

Forthcoming in *The Journal of Philosophy*

### **Against the Degree-Scope Response to Moral Luck, or A Farewell to Responsibility for Consequences\***

**Abstract:** Resultant moral luck is typically considered to be the most problematic type of moral luck. Arguably the most popular response to the problem of resultant moral luck is the idea that resultant luck affects the scope but not the degree of responsibility. Call this the ‘Degree Scope Response’ (**DSR**). Philosophers also use **DSR** in responding to other types of moral luck and in contexts outside moral luck. In this paper, I argue that **DSR** fails. Then I suggest that we should hold that resultant luck affects neither the degree nor the scope of responsibility. Put differently, consequences are metaphysically irrelevant to responsibility. Further, I discuss various advantages of this view and show its various implications on questions about free will, theories of causation, and responsibility in contexts outside moral luck. I also defend this view against the worry that it is too revisionary.

Moral luck occurs when something beyond one’s control affects one’s moral responsibility.<sup>1</sup> Consider two assassins. The first assassin shoots and the victim dies. The second assassin shoots but a random bird intercepts the bullet and changes its trajectory, hence the victim doesn’t die. Whether a bird intercepts a bullet is a matter of luck—i.e., beyond the assassins’ control. Nonetheless, if the second assassin is less blameworthy than the first assassin, this is a case of moral luck—specifically, *resultant* moral luck. Resultant moral luck is typically considered as the most problematic kind of moral luck. This is evident also in the fact that resultant moral luck has received the most attention in literature.

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\* **Acknowledgements.** Many thanks to Jeffrey Behrends, Sara Bernstein, Ben Bradley, Keith Hankins, Kellan Head, Mark Heller, Zoë Johnson King, Stephen Kershner, Andrew Khoury, Matthew Kopec, Hille Paakunainen, Matthew Talbert, and Joshua Tignor for their very helpful comments and suggestions. I am also very grateful to a referee and an editor of this journal for their insightful comments.

<sup>1</sup> See Nagel (1979) and Williams (1981) for the classic discussions on moral luck. See Hartman (2017:23-31) and Anderson (2019) for discussions on and defenses of the above standard definition of moral luck. I use this definition for ease of exposition. I don’t take a position on whether it’s the correct one.

Most philosophers in the moral luck debate reject resultant moral luck.<sup>2</sup> And arguably, the most popular response to the problem of resultant moral luck is the one that appeals to the degree-scope distinction.<sup>3</sup> The idea is that while the (un)lucky consequences of an action can affect the scope of one's responsibility, they can't affect the degree of one's responsibility. Put differently, while the first assassin above is morally responsible *for* more things (i.e., the victim's death) than the second assassin, the degree of their responsibility is the same. Call this the '*Degree-Scope Response*' (**DSR**). It's important to note, however, that what's at stake is not merely a response to the problem of moral luck. Philosophers often employ **DSR** in contexts outside moral luck.<sup>4</sup> Thus, **DSR**'s success or failure has even further significant philosophical implications.

Below in **§1** I further explain **DSR**. In **§2** I argue that **DSR** fails. In **§3** I consider four objections and respond to them. Given that **DSR** fails and most philosophers reject that consequences affect the *degree* of responsibility, in **§4** I suggest that consequences affect neither the degree nor the scope of responsibility. Further, I discuss various advantages of this

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<sup>2</sup> Rejecting resultant moral luck has been called 'the Orthodox View' (Ferrante, 2009) and 'the Standard View' (McKanzie, 2017). Moore—a little sarcastically too, I suppose—calls it 'the standard educated view' (1997:233). Hartman (2019:3180) describes it as "the most popular position in the moral luck debate." Nelkin (2021) emphasizes "the large group who focus exclusively on resultant luck" among the moral luck skeptics. See Hartman (2017:129) for an extensive catalogue of published opinions regarding various types of moral luck.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Thomson (1989:211), Zimmerman (1993:227, 2002:560-1, 2006:598-9), Peels (2015:74), and Swenson (2022:400). The underlying idea in **DSR** can also be found in Fischer (1986:256), though instead of '*scope*,' Fischer calls it the '*content*' of responsibility. My impression is that the influence of **DSR** is much more apparent in conversation than in print. In conversation, it's hard not to get the impression as though **DSR** is something of a philosophical commonplace or that it's implausible not to endorse **DSR** especially if one wants to hold that (e.g.,) both assassins above are equally blameworthy.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Capes & Swenson (2017:974) (in defending the principle of alternative possibilities), Swenson (2019:113-7) (to argue that responsibility requires difference making), Collins & de Haan (2021:197-8, 205-6) (in the context of collective responsibility), and Montminy (2023:447-8) (to argue that one can be responsible for consequences that involve deviant causation).

view and show its implications on questions about free will, theories of causation, and responsibility outside moral luck. I also show that this view is *not* too revisionary.

Here are two clarifications. First, I won't argue against the degree-scope distinction itself. Notice that **DSR** goes beyond observing this distinction. **DSR** suggests a specific relationship (or lack thereof) between consequences of an action and the degree of moral responsibility on the one hand, and consequences and the scope of moral responsibility on the other: that the consequences are irrelevant to the degree but not to the scope of responsibility. Second, by "moral responsibility," one might mean at least two things. One is to have a moral duty. For instance, parents are responsible for taking care of their children. And two, one might mean being morally blameworthy or praiseworthy for one's behavior. The sense of responsibility that's in question in the moral luck debate, and what I'll henceforth refer to by "responsibility" unless I indicate otherwise, is the latter one. This isn't to say that the former is irrelevant to our discussion. As we'll see below, to the extent that the former is relevant to one's blameworthiness or praiseworthiness, or to the extent that the latter in turn generates (*prima facie*) duties for one, the former is also relevant. But the moral luck debate is *ultimately* about the latter.

Let me also further clarify the sense of responsibility in question. It refers to an evaluation of the agent: It's the agent that's blameworthy or praiseworthy in light of how she conducted herself. This sense of responsibility is sometimes called "basic desert responsibility." When one is responsible in this sense, one *deserves* certain reactions—such as blame, resentment, indignation, or punishment, or praise, gratitude, or reward. One's deservingness of these reactions generates *basic* or *non-instrumental* reasons for responding to one in these

ways. These reasons—in the absence of overriding considerations—make the reactions in question at least morally permissible. Note that what’s in question here is different from the *appropriateness* (or all-things-considered *rightness*) of blaming or praising. *Blaming* (or *praising*) can be appropriate in the absence of *blameworthiness* (or *praiseworthiness*). For instance, it can be appropriate to blame someone *not* because they’re blameworthy (e.g., when they have an *excuse* for their wrongdoing), but because doing so helps them better understand their mistake and avoid repeating it in the future. Conversely, blaming can be inappropriate *despite* blameworthiness. For instance, it can be inappropriate for one to blame the blameworthy if one doesn’t have the *authority* or *standing* to blame (e.g., when one is blameworthy for the same kind of wrongdoing as the one that’s blameworthy). Accordingly, the moral luck debate is about *one’s worthiness* or *deservingness* of praise or blame.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, turning briefly to theories of responsibility, the two most popular among them in contemporary literature are the so-called ‘control’ theories and ‘quality of will’ theories. On the former, responsibility is grounded in *control* (or free will) and being (reasonably expected to be) *aware* of various morally relevant factors. On the latter, responsibility is grounded in one’s *quality of will*—i.e., roughly, one’s proper concern, or lack thereof, for others’ morally relevant interests. Although these two kinds of theories are often seen as rivals, they can also be consistent and complement each other (cf. Capes, 2012). Both these kinds of theories are involved in discussions over moral luck, though the control theories appear more frequently.

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<sup>5</sup> The above characterization of responsibility aligns with what others in the moral luck debate typically have in mind, including those who disagree with my main theses in this paper. See, e.g., Zimmerman (2002:554-8), Hartman (2017:32-5), and Khoury (2018, p.1358, and p.1372, fn.47). Zimmerman accepts **DSR**. Hartman holds that consequences can affect the degree of responsibility. Khoury holds that they affect neither the scope nor the degree of responsibility.

Among those who subscribe to the underlying or motivating thoughts in these views, some accept **DSR**, and some reject it—either by holding that the consequences affect (also) the degree of responsibility or by holding that they affect neither the scope nor the degree of responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Insofar as all these competing positions align with the underlying thoughts in these two theories of responsibility, my arguments and theses below are also consistent with them. Indeed, if I'm correct, those who subscribe to these theories should reject **DSR**. And insofar as they're also inclined to reject that consequences affect the degree of responsibility, they should hold that consequences are metaphysically irrelevant to responsibility.

### 1. Degree-Scope Response

Consider the following case:

**(Hitter)** Hitter—freely, knowingly, and without proper concern—throws a rock at Sally. The rock hits and wounds Sally.

Plausibly, Hitter is blameworthy for what she did. It's natural to think that she is responsible for harming Sally. But consider this:

**(Misser)** Misser—freely, knowingly, and without proper concern—throws a rock at Barry but misses the target due to a random strong gust of wind causing the rock to fall short.

Many find it implausible to hold that Hitter and Misser differ in blameworthiness.<sup>7</sup> Something as random as a gust of wind shouldn't make them differently responsible. But then we end up with

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Zimmerman (2002, esp. p.556), Hartman (2017, esp. pp.33-4) and Khoury (2018, esp. pp.1367-8).

<sup>7</sup> Some might find it intuitive that it's fitting for Sally to be angrier than Barry (since Sally got hit by a rock), which might in turn be considered as evidence that Hitter is more blameworthy than Misser. However, *if* Hitter is more blameworthy than Misser, **DSR** is false. *That DSR* is false is also what I argue in **§2**, and my argument doesn't presuppose that Hitter and Misser are equally blameworthy. In **§4**, I suggest that consequences don't affect the degree of responsibility (i.e., that Hitter and Misser are equally blameworthy) largely because most philosophers in the moral luck debate accept this thesis. Moreover, I believe that the proponents of this thesis have ample resources to address or respond to the kind of intuition in question. For instance, in real-life cases, it can sometimes be *right* or *appropriate* for Sally to be angrier than Barry. But this is consistent with Hitter and Misser

an inconsistent set of beliefs: **(i)** Hitter is responsible for harming someone, **(ii)** Misser is *not* responsible for harming someone (since he didn't harm anybody), and **(iii)** Hitter and Misser are *not* differently responsible. In a way then we're torn in opposite directions.

This is where **DSR** stakes out a middle ground. It says that Hitter's *degree* of responsibility is equal to Misser's degree of responsibility—that they deserve equally harsh reaction, blame, or punishment. But Hitter is responsible *for* something that Misser isn't—i.e., harming someone. It seems then that **DSR** nicely resolves our conflicting intuitions.

Moreover, notice that intuitively Hitter has a duty in reparations towards Sally since she harmed Sally. But Misser doesn't have the equivalent of this duty towards Barry since he didn't harm Barry—though plausibly he has a duty to apologize to Barry. And if—as **DSR** holds—Hitter is responsible (i.e., blameworthy) *for* harming Sally while Misser isn't responsible for harming anyone, it's plausible that Hitter has an additional duty and Misser doesn't. Hence, it's another advantage of **DSR** that it helps us account for Hitter's additional duty.

## 2. DSR Fails

Here's the crucial question, however: What does it mean to say that Hitter is 'responsible *for*' harming Sally? We might mean three things.

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being equally blameworthy. Furthermore, as I note below, contrary to what's sometimes asserted in the literature, the overwhelming majority of ordinary people hold that consequences don't increase one's blameworthiness. See also Khoury (2018:1369-72) and Nelkin (2021: §4.1.1) for further helpful suggestions.

First, Hitter is *causally* responsible for harming Sally. Indeed, this is true by stipulation. But causal responsibility doesn't entail moral responsibility or blameworthiness. Also, this can't be what **DSR** *distinctively* is about because then **DSR** would be stating the obvious.

