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Moral Responsibility in Crisis: From Collapse to Epistemic Agency and the Islamic Philosophical Tradition

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Abstract: Recent philosophical debates describe moral responsibility as being in crisis. This crisis is articulated through arguments claiming that responsibility collapses under metaphysical, normative, and psychological examination; agents lack ultimate self-determination, desert appears unjustifiable, and responsibility practices are said to rely on unrealistic, God-like conceptions of human agency. At the same time, contemporary philosophy is marked by an internal tension between the denial of responsibility and its expansion. It is simultaneously extended into the epistemic and doxastic domain, where agents are held responsible for ignorance, belief-formation, and epistemic conduct. The coexistence of collapse claims and the expansion of responsibility constitutes the core of the contemporary responsibility crisis. Through a comparative conceptual analysis, this study argues that the crisis arises not from any incoherence in moral responsibility itself, but from contingent philosophical assumptions about agency that demand total control, self-creation, or ideal epistemic access. Drawing on analytic accounts of epistemic responsibility, the paper defends a reconceptualization of responsibility grounded in diachronic non-ideal epistemic agency rather than metaphysical ultimacy. On this view, ignorance does not undermine responsibility but becomes one of its central sites. The paper concludes by turning to the Islamic philosophical tradition. Despite its Aristotelian foundations, this tradition exhibits no pressure toward responsibility collapse. By scaling responsibility to intention, rational governance, and finite human capacities, Islamic philosophers provide a stable account of moral responsibility, demonstrating that responsibility need not be absolute to remain coherent and defensible.

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Introduction:

Moral responsibility has often been regarded as the unseen foundation that underlies moral thoughts, silently supporting practices of praise and blame, the justification of punishment and reward, and the attribution of rights and autonomy. It is the lens through which we interpret human action, the measure by which we commend virtue or censure wrongdoing. To hold someone morally responsible is to recognize them as answerable, not as a causal contributor to an event, but as someone who is praise or blame-worthy with respect to the moral significance of their actions. In this sense, responsibility is both a descriptive and a normative concept; it describes the role the agent plays in the world, and grounds the moral evaluation of what she does.

Yet, this foundational assumption has come under sustained examination in contemporary philosophy. The "crisis of responsibility" emerges when the conceptual and practical presuppositions of moral accountability are examined with rigor. Philosophical critiques converge on the unsettling conclusion that traditional notions of responsibility are neither metaphysically straightforward nor normatively unproblematic. Metaphysical challenges assert that ultimate responsibility is conceptually impossible. Normative critiques question whether our moral practices are justified even if responsibility were coherent, emphasizing that desert, rights, and moral evaluation require foundations that human agency cannot supply. Psychological and sociological critiques demonstrate that the belief in responsibility often functions ideologically, sustaining social hierarchies and legitimizing punishment even when agents lack the God-like control traditionally assumed necessary for accountability.

These critiques collectively depict a profound tension between the moral practices we inherit and the philosophical grounds for them. The demand for ultimate control, self-authorship, and metaphysical independence renders responsibility simultaneously precarious, ungrounded, and

illusory. Yet, this apparent collapse need not lead to the extinction of moral responsibility. Recent analytic approaches reconceptualize responsibility in terms of epistemic agency, tracing accountability not to omnipotent self-creation but to the ways agents manage their beliefs, exercise reason, and navigate ignorance. By shifting focus from action in isolation to the conditions of belief and inquiry, contemporary philosophers show that responsibility can persist even under non-ideal, finite, and socially embedded circumstances.

This paper situates the contemporary debate within a broader philosophical horizon, exploring both the analytic reconceptualization of responsibility and its prefiguration in classical traditions that accommodate human finitude without undermining accountability. In particular, the Islamic philosophical tradition provides a rich framework in which moral responsibility is neither burdened by divine-like self-creation nor collapsed by epistemic or causal constraints. By examining central figures within this tradition, we can see how responsibility remains intelligible, proportionate, and normatively defensible when properly scaled to the capacities of finite human agents.

