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MORAL COMPETENCE AND MENTAL DISORDER

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore moral competence as a central condition on moral responsibility. I distinguish two main conceptions. According to the first, a morally competent agent is someone who knows right from wrong. According to the second, a morally competent agent is someone who responds aptly to reasons. These two conceptions are not mutually exclusive; however, they merit separate treatment as they offer different insights on how and why moral competence might be compromised. This distinction of particular relevance to us since the chapter critically examines a standard assumption, according to which whenever a mental disorder impacts moral competence, it decreases its scope (on the first conception) or precision (on the second). In close conversation with the memoir literatures on bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia, I argue that moral competence may also be affected by what looks like increases in scope or precision; moreover, neither impact – decrease or increase – necessarily undermines moral competence in and of itself; oftentimes, either could enhance it in a reliable way. Finally, by critically revisiting the ecological or scaffolding approach to moral responsibility, I show that moral competence is best understood as a practical way of knowing right from wrong embedded in daily routines and habits, and irreducible to propositional understanding or intellectual skills.

This upshot bears on neighbouring debates about the epistemic condition on moral responsibility where the status of moral ignorance is hotly contested. As we shall see, the notion of moral competence can play the role of a heuristic device helping separate out instances where moral ignorance exculpates from others where, by contrast, it is the very object for which a person is called to account.

The subsequent discussion assumes an interpersonal or socialised rather than a purely metaphysical approach to moral responsibility (e.g., Ceva and Radoilska 2018). On this

approach, real-life practices of holding responsible and taking responsibility are interpreted as relevant to ascertaining the nature and scope of the concept.

Why Moral Competence Matters and How Mental Disorder Might Affect It

One way to formulate the epistemic condition on moral responsibility is as follows: *Moral responsibility requires knowledge of what one is doing*. While this formulation has intuitive appeal, it also proves elusive on reflection. For instance, some authors have tried to fill it in by articulating the kinds of knowledge agents ought to have to be responsible for their actions. As Sliwa (2017: 127) puts it: "Our knowledge of the right and wrong thing to do is, in part, what determines whether we do the right or wrong thing intentionally. Moral responsibility inherits its epistemic condition from the epistemic condition on intentional action." This line of reasoning ties closely together ignorance of what one is doing with ignorance of whether what one is doing is right or wrong. So, in paradigm cases, either kind of ignorance would disrupt – if not invalidate altogether – the ascription of moral responsibility for things done unawares. The so-called Parity Thesis (e.g., Rosen 2003; Levy 2011), according to which moral ignorance undermines moral responsibility in relevantly similar ways to factual ignorance is a logical conclusion of this approach. In other words, moral ignorance is an exculpating factor as much as factual ignorance is – provided that neither is the outcome of what Holly Smith (1983: 547) termed an initial 'benighting act': an agent chooses to not improve their knowledge or understanding when they should have done so or even, actively undertakes steps to avoid the required knowledge or understanding. Hence, any moral responsibility for actions done in ignorance, be it moral or factual, is ultimately reducible to that for prior intentional actions – making oneself ignorant, incompetent or incapacitated while knowing what one is doing.

Most contributors to the discussion on the epistemic condition of responsibility would agree with this assessment of how factual ignorance works (cf. Robichaud and Wieland 2017). Being unaware of relevant facts through no fault of one's own – as opposed to cases of negligence or

recklessness where agents are under specific obligation to inform themselves of such facts – is a good ground for excuse (cf. Stark 2016). At the same time, however, the issue of whether and when agents can be responsible for their own moral ignorance is hotly contested. Unlike the initial approach we considered, there is another one which, by contrast, does not seek to align the epistemic condition of moral responsibility to that of intentional action. Instead, both knowing and ignoring whether what one is doing is right or wrong are taken to be core exercises of agency, for which moral responsibility can be aptly ascribed. On this alternative approach, our shared understanding of factual ignorance as a plausible ground for excuse would be a poor guide to ascertaining the impact of moral ignorance on moral responsibility. This view is known as the Asymmetry Thesis (e.g., Alvarez and Littlejohn 2017; Hartford 2019).