Second, we might mean that Hitter is *liable* for harming Sally, that Hitter has a *duty* in reparations because she harmed Sally. I think Hitter has this (prima facie) duty. Moreover, the fact that Hitter has this duty provides us with most, if not all, of what we need to resolve our conflicting intuitions above. But, first, what's in question here is the *duty* sense of responsibility, which is not the ultimately relevant sense of responsibility in moral luck. So, if this is what **DSR** is about, **DSR** misfires as a response to the problem of moral luck. Proponents of **DSR** might object that it's because Hitter is blameworthy *for* harming Sally that she has a duty in reparations. But this only further highlights the distinction between the two senses of moral responsibility and tells us that *that* Hitter has this duty is at best an implication of **DSR**, not **DSR** itself. Second, if this is what **DSR** is about, **DSR** equivocates 'responsibility'. Consider the following: **(P)** Hitter's degree of responsibility (i.e., *blameworthiness*) is equal to that of Misser's, but Hitter is responsible (i.e., incurs *duty*) for more things. The problem isn't that **(P)** is false. Indeed, I think it's true. The problem is that, as I discuss below, **(P)** is consistent with a rival response to the problem of moral luck: that consequences affect neither the degree nor the scope of blameworthiness. Hence, **(P)** can't be what **DSR** *distinctively* is about. Also, to the extent that this rival response is plausible, **DSR** would then be cashing in on the plausibility of another response to the problem of moral luck.

Third, by "Hitter is responsible *for* harming Sally," we might mean she's blameworthy *for* harming Sally. That is, she's blameworthy *because* she harmed someone—that having harmed

someone, i.e., the consequence of her action, *makes* her blameworthy, or *grounds* her blameworthiness. This, I think, is what **DSR** is about.<sup>8</sup> But then **DSR** is untenable. To see this, recall that **DSR** holds that consequences are irrelevant to the degree of responsibility: Hitter's degree of blameworthiness is the same as Misser's degree of blameworthiness. But this is odd because **DSR** then entails that one's *degree* of blameworthiness can be fixed even before what *makes* her blameworthy is fixed. That is, one's degree of blameworthiness can be in place temporally prior to what makes one blameworthy is in place, which seems implausible. By analogy, consider the idea that the strength of one's epistemic justification can be in place even before what makes one's belief justified (e.g., one's evidence) is in place, which seems implausible.

One might object that the following construal of **DSR** can avoid the above concern. Hitter's degree of responsibility is fixed once what she's responsible for—i.e., the consequence of her action—is in place, but Hitter's degree of responsibility remains the same as Misser's degree of responsibility. That is, the scope of Hitter's responsibility doesn't *increase* her degree of responsibility though the occurrence of the scope must be waited for Hitter's degree of responsibility to be in place or accounted for.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Although I think this is the most straightforward reading of **DSR**, Zimmerman (2002:564-5)—a proponent of **DSR**—would reject it. But then—given also the foregoing discussion—what 'responsible *for*' amounts to in **DSR** would be quite mysterious. Part of Zimmerman's response to this might be his view that 'scope counts for nothing' (p.568). My response to the first objection in §3 addresses this view. The second objection I consider in §3 might also undermine this reading of **DSR**. See my response to it below. Also, Khoury (2018:1361-3) rejects **DSR** partly by rejecting the claim that 'scope counts for nothing.' He argues that what one is responsible *for* is part of what makes one responsible, and hence can't 'count for nothing' or be irrelevant to one's responsibility. In contrast, my argument in this paragraph and the next two is that: Given that what one is responsible for is part of what makes one responsible, **DSR** entails a highly implausible claim that it can avoid only through an *ad hoc* move. An earlier and less developed version of this argument first appeared in my (Demirtas, 2025).

<sup>9</sup> Swenson (2019:110-1) suggests something similar to this.

But this seems *ad hoc*. If we can fully account for Misser's degree of responsibility without appealing to consequences, it's unclear why we must wait for the consequences of Hitter's action to account for her degree of responsibility. The consequences seem redundant in accounting for her degree of responsibility. To bolster the point here, consider the timeframe after Misser's rock falling short and Hitter's rock still travelling to its target. We must wait before we can account for Hitter's degree of responsibility despite the fact that nothing that happens thereafter—e.g., whether Hitter's rock also falls short briefly afterwards, whether it touches Sally, or whether it harms Sally—makes her deserve any more blame, or any harsher or different treatment. This seems quite odd.

One might worry, however, that if consequences don't affect the scope, Hitter isn't responsible *for* harming Sally. But then Hitter can't have a duty in reparations towards Sally which seems implausible.<sup>10</sup>

I think this worry is *a*, if not *the*, major motivation behind **DSR** and why it initially seems so appealing. However, we don't need **DSR** to avoid this worry—even if we want to hold that Hitter's degree of blameworthiness is equal to that of Misser's. The underlying assumption in this worry is that blameworthiness for something is necessary for having a duty concerning that thing. But this is false. First, consider moral duties like telling the truth, keeping one's promises, being non-maleficent, or helping those in need. None of them requires being blameworthy for anything. Second, consider that *mere* causal responsibility is often sufficient to generate a (*prima facie*) duty. Suppose while walking home, you get caught up in a heavy rainstorm which

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<sup>10</sup> See Rolffs (2023) for this worry.

causes very low visibility. You want to avoid getting wet and sick. So, you start walking fast. Shortly after, you run into someone who's also walking fast and knock him down. You're causally responsible for harming him, but you're not blameworthy given the circumstances. What happened was an accident. But surely you have a duty now—you should help him up and get cleaned. Or suppose you take someone else's property non-culpably not knowing that it belongs to someone else. When it turns out later that it belongs to someone else, you have a duty to give it back, which doesn't require you to be blameworthy for taking it in the first place. Third, consider cases where, *through no fault of your own*, your teenage kid, pet, or farm animal causes harm to others. You're not blameworthy for the harm, but plausibly it's your duty to compensate for it. So, being blameworthy for something is *not* necessary for having a duty concerning that thing. Indeed, holding otherwise commits one to implausible claims.

It follows that *if* Hitter has a duty after harming Sally, this needn't be because she's blameworthy *for* harming Sally. And here are two alternative suggestions about what might generate Hitter's duty. One, Hitter's duty arises partly from the fact that she's blameworthy *for willing* (or attempting) to harm Sally *plus* she's causally responsible for harming Sally (Khoury 2018). Two, it could be that Hitter's duty arises from what Susan Wolf (2001) calls the '*nameless* virtue'—the virtue of *taking* responsibility for the consequences of one's actions *even if* those consequences are unforeseen, unintended, or somehow out of one's control. Both these suggestions are plausible and consistent with denying that Hitter is blameworthy *for* harming Sally. One might worry that these alternative suggestions are a bit 'forced.' But, contrary to appearances and as the above discussion shows, there isn't a simple, straightforward

connection between the two senses of responsibility—i.e., being blameworthy or praiseworthy versus having duties.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Objections

In this section, I consider four points in favor of **DSR** and argue that they fail. First, Zimmerman (2002:568) argues that “[d]egree of responsibility counts for everything, scope for nothing.” What matters is how much blame or punishment, or praise or reward, one deserves and not *what* one deserves it *for*. Hence, one might think, even if (un)lucky consequences affect the scope of responsibility, this is immaterial.

But this is strange. One, it’s odd to think that *what* one is responsible *for* counts for nothing. Two, the idea that scope counts for nothing is self-undermining for **DSR**: why should we hold that consequences affect the scope if the scope counts for nothing? One might as well reject it given that **(A)** accounting for duties or liabilities doesn’t—as discussed above—require holding that consequences affect the scope, and **(B)** the scope doesn’t —by the lights of **DSR**—affect the degree. Three, given **(A)** and **(B)**, it’s hard to see what might motivate the idea that consequences affect the scope. But even if there are such further motivations, it would be quite surprising to *substantially* satisfy them if the scope counts for nothing.

Second, one might argue that we should accept that consequences affect the scope to account for what’s sometimes called *derivative* or *indirect* responsibility. That is, one might be

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<sup>11</sup> A further lingering worry might be that it’s unfair that a duty incurs for Hitter but not for Misser. However, first, again the duty sense of responsibility isn’t the ultimately relevant sense of responsibility in the moral luck debate. Second, most (if not all) our duties incur partly due to factors we can’t control: if someone happens to ask you a question, you have a duty to tell the truth; if someone happens to be around you, you have a duty to be non-maleficent towards them, etc. There’s nothing concerning here. Third, and more importantly for my purposes, *even if* there’s anything concerning, **DSR** itself doesn’t help against it.

*basically* responsible for, or on grounds of, an attempt (or willing) and *derivatively* responsible for the consequences of that attempt. This picture might also allow us to observe a distinction between the *grounds* of responsibility (or what *makes* one responsible) and what one is responsible *for*.<sup>12</sup>

However, one, it's unclear that the basic versus derivative responsibility distinction adds anything substantive to the debate. 'Derivative responsibility' seems like just another name for 'responsibility for consequences.' And the idea that there is responsibility for consequences amounts to the idea that consequences affect the scope of responsibility. Two, consider this: Does derivative responsibility affect the degree of responsibility or not? If it does, this is *not* consistent with **DSR**. If it doesn't, derivative responsibility is no different than the scope of responsibility *as construed by DSR*. Three, it's unclear why we should think that what makes one responsible and what one is responsible for are completely distinct from one another. In fact, it seems odd to me to think that one can be responsible for something completely other than what makes one responsible. The following seems perfectly plausible: an attempt (or willing) that satisfies the control condition and the epistemic condition, or one that (also) displays a certain quality of will, is both what one is responsible for and is (part of) the ground of responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Notice also that this view is theoretically simpler since it combines the ground of responsibility with what one is responsible for. Moreover, if one wants to separate the two and hold that one is basically responsible *for*, or on *grounds of*, (e.g.,) an attempt and

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<sup>12</sup> Sartorio (2019:101-2) suggests this distinction.

<sup>13</sup> Here, I have in mind the 'control' and 'quality of will' theories of responsibility mentioned above. Also, some theories reduce all responsibility to responsibility for character. (Cf. Talbert (2019) and Hartman (2020) for further discussion on such views in the context of moral luck.) These views are consistent with and further support the general point above.

derivatively responsible for the consequences of that attempt, one owes us an account of the connection between the two—i.e., an account of under what conditions derivative responsibility occurs.<sup>14</sup> The problem is that it would be quite curious to spend effort for such an account given that derivative responsibility ‘counts for nothing’ or given **(A)** and **(B)** above—*especially* considering the difficulties involved in giving such an account.<sup>15</sup>

Third, Swenson (2019:111) considers the following case in defense of **DSR** (or the *hybrid approach to luck*, as he calls it):

**(House Destruction)** Neal and Chris both fire rockets into the air. Neal’s rocket lands on your house, causing it to burn down. Chris’s rocket causes no harm.

Plausibly Neal is liable (i.e., has a duty in reparations) for the destruction of your house.

Crucially, Swenson argues (p.112), even if Chris is *also* liable, Neal’s liability seems stronger. That is, if only one of them can compensate you, it must be Neal. But Neal and Chris seem equally blameworthy and the only difference between them concerns the scope of their responsibilities: Neal is, and Chris isn’t, responsible for the destruction of your house. Hence, we should accept that consequences affect the scope of responsibility to account for *degrees* of one’s duty or liability.

However, as argued above, being responsible (i.e., blameworthy) for something isn’t necessary for having a duty concerning that thing. Put differently, the scope of responsibility

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<sup>14</sup> Copp (1997:449-50) and Khoury (2018:1363) make similar points. Cf. also Kershnar (2018:116-7) for an argument against derivative responsibility.

<sup>15</sup> I’ll further discuss this in the last section. Suffice it to note for now that giving such an account involves *inter alia* sorting through difficult puzzles about causation. Arguably the most intimidating among them are the ones that involve deviant causation. (See, e.g., Talbert (2015), Bernstein (2019), Montminy (2019), and Alexander (2021) for further discussion.) Notice that those who *fully* accept resultant moral luck and the proponents of **DSR** face this difficulty together. The difference is that the former have some motivation to tackle this difficulty since they hold that consequences can increase the degree of responsibility.

doesn't need to cover that for which one is liable. Indeed, thinking otherwise commits one to implausible views. Moreover, again, it's plausible that Neal's duty arises from the following facts: he's *blameworthy for willing to fire a rocket near your house (or blameworthy for attempting to destroy your house)* and he's *causally responsible for the destruction of your house*. If these facts together ground Neal's liability, they can also ground the fact that his liability is stronger than Chris's liability—if Chris has any liability at all. Hence, we need not accept that consequences affect the scope to account for degrees of liability.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, Swenson (2019:113) also considers the following pair of cases:

**(Rescue 1)** Justin appears to see his friend Taylor drowning. He exerts great effort to throw a raft out to him. But Taylor was not actually drowning. Justin's act does not accomplish anything.

**(Rescue 2)** Justin appears to see his friend Taylor drowning. He exerts great effort to throw a raft out to him. Taylor uses the raft to avoid drowning. Taylor would have drowned if Justin had not acted.

Swenson argues that it seems that the value of Justin and Taylor's relationship increases *more* in

**(Rescue 2)** than in **(Rescue 1)**. But Justin is equally responsible (i.e., praiseworthy) in the two

cases. The only difference is Justin's scope of responsibility in **(Rescue 2)**, which is partly due to

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<sup>16</sup> Three things to note here. One, Swenson's discussion about (degrees of) liability involves several more cases (p.111-3, and fn.#8). But my response, given also the discussion in the previous section, suffices as rejoinder to all the further claims he makes via the other cases. Two, Swenson shouldn't have an in-principle objection to the idea that the scope of responsibility doesn't need to cover that for which one is liable. Later in the paper he distinguishes between being responsible for *causing* a harm versus being responsible for *the harm*, and accepts that the former is sufficient for liability for the harm (p.115). Three, one might worry that I concede above that the scope of one's responsibility (e.g., Neal's *willing* to fire rockets near your house) is *important*—i.e., needed to account for, say, liability. If so, my response fails because Swenson wants to establish just that—that the scope of one's responsibility is important. I grant that one might get this impression from Swenson's discussion (see, e.g., p.111, and p.112, fn.8). But, first, this can't be all he has in mind since accepting that the scope of responsibility is important is consistent with holding that consequences affect the degree and the scope and holding that they affect neither (i.e., it's consistent with both fully accepting resultant moral luck and fully rejecting it). To defend **DSR**, one must argue that accounting for (degrees of) liability requires that the scope of responsibility cover that for which one is liable (i.e., consequences). Second, even if my response fails as a rejoinder to what Swenson intends to establish using **(House Destruction)**, one might use this case to defend **DSR** in just the way I suggest it must be.

luck. Hence, we should accept that consequences affect the scope of responsibility to account for the *increase* of strength in relationship in **(Rescue 2)**.

However, one, even if the value of Justin and Taylor's relationship increases more in **(Rescue 2)**, we don't need to hold that Justin is responsible for *rescuing Taylor* to account for this.<sup>17</sup> If we don't need consequences being in the scope of responsibility to account for (degree of) liability, plausibly we don't need it to account for the degree of a relationship. Similarly as above, we can perfectly account for it in virtue of Justin's moral responsibility for his attempt to rescue Taylor plus his causal responsibility for rescuing Taylor. Two, it's questionable that the value of Justin and Taylor's relationship increases *more* in **(Rescue 2)**. Consider the following case. Suppose someone wants you shot in the foot to 'teach you a lesson,' and offers a lot of money for the job. Billy—a close friend of yours—takes the job. Later that day, he fires his pistol, but a random bird intercepts the bullet, and you don't get harmed. It doesn't seem that the strength of your relationship with Billy decreases any less than if he were to successfully shoot you in the foot. It would be strange for you to think that since Billy didn't harm you, you should still have a minimal relationship with him; but if he were to end up harming you—i.e., if that bird didn't cross paths with the bullet—you'd never want to see him again. This suggests that *if*

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<sup>17</sup> As a referee points out, on Scanlon's (2008) view, blame involves relationship modification (e.g., revising one's attitudes toward the blameworthy). But if Justin isn't responsible (i.e., praiseworthy) for rescuing Taylor, it's unclear how the modification (i.e., enhancement) in Justin and Taylor's relationship can be warranted on a Scanlonian view. In response, first, the view seems neutral (or at least doesn't need to take a position) on responsibility for what exactly (e.g., attempting to rescue Taylor or rescuing Taylor) that warrants relationship modification. Second, Scanlonians can accept that moral responsibility is *not* the only factor that warrants relationship modification. For instance, having known someone for a long time can also enhance a relationship with that person. (Thanks to Zoë Johnson King for this second point and the example.) Given these two points, the following (which I suggest below) seems consistent with a Scanlonian view of blame or praise: Justin and Taylor's relationship enhances because of **(i)** Justin's praiseworthiness for attempting to rescue Taylor and **(ii)** his causal responsibility for rescuing Taylor.

the strength of Justin and Taylor’s relationship should increase, it should increase equally in both cases.

#### 4. Taking Stock

Regarding the relationship between consequences of an action and the degree of responsibility on one hand and the scope of responsibility on the other, logical space allows the following options:

- (1) Consequences affect both the degree and the scope of responsibility.
- (2) Consequences affect the degree but not the scope of responsibility.
- (3) Consequences affect the scope but not the degree of responsibility.
- (4) Consequences affect neither the degree nor the scope of responsibility.<sup>18</sup>

Option (2) seems like a strange view, and is likely a target of many of the objections above that **DSR** faces. I’m also not aware of anyone defending it. Hence, I leave it aside. Option (3) is **DSR**.

Given that **DSR** fails, one can hold option (1) which amounts to fully embracing resultant moral luck. Although my arguments above might put some pressure on proponents of resultant moral luck, they are largely consistent with (1). But most philosophers in the moral luck debate

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<sup>18</sup> Rolffs (2023), after criticizing both **DSR** and option (4), suggests two conceptions of moral responsibility as a middle ground: internal responsibility and external responsibility. He suggests that consequences affect the degree and the scope of external responsibility but not those of internal responsibility. Option (4) (given further clarifications below) corresponds to internal responsibility. It’s less clear to me what external responsibility is supposed to be. But it is, Rolffs argues, what’s necessary to account for (a) duties, (b) distinguishing between accidents (i.e., unintentionally caused bad events) and bad deeds (i.e., intentionally caused bad events), and (c) avoiding the revisionary implications of (4). I argued that (4) can account for duties. To my mind, option (4) plus one’s *causal* responsibility for consequences is all we need to distinguish between accidents and bad deeds. And below I argue that (4) is *not* too revisionary (cf. also Tiffany (2023:529-30) that (4) is revisionary). Moreover, one, a proliferation in allegedly distinct conceptions of responsibility is partly what has led responsibility literature into a ‘morass’ as Shoemaker (2020) calls it. We shouldn’t add to the problem by further increasing the conceptions of responsibility—especially given that these added conceptions, while allegedly solving one puzzle, potentially raise even more puzzles and questions (e.g., regarding the exact relationship between these various conceptions of responsibility). Two, increasing the conceptions of responsibility to avoid being revisionary (or to accommodate the principle of charity) potentially comes at the cost of another theoretical virtue—i.e., simplicity. So, in the end, it’s unclear that we gain a net theoretical value.

‘reject’ resultant moral luck—at least in the sense that they reject that consequences affect the *degree* of responsibility. Since **DSR** fails, these philosophers should accept **(4)**.

Below I take it that **(4)** is correct, discuss its various theoretical implications and advantages, and argue that **(4)** is *not* too revisionary.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, to the extent that **(4)** is attractive, we have further reasons against **(1)**—i.e., against resultant moral luck. Here’s a clarification before I proceed. What seems most consistent with fully rejecting resultant moral luck is to hold that what one is responsible *for* is a mental element, event, or act (such as an *intention, decision, willing, or trying*). What comes afterwards doesn’t affect one’s degree of responsibility. Indeed, some who deny resultant moral luck think that this isn’t only consistent with but entailed by rejecting resultant moral luck (Wolf 2001:13-18, Enoch 2012: 101, Khoury 2018). I don’t take a position on what exactly that mental act or element is. For ease of exposition, I’ll call it an ‘attempt.’

**I. Responsibility Internalism.** Some philosophers are internalist about responsibility. They hold that responsibility depends only on factors internal to agents.<sup>20</sup> If **(4)** is correct, this is good news for internalism. Indeed, more needs to be said yet to establish internalism, but this is a significant step in that direction.

It’s worth noting, at this point, the striking similarities in motivations for responsibility internalism or option **(4)** and an account of act individuation according to which an act is individuated by, or essentially is, a willing or attempting (e.g., willing to throw a rock at

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<sup>19</sup> Also, I argue elsewhere that consequences don’t increase one’s responsibility (Demirtas, 2022a). See also my (Demirtas, 2022b) for further reasons to be suspicious that consequences increase one’s responsibility.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Kershnar (2018: ch.7), Khoury (2018), and Demirtas (2023).

someone).<sup>21</sup> What follows from a willing (e.g., moving one's arm, throwing a rock, hitting someone with a rock) are consequences, and are contingent properties or different descriptions of what is essentially the same act. On a slightly different and popular account—associated with Anscombe (1957) and Davidson (1980)—acts are individuated by basic bodily movements instead (e.g., moving one's arm). Davidson (1980:59) says: "We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature." But—as Khoury (2018:1365) also notes—if our bodily movements, after our willing them to move, can also be 'up to nature,' then the latter view should reduce to the former. Additionally, on some accounts to which I'm sympathetic, action requires guidance or control (Frankfurt, 1978). If so and given that there's '*no fresh injection of control*'<sup>22</sup> after willing, acts are essentially willings.<sup>23</sup>

**II. Free Will.** It's somewhat puzzling that, as Hartman (2023) notes, philosophers often discuss free will and moral luck in isolation. We should remedy this to make philosophical progress. Consider, for instance, the principle of alternative possibilities which has long been a central element in the classic free will debate: (**PAP**) free will and responsibility require an alternative possibility to do something other than what one actually does. However, **PAP** is

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<sup>21</sup> Thanks to an editor for bringing this up and prompting me to add the following discussion. Cf., Sandis (2010), and Wilson and Shpall (2016, §1.1 and §1.2), for an overview of the debate on act individuation.

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Andrew Khoury for this insightful and eloquent phrase.

<sup>23</sup> A referee points out that the control in question might involve counterfactual conditionals (e.g., what one does, or can do, in relevant counterfactual situations). Hence, it might be that an act is individuated by more than a willing. In response, first, notice that once we grant that an act is essentially a willing, there's still the question about what properties that willing must have. If action requires control, that willing must be such that one controls it. And if control involves various counterfactual conditionals, then that willing must be such that it involves those conditionals. All this seems consistent. Second, I'm inclined to think that control is grounded only in actual courses of events. Put differently, what happens in counterfactual situations is not metaphysically relevant to control (though it might be epistemically or evidentially relevant). Third, even if what happens in counterfactual situations can partly ground control, whether what comes after a willing—in actual or counterfactual situations—can be part of that ground is a further question. If there is no fresh injection of control following an actual willing, then plausibly what follows that willing is irrelevant to control. If so, we should likewise regard what follows a counterfactual willing as similarly irrelevant.

notoriously ambiguous. One ambiguity concerns the question of alternative possibility to *do what* that **PAP** suggests is necessary. Consider Hitter again. Which of the following alternatives must be available to her: not *harming* Sally, not *hitting* Sally with a rock, not *throwing* a rock at Sally, or not *attempting* to throw a rock at Sally? If the consequences of an attempt are irrelevant to responsibility, the only alternative possibility that might matter is whether Hitter could have *attempted* differently. That is, option **(4)** resolves a significant ambiguity in **PAP**. Moreover, if **PAP** suggests that an alternative to something other than an attempt is needed for responsibility, **PAP** is false. Indeed, there's still more to discuss about **PAP**. Whether free will and responsibility require an *alternative attempt* is an important question. But we will have made significant philosophical progress.<sup>24</sup>

Let me introduce circumstantial moral luck to discuss an important caveat at this point.<sup>25</sup> *Circumstantial luck* occurs depending on whether one faces a moral challenge partly due to factors beyond one's control. Circumstantial *moral* luck occurs when one's responsibility is affected by circumstantial luck. Some philosophers argue that rejecting resultant moral luck while accepting circumstantial moral luck is an unstable or implausible position—that rejecting

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<sup>24</sup> These days, **PAP**-defenders typically accept that: **(PAPb)** **PAP** applies *only* to *basic* responsibility (i.e., responsibility for a decision or an attempt). Hence, one might think, the discussion above doesn't really advance the debate over **PAP**. However, first, not all **PAP**-defenders accept **PAPb**. On the contrary, some defend **PAP** as applied to *derivative* responsibility (or responsibility for consequences) because—allegedly—it's stronger since it's immune to various counterexamples to **PAPb**. (See Robb 2023, §5.3.2, for a brief overview.) Second, those who accept **PAPb** typically do so because they *accept* derivative responsibility which, they hold, doesn't require alternative possibilities (cf., e.g., Robinson 2019:216). But my discussion suggests that **PAP**-defenders should hold **PAPb** because there's no derivative responsibility. And given my suggestion, **PAP**-defenders need not hold a view that different standards (i.e., availability of alternative possibilities) apply to basic responsibility versus derivative responsibility.

<sup>25</sup> Thanks to a referee for prompting me to add the following discussion.

(/embracing) one requires rejecting (/embracing) the other.<sup>26</sup> And, after rejecting resultant moral luck, if we're led to also reject circumstantial moral luck, a further implication is that **PAP** is false (cf., Zimmerman 2002). Here's roughly how the argument unfolds. Imagine that Hitter and Misser threw a rock at their respective victims because someone paid them to do so. Imagine now another person, Rester. Rester is currently resting at home because she has a headache. If not for the 'fortuitous' headache, she'd be out today and offered money to do the same. She'd then take the job and throw a rock at an innocent person. It might seem intuitive that Rester is just as blameworthy as Hitter and Misser—especially if the 'fortuitous' gust of wind doesn't make Misser any less blameworthy than Hitter. But Rester can't be blameworthy because of what she does—she's resting at home. Plausibly, if she's blameworthy, it's because she *would* have thrown a rock at an innocent person for money given the circumstances. This suggests that what matters for responsibility isn't what one *actually* does, which also makes the availability of an alternative possibility to do something other than what one actually does irrelevant. What matters is what one *would* have done given the circumstances.

Now, in this paper I don't take a position on whether **PAP** is true. However, I would deny that rejecting resultant moral luck leads to rejecting circumstantial moral luck, and thus the above argument against **PAP**.<sup>27</sup> I argue elsewhere that rejecting resultant moral luck alone *is* a

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<sup>26</sup> This is what might be called the 'line-drawing' challenge for those who reject resultant moral luck alone. The challenge involves also constitutive moral luck, but for brevity I leave it aside. See, e.g., Moore (1997:237), Zimmerman (2002), Hartman (2017:105-111), Nyman (2022), and Demirtas (forthcoming) for further discussion.

<sup>27</sup> Here's another way to resist the above argument against **PAP**. One might plausibly insist that what matters for responsibility is not just what one would have done but what one would have done *freely*. And it's a legitimate question whether the counterfactual circumstances in which one acts freely must involve alternative possibilities. Hence, we return to discussing the relevance of alternative possibilities—albeit in counterfactual situations—to responsibility. See Zimmerman (2002:571-4) for further discussion and Zimmerman's response to a similar line of resistance to his argument.

stable and plausible position (Demirtas, forthcoming).<sup>28</sup> Here's a summary of my argument. The grounds for responsibility (i.e., control, awareness, or quality of will) in the context of an action must be in place either *at the time* of action or *prior* to it. Whether you control your actions, are aware of their morally relevant factors, or have one or another kind of quality of will *after* you perform an action cannot be relevant to your responsibility in the context of *that* action. For instance, suppose you knock someone down while you're non-culpably sleepwalking, and wake up right after the event. You're in control of your actions now as opposed to when you knocked him down. Yet it's implausible that this newly gaining fact retroactively makes you blameworthy in the past. But notice that consequences of an action come *after* the action, and hence cannot affect that which must be in place *at the time* of or *prior* to that action. And if consequences cannot affect the grounds for responsibility, they cannot affect one's responsibility, which then entails that resultant moral luck cannot exist. Notice also that circumstantial luck *can* affect the grounds for responsibility. A difficult moral challenge can affect one's degree of control. Whether one faces a moral challenge can affect what one is aware of. A moral challenge can be part of what generates a certain quality of will or influence an already existing quality of will. And if circumstantial luck can affect the grounds for responsibility, it can affect one's responsibility, which entails that there can be circumstantial moral luck.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Notice that rejecting other types of moral luck is consistent with the two main theses in this paper—that **(i) DSR** fails and **(ii)** (actual) consequences are irrelevant to responsibility. But it is *inconsistent* with another thesis I suggested above—that what we're responsible for is what we *will* or *attempt* (and not the rest of what follows). This is because, as discussed above, rejecting the other types of moral luck implies that we're responsible *not* because we actually (attempt to) do something, but because we *would* (attempt to) do it given the circumstances.

<sup>29</sup> Those who accept resultant moral luck might find the above argument dialectically questionable as it dismisses that actual consequences can be part of the ground for responsibility. However, as I argue at length in my paper, those who reject resultant moral luck alone can plausibly hold that what matters for responsibility is whether the consequences are *expected* and not whether they are *actualized*.

Even given the above argument that rejecting resultant moral luck alone is plausible, one might have lingering worries about the intuition that Rester is as blameworthy as Hitter and Misser. So, here are two further things to note. One, rejecting resultant moral luck alone and hence holding that Rester is *not* as blameworthy as Hitter and Misser is consistent with holding that Rester is on a par with Hitter and Misser regarding another moral evaluation—i.e., that Rester has an equally morally undesirable *character* as Hitter and Misser. Two, consider this. Suppose ‘fortuitously’ you’re walking by a pond where a kid is drowning. You can be praiseworthy or blameworthy depending on how you react. Suppose alternatively that you were at home, watching a movie, totally unaware that a kid is drowning in the pond. Plausibly in the latter scenario you’re neither as praiseworthy, nor as blameworthy, as you could be in the former scenario. And if the differential judgement between these two scenarios is plausible, it’s equally plausible in thinking that Rester isn’t as blameworthy as Hitter and Misser.

**III. Causation.** If consequences affect the scope or the degree of one’s responsibility, we need to figure out whether a given consequence is caused by one. But this task can get messy. I’ll illustrate this via two things: the puzzle of thirsty traveler and omissive causation. One, consider the following case:

**(Thirsty Traveler)** Billy and Suzy want Sally dead. Sally, the traveler, has a canteen full of water that she will need to drink to survive. To kill Sally, Billy adds poison to the canteen. Afterwards, unaware of what Billy did, Suzy steals Sally’s canteen to kill her. When Sally gets thirsty, she reaches out for her canteen but can’t find it. Soon after, she dies.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The original thirsty traveler case is from MacLaughlin (1925). See Talbert (2015) for an excellent treatment of various versions of the case. Regarding the blameworthiness of agents involved in these cases, Talbert also makes a point similar to mine.

The decades-long debate proved that it's quite difficult to give a correct causal analysis in this case. It's hard to think that Billy killed Sally because it's not Billy's poison that killed her. It's hard to think that Suzy killed her because preventing people from drinking poisoned water doesn't kill them. It's equally hard to think that neither of them killed her because if not for what they did she wouldn't have died. But if neither Suzy nor Billy is causally responsible for her death, it's difficult to see how Suzy and Billy conjunctively or disjunctively could cause her death. Out of nothing comes nothing.

Two, suppose Timmy doesn't feed his cat, and the cat dies. Did Timmy's omission cause his cat's death? The problem is that it's unclear that omissions (or *absences* or *non-events*) like 'not feeding a cat' can cause anything. Also, many philosophers deny omissive causation, and many theories of causation cannot account for omissive causation. For instance, productive theories of causation hold that causation is a matter of producing an outcome. According to one prominent example of such an account, *c* causes *e* if there is a transfer of force or energy from *c* to *e* (Dowe 2000). But omissions can't transfer anything. Consider also counterfactual theories of causation according to which causation is a matter of a counterfactual dependence between *c* and *e* (Hall 2004). On the simple counterfactual view, *c* causes *e* just in case had *c* not occurred, *e* would not have occurred. And given that *had Timmy not omitted feeding his cat, the cat wouldn't have died*, it might seem, Timmy's omission caused his cat's death. But this counterfactual dependence is true not just of Timmy's omission, but that of countless others', and the cat's death (Bebee 2004). For instance, it's true of King Charles III that had he not omitted feeding the cat, the cat wouldn't have died. Hence, King Charles III and countless others come out as a cause of the cat's death. But this seems implausible.

Now the point is *not* that the questions raised above are unimportant or irresolvable. However, one, given option **(4)**, we safely ignore all these causation-related questions in accounting for responsibility. That is, Billy and Suzy both are *as* responsible as a murderer, they both are responsible *for* their respective attempts, and the rest is irrelevant. And we don't need to figure out whether omissions are causes to determine whether and to what degree Timmy is responsible. Two, the existence of omissive causation is often motivated by the alleged truth of claims like "Timmy is morally responsible for his cat's death." Moreover, on some theories of causation, alleged facts like Timmy's moral responsibility for cat's death also *ground* causation by omission—e.g., Timmy's causing the cat's death.<sup>31</sup> Since on option **(4)** claims like "Timmy is morally responsible *for* the cat's death" are false, **(4)** undermines the above motivation for omissive causation, and tells us that the theories in question are false.<sup>32</sup>

**IV. Option (4) Isn't Too Revisionary.** These last remarks are also indicative of a worry regarding **(4)**. Consider expressions like "Hitler is responsible for harming Sally," "Justin is responsible for saving Taylor." More generally, consider the expression "X is responsible for Y" where Y refers to something that occurs after an attempt. **(4)** entails that these expressions are false. But given the ubiquity of similar expressions and thoughts in everyday life, **(4)** seems too revisionary.

I grant that **(4)** is revisionary, but not enough to worry us. To begin, notice that a big portion of ordinary uses of the expression "X is responsible for Y" where Y refers to something

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Sartorio (2007, §4) for further discussion on such views of omissive causation.

<sup>32</sup> Also, Sartorio (2023) presents a novel argument that causation is *intransitive*. The argument assumes responsibility for consequences. Hence, **(4)** entails that the argument is unsound.

that occurs after an attempt is consistent with **(4)**. First, sometimes we use this expression to refer merely to people's *causal* responsibility just like in common expressions like "Flood is responsible for the destruction of the dam," and "Fire is responsible for the destruction of the house." Second, sometimes we use this expression to refer to people's duties or liabilities. Consider expressions like "Lifeguards are responsible for ensuring the safety of swimmers," "The aggressor is responsible for the harm he caused." Notice also that we often say, "You're responsible for what you've done," or "You're responsible for the consequences of your action" without implying that our interlocutor is blameworthy for anything or even after granting that she isn't. This is often the case when, say, someone forgets to do something, but we know that they didn't 'mean it,' and think that they need to 'correct for' what happened anyway. Third, we often use the expression in question to mean "X is to blame for Y." But even then, sometimes the implication is merely causal just like in common expressions like "The snowstorm is to blame for the accident." Or sometimes the implication is merely that X *wrongly caused* Y which is consistent with X's being *not* blameworthy at all since doing something wrong is *not* sufficient for blameworthiness.

Of course, I grant that the expression "X is responsible for Y" where Y refers to something other than an attempt is often used also to *just* mean, or to mean *additionally*, that X is blameworthy or praiseworthy for Y. And this is *inconsistent* with **(4)**. But given the discussion in the previous paragraph, it's unclear that this implication of **(4)** requires too big a revision. Even if the revision that **(4)** requires is—although not too big—still at a considerable level, here are three reasons not to worry about it. First, if we're expecting to come out of the debate over responsibility without any revision to our ordinary thought and talk, this expectation will be

frustrated. One thing that's rather clear in the literature is that one way or another we'll have to embrace some views that initially seem difficult to accept.<sup>33</sup> Second, contrary to what's sometimes asserted in the literature, empirical studies—especially when executed carefully—show that the vast majority of ordinary people (up to nearly 90%) hold that consequences can't affect one's blameworthiness.<sup>34</sup> Given that **DSR** fails, option **(4)** best captures ordinary people's thoughts. Third, after all this, insisting still that option **(4)** is revisionary enough to warrant a substantial worry undermines the value of philosophical discovery. If we assume that our ordinary thought and talk perfectly or nearly perfectly capture reality, we're left with hardly any motivation for philosophical theorizing and discovery. Indeed, then the views that are *not* revisionary or *nearly not* revisionary should look philosophically suspicious instead.

## 5. Conclusion

I argued that the idea that consequences affect the scope but not the degree of responsibility is false. Hence, we should either fully accept or fully reject resultant moral luck. I suggested that the latter is the better option, showed its advantages, explored its implications outside moral luck, and argued that its revisionary implications do not warrant substantial concern. The above discussion suggests that especially those who hold that consequences don't affect the degree of responsibility should happily embrace this option.

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<sup>33</sup> Recall (e.g.,) Pereboom's (1995:41-2) remarks: "Given that free will of some sort is required for moral responsibility, then libertarianism, soft determinism, and hard determinism, as typically conceived, are jointly exhaustive positions [...] Yet each has a consequence that is difficult to accept."

<sup>34</sup> Cf., Kneer and Machery (2019) for a critical survey of these studies, and the results of their own study.

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