The Collapse of Moral Responsibility in Contemporary Philosophy

It is necessary first to articulate the sense in which moral responsibility is said to be in crisis within contemporary philosophy. Critics approach the issue from different angles yet converge on the conclusion that the difficulty is not superficial, but fundamental. Some pursue a metaphysical route, claiming that it is impossible to meet the requirements necessary for agents to be ultimately responsible for their actions. Others offer a normative challenge and maintain that practices of praise, blame, and punishment lack moral justification when those metaphysical assumptions are questioned. Still others emphasize empirical and

psychological considerations, arguing that human agency does not function in the way responsibility practices assume. Considered together, these approaches indicate a fundamental disruption of the ethical framework that has long influenced moral thought.

This general diagnosis sets the stage for a closer examination of how the collapse of responsibility has begun. Each line of critique focuses on a different dimension of the concept, and their force is best appreciated by considering them in turn. The first and most fundamental challenge proceeds at the metaphysical level, demonstrating that moral responsibility, independent of empirical facts about the world, is conceptually impossible. Galen Strawson's "Basic Argument" (1994) targets what he calls ultimate responsibility; the kind of responsibility required to justify desert-based praise and blame.

Strawson's Basic Argument begins from this premise: to be morally responsible for one's actions, one must be morally responsible for who they are, at least in certain respects. Actions flow from character, dispositions, values, and psychological traits; if these are not under one's responsibility, then the actions that arise from them cannot be either. But to be responsible for the way one is, one would have had to intentionally choose or create oneself in that respect. Any such choice, however, just shows who you already are, or what drives you deep down. Responsibility therefore regresses indefinitely: to be responsible for X, one must have been responsible for Y; to be responsible for Y, one must have been responsible for Z; and so on, without end (Strawson, 2002).

This regress cannot be completed. No agent can be causa sui or the ultimate cause of themselves. As a result, no one can ever be responsible in the deep sense required for moral desert. Significantly, Strawson's argument does not depend on determinism. Even in an indeterministic or libertarian universe, the problem remains; responsibility is metaphysically impossible. There is no conceivable structure of agency, that could ground the kind of

responsibility our moral practices presuppose.

Whereas Strawson argues that moral responsibility is impossible in principle, a further line of critique shows that even if responsibility were conceptually coherent, it would still lack any adequate normative foundation. This argument targets moral responsibility as it operates within ethical theory, most notably within non-consequentialist frameworks, by denying that there is anything capable of grounding desert, rights, or accountability. Under this account, the collapse of responsibility is not merely metaphysical but normative. The central claim is that responsibility requires a basic responsibility-maker, that is, some intrinsic feature of a person that makes them responsible by itself. Without such a foundation, responsibility cannot get off the ground (Kershnar, 2024, p. 4). This mirrors foundationalism in epistemology; just as beliefs require foundational justifiers, responsibility requires a foundational maker.

According to Stephen Kershnar, the two most plausible sources of moral responsibility are a person's psychology at a given moment and individual decisions. Both prove inadequate. A person's psychological makeup cannot serve as a foundation for responsibility because it can be implanted, manipulated, or created instantaneously; possessing such a psychology does not make an agent responsible. Likewise, decisions cannot ground responsibility, as they are the outcomes of prior psychological states for which the agent is not accountable. Consequently, responsibility cannot originate at the level of either character or choice. From this, it is concluded that no one is morally responsible (Kershnar, 2024, pp. 37-38).

The collapse deepens when responsibility is tied to non-consequentialist ethics. Non-consequentialism relies on rights; rights require autonomy; autonomy entails responsibility. If responsibility does not exist, then rights lack justification and non-consequentialism collapses

with it. According to this line of argument, the failure of responsibility undermines both particular practices of praise and blame and the broader structure of moral normativity itself. Moral desert, blameworthiness, and even moral wrongness lose their footing, along with morality understood as a system of agent-directed obligations rather than a framework grounded solely in outcome assessment (Kershnar 2018; 2022; 2025).

There is yet some psychological and cultural mechanism that sustains belief in moral responsibility despite its philosophical failure. Bruce Waller's critique shifts attention from abstract argument to ideological function. He argues that moral responsibility is part of what he calls the "Apotheosis Aspiration" (Waller, 2020, pp. 1-20), the deep desire to see ourselves as God-like agents, self-made, self-caused, uniquely powerful originators of action .