Furthermore, recent developments in epistemology and, in particular, the epistemologies of ignorance (e.g., Sullivan and Tuana 2007) and vice epistemology (e.g., Tanesini 2021) have shed light on the various ways, in which ignorance can be culpable in and of itself, in the absence of a prior benighting act. And even though most contributors would not necessarily support the Asymmetry over the Parity Thesis, in regard to responsibility, moral ignorance is typically treated as a guide to factual ignorance rather than the other way around.

In this context, the notion of moral competence becomes crucial. For it can offer a promising criterion for separating out instances of culpable, from instances of non-culpable and potentially exculpating moral ignorance. While the term 'moral competence' is not frequently used, the concept is right at the heart of current debates on both the nature and scope of moral knowledge and the conditions on moral responsibility. A closer look at the relevant literatures helps distinguish between two main conceptions. According to the first, a morally competent agent is someone who knows right from wrong (e.g., McGrath 2019). According to the second, a morally competent agent is someone who responds aptly to reasons (e.g., Ceva and Radoilska 2018). As outlined earlier, these two conceptions are not mutually exclusive; however, they

merit separate treatment as they offer different insights on how and why moral competence might be compromised.

For instance, if moral competence is about knowing right from wrong, the target notion is that of reliable detection. Getting it right here amounts to separating out morally acceptable courses of action from morally objectionable ones. Importantly, reliability in this respect is assessed without any reference to the reasons why an action is the right, as opposed to wrong, thing to do. For the relevant challenge is of breadth rather than depth: knowing right from wrong in whatever circumstances one might be called to action.

By contrast, if moral competence is about responding appropriately to reasons, the target notion is that of adequate understanding. Getting it right here amounts to weighing reasons for and against eligible courses of action, and doing so in terms of potential justifications, explanations or apologies that might be owed to others. For the relevant challenge is of depth rather than breadth: being able to give reasons for one's actions that are reasons of the right kind (cf. Hieronymi 2005).

So, while the first conception of moral competence is best understood in terms of scope, in response to the question "Is this a case in which one can tell right from wrong?", the second conception is best understood in terms of discernment, in response to the question "Could one grasp the reasons that make one's actions right or wrong?"

There is a long-standing trend in the literature on responsibility associating moral competence as discussed with sanity in the legal sense. Arguably, the best-known example of this trend can be found in Susan Wolf's "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" (1987). Recent discussions of the so-called insanity defence make the connection even more salient. Consider the following excerpts:

> The canonical case of legal insanity involves a defendant who forms the requisite *mens rea* for a crime but lack understanding of the legal and moral quality of her act –

typically, that all things considered, the act is wrong […]. Symptoms of a mental disorder can undermine a person's capacity to be law-abiding at the time of a crime by causing a lack of moral knowledge; and the presence of a mental disorder signals to the court that the defendant is not culpable for this ignorance. (Sifferd 2022: 113)

> […] the rule of law presupposes creatures of a special kind; viz., those able to give and to comprehend reasons for their actions; persons able to defend their actions by supplying justifications which are, after all, reasons sanctioned by the law. The concept of *mens rea* is but the technical term for what is otherwise one of the core and common sense assumptions of legal responsibility and liability. (Robinson 2013: 19)

These excerpts are noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, each of them taps into a congenial conception of moral competence, the former, that of knowing right from wrong, the latter, that of responding aptly to reasons. And second, they both imply that insanity in the legal sense compromises the moral competence they consider as fundamental in virtue of a decrease in either scope or discernment below a required threshold.

In some ways, the second feature might seem unsurprising. After all, mental disorders and psychological impairments more broadly are routinely treated as pathologies undermining of personal agency rather than mere obstacles to it (see, however, Radoilska 2022). Expanding on this underlying assumption, it would be tempting to argue that when mental disorders impede moral competence, the issue is either of reduced scope, for a person gets to tell right from wrong in fewer cases, if any, or of reduced discernment, for they do not fully, if at all, grasp the reasons which make their actions right or wrong.

