

John Martin Fischer

Deep Control: Essays on Free Will and Value.

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Deep Control contains work published between 2005 and 2010. It follows up on other collections of Fischer's work, *My Way* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and *Our Stories* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Most of the 12 essays are here as they were originally published, but a few are combined versions of two or more other essays or are slightly revised versions of the original. The essays here build on previous debates and so they are very much aimed at readers who are already familiar with Fischer's work on free will and responsibility and are immersed in the debates between him and other theorists. The first essay does give a detailed account of his view, adapted from a précis of *My Way*. The rest of the book is divided into two sections. The first, containing 5 essays, is devoted to defending Harry Frankfurt's well known view that moral responsibility does not require "regulative control or access to alternate possibilities" (17). The second, with the remaining 6 essays, spells out Fischer's view of what is it to have deep control of one's actions, which he describes as a middle path between superficial control and total control.

Although Fischer has arranged the chapters in a logical order and made some revisions to the papers to avoid redundancy, there is still considerable overlap from one paper to another. Readers would expect this from such a collection. More problematic is redundancy within some chapters, but this only occurs occasionally. There are some cross-references between chapters, but to a large extent, each stands on its own, so it is possible for readers to dip into the book to find Fischer's discussion of particular issues without having to read the whole thing from beginning to end. Given that the book will appeal to a specialized readership of graduate students and professional philosophers working in the area of analytic moral psychology, who have access to academic libraries, one might wonder whether the collection is somewhat over-inclusive, but there is an argument to be made for including even very minor papers to make them more readily available.

The editing of the revised versions of papers has a few errors. For example, sometimes other chapters are referred to as papers, and at least once, a reference to "the previous section" of a paper should have been changed to "the previous chapter" (145).

Fischer is both a clear writer and also has a lightness of touch, using interesting thought experiments, bringing in some references to current events, and occasionally adding a conversational tone to his explanations. He also embraces names given to certain arguments or groups defending particular ideas (e.g., the Consequence Argument, the Direct Argument, the New Dispositionalists), which makes it easier to map out where he is in his exposition. As a whole, the book sets out a very detailed and plausible view on particular issues in the debates over free will and moral responsibility.

Fischer addresses issues that are familiar in discussions of free will and morality, such as: What is it for a person to act freely? Is the person's action less free if the laws of physics are deterministic? What kind of control does a person need to have over his actions for him to be morally responsible for them? Fischer very often sets out his own ideas by criticizing the arguments of others and by contrasting his approach with theirs. Central to his work is Harry Frankfurt's criticism of the Principle of Alternate Possibilities. Fischer agrees with Frankfurt on this: he argues that a person can be responsible for an action even if she or he could not have actually done otherwise. As Fischer puts it, we do not need regulative control of our actions to be morally responsible for them. Much of the project of this book is to distinguish regulative control from guidance control. Fischer argues that guidance control requires that the agent be responsive in certain ways to reasons for action. Furthermore, the agent needs to take responsibility for the action, which he terms "mechanism ownership."

The essays distinguish Fischer's view from those that are very different from his, such as those that deny free will and those who assert that we have free will on the basis of physical indeterminism (libertarians). It is informative to see Fischer's arguments against these views. However, it is more informative to see how he distinguishes and argues for his ideas over those of closer rivals such as Scanlon, Wallace, Watson, and Mele. While Fischer believes he has basically the right view, he is very aware of the uncertainty of philosophical reasoning and the difficulties of achieving any certainty in conclusions, and his frank appraisal of the state of the debate is refreshing. His approach is always to engage in dialog with his critics and to build a systematic case for his own claims, and showing where the problems occur in his critics' arguments. Fischer's writing stands as a model for an open-minded and reasonable model for how to do philosophy.

An instructive example of this occurs in his chapter on "Guidance Control." Fischer responds to potential counter-examples (presented by Mele) to his theory of moral responsibility. Here are the three conditions that he (with Ravizza) for what it is for an agent to take responsibility for the process or "mechanism" that leads to action (213):

- (1) The agent must see himself as the source of his behavior in the sense that he must see that his choices and actions are efficacious in the world.
- (2) He must accept that he is a fair target of the reactive attitudes as a result of how he exercises his agency in certain contexts.
- (3) His view of himself specified in (1) and (2) be based, in an appropriate way, on the evidence.

Mele gives the case of Fred, an agoraphobic who has stayed in his house for ten years, forgoing attending important events including his daughter's wedding because of his fears of going outside. Yet Fred would leave his house if it were on fire. Mele contends that Fred's medical condition means he is not morally responsible for missing his daughter's wedding. Fischer agrees that this case is troubling for his view, but points out that even plausible approaches may yield results that are not entirely comfortable. Elsewhere he refers to the method of reflective equilibrium in philosophical reasoning, so it may well be that we need to overrule our intuitions about some cases if we are to apply consistently the best theory of moral responsibility available to us.

Yet Fischer is also willing to contemplate adapting his theory to accommodate intuitions. He could do this by saying that some more minimal kinds of reasons for reactivity are not enough for moral responsibility, and one needs to have a more full-blown ability to act on reasons to be morally responsible. Then, according to the revised theory, Fred would not be morally responsible for staying in his house, and this would fit with our intuitions about the case. Fischer does not make this change to his official theory, but he does hold it out as a reasonable move. His main point is that cases like that of Fred are difficult, and it is difficult to know what to say about them. Thus, philosophical theories won't provide a simple way to resolve disputes about what kind of reactive attitudes towards Fred are most appropriate.

Most of the thought-experiments, Frankfurt-style cases and otherwise, that Fischer considers in this collection are hypothetical, and many depend on science-fiction scenarios. A good deal of the argumentation relies on intuitions regarding these cases. It would have been helpful for Fischer to include a more systematic discussion of what justifies drawing conclusions from these intuitions regarding counter-factual situations. Nevertheless, Fischer's admissions of the tentativeness of his conclusions go a long way to confronting this issue.

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