This aspiration fuels belief in free will, moral responsibility, and the "belief in a just world". Together, these beliefs allow individuals and societies to interpret suffering as deserved and privilege as earned. This view denies moral responsibility by allowing so many excuses that almost no one can be held accountable (Waller 2006; 2011, p. 206). The persistence of responsibility is not explained by its plausibility, but by its usefulness. Responsibility legitimizes punishment, enables the redirection of pain through retribution, and stabilizes social hierarchies. When harm occurs, responsibility allows us to "pass the pain along" under the guise of justice (Waller, 2020, p. 65).

It is also argued that responsibility can block inquiry. By considering actions as freely chosen wrongdoing, we may foreclose deeper investigation into the social, psychological, or biological factors that could lead to such behavior (Waller, 2020, p. 16) and we may potentially miss opportunities for prevention or reform. In this way, responsibility functions as an epistemic stop-sign. When the apotheosis aspiration is exposed as a fantasy; when we accept that humans are fully embedded in causal systems, the responsibility framework collapses. What remains is the

possibility of moral practices grounded in compassion, prevention, and understanding rather than blame. Responsibility thus collapses at every level where it might seek refuge. There is no metaphysical foundation, no normative justification, and no rational psychological basis for moral responsibility .

The Limits of Responsibility Skepticism

This collapse illuminates the crisis of responsibility in contemporary humanity. Societies continue to rely on responsibility-based practices, punishment, blame and moral condemnation, even as philosophical, scientific, and social developments erode their foundations. The result is a tension between practice and justification, between what we do and what we can defend. Responsibility is demanded in conditions that systematically undermine knowledge, control, authorship, that responsibility presupposes. To understand why these tensions persist, it is necessary to examine the conceptual assumptions embedded within the collapse arguments themselves.

The arguments for the collapse of responsibility share a highly demanding assumption that moral responsibility requires an agent to have rational control over all psychologically relevant factors that causally explain their action. Within this framework, responsibility presupposes comprehensive self-authorship that is control over one's choices, over one's character, motivations, and deliberative structure. It is this assumption that renders responsibility metaphysically impossible for Strawson, normatively ungrounded for Kershnar, and ethically indefensible for Waller. Randolph Clarke (2005) challenges this premise by arguing that the standard of rational control presupposed by these collapse arguments is excessively stringent.

Clarke invites us to consider a scenario in which agents are endowed with agent-causal libertarian powers but are not self-authors of their entire motivational set. Suppose agents are created with two

balanced classes of reasons, self-interested reasons and altruistic reasons, and lack any other kinds of reasons for action. In such a case, agents would not be ultimately responsible for the fact that structural feature of their agency would be given, not chosen. Nevertheless, when an agent is faced with a genuine choice between a self-interested option and an altruistic one, and they exercise their agent-causal power to select the altruistic option, it remains plausible to say that she is responsible for that particular choice (Clarke, 2005; Caruso & Pereboom, 2022, p. 23) .

Responsibility, on this account, does not attach to the authorship of one's entire psychology; it attaches to the selective exercise of agent-causal control among available reasons. If this is correct, then Strawson's regress argument establishes at most the impossibility of a God-like form of responsibility, not the impossibility of responsibility as such. Waller's God-like-power argument according to which responsibility demands an apotheosis of human agency loses much of its force. At the same time, Kershnar's claim that responsibility collapses in the absence of a basic responsibility-maker rests on the same foundationalist ideal Clarke rejects, the idea that responsibility must be grounded in a single, ultimate, self-justifying source. Clarke's account permits responsibility to be real without being foundational, selective without being total, and agential without being self-creative .

At the very moment when thinkers argue that moral responsibility collapses, other philosophers intensify responsibility by extending it to doxastic states and epistemic dispositions. The result is not the death of responsibility, but a crisis: responsibility is simultaneously undermined and expanded. Contemporary humanity stands between the impossibility of responsibility and its expansion into the domain of belief and ignorance.