Could this be the full picture? In the following, we shall look into some fist-person narratives of people diagnosed with severe mental disorders and psychological impairments that demonstrate a more complex relationship to moral competence. To anticipate, in some cases, moral competence seems to be affected in virtue of what looks like an increase of scope or

discernment: in the first instance, the difference between right and wrong becomes focal in almost every situation; in the second, the call of reasons for action, albeit of the right kind, is experienced as overwhelming. Taking up a helpful distinction first introduced in Petrolini (2020), I shall refer to these kinds of increase as 'hyper-agency'; conversely, I shall use the term 'hypo-agency' for the more familiar challenges to moral competence that derive from reductions in regard to scope or discernment.

Hypo- and Hyper-Agency in First-Person Narratives of People Diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, Autism and Schizophrenia

According to Petrolini (2020), both hypo- and hyper-agency have two dimensions: first, self-attribution, which is binary, and second, a sense of agency or control, which, by contrast, in scalar. For instance, the experience of auditory verbal hallucinations is a case of hypo-agency characterised by incorrect self-attribution and a diminished sense of agency. By contrast, the experience of pathological guilt is a case of hyper-agency where incorrect self-attribution comes along with an inflated sense of agency. While the epistemic focus of the original distinction is welcome as it turns the spotlight on the agent's self-understanding and the impact of mental disorders on it, it is important to note that such conditions might also affect a person's agential capacities more directly, independently of whether these effects are correctly assessed by the agent or not. For instance, autism might impede a person's ability to 'read the room' by using non-verbal cues in a way that is often taken for granted by neuro-typical agents. Clearly, this is an instance of hypo-agency; yet, affected agents may correctly assess themselves both in terms of self-attribution and sense of control. As a young person with autism cited in Wing (1992: 131) reports: "People give themselves messages with their eyes but I do not know what they are saying." To reflect this potential duality, the following discussion will distinguish between *felt* and *manifest* instances of hypo-. and hyper-agency relevant to moral competence.

The analysis will focus on three first-person narratives of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia: Kay R. Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind* (1996), Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures* (2006) and Elyn Saks, *The Centre Cannot Hold* (2015); however, to address the worry that these memoirs are of exceptional personalities and, therefore, unrepresentative, some additional first-person accounts will also be drawn upon.

The rationale for this methodological choice is fourfold. First, as we saw earlier, knowing what one is doing is a defining feature of intentional actions. It also entails knowing that it is oneself doing it. Recent discussions have shown that this distinctive self-knowledge has a similar role to play beyond intentional actions, in wider exercises of personal and therefore responsible, as opposed to merely causal agency (cf. Radoilska 2017). So, if we are to explore the impact of hypo- and hyper-agency on personal agency and more specifically a person's moral competence, this cannot be achieved without at the same time assessing the impact they have on agential self-knowledge.

Second, heeding first-person testimonies of this kind is even more urgent when they come from marginalised or stigmatised groups and individuals as the case is with severe mental disorders and psychological impairments. As the growing literature on epistemic injustice forcefully demonstrates, ignoring the epistemic value of such testimonies impedes the creation of much-needed conceptual resources, depriving everyone – the epistemically disadvantaged as well as the epistemically privileged – from a chance to develop a more accurate self-understanding as agents (cf. Kidd et al. 2017).

Third, all three conditions – bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia – might significantly affect moral competence. Bipolar disorder induces dramatic changes in one's evaluative stance during episodes of mania or depression. Autism impacts the understanding of other people's mental states thus making it difficult to distinguish approval from disapproval, consent from

dissent. Schizophrenia is characterised by vivid and persistent hallucinations and delusions that are virtually impossible to distinguish from reality.

Fourth and final, as the memoirs demonstrate, both felt and manifest hypo- and, respectively, hyper-agency are consistent with an intense commitment to maintaining one's moral competence.

Consider the following excerpts from Jamison's memoir of what it is like to pursue a highly successful academic and clinical career, becoming a world-leading specialist of bipolar disorder, while at the same time living with this condition:

> The chaotic visual impact upon entering the room reflected the higgledy-piggledy, pixilated collection of electric lobes that only a few weeks earlier had constituted my manic brain. […] There was a bill from a taxidermist in The Plains, Virginia, for example, for a stuffed fox that I for some reason had felt I desperately needed. I had loved animals all my life, had at one point wanted to be a veterinarian: How on earth could I have bought a *dead* animal? […] How could I have so directly contributed to killing one? I was appalled at the grisly nature of my purchase, disgusted with myself… (Jamison 1996: 75-76)
>
> The pharmacist, having just filled my first prescription for lithium, had smiled knowingly as he rang up the sale for my snakebite kits and other absurd, useless, and bizarre purchases. I knew what he was thinking and, in the benevolence of my expansive mood, could appreciate the humour. He, unlike me, however, appeared to be completely unaware of the life-threatening problem created by rattlesnakes in the San Fernando Valley. God had chosen me, apparently *only* me, to alert the world to the wild proliferation of killer snakes in the Promised Land. […] I had also come up with a plan to alert the *Lost Angeles Times* to the danger. I was, however, far too manic to tie my thoughts together into a coherent plan. (*ibid.*)

On these occasions, moral competence is clearly compromised. In the former excerpt, this is due to hypo-agency – first manifest (during the manic episode) and then felt (in its aftermath). It is best described as decrease in scope, in line with the first conception of moral competence we discussed. In the latter, by contrast, this is due to felt hyper-agency, best described as superfluous increase of discernment, in line with the second conception. Yet, responsibility is ascribed both by the agent herself as evidenced by the earlier excerpt and wider society, e.g., Jamison (1996: 75): "…money spent while manic doesn't fit into the Internal Revenue Service concept of medical expense or business loss."

However, as Jamison's memoir shows, the impact of hyper-agency on moral competence is not uniformly adverse. In fact, such positive contributions of manifest as opposed to felt hyper-agency in the context of bipolar disorder are extensively documented and widely acknowledged. To give an example outside of Jamison's memoir:

> At our heights we may find ourselves capable of creating music, art, words, and inventions which touch people's souls and shape the course of history […] We're making the effort to stay balanced and grounded so we can use our powers to make the world we live on better, more beautiful, and way more interesting (The Icarus Project 2013)

Moral competence here is by no means compromised. Instead, it appears greatly enhanced by manifest hyper-agency both in terms of scope and discernment, coupled with lucid self-understanding.

Let us now look into possible impacts of hypo- and hyper-agency in the context of autism. The following two excerpts come from a memoir by Temple Grandin, a successful academic and businessperson diagnosed with the condition:

> The work I do is emotionally difficult for many people, and I am often asked how I can care about animals and be involved in slaughtering them. Perhaps because I am less

> emotional than other people, it is easier for me to face the idea of death. I live each day as if I will die tomorrow. This motivates me to accomplish many worthwhile things, because I have learnt not to fear death and to accept my own mortality […] However, I am not just an unfeeling observer; I have a sensory empathy for the cattle […] My goal is to reduce suffering and to improve the way farm animals are treated. (Grandin 2006: 94)

> There are situations where "normal" people have a horrific lack of empathy. Some of this lack of empathy is beyond my comprehension. Time after time I read about a company that is in financial trouble and they need to ask the workers to take a cut in pay. The workers agree to a pay cut, but the chairman of the board gives himself a bonus […] For me to have empathy is to visually put myself in the other person's place. I can really empathise with a laid-off worker because I can visualise his family sitting at the dining room table trying to figure out how the bills will get paid. If the worker fails to pay the mortgage he will lose his house. (Grandin 2006: 97-99)

Arguably, the first excerpt presents a case of felt and manifest hypo-agency as decrease in scope with respect to emotions. The second, by contrast, demonstrates felt and manifest hyper-agency as increase of discernment in terms of empathy. This is particularly important as it belies a popular preconception that people with autism are unable to truly empathise with others due to emotional deficits in a way that affects their moral competence (cf. Sacks 1995). In a similar vein, Jim Sinclair (1992: 299) explains: "Being autistic does not mean being uncaring." His testimony speaks of manifest hyper-agency as increase of discernment with respect to interpersonal relationships:

> Because I don't *need* people in my life, I'm free, as nonautistic people can never be free, to *want* other people in my life. Because I don't need relationships with anyone, I'm free to choose a relationship with *someone* – not because I need a relationship but

> because I like that person […] When I make a connection it's special because I don't have to do it, but I choose to do it. (Sinclair 1992: 300).

In all three instances, both hypo- and hyper-agency contribute positively to moral competence instead of undermining it; moreover, they do so in a non-accidental way: hypo-agency with respect to emotions operates as 'noise reduction', thus enabling a sustained constructive attitude to the suffering of fellow beings while hyper-agency with respect to interpersonal relationships supports authenticity and mutual respect (see also Sinclair 1992: 301-302).

Non-accidental positive contributions to moral competence through felt and manifest hypo- and hyper-agency with respect to scope and discernment are also documented by Elyn Saks, a leading expert on mental competence in law, diagnosed with schizophrenia. For instance:

> I understood early on that going to the mental wards sometimes set me off emotionally – it probably aroused my own dependency needs, as well as my anger at how I had been treated when I was being held in the hospital. But I was convinced I understood more than most people did […] about what it was like to be the helpless patient in that bed, or the terrified patient in four-point restraint […] While preparing my Note, I spoke to one mental health professional then on the Yale faculty. "Wouldn't you agree that being restrained is incredibly degrading?" I asked. "Not to mention painful. And frightening." The professor looked at me in a knowing way. "You don't really understand," he said kindly. "These people are different from you and me. It doesn't affect them the way it would affect us." *If only he knew*, I thought to myself […] My work had made a difference. It helped another attorney and it helped patients who were no different from me. No different at all. (Saks 2015: 211-13)

Taking stock of these consistently positive contributions is especially significant given what Saks (2015: 330-31) rightly refers to as 'the mythology that fuels the stigma: that schizophrenics are violent and threatening." Importantly, however, these contributions tag onto

patently disturbing and disruptive instances of felt hypo- and hyper-agency that arguably undermine moral competence in terms of scope (first passage below) and discernment (second passage), both clearly echoed in the wider memoir literature on schizophrenia (cf. Caroll 2017; Weiner 2018):

> […] thoughts crashed into my mind like a fusillade of rocks someone (or something) was hurtling at me – fierce, angry, jagged around the edges, and uncontrollable. I could not bear them, I did not know how to defend myself against them (Saks 2015: 83)

> […] there was a cluster of news stories about a workplace shooting […] *Could I do that? Have I done that? Am I a mass murderer? Am I him? Did I shoot those people? Was the wrong person killed?* It haunted me for weeks, worrying that somehow I'd had a hand in the carnage. *Was the wrong person accused? Should I go to the police and confess? I'm evil.* (Saks 2015: 119)

To recap the discussion so far: we critically examined the standard assumption that severe mental disorders and psychological impairments undermine moral competence in terms of hypo-agency, a decrease in scope or precision below a minimum threshold. Looking at first-person accounts of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia, we discovered the following:

1. Moral competence can also be affected by 'hyper-agency', that is, increase in scope or precision above an expected range.
2. Both hypo- and hyper-agency can be manifest as opposed to merely felt.
3. There are instances where manifest hyper- as well as hypo-agency enhance moral competence in a non-accidental way.

On the complex picture that emerges, neither felt nor manifest hypo-, or hyper-agency, undercut moral competence in and of themselves. The fact that more often than not they both operate and are experienced as impediments to moral competence in the context of severe

mental disorders or psychological impairments may have to do with the interpersonal and institutional contexts in which this competence is exercised. This is the guiding hypothesis that we shall consider in the third and final section of this chapter.

Moral Competence in Context: Scaffolding, Un-Scaffolding and Partial Re-Scaffolding of One's Own Agency

At first blush, our hypothesis might look like a straightforward implication of the so-called ecological approach to moral responsibility (e.g., Vargas 2013; McGeer and Pettit 2015). For this approach highlights the constitutive role that social interactions play for supporting individuals in their capacity of responsible agents. As McGeer and Pettit (2015: 175) put it:

> Your capacity to respond to the reasons, then, will be fixed in place, not just by how you are in yourself, but by the audience-exposed environment in which you operate; it will have an ecological character.

In other words, moral competence is poorly understood if treated as a psychological capacity that individual agents possess independently of the interpersonal contexts in which they exercise it. For sensitivity to real-life audiences is a core dimension of it, as much as (direct) sensitivity to reasons:

> […] the practice of holding one another responsible is of immense importance in human life, providing for a sort of mutual scaffolding or capacitation and enabling us to lift our performance to a level we might not otherwise have attained. (ibid:187)

Clearly, the notion of social scaffolding here is meant to drive home that interpersonal interactions where agents are challenged and called to answer for themselves help them maintain and hone their moral competence: sensitivity to audiences always strengthens sensitivity to reasons:

> […] no matter how sensitive I take you to be to the reasons relevant in the situation, I assume that you are also sensitive to me, as to an authorized audience: you are disposed

> in light of my manifest expectations as to how you will perform to become even more sensitive to the requirements of the relevant reasons […] I speak as someone invested in your proving to be responsive and as someone who thinks I can help to make you responsive. (ibid:178)

This optimising picture is partly echoed by the memoirs we considered: "When you are really crazy, respect is like a lifeline someone's throwing you. Catch this and maybe you won't drown", writes Saks (2015: 80) about being asked to give reasons for her actions and her preferences during episodes of severe psychosis. In a similar vein, Gradin (2006:114) recounts multiple experiences of effective scaffolding, including the following:

> When a new manager took over the *Arizona New Ranchman*, I did not realise that he thought I was weird, and I was in danger of being fired […] My pal Susan saw the warning signs and she helped me assemble a portfolio of all my articles. After the manager saw how many good articles I had written, he gave me a raise.

On other occasions, however, social scaffolding through sensitivity to real-life audiences proves disempowering and toxic, e.g., Sinclair (1992: 301):

> I met someone who offered to teach me what I needed to know. He was a doctoral student in special education who worked with developmentally disabled people […] He abused me [...] He told me it was my fault. When I told his faculty adviser about it, the professor said that this was friendship, that it was something I needed.

These occasions bear close analogy to cases of moral insecurity due to systemic deprivation and discrimination (Kennett and Wolfendale 2019). According to Kennett and Wolfendale, this is a widespread phenomenon where the sense of one's agency and long-term perspective are adversely impacted since there is no reliable link between one's efforts and outcomes. That is to say, planning and self-control do not typically pay off for morally insecure agents since they and their life projects are not treated as important enough by the wider society. At the same

time, however, morally insecure agents are also subject to stigmatising moral condemnation, as, for instance, when extreme poverty is attributed to lack of initiative or poor work ethic.

Drawing on the resources introduced earlier, we can see that moral insecurity points to a distorted and harmful social scaffolding which consists of inappropriate manifest hyper-agency expectations – "If only you would try harder!" – coupled with unfair hypo-agency accusations – "You failed yet again, while others manage just fine!"

Clearly, in such debilitating contexts, the social scaffolding available can only jeopardise one's moral competence. Instead, deliberate un-scaffolding as insensitivity to real-life audiences appears to be the only chance – albeit precarious – for maintaining it. This experience – liberating and isolating at once – is widely documented in the memoirs we introduced earlier. In their context, un-scaffolding one's agency often begins by questioning the limitations a diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or autism sets out in terms inability to, e.g., live independently (Saks 2015), have a professional career (Jamison 1996), build significant relationships and even learn to drive (Grandin 2006; Sinclair 1992).

This resistant and creative dimension of moral competence is not easily accounted for by the ecological approach as it currently stands. For it interprets responsiveness to reasons, respectively moral competence as a set of skills that is strongly dependent on ongoing feedback from real-life audiences (cf. McGeer 2019: 311-13). Some authors, e.g., Kennett and Wolfendale (2019) take this difficulty as an indication that we should abandon the underlying project of socialising moral responsibility altogether and approach it instead through a metaphysical lens. This solution, however, would leave us with no account of how and why un-scaffolding one's agency can be apt and even successful in debilitating contexts, yet subpar at best in more supportive settings. Expanding on Gilbert Ryle's essay "On Forgetting the Difference between Right and Wrong" (1958), I would like to propose an alternative that

retains the ambition of socialising moral responsibility but questions the complete and ongoing dependence of morally competent agents from their – at times inadequate – real-life audiences. Ryle's starting point is the observation that such statements as: "I once knew the difference between right and wrong but have now forgotten it" should strike us as absurd. According to Ryle, this reaction tells us something important about the nature of moral knowledge, namely, its conceptual link to caring about right and wrong revealed in how we feel and act in light of the distinction between the two. Caring here is presented as a complex and embodied disposition, over and above the propositional grasp of moral norms at the root of the two initial conceptions of moral competence we considered or the skill-based responsiveness to reasons the ecological approach puts forward instead. So, on Ryle's account, if one can no longer tell the difference between right and wrong, this can only be a case of ceasing to care and thus becoming a different person rather than forgetting:

> The use of 'forget' for the loss of information or technical abilities, and its nonuse for the secessions of caring, may go with another difference. If I have ceased to enjoy bridge, or come to admire Picasso, then I have changed. But, if I have forgotten a date or become rusty in my Latin, I do not think of this as a change in *me*, but rather as a diminution of my equipment. (Ryle 2009 [1958]: 401).

Building on Ryle's notion of caring, we can venture that some routines and habits of caring might be constitutive of moral competence over and above the skills highlighted by the ecological interpretation. Being irreducible to deliberate rules or policies, these routines and habits are meant to function as go-to modes of engaging with one's context and its challenges, especially when environmental feedback from real-life audiences becomes unreliable. This makes them well-suited to the re-scaffolding, albeit partial and temporary, of one's responsible agency in the aftermath of a morally competent social un-scaffolding.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I fleshed out the notion of moral competence with reference to the epistemic condition on moral responsibility. Thus, I argued against a standard approach to the relationship between moral competence and severe mental disorders and psychological impairments, stating that whenever such conditions impact on moral competence, they do so by decreasing its scope or precision. Looking closely at first-person accounts of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia, I showed that moral competence can also be affected by increases in scope or precision; moreover, such increases as well as decreases do not always undermine moral competence; instead, they often enhance it in a reliable way. To make room for this resilient and creative dimension of moral competence emerging from the first-person accounts we considered, I revisited recent work on socialising moral responsibility. The upshot is a novel understanding of moral competence as practical knowledge embedded in personal habits and daily routines, beyond the capacity to merely tell right from wrong.

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Biographical Note

Lubomira Radoilska is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kent, UK. She works on issues at the intersection of philosophy of action, ethics an epistemology. Radoilska is the author of *Addiction and Weakness of Will* (OUP, 2013) and editor of *Autonomy and Mental Disorder* (OUP, 2012).

Further Reading

K. Hutchison et al. (eds.), *Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) explores key challenges to theorising moral responsibility arising from non-ideal social contexts.

M. King and J. May (eds.), *Agency in Mental Disorder: Philosophical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) is a collection of new essays offering empirically-informed philosophical discussions of responsibility in the context of mental disorder.

L. Radoilska (ed.), *Autonomy and Mental Disorder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) brings together interdisciplinary insights on the norms and value of autonomy in the context of mental disorder, with reference to moral responsibility and moral standing.

D. Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) develops a comprehensive theory of moral responsibility with particular emphasis on specific mental disorders and psychological impediments.

S. Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” in F. D. Schoeman (ed.), Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions: New Essays in Moral Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) is an important paper expanding on the implicit connection between moral incompetence and insanity in the legal sense.