

Alternatives and responsibility: an asymmetrical approach*

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In this paper, I defend an asymmetrical view concerning the relationship between alternative possibilities and moral responsibility, according to which alternative possibilities are required for being blameworthy, but not praiseworthy, for what one decides or does. I defend the non-necessity of alternatives for praiseworthiness through an examination of what I call ‘Luther’ examples. My defence of the necessity of alternatives for blameworthiness proceeds instead through an analysis of so-called ‘Frankfurt’ examples. In both cases, my arguments rest on the contention that, in ascriptions of moral responsibility, the primary question is not whether the agent could have done otherwise, but whether she should have done what she did, so that the former question only becomes pressing when the answer to the latter is negative. Concerning moral responsibility, then, the concept of moral obligation or duty is prior to that of alternative possibilities.

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