From the Collapse of Responsibility to Epistemic Responsibility

If responsibility appears to collapse at the level of action, it is not because moral agency has disappeared, but because its conditions have been

mislocated. The contemporary sense of crisis arises from an exclusive focus on occurrent action and momentary awareness, coupled with idealized expectations of control. When this focus is widened to include the epistemic conditions under which actions are formed, including beliefs, omissions of inquiry, and failures of attention, the apparent collapse gives way to a redistribution of responsibility rather than its negation. It is precisely at this point that responsibility shifts from metaphysical self-authorship to epistemic agency. The question becomes not whether agents possess impossible forms of control, but whether they are appropriately responsive to reasons given their epistemic situation. It is within this analytic reorientation that responsibility for ignorance becomes philosophically central.

Within analytic moral philosophy, a compelling alternative emerges when responsibility is understood as extending beyond actions to the epistemic conditions that make those actions possible. On this account, ignorance does not automatically excuse; rather, it becomes itself a potential object of moral evaluation. The crucial question is no longer simply whether the agent knew at the time of acting, but whether the agent's epistemic state resulted from an appropriate or deficient exercise of epistemic agency. Michael J. Zimmerman develops this insight by distinguishing between ignorance that excuses (Zimmerman, 2017) and ignorance for which an agent is blameworthy. As he says, "ignorance can come about in one of two ways: either by way of failure to believe the truth or by way of believing it without adequate justification" (Zimmerman, 2008, p. ix). Both forms of ignorance are doxastic conditions that can, in principle, be attributable to an agent's epistemic conduct. This distinction relocates responsibility from the wrongful act performed under ignorance to the prior epistemic failures; failures of belief formation, justification, or

inquiry; that produced that ignorance.

Zimmerman's "Argument from Ignorance" is among the most rigorous attempts to show that wrongdoing performed in ignorance is not directly blameworthy unless the agent is blameworthy for that ignorance itself .

If P committed A, which resulted in O, but P was ignorant, at the time at which he or she committed A, that O would occur as a result, then P is not to blame, in virtue of the fact that A resulted in O, for either A or O, unless P is to blame for his or her ignorance. (Zimmerman, 2022, p. 7)

According to Zimmerman, blameworthiness for ignorant wrongdoing must be traced to some prior state or act for which the agent was directly culpable. This commitment is crystallized in what he calls the Origination Thesis: every chain of blameworthiness originates in an item of behavior for which the agent was directly culpable and which the agent believed, at the time, to be wrong (Zimmerman, 2022. p. 21). Wrongdoing performed from ignorance, therefore, cannot itself be the fundamental locus of blame; at most, it is indirectly blameworthy, and only if the ignorance that underlies it is itself inexcusable. Responsibility, on his view, does not demand self-creation ex nihilo; it requires that at some point in the explanatory chain, the agent exercised control in a way that was informed by her own evaluative outlook.

Even when ignorance is fundamental and morally disturbing, as in cases of what is described as fundamental moral ignorance (Zimmerman, 2022, p. 289; Ross, 2002, p. 42), this does not entail that responsibility is conceptually incoherent. Crucially, Zimmerman emphasizes that ignorance itself can be motivated or willful and agents may actively avoid evidence, suppress inquiry, or resist moral reflection precisely because knowing would threaten their self-image, interests, or commitments (Zimmerman, 2020). In such cases, ignorance is not a passive epistemic deficit but the product of agential management of belief. Agents are expected to anticipate foreseeable risks, to check

assumptions, to remain responsive to available evidence, and to correct mistaken beliefs. This shows that responsibility must be carefully disaggregated into direct and indirect forms, and that its epistemic conditions must be specified with far greater precision than contemporary collapse arguments allow.

This conception of responsibility for ignorance is given a systematic theoretical formulation in what Rik Peels calls the Influence View of responsibility for our doxastic attitudes (Peels, 2023, pp. 240–246). According to this view, agents can be morally responsible for their epistemic states not because they are the ultimate originators of those states, but because their prior epistemic conduct has significantly influenced them. Inquiry, evidence-responsiveness, patterns of attention, and habits of belief-formation all play a role (Peels, 2018). Responsibility thus attaches not to an isolated epistemic moment but to diachronic patterns of epistemic agency. In rejecting the need for ultimate rational self-authorship, the Influence View already departs from accounts of responsibility that presuppose full and transparent access to one's own mental life. Responsibility, on this view, is compatible with causal dependence, developmental constraint, and epistemic limitation.

