

Gregory Mellema, *Complicity and Moral Accountability*, (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 163 pages. ISBN: 9780268035396 (cloth). Hardback: \$40.00.

Mellema's *Complicity and Moral Accountability* is a short exploration of complicity and its relation to various moral concepts, predominantly moral accountability. It is composed of 13 chapters, with three very short appendices. The primary audience of the book is academic philosophers, but his style is straightforward and simple enough that the book would be accessible to non-academics. It could naturally be used in an upper-division or graduate level course in Ethics as well as an introductory course in Ethics or applied Ethics.

Mellema's discussion utilizes a few basic terms. When a person is complicit, he is an *accomplice* to a *principal actor*. A *contributing action* is the action whereby a person is made complicit in the actions of a principal actor. An *indirect accomplice* is an accomplice to an accomplice. Mellema repeatedly points out that a group of people might become complicit in a principal actor, that a principal actor might actually be a group of people, and that contributing actions might also include omissions or failure to act (2). Though Mellema permits that one might be complicit in a good action, he restricts his attention to those cases where one is complicit in morally negative actions (1-2).

In the Introduction, Mellema introduces a number of plausible claims that are the backbone of his discussion. First, when one is an accomplice, one is always morally responsible for one's contributing action. Additionally, if one is complicit in wrongdoing, then one is to blame for one's contributing action (2). Second, sometimes an accomplice is not responsible for the wrongdoing of a principal actor. If I fail to report a co-worker's illegal activity, I may be complicit in that activity but I am not responsible for it. However, sometimes an accomplice is responsible for the wrongdoing of a principal actor (4). For instance, if I command a subordinate to do something wrong, I am complicit in his wrongdoing. I can be held responsible for both my contributing act—my command—as well as the subordinate's action as well.

The initial chapters contain some analytic work. Mellema articulates a scheme, borrowed from Aquinas, for ways that one can become an accomplice, i.e., a scheme for sorting contributing actions. They are: by command, by counsel, by consent, by flattery, by receiving, by participation, by silence, by not preventing, and by not denouncing (19). His use of the scheme is a little awkward as he broadens Aquinas' intent on some of the ways (e.g., by flattery (22-3)) and has to address apparent redundancies (e.g., not denouncing seems to be a way of being silent (24)). Though Mellema insists that this schema is a useful one, for the most part, he does not utilize it throughout the remainder of the book.

Some more helpful distinctions are three "grades" (as I'll call them) of being an accomplice. One can *enable* harm, where one's contributing action is necessary for the harm to occur the particular way that it did (45-6); one can *facilitate* harm, where one's contributing action increases the likelihood of the harm occurring (55); one can *condone* harm, where condoning is neither necessary nor increases the likelihood for the harm to occur (61-2). Mellema points out that these distinctions cuts across Aquinas' scheme (45). He also plausibly maintains that enabling harm is more serious than facilitating harm which is more serious than condoning it (64). Combining Aquinas' schema for contributing actions with these grades of being an accomplice gives Mellema a large number of distinctions that are helpful for sorting concrete cases of complicity.

Much of the rest of the book amounts to an exploration of complicity and other concepts. Though Mellema is critical of other authors and has certain theses he is interested in defending, most of the book is not dedicated to an extended defense of a few claims. Rather, he spends much of the time relating complicity to other concepts and carving out an important place for complicity in our moral thinking about responsibility. Let me highlight a few examples.

The chief concept Mellema relates complicity to is moral responsibility. Accomplices are always responsible for their contributing acts and may also be responsible for the actions of principal actors. But Mellema relates complicity to other concepts as well. For instance, Mellema maintains that even when an accomplice is not responsible for the actions of a principal actor, that actor's action may nevertheless *morally taint* the accomplice thereby affecting the accomplice's integrity (27-8). In a particularly interesting chapter, Mellema relates complicity to the concept of moral expectation. Moral expectation is a weaker category than moral obligation; though we are always expected to do what we are obligated to do, we might be expected to do things that we are not obligated to do (88). Mellema argues that we are morally expected to avoid complicity in the wrongdoing of others (89). Further, when we fail this moral expectation by becoming complicit, our actions can take on a symbolic dimension that is morally important (95ff.). Specifically, it symbolizes the willingness of the accomplice to be complicit in other wrongdoing or even a willingness to perform wrongdoing.

Mellema also defends an important place for complicity in our moral thinking about responsibility. Thus, he rightly rejects Karl Jasper's view that each of us is co-responsible for all the wrongs committed by others (126-7). He also rejects the suggestion of H. D. Lewis that none of us could be responsible for the actions of others (120-1). Jasper's view deprives complicity of its importance by making it too easy; Lewis' view reduces its importance by greatly restricting the scope of things that people can be responsible for through complicity. But Mellema also resists reducing complicity to collective responsibility. In a helpful chapter comparing the two, Mellema reveals the ways in which complicity and collective responsibility can come together. But he is clear that they are distinct. For instance, being an accomplice is not simply the same thing as being a member of a collective group that is responsible for an outcome. After all, a collective group is responsible for some outcome, but an accomplice may not be responsible for the action of the principal actor (71).

Mellema's exploratory approach has pros and cons. On the one hand, Mellema's views on a topic are often times self-contained in a single chapter or two. As a result, trying to understand Mellema's views rarely involves trying to juggle various claims made throughout the book. Additionally, chapters could easily (and profitably) be excerpted and assigned in (e.g.) a Business Ethics course without too much loss of meaning. On the other hand, since many topics are confined to a single chapter—and the chapters are short, an average of 12 pages—various subject matters feel underdeveloped. For instance, Mellema's main discussion of moral taint is two pages and his chief example introducing the concept is, to me at least, unconvincing. Likewise, in his discussion of moral expectation, Mellema spends some time describing what doesn't determine moral expectation but less time describing exactly what does. And Mellema's final chapter discusses moral complicity and legal complicity but feels too abbreviated to do justice to a subject that could receive its own book length treatment. But even if Mellema's individual chapters feel underdeveloped at times, it is worth underscoring that he discusses a wide range of topics. For instance, I haven't even mentioned his interesting chapters on Kutz on complicity (chapter 3), how to avoid complicity (chapter 7), how accomplices and principal

actors may act in well-integrated ways (chapter 9), the nature of indirect accomplices (chapter 11), or what role agreement plays in complicity (chapter 12).

Finally, Mellema's book is admirable in several ways. He has a knack for carefully elucidating and circumscribing distinctions we antecedently recognize but are difficult to articulate. Further, his book is full of interesting and thought provoking examples. Even in cases where I am not fully convinced by his examples, I found them to be exactly the kind of test cases worth discussing. And his discussion is sensitive to the complexity of ordinary life. He rarely tries to cram cases into his preferred way of thinking, instead offering a more nuanced view to accommodate ordinary thinking. Even though I have my disagreements with Mellema, this is exactly the kind of philosophy book that is a pleasure to read—accessible, interesting, and thought provoking.

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