



## IPO2021 Essay

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### Topic 4

In the given quote the author somewhat proposes that there could be a certain responsibility for an event, in the cause of which one could have taken part. Unfortunately, I must disagree. In this essay I will elaborate on the conditions when an individual can be considered responsible for an event, explain that the notion of guilt in itself is illogical and cannot be considered important as well as the real reason why society accepts any responsibility as a whole.

In order to do that I will be obliged to prove a few directions of logical explanations:

1. What is responsibility and on what conditions can we consider an individual responsible;
2. What is guilt and is an individual expected to experience it in the event of "guiltless guilt";
3. How obligations influence the possibility of guilt;
4. The effect obligations have on the emotional undertones;
5. How an individual is determined to act a certain way and thus cannot be held responsible;
6. The reason we accept free will as an illusion in governmental institutions;
7. How responsibility can be considered a social construct and therefore non-existent;
8. A concluding example of the given arguments in practice.

I. Responsibility is a construct by which we measure the part an individual took in an event and its accordance with the obligations of such an individual. However, we can only consider responsibility on a number of conditions:

- a) the agent made a conscious choice without pressure or outside influence;
- b) the agent had the ability to fully understand conditions that had come with the action;
- c) the agent understood and took into account the maximum amount of consequences possible and still decided to act.

In case that at least one of these is not accomplished one cannot consider an individual guilty of the consequences of the event as the choice made was not an informed one and thus came from manipulated information and this version of responsibility cannot be considered just. John Rawls, Dworkin and Roemer explain the importance of an informed choice by analysing how the choice made otherwise was not meant for the same consequences. Therefore, if one is not informed that one will be poisoned by the tea given to them, one will die despite their intention not to.

By the Stoic explanation of guilt we can eliminate this notion in general. The regret for the feeling of guilt means that the outcome does not satisfy the individual. If one was able to control all interchangables that led to the event, the event would not occur. Therefore, the event was beyond the control of the individual or the individual was not fully informed of the consequences of their actions.

This leads us to the first point of why the notion "guiltless guilt" remains simply guiltless as the clear intention not to be guilty means that the choice was not fully informed.

II. Guilt as is also leads us to two definitions: (a) it is an irrational feeling we experience as a result of our actions and obligations; (b) it is the societal comprehension of our actions (i.e. if the

environment considers us responsible).

I will elaborate on the first definition later on, so we may now focus on the second one. The perfect example for this may be Mersault in Albert Camus's "L'Étranger". For context the hero is convicted and sentenced to death by the guillotine for a murder he doesn't believe himself to be guilty of as it can be considered a clear example of self-defence. However, the court decided not to accept this version of events coming from a place of outside blame. The court and the spectators took into account Mersault's generally non-human behaviour: lack of emotions, empathy, goals in life, wish for life, passions, close connections with others etc. Although by the law's principles he should not have gotten the death sentence, the people's comprehension of the situation, their inability to understand the situation and the choice Mersault was able to make influenced the rational decision and put unnecessary responsibility upon the victim.

With such an interpretation we cannot freely come up with examples when society can consider somebody "guiltlessly guilty" as it normally considers guilty the individual or institution, which directly led to the event occurring. It does not blame sickness for the fact that a student failed a subject but rather the student for not putting in enough work.

III. As you may have noticed, I have already mentioned obligations twice, which means that they influence both of these points.

Firstly, what can we consider an obligation? An obligation is a certain deal an individual makes with society, the state or other individuals. Exempli gratia, a police officer takes up the obligation to protect other citizens as soon as he goes into such a workforce. Some of them are more obvious like the military oath or the Hypocrites oath for doctors. In both cases the individual openly agrees to the conditions of their roles and takes up an obligation in exchange for a salary, social benefits and security, and other things that come with a job. Even without an official oath every working person still takes up an obligation. A teacher takes up an obligation to educate, help and be responsible for the lives of others willingly and thus cannot betray their promise to the state. If a child hurts their leg while the teacher wasn't looking, we can freely consider the teacher responsible and even guilty as they had agreed to such conditions.

An obligation can also come in the form of a social role. When a woman gives birth and signs the birth certificate, she agrees to become loyal to all obligations of a mother.

The last of many examples I will give is a more specific one. It is the obligation of the citizens. For this we can imagine the hypothetical scenario proposed by John Rawls in his Theory of Justice in order to estimate what the just society is meant to look like. However, this hypothetical scenario is in many respects quite real. I am speaking of the social agreement between the state and the citizen. The latter gives up some rights (for instance freedom if they commit a crime), resources (taxation) et cetera, so that the state is able to provide minimal life conditions (social payments), protection of said rights (police force, healthcare). Thus, the state becomes the most efficient institution for providing its citizens. However, as I have explained earlier in order for this obligation to exist the agent must have made a choice, which is one of the reasons why minors in most countries are treated differently from adults - they receive a certain trial to what it is like to live in the state. At any given time an individual can leave for a life in a different country or outside of society in general. Therefore, our obligation as citizens to, for instance, not commit crimes stands.

There are a number of other obligations every human has but I will elaborate on them by necessity as the general logic should be clear by now.

All of this means that an individual can only be considered responsible for a bad outcome if they had the direct responsibility to act differently, which once again proves that nobody can be "guiltlessly guilty" if they were acting upon their obligations as this must be considered the only innocent choice to act on.

However, there is one more situation the reader may remember, when society blames those, who only act accordingly to their obligations: OMON officers during the recent protests in Belarus, the special forces who killed numerous young people during the 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, those participating in the Myanmar coup in 2021 etc. This could potentially affect the argument of outside blame.

The difference of these situations is that:

- a) in most of these cases the ones who were blamed the most were the superiors, who gave the order to shoot, kill, stomp and torture - they obviously did not act in accordance to their obligation to protect and give lawful orders;
- b) the soldiers that are blamed also acted without regard for their obligations to serve the people, not the government, which makes them responsible.

IV. The time has come to explain the first definition of guilt in the second paragraph. For this we must analyse the possible prerequisites to feeling guilty of which there are two.

First of all, the outside blame will inevitably cause our emotional undertone to change. In the recent lectures of Andrii Baumeister the speaker analyses the influence the environment has on our perception of the world around us. This is the exact mechanism of propaganda: we think the thoughts we hear most often. With time we stop questioning the affirmations we are used to perceiving as dogmas. The more people talk about them, the more appealing the thoughts seem. If one hears that they are to blame often enough, one starts to believe it. As one more point of view we can turn to psychology and the mechanism of trauma formations. If a child is constantly blamed, in adulthood they are most likely to blame themselves in all bad situations regardless of their part in them.

Secondly, our own perception of obligations may be flawed. People often forget, which obligations they agreed to or not. This may be hard considering how complex these mechanisms often are (e.g. the Rawls mechanism mentioned earlier). For example children often feel obligated to help their parents in adulthood because they were conditioned to think so for many years (one more argument in favour of outside influence to our perception) although they never agreed to be born. It was the parents' decision and risk all along.

From here we can draw two conclusions:

- "guiltless guilt" is again not possible because the feeling of guilt comes from non-existent obligations, which makes the feeling illegitimate;
- even if this is not true, we must accept that this analysis brings us to the understanding that "guiltless guilt" is our own illusion, which can always be changed and altered and thus is not a "condition" to that extend but rather a false belief.

V. Unfortunately, we cannot accept even the slightest possibility of this notion existing as the arguments I have presented would not have the absolute evidence. In addition to this, in case the reader for an unknown reason finds these arguments unconvincing, one more layer of proof must be provided.

Here, we come to the question of the possibility of choice as is, which will bring us to the question of if responsibility can exist at all.

For this we will analyse three concepts:

- free will;
- determinism;
- fatalism.

Free will is the notion that an individual has full control over their life and what actions they take. This may sound intuitively good and optimistic as it allows individuals to feel in control and power, which is to a certain degree our evolutionary need. In order to survive humans must feel superior to their surroundings as to be confident in their abilities in comparison to everything they are up against. In such respects we can consider Herbert Spencer's (however famously but falsely considered to be Darwin's) "survival of the fittest" is genetically necessary for survival. In the modern Capitalist society competition is essential in practically every field, which means that this need is still relevant.

This need conditions us to find the notion of free will so appealing however untrue it may be. The reason for this is that we receive the proof on the level of separate examples that are meant to indicate how we make choices on the grounds of impulses, wishes and beliefs as presented by Prof. Stephen Priest among others in his lecture on Metaphysics and free will. However, in comparison to determinism these arguments do not stand.

Determinism is a philosophy that explains how no choice is truly random and why free will cannot possibly exist. There are a number of obvious reasons for our actions taken into account by Prof. Priest as well. These are an individual's race, gender, sex, ethnicity, sexuality, mental and physical capabilities, the country of their birth and current living. All this obviously conditions us to act a certain way on numerous levels.

Let's say our agent is a man in poverty born and raised in the ghetto. He is used to seeing violence, conditioned by his background to disrespect and distrust the police especially if he is of non-white origin. He has a large family as poorer people statistically have more children because their level of education doesn't provide them with adequate level of sex education, they do not have enough money for contraception (also proven by the fact that also statistically they are more likely to have STDs) or abortions, hope to receive social support from the government on the grounds of having lots of children. Our agent is most likely in one of these categories. He is most likely poorly educated as the schools in such areas normally do not have good teachers because they are afraid of the level of crime in such areas or the salaries are lower because the schools do not receive additions to the budget from private investments from the parents as the parents most likely do not have such funds. He also probably started working from a young age and did not have enough time to invest in his education. He has a long income job if any job at all. So, we come to the conclusion that our agent has no ability for luxury, has to feed his family, likely has relatives associated with gang violence and

thus has the influence to join himself. All of these factors influence him to ultimately join a gang. He basically has no other choice because his environment determines him to do so.

Maybe a more convincing argument will come of the explanation given to us by Paul Ree. Every thought and idea we have is determined by something else. if we "randomly" decide to eat an apple, this wish comes from a few prerequisites: we are hungry, we have an apple, we like apples. All of this conditions us to eat an apple. There are no impulsive decisions as suggested by Stephen Priest because every decision has prerequisites determining us to act a certain way.

Fatalism on the other hand interacts more with the essence of our existence but also rejects our free will. If all our decisions are prewritten and made for us we really have no say in what happens, which also means that in truth we are not responsible for our own decisions.

Both determinism and fatalism deny the possibility of individuals being able to be responsible for anything at all, which means that "guiltless guilt" is impossible as nobody can be blamed for anything.

VI. In order to make the argument of determinism primarily (as fatalism does not require further analysis as it is built on intuitions rather than proof) sound the existence of institutions based on choice must be explained.

The perfect mechanism is presented by the Justice System. Normally, three functions are accepted: rehabilitation, punishment and prevention. Let us walk through each one.

Punishment - obviously, we may not accept this function coming from the determinist point of view. Nevertheless, it has a different purpose to exist.

Rehabilitation may remain efficient as conditions for change are presented (presuming efficiency of the institution of jail), which determine the inmates to ideally no longer commit crimes and fit perfectly into the determinist logic.

Prevention shall be considered the most important function as it assists us in describing how determinism really works in practice.

One must accept that the choice made by an individual is inevitably the only one possible at least for the sake of the argument. However, this means that originally there is a number of choices totally possible. If another person is presented with the same decision but different circumstances they might not make the same decision. A higher class person will not choose to become a gang member presented with such a possibility because they virtually have no reason to.

Both functions of punishment and prevention function in order to keep the selection of potential choices the same. If there was no punishment for committing a crime the selection would be somewhat similar to the following: buy bread or steal bread. In such a comparison any individual in possession of 10 pence to buy bread will choose to steal bread because they do not want to lose the money and there is no punishment for stealing bread. If one is fined (for instance) for stealing bread the individual will not steal as this stands as the rational choice.

Therefore, punishment and prevention work with the prerequisites, which condition individuals to behave a certain way and are necessary for the most efficient governing.

VII. If this explanation too is not clear enough, the reader may accept the third interpretation of responsibility.

When responsibility was defined in the first lines of this essay it was described as a construct, more specifically a social one. The notion of responsibility exists in the perception of humans as a fox is not responsible for the death of the rabbit it eats because no animal comprehends or experiences responsibility. The fact that the notions of "guilt", "responsibility" and "blame" only exist in the human society makes them social constructs that can possibly exist only in the human mind.

A good analogy would be money. Animals and other creatures do not use money as it is only used in the human society. Money is a social construct which has a meaning only in the human mind, otherwise it is simply a few pieces of paper with the faces of random historical figures or numbers on the screen of an ATM.

The fact that responsibility is a social construct makes it real only as an illusion. If everybody collectively decided that money is no longer needed and humanity must become purely altruistic, money would disappear. This means that responsibility is fully dependant on human comprehension.

This in turn means that any semi-rational explanation can make any individual believe that they bear no responsibility for the situation at all. Therefore, nobody is truly "guiltlessly guilty" if they have no masochistic wish to feel the intuitively negative emotion of guilt.

VIII. In order to sum up everything in the clearest way possible I will provide an example and filter it through every level of rebuttal of the "guiltless guilt".

Let us imagine a pilot as suggested by the source of the given quote. May they be called the P-agent and obtain male pronouns considering the historical period of the presumed events as to generalise such an event to more than specifically the author. He is tasked with the task to drop the fatal bomb upon the Japanese town of Hiroshima in order to make the Japanese surrender as the last enemy of the Allies.

a. We are unable to functionally prove the P-agent was fully informed of the situation and the consequences of the atomic bomb as it is not yet common knowledge. However, let's presume he was fully informed for the sake of his safety and understands the consequences of the Hiroshima destruction.

This was an order from his superiors which implies two interpretations: (a) he is not directly responsible for the deaths and destruction caused by the Atomic bomb as in case of his denial to complete the task his superiors will simply appoint another pilot; (b) as the Atomic bomb was a nuisance it was not considered a war crime of any kind and the P-agent by going to war agreed to do everything in his power to stop the war, protect the citizens of his country as well as its sovereignty, which makes it his direct obligation to sacrifice the lives of the citizens of Hiroshima in order to save the ones of the US from potential attacks.

Therefore, the P-agent cannot be "guiltlessly guilty" for he had the obligation to drop the bomb and thus bears no responsibility for such an action.

b. The P-agent also understood that his wish to not conform would cause in him being put under the Tribunal as well as disrespected by fellow military men, his country, his family and so on. The War had also most likely had an effect on him. He had seen hundreds if not thousands of soldiers die. If the War doesn't end more are going to die. He is tired of War. He misses his family, his homeland, his Mum's food, clean clothes, good night's sleep. The sooner the War ends, the sooner he goes home to his bride if he has one. Thus, the P-agent has no other choice but to drop the bomb, which means that, again, he cannot be held responsible for those deaths.

There is also the possibility that his fate was to drop the bomb, therefore he had no say in the action and cannot be held accountable for it. Once again, he cannot be "guiltlessly guilty".

c. The P-agent does think he is responsible after the fact of the Hiroshima tragedy. However, not everybody agrees with him. The American War propaganda most likely conditioned americans to consider him a hero. The P-agent uses the logic from block "b" to make himself think he had no other choice but to bomb Hiroshima. The structure of the construct chsnages and he is no longer responsible as responsibility does not exist in reality. He cannot be "guiltlessly guilty" as guilt and guiltlessness do not exist.

In summa, in three layers of logic I have proved to the respected reader that the author is wrong or at the very least temporarily wrong in assuming that "guiltless guilt" has any chance of existing.

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