterns of practical deliberation" (Wiggins, 2003, 114) are needed for free and responsible actions. Finally, according to Geert Keil, freedom of will and moral responsibility are based on the „complex capability of practical reasoning, of examining one's own wishes and suspending them if necessary, and of letting the outcome of this process result in action." (Keil, 2009, p. 27, translated from German).

I do not want to blur the lines between compatibilism and libertarianism. Libertarian accounts of moral responsibility presuppose metaphysical alternatives in human reasoning and action, whereas compatibilist accounts do not.

Nevertheless, both sides converge on one point: The human capacity of practical reason is the central feature of moral responsibility.

3 Subjective Reasons Govern Human Action

The fact that many philosophers of moral responsibility focus on the human capacity of practical reason leads to an understanding of human action that is heavily reasons-focused. From this perspective, human action is governed primarily by the reasons the agent cites for their action. Before humans act, they reflect on reasons for and against different actions and subsequently they act because of one or several of these reasons. If the agent does not consciously consider reasons before acting, they can reliably give reasons after the action. Robert Nozick paradigmatically expresses this reasons-focused perspective:

Making some choices feels like this. There are various reasons for and against doing each of the alternative actions or courses of action one is considering, and it seems and feels as if one could do any one of them. In considering the reasons, mulling them over, one arrives at a view of which reasons are more important, which ones have more weight. One decides which reasons to act on; or one may decide to act on none of them but to seek instead a new alternative since none previously considered was satisfactory. (Nozick, 1995, 101).

What is exemplary here for many analyses of human action in debates about moral responsibility is the fact that Nozick describes human action as exclusively driven by the agent's subjective reasons. Nozick and many other philosophers of moral responsibility characterize human action by sufficient self-transparency. At least under normal circumstances, humans can reliably explain why they behave in a certain way and the reasons they cite for their behavior are the main (or the sole) grounds behind their actions. Cases of self-deception, in which people tell a false or a highly incomplete story about their own conduct, are rare occasions. Usually, humans know why they are doing what they do.

The debate about moral responsibility is pervaded by examples of self-transparent actions that are guided exclusively by the agent's reasons. No matter if you take Robert Kane's case of a woman that is torn between doing the morally right thing and acting selfishly (Kane, 1998, p. 126, Kane, 2007, 28), Fischer und Ravizza's numerous examples of different actions by various individuals (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, 59 ff., 65, 83, 85, 87 f., 99, 215 ff., 232, 234, 241 ff., 243), or even Harry Frankfurt's much discussed case of a drug-addict (Frankfurt, 1988, 17 ff., 22, 24 ff., 96, 164), in all these and other examples that philosophers use to illustrate core features of their theories, agents are self-transparent beings.

4 The Case for Omnipresent Self-Deception

Undoubtedly, there are cases of self-transparent action. If I go to the bakery to buy some bread, my subjective reasons (e.g., being hungry and craving bread) fully justify and explain the action. At least, there are no grounds for assuming that my reasons are a mere delusion and that there are other factors actually causing me to go to the bakery. Nevertheless, many cases of human action are much more complicated. Oftentimes, the agent's subjective reasons are only one of many factors that drive the action. However, people often do not recognize these other factors. Instead, they tend to rationalize their behavior.

As aptly put by Schwitzgebel and Ellis, “rationalization is post-hoc reasoning toward a favored conclusion, where both the preference for the conclusion and the search for justifications are shaped by some epistemically non-probative distorting factor that isn't explicitly appealed to in those justifications.” (Schwitzgebel & Ellis, 2017, p. 172) In cases of rationalization, people do not realize that their subjective reasons are only a part of the story and that there are other factors exerting decisive influence on their conduct. People often disregard or misunderstand the influence of their self-image, identity, self-esteem, and their basic worldview on their reasoning and behavior. Simultaneously, they are convinced that their subjective reasons provide a comprehensive explanation of their action. The point is not that people believe themselves to be purely rational and self-transparent in general, but that they identify concrete examples of self-deception primarily in other people.

[W]e tend to treat our own introspections as something of a gold standard in assessing why we have responded in a particular manner and whether our judgments have been tainted by bias. By contrast, we treat the introspections of other actors as merely another source of plausible hypotheses – to be accepted or rejected as a function of their plausibility in light of what we know about the particular actor and about human behavior in general. (Pronin et al., 2004, 784).

While we have no problem pointing out cases of limited self-understanding in other people, we believe our own action explanations to be valid under normal circumstances. However, as suggested by psychological evidence, we underestimate the complexity of our actions much more often than we think. Self-deception is an ubiquitous phenomenon.

4.1 Failures of Self-Assessment

Oftentimes, people have difficulties in arriving at a sound evaluation of their own capabilities (Dunning et al., 2004; Pronin et al., 2004; Zell & Krizan, 2014). In many realms, people believe themselves to be better than average (Zell et al., 2020). For example, people think that they are above average in driving a car (Svenson, 1981), in handling guns safely (Stark & Sachau, 2016), and in numerous moral qualities and intellectual abilities (Brown, 2012; Friedrich, 1996; Kimmelmeier &

Malanchuk, 2016; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Pronin et al., 2002). Concurrently, people think to be less suggestible than other people are (Andsager & White, 2013; Davison, 1983; Eisend, 2017; Paul et al., 2000). For instance, people judge themselves to be less influenced than other people are by political polls (Wei et al., 2011), fake news (Jang & Kim, 2018), deceptive advertising (Xie & Johnson, 2015), and by sexual content in movies and the internet (Rosenthal et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2015). Since it is impossible that the average person actually has above average skills or is less suggestible than average, these research results suggest robust overconfidence in people.

In addition, people are highly skilled in explaining away evidence that contradicts this inflated self-image. They identify the causes of failures and mistakes in external circumstances or in temporary conditions, while simultaneously attributing the causes of success to internal and stable factors (Allen et al., 2020; Mezulis et al., 2004). If your sports team loses, it was the referee's fault, but if you win, it was due to your team's excellent physical fitness.

In sum, people tend to have an overly optimistic opinion about themselves. One central explanation for this phenomenon is motivational (Gaertner et al., 2002; Mezulis et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2008; Zell et al., 2020). We want to see ourselves in a positive light. Thinking of ourselves in overly positive terms is an easy way to boost our self-esteem. People do not want to appear unintelligent, incapable, or immoral and their inflated self-image helps them satisfying this desire. However, we do not justify our self-assessments in this way. We do not claim that we believe ourselves to be better than other people are because this protects our self-esteem. We simply believe to assess our qualities reliably. Self-evaluations frequently are cases of self-deception. Beyond that, because people's self-evaluations can determine in which kind of actions they engage (e.g., driving extremely fast, handling with loaded guns, etc.), flaws in self-insight can contribute to unethical behavior.

4.2 Selective Information Processing and Motivated Reasoning

Human information processing is heavily distorted in favor of people's basic identities and worldviews. People tend to pay less attention to information that contradicts their fundamental convictions (W. Hart et al., 2009), to process this information rather superficially (Richter & Maier, 2017), and to remember it inaccurately (Hennes et al., 2016; Shao & Goidel, 2016). Beyond that, human reasoning is oftentimes highly biased in a similar manner. People accept evidence that supports their fundamental attitudes and criticize contrary evidence comprehensively. Simultaneously, they are convinced that they are just giving an objective assessment of the evidence (Hornsey & Fielding, 2017; Kunda, 1990; Nickerson, 1998; Rothmund et al., 2017). For example, in regard to various contested topics (e.g., climate change, death penalty, gaming and aggression, etc.), people judge scientific and journalistic evidence to be valid and credible if it supports their attitudes, and they doubt contrary information by citing sophisticated counter-arguments. Scientific experts are equally assessed to be reliable sources only as long as they support people's opinions (Bender et al., 2016; Ditto et al., 2019; Greitemeyer, 2014; Kahan, 2013; Kahan

et al., 2011; Lord et al., 1979; Nauroth et al., 2014, 2015). Confronting people that hold false opinions with contrary scientific evidence can in some cases even backfire and lead to a strengthening of these wrong attitudes (Chapman & Lickel, 2016; P. S. Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Nyhan et al., 2014).

One main factor behind such motivated reasoning is the fact that people's attitudes are usually a central part of core identities and global worldviews. For example, attitudes about the nonexistence of climate change or about the dangerousness of vaccines are connected to various moral convictions, personal values, political ideologies, spiritual beliefs, and religious creeds (Browne et al., 2015; Hornsey et al., 2016; Hornsey et al., 2018; Rutjens et al., 2018). Having these worldviews questioned is very unpleasant and, consequently, people try to get out of this unpleasant state of mind (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957). Because, in most cases, it is much easier to doubt counter-attitudinal evidence in various ways than to question and change one's identity, people selectively believe in arguments that help them to protect their worldview.

It is easy to see how distorted information processing can contribute to morally problematic behavior. Just imagine a mother whose belief in conspiracy theories about vaccination is the product of distorted information processing and worldview defense. Since the mother is strongly convinced that she simply has discovered the truth about vaccination based on an objective evaluation of information, she refuses vaccinations for her child. Due to the lack of immunization, the child gets severely ill and suffers from long-term effects for life.

Information processing is a striking case of self-deception. People do not claim to hold on to their opinions in the face of contrary evidence because this is the easiest way to protect their identity. On the contrary, they claim that they simply have the better arguments on their side. While people think that they believe in their fundamental convictions and basic worldviews because of the reasons they cite, psychological research suggests that it is oftentimes the other way round. People find reasons appealing because these reasons help them justifying their identity.

4.3 Dealing with Existential Terror

Humans are the only known animals that are aware of their mortality. Humans know that their existence will inevitably end one day. According to terror management theory, much of human activity is devoted to suppressing existential terror that comes along with awareness of the finiteness of life (Pyszczynski et al., 1999; Solomon et al., 2000, 2015). Humans create culture to fight their fear of death. By adopting cultural worldviews (e.g., moral norms, political beliefs, religious convictions, etc.), humans take part in supra-individual entities that will outlast their own existence. Cultural worldviews provide symbolic immortality. By taking part in a culturally shaped lifestyle, humans are not mere biological organisms but rather unique beings that participate in phenomena transcending their individual existence. When humans live in accordance with norms, values, and expectations of their cultural worldview, their self-esteem is protected or increased, whereby existential terror can be kept at a minimum.

From the perspective of terror management theory, human culture is a coping mechanism for dealing with existential terror. The downside of this is that competing cultures can be threatening. Since different cultures value different behaviors, beliefs and traditions, other cultures question one's own cultural worldview. Thereby, other cultures challenge one's own way of coping with mortality and have the potential of triggering existential fear. For this reason, people engage in worldview defense. When people are reminded of their own mortality, they strengthen their political beliefs (Burke et al., 2013; Jost et al., 2017). Furthermore, making people aware of their mortality can trigger devaluations of other cultures, intolerance, stereotypes, prejudice, aggression, and propensity to violence (Burke et al., 2010; Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008; Martens et al., 2011; Niesta et al., 2008; Vail et al., 2019). Consequently, research on terror management theory suggests that existential terror is one driver of conflicts between cultures.

Human coping with existential terror is a further case of self-deception. Admittedly, people sometimes claim to create things (e.g., art or science) in order to leave something meaningful behind after they have died. However, people do not claim that they believe in certain moral norms or political attitudes because this helps them dealing with their fear of death. People do not justify the devaluation of different religious creeds by referring to the possible threat to their own terror management. They do not cite their existential fear as a reason for fighting another culture. Instead, people are convinced that they have the right cultural beliefs simply for the right reasons.

4.4 Summing up

There is much more psychological evidence for decisive impacts on human conduct, which we oftentimes do not cite as reasons, such as the influence of implicit just world beliefs on the tendency to blame victims (Furnham, 2003; Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1980), the influence of existential and epistemic motives on political opinions (Jost, 2017; Jost et al., 2017; Jost, 2018; Jost et al., 2003), or the influence of people's striving for a positive self-image on their justification of meat consumption (Bastian & Loughnan, 2017; Timm, 2016). However, the basic pattern should be clear by now. In many instances, we do not realize the marked influence of our core desires, motives, and fears on our attitudes, our behavior, and on the reasons that we cite for our attitudes and behavior. While humans are much worse at gaining valid self-insight than they think, they are extremely good at rationalizing their conduct.

5 A Realistic Conception of Human Action

Examples of human actions discussed in the debate about moral responsibility usually follow a typical pattern. Either an agent A performs action X for reason R, or the agent A decides between doing X because of reason R and doing Y because of reason S. However, as suggested by psychological research, a large

number of human actions do not follow that simplistic pattern. In light of the highly limited self-transparency of practical reason outlined above, a realistic conception of human action would be more like the following: A is convinced to have performed an action because of reason R. However, A has performed the action also because of S, T, and Q without realizing the influence of these factors. Furthermore, if S, T, and Q did not influence A's action, or if A was aware of their influence, A would probably not cite R as a reason.

Let me illustrate this with one example: Peter attacks peaceful demonstrators of the climate justice movement and hits one of the protesters in the face. He says that he punched the activist because Peter knows that climate change is a hoax and that he wanted to protect the rights and liberties of the citizens, which the climate activists are planning to undermine. He further claims that his belief in the nonexistence of climate change is based on a thorough internet research of the relevant facts and arguments. While Peter feels confident that he has provided a comprehensive explanation of his action, matters are much more complicated. Peter does not realize that he is a climate sceptic because denying climate change simply fits nicely into his broader worldview. He has always been a strong advocate of individual liberties and an opponent of state interventions. In addition, Peter believes that there is no intrinsic value to nature. It is much easier to integrate the conviction that climate change is a hoax into this belief system than to realize that fundamental changes of society are needed in order to preserve the natural bases of human existence. Moreover, Peter is a convinced Republican and he thinks that the U.S. is the greatest country on earth. Therefore, his climate change denial serves the preservation of his political and national identity. Beyond that, all his normative convictions and identity-related attitudes have highly biased Peter's internet research in favor of climate skepticism. However, since Peter thinks that he is a fairly intelligent, clever, rational, and well-educated citizen, he is sure that he merely sorted out the good from the bad arguments. Finally, the fundamental attitudes and worldviews that lie beneath his climate skepticism serve his personal terror management. However, if you asked him whether his political and moral convictions served the purpose of suppressing existential terror, he would think that you are joking.

This case illustrates that the subjective reasons of the agent are oftentimes only one of numerous decisive contributing factors to human actions. By identifying the faculty of practical reason as the core feature of moral responsibility and by concentrating on self-transparent instances of action, philosophers of moral responsibility present a highly idealized, simplistic, and overly intellectualized picture of human behavior. Of course, humans do possess practical reason and, admittedly, psychological studies cannot disprove this anthropological fact (Brink, 2013, 140 ff.; Schlosser, 2013, 217–222 and 229 ff.; Tiberius, 2015, 144 ff.). Nevertheless, concentrating on the capacity of practical reason bears the risk of detaching philosophical discussions of human action from reality. While the agent's reasons are an important aspect of action, they are by far not the only one and, in many cases, subjective reasons are mere rationalizations. A conception of moral responsibility that wants to do justice to the complexity of human behavior has to take into account the limited self-transparency of practical reason. Consequently, identifying the capacity of

practical reason as the core guarantor of moral responsibility is not wrong, but it is unsatisfactory.

6 Moral Responsibility as a Socially Contextualized Phenomenon

While we oftentimes have considerable difficulties gaining valid self-insight, the social contexts we live in have a mayor influence on how far we come on our journey to self-understanding. The amount and the kind of education we get, the institutions we are a part of, the way political messages are communicated to us, the social diversity of the city we live in, and many more aspects of our social environment can promote self-critical, reliable, and thorough self-understanding or they can impede it. Because social contexts provide the basis for a more or a less self-transparent functioning of practical reason, moral responsibility itself has to be socially contextualized.

Conceptualizing moral responsibility as a socially contextualized phenomenon means that there is responsibility for social surroundings. Moral responsibility is not limited to individual actions, attitudes, or character traits. We are also responsible for the creation of social contexts and for the impact that these contexts have on ourselves and on other people. One dramatic example to illustrate this are the Milgram experiments (Blass, 1999, 2012; Lüttke, 2004; Milgram, 1974). These experiments have shown that an alarmingly high number of people have extreme difficulties standing up to authority figures. Even mild pressure exercised by an authority can nudge people into doing horrible things. Furthermore, people are not very good at anticipating this devastating authority influence on their own behavior (Blass, 1999; Grzyb & Doliński, 2017; Milgram, 1974). People tend to underestimate to a considerable degree how many other people will commit immoral deeds under authority pressure and they believe themselves to be even less suggestible by authority than other people are.

On my account, responsibility for immoral deeds done under authority pressure has to be expanded beyond the individual perpetrators. Those people that put other people in a position in which authority pressure makes immoral behavior likely are co-responsible for the misdeeds. Take the example of war crimes. It is highly probable that the hierarchy based and authority driven structure of the military can contribute to such wrongdoings. Soldiers are trained to follow orders and not their conscience. Consequently, training people in this manner and sending them to highly stressful battle situations means creating a social environment that can be detrimental to self-transparent reasoning in the soldiers and, thereby, make immoral deeds likely. That is why the soldiers are not the only ones responsible for their crimes. Generals and politicians that put soldiers in this position must bear some share of the blame. In addition, since it is a societal decision to fund the military and to send soldiers to battle, at least those parts of society that approve of this decision are partly to blame for military wrongdoings, too.

Moral responsibility for social surroundings, however, is not limited to detrimental influences on moral conduct. More important is responsibility for enabling societal conditions. Since societal conditions can have a huge influence on how reliable

people understand their own reasoning processes, it is possible to shape these conditions in a way that facilitates reflective self-understanding. Therefore, we are responsible for how effective we support each other in understanding ourselves.

At a very basic level, this includes, among others, the way we communicate with each other. Let us assume that the activist in the aforementioned example has openly ridiculed Peter's beliefs about climate change before Peter punched him. This ridicule has challenged Peter's fundamental identity and self-image and, thereby, triggered several biased reasoning processes, whereby Peter came to believe in the non-existence of climate change even stronger than before. Consequently, while the activist is not responsible for the fact that Peter punched him, he bears at least some responsibility for communicating in a way that strengthened Peter's problematic attitudes.

At a higher level, responsibility for enabling societal conditions entails the responsibility for the general opportunities that people have to acquire reliable self-insight. Through socialization processes, societies can provide individuals with the possibilities to gain a deeper understanding of their own limits of reasoning and self-understanding. For example, had Peter grown up in a society in which every citizen is routinely educated thoroughly about psychological biases, he might have been able to reflect more critically on his own reasoning. However, since the society Peter lives in has failed to provide him with enough opportunities to gain skills of critical self-reflection, society is partly co-responsible for his distorted opinions about climate change. More specifically, the political decision makers that shape the educational system in Peter's society are co-responsible for the fact that citizens of their society lack the opportunity to gain better self-insight and, thereby, have false or problematic opinions.

As a final note, I want to stress that by emphasizing the influences of social contexts on the human capability of practical reasoning I am not taking sides with sceptics of moral responsibility. Some philosophers have interpreted psychological research as showing that unconscious processes triggered automatically by external stimuli control human behavior and they have uttered highly skeptical claims about agency, personhood, and moral responsibility (Caruso, 2012, 2015; Doris, 2009, 2015; Taylor, 2010). In my opinion, such skeptical views could only be defended by explaining why research on the effects cited by these philosophers, such as priming or implicit biases, is characterized by fundamental inconsistencies, by several methodological and interpretive problems, and primarily by effects that are much too small to explain human conduct exclusively through unconscious processes (Carlsson & Agerström, 2016; Greenwald et al., 2015; Greenwald et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2017; Kidder et al., 2018; Lodder et al., 2019; Oswald et al., 2013; Weingarten et al., 2016). To my knowledge, no such an explanation is currently available. My own account is much less skeptical since it does not deny or marginalize the influence of conscious reasoning on human behavior. On the contrary, my emphasis on responsibility for enabling societal conditions implies that humans are capable of improving their self-insight under favorable circumstances. What I do question, however, is that human actions are characterized adequately by a primary focus on the agent's subjective reasons. Human behavior is extremely complex and our self-understanding is limited. Therefore, contextualizing moral responsibility is not a skeptical account,

but it is rather an attempt to develop a more differentiated and comprehensive picture of moral responsibility.

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