This departure becomes clearer when Peels turns to an influential epistemological thesis often assumed in the background of responsibility practices: the Transparency View. According to this view, agents know their own mental states not through introspection but by attending outward to the world—determining, for example, whether they believe p by considering whether p is true (Evans, 1982, p. 225). Peels argues that this account breaks down for several varieties of ignorance. In such cases, agents cannot reliably self-ascribe their epistemic states simply by reflecting on the world, revealing important limits on epistemic self-knowledge.

The failure of the Transparency View lends further support to the reconceptualization of responsibility advanced in contemporary analytic philosophy. If agents do not always enjoy transparent access to their own epistemic states, then moral responsibility cannot presuppose idealized self-knowledge at the moment of action. Instead, epistemic agency must be understood as operating under conditions of opacity, mediation, and limitation. These conditions, however, do not render responsibility void; rather, they relocate it. What remains normatively assessable is not perfect awareness, but the agent's patterns of inquiry, responsiveness to reasons, and management of belief over time. In this respect, Peels's critique reinforces Zimmerman's tracing strategy: responsibility is not grounded in instantaneous epistemic clarity, but in the diachronic conduct through which epistemic states—including ignorance—are formed, sustained, or resisted.

Peels, though, does not claim that all ignorance is culpable; on the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges disbelieving, suspending, undecided, unconsidered, deep and complete ignorance, a variety of non-culpable epistemic limitation (Peels, 2020; 2023, pp. 74-82). Agents are often embedded in social, cultural, and institutional contexts that constrain what they can reasonably know. But recognizing these constraints does not imply that responsibility collapses. It shows that responsibility must be calibrated to epistemic norms rather than metaphysical ultimates. Moral responsibility becomes a matter of how agents manage their epistemic lives under non-ideal conditions, not whether they transcend those conditions altogether.

Building on the analytic shift already articulated where responsibility is no longer confined to momentary action but extends to epistemic states and practices, Nadja El Kassar's work can be read as providing further conceptual support for treating ignorance itself as a locus of epistemic responsibility. Her central insight is that ignorance should not be understood merely as a static absence of knowledge, but

as something attributable to agents in virtue of how their epistemic lives are structured and sustained. She believes that "ignorance is a disposition of an epistemic agent that manifests itself in her beliefs—either she has no belief about p or a false belief—and her epistemic attitudes (doxastic attitudes, epistemic virtues, epistemic vices) (El Kassar, 2018). On this reading, ignorance is not an external misfortune that simply befalls an agent; it is tied to the agent's doxastic condition, having no belief or a false belief, and thus belongs within the space of epistemic agency. Responsibility, in fact, survives ignorance precisely because ignorance is not normatively inert.

Seen against the background of Zimmerman's tracing strategy and derivative responsibility and Peels's emphasis on epistemic influence, El Kassar's contribution helps solidify a unified analytic picture: moral responsibility does not require ideal knowledge, nor does ignorance function as a global defeater of accountability. Instead, responsibility tracks how agents stand in relation to their doxastic states; whether they hold false beliefs, suspend judgment, or fail to form beliefs where inquiry is called for. She argues that "ignorance is a disposition of an epistemic agent that is constituted by (1) beliefs, (2) epistemic attitudes, (3) epistemic character traits, (4) conduct and (5) socio-political structures". On this model, agents are not omniscient, they are finite, non-ideal, rational agents whose beliefs and non-beliefs are subject to norms (El Kassar, 2025, p. 5). The broader philosophical consequence is clear: once ignorance is understood as a doxastic state and agent-relative, the "collapse of responsibility" gives way to a more realistic and normatively robust conception in which responsibility extends into, rather than retreats from, the epistemic domain. This reconceptualization also invites us to examine non-Western frameworks of moral responsibility, in which epistemic limitations are

accommodated without undermining accountability.

The Absence of a Responsibility Crisis in the Islamic Philosophical Tradition

One way to assess whether the supposed collapse of moral responsibility reflects a genuine philosophical crisis or merely the consequences of overly demanding modern expectations is to look at traditions in which responsibility was theorized without appeal to metaphysically extravagant demands. The Islamic philosophical tradition offers a unified and internally coherent framework in which moral responsibility is neither burdened by God-like powers of self-creation nor undermined by causal dependence, psychological mediation, or epistemic limitation. Within this tradition, responsibility remains stable, intelligible, and proportionate to finite human agency.

This tradition shares the assumption that responsibility does not require ultimate agency over one's character, intentions or motives, or total causal history. The human soul is conceived as a unified though not self-originating substance, operating through an organized plurality of faculties. The human agent is not the creator of their own nature, cognitive or motivational repertoire; nor is she required to be so in order to be responsible. Responsibility, on this view, is never grounded in absolute self-origination but in the rational governance of action within the limits of a given nature.

Ibn Sīnā provides the foundational framework for this account. He distinguishes carefully between perceptual awareness and rational agency and insists that moral responsibility attaches only to actions issuing from the higher rational faculties. Sensory and imaginative powers merely register and preserve representations; they do not, by themselves, determine action or confer accountability. Moral agency begins only when representations are taken up by practical reason, which, "with recourse to the general judgment of theoretical reason, together with first principles and empirical premises,

proceeds to infer those particular human necessities a person requires in order to attain his voluntary ends" (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, p. 241). It is at this stage that representations are evaluated in light of general norms and translated into particular judgments. Upon the formation of these particular judgments, the particular volition to perform an action is formed, and this in turn results in the occurrence of the act (Sa'ādat Mostafavi, 2008, pp. 168-169). This structured transition from judgment to volition blocks the inference from causal or psychological influence to moral irresponsibility.

Importantly, Ibn Sīnā denies that human agency must resemble divine agency in order to ground responsibility. Human will is both the origin and the end of every voluntary act. It is "among those realities that are intrinsically self-determining and therefore do not require a prior act of will" (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, p. 165). This claim does not attribute absolute independence to human volition; instead, it situates the will within an ordered causal and rational structure in which its self-determination is sufficient for moral attribution. Accordingly, moral accountability does not depend on an agent being the ultimate source of their own existence or character, but on their capacity to initiate action through practical judgment and volition in accordance with rational norms. In this way, Ibn Sīnā's framework directly undermines positions that equate responsibility with God-like autonomy and shows that finite, conditioned agency can nonetheless be fully adequate for moral responsibility.

Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī develops this framework refining the distinction between actions with a natural origin and actions with a volitional origin. Many operations of the soul, especially those associated with vegetative and animal faculties, are automatic or instinctive and therefore fall outside the scope of moral evaluation. Responsibility is deliberately restricted to actions arising from the coordinated activity of knowledge, power, and will

(Ṭūsī, 1939, p. 41). This principled restriction prevents the overextension of responsibility that gives rise to modern collapse arguments, such as those advanced by Strawson and Waller, which assume that responsibility must encompass the totality of an agent's psychological formation.

A central feature of Ṭūsī's account is the role of intention (niyya) as the mediating element between knowledge and action. Intention, for Ṭūsī, is a practical orientation of the agent toward rationally recognized ends, formed under conditions of deliberation and capacity. An action cannot occur prior to the formation of an intention (Ṭūsī, 1994, p. 15), because it is intention that unifies cognition, desire, and agency into a genuinely voluntary act. Without intention, no action counts as voluntary, and without voluntariness, no responsibility arises. In this respect, intention functions as a bridge between epistemic apprehension and practical execution, ensuring that responsibility attaches only where the agent has practically endorsed an action in light of their practical judgment. By anchoring responsibility in intention rather than in metaphysical freedom or ultimate self-authorship, Ṭūsī avoids the familiar dilemma between determinism and indeterminism. Responsibility does not depend on exemption from causal order, nor on the agent's authorship of their deepest motives; it depends on whether the agent intended the act as their own, on the basis of practical understanding.

Mullā Ṣadrā provides a decisive metaphysical reinforcement of this ethical-psychological framework. He distinguishes between divine and human agency. In God, knowledge, power, and will are identical with the divine essence and operate without mediation. In human beings, by contrast, these principles are distinct, temporally ordered, and exercised through psychological and bodily faculties (Ṣadrā, 1989, Vol. 4, p. 111; Vol. 6, p. 356). Responsibility is never modeled on divine causation. Human beings are not defective gods; they are finite agents whose responsibility is proportionate to their mode of being. This

difference constitutes the very condition under which human responsibility becomes possible. When responsibility is scaled correctly to finite beings, the Strawsonian demand for total rational authorship is revealed as a category mistake rather than a genuine threat.

Ṣadrā's conception of the soul as the unified source of all internal causes of action, including knowledge, inclination, will, and power (Ṣadrā, 2002, p. 169), addresses the claim that responsibility collapses due to the absence of a basic responsibility-maker. Ṣadrā does not seek a single foundational event or state that bears responsibility in isolation. He does not locate responsibility in a momentary choice, a discrete volition, or a psychologically primitive state that bears normative weight on its own. Rather, responsibility arises from the structured and purposive activity of a unified substance, the soul, operating through a plurality of differentiated yet coordinated faculties. The soul is thus the internal principle that integrates these diverse causal elements into a single agential source, even though none of them functions as an ultimate foundation. Hence Responsibility persists precisely because it is grounded in an organic, unified, and dynamically structured agent whose actions unfold through mediated rational and volitional powers.

Against the assumption central to modern responsibility skepticism that accountability requires infinite control over one's nature, Ghazālī maintains that volitional agency (ikhtiyār) is both real and normatively significant precisely because it is limited, developmental, and proportionate to human capacity. Volitional agency itself is not a fully actualized power from the outset; it is a potential that can be strengthened If the requisite conditions are present (Ghazālī, 1964, p. 63). Volitional agency is "that volition which is aroused by the hint of reason" (Ghazālī, Vol. 4, p. 439). On this view, ignorance and natural constraint do not entail a collapse of responsibility but instead delimit its proper scope;

responsibility arises where rational judgment can meaningfully guide willing, and it lapses only where such guidance is genuinely unavailable. By locating responsibility in rational direction rather than in absolute control, moral accountability is neither illusory nor God-like, but anchored in finite agency, structured development, and the purposive governance of action under non-ideal epistemic conditions.

Across all these thinkers, ignorance occupies a morally nuanced position. Ignorance neither automatically excuses nor annihilates responsibility. Action presupposes some degree of cognition but this requirement is not epistemically idealized. Responsibility does not demand exhaustive knowledge, infallibility, or full transparency of one's motivational structure. What matters is whether the agent possessed sufficient cognitive access to deliberate meaningfully and to form intentions. This graded epistemic model anticipates contemporary accounts of responsibility for ignorance, such as Zimmerman's culpable ignorance framework and Peels's emphasis on epistemic agency, without succumbing to skepticism.

The hierarchical integration of faculties preserves the unity of the agent despite psychological complexity. Lower faculties are subordinated to higher rational capacities, and practical reason governs action in coordination with cognition and motivation. Actions remain attributable to the agent as a whole, not fragmented among competing subsystems. Moral responsibility, therefore, is neither absolute nor groundless but proportionate to human cognitive and practical capacities.

Conclusion

The contemporary diagnosis of a "collapse of moral responsibility" gains its force only under a specific and contingent conception of agency; one that demands God-like powers, total rational transparency, and exhaustive control over one's psychological and epistemic constitution. When responsibility is required to survive infinite regress,

foundational self-creation, or absolute epistemic control, its collapse is not surprising; it is built into the premises. But the analytic reconstruction developed in this paper shows that even within contemporary philosophy, this collapse is neither inevitable nor decisive. Responsibility can remain intelligible under conditions of ignorance, finitude, and causal dependence. Ignorance becomes morally significant as a doxastic condition that may itself fall within the scope of rational evaluation .

What is striking, however, is that this analytic "rescue" of responsibility mirrors a structure that has long been present in the Islamic philosophical tradition. Although this tradition is deeply indebted to Aristotelian metaphysics and psychology, it never generated the internal pressure toward responsibility collapse that characterizes much of the modern Western discourse. This is not because Islamic philosophers ignored causation, ignorance, or human limitation, but because responsibility was never extended beyond the capacities of finite agents. From Ibn Sīnā to Ṭūsī, Mullā Ṣadrā, and Ghazālī, responsibility is systematically scaled to intention, rational governance, and epistemic sufficiency, not to ultimate origins or total control. Human agency is neither divine nor illusory; it is mediated, developmental, and normatively adequate.

When responsibility is detached from impossible ideals and re-anchored in rational direction, intention, and epistemic agency, its coherence re-emerