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Review of Reason's Debt to Freedom: Normative Appraisals, Reasons, and Free Will by Isgtiyaque Haji

William Simkulet

Cleveland State University, w.simkulet@csuohio.edu

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Ishtiyaque Haji

Reason's Debt to Freedom: Normative Appraisals, Reasons, and Free Will.

Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2012.

270 pages

\$65.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-19-989920-3)

In *Reason's Debt to Freedom*, Ishtiyaque Haji presents a surprising, innovative, and rigorous contribution to the debate over free will and moral responsibility. The central thesis of this book is that a certain kind of reason – a *pro tanto* reason – requires free will, or the ability to do otherwise. *Pro tanto* reasons are reasons that can be outweighed or overridden and can be contrasted with all-things-considered reasons, which by contrast cannot be outweighed.

Haji refrains from taking a stance as to whether this ability to do otherwise requires strong alternatives of the kind advocated by incompatibilists who believe free will is incompatible with determinism, or weak alternatives of the kind advocated by some compatibilists who believe free will is compatible with determinism, where determinism is the theory that the actual past, coupled with the laws of nature, completely determines only one possible future. However, in chapter 6, Haji notes that the traditional compatibilist accounts of weak alternatives have had their shortcomings.

Seeking to avoid the thorny issue of weak alternatives, some philosophers—semi-compatibilists—contend that moral responsibility does not require free will or alternative possibilities of any kind. Semi-compatibilists have relied upon thought experiments, such as Frankfurt-style cases, to demonstrate the intuitive plausibility of their theories. Frankfurt-style cases purport to show that an agent can be uncontroversially morally responsible for an action despite being unable to do otherwise. Black wants Jones to kill his neighbor and is reasonably sure that Jones will do so on his own; however, Black doesn't want to take any chances and he implants Jones with a device designed to force Jones to kill his neighbor that will trigger only if Jones begins a deliberation process that would lead him to choose otherwise.

While semi-compatibilists argue moral responsibility doesn't require free will, they do not argue against the close relationship between moral responsibility and having reasons. Haji affirms the theory that moral responsibility requires control of some kind. For semi-compatibilists, the control required for moral responsibility constitutes having certain reasons, including *pro tanto* reasons, that causally determine our actions in an appropriate way. By demonstrating that objective *pro tanto* reasons require the existence of alternate possibilities, Haji is able to offer a substantive criticism of semi-compatibilism without having to offer a deeper analysis of where Frankfurt-style cases go awry.

Haji's criticism of semi-compatibilism is innovative, but I fear it ignores two substantial debates concerning moral responsibility: (1) the question of robustness, and (2)

the moral luck debate. Harry Frankfurt contends that his case is a counterexample to the principle of alternate possibilities even if it doesn't truly cut them off; it is sufficient to show that alternate possibilities do not play any role in explaining the agent's moral culpability. Derk Pereboom and David Hunt have similarly constructed neo-Frankfurt-style cases that purport to deny an agent robust alternate possibilities. In Frankfurt's original case, Jones can be said to have robust alternate possibilities because the device is triggered when he begins a deliberation that would lead to him choosing not to kill his neighbor; critics of Frankfurt-style cases argue this is a *prima facie* praiseworthy act that explains why he would be blameless were the device to trigger. In neo-Frankfurt-style cases, the agent in question has decided to do some heinous act but would normally have the ability to reconsider her choice through some indeterministic decision making process; however the agent is implanted with a device that is set to trigger the moment she so much as imagines that she can refrain from the heinous act. Proponents of these cases argue that this trigger is not robust enough to make the agent differently morally responsible for the heinous act, were the device to trigger or not. For Haji, it is not clear whether a genuine objective *pro tanto* reason would cease to be a *pro tanto* reason if a neo-Frankfurt-style case device was present. If whether something is a *pro tanto* reason depends upon whether a device has been implanted, then it is a matter of luck, seemingly undermining the control requirement; if not, then one can have an objective *pro tanto* reason without having alternate possibilities.

The problem of moral luck is that it makes sense to say that we are morally responsible for many things that are outside of our control, such as the consequences of our actions. For example, we might hold Jones morally responsible for killing his neighbor even if it is ultimately outside of his control whether or not he succeeds; for example he could have shot his neighbor, but it is a matter of luck - outside of his control - that the gun didn't backfire. One solution to the problem of moral luck is to adopt a distinction between moral responsibility and *derivative moral responsibility*, where to be derivatively morally responsible for *y* is to be morally responsible for *x*, where *x* is conceptually connected to *y* in an appropriate way. While it doesn't make sense to say that we are truly morally responsible for the consequences of our actions because they are largely determined by circumstances outside of our control, it does make sense to say that we are derivatively morally responsible for them in many cases because we are said to be in complete control of our intentional choices, and there is often a regular connection between our intentions and the outcomes of our actions. Despite the rigor with which Haji approaches his discussion of reasons and moral responsibility, his analysis still asserts that moral agents are morally responsible for the consequences of their actions—what they do—rather than what they intend to do, despite these consequences being a matter of luck. In doing so, Haji threatens to undermine the connection between moral responsibility and control that is central to his criticism of semi-compatibilism.

In spite of this, it is uncontroversially true that this book presents a rigorous, original, and well-thought out argument against semi-compatibilism; *pro tanto* reasons of the kind it is generally accepted are necessary for moral responsibility require alternate possibilities – free will – either strong alternatives of the kind incompatible with determinism, or weak alternatives of the kind compatibilists sometimes advocate. Haji

has made a strong and long-lasting contribution to the free will debate that all philosophers working in the field should read.

William Simkulet
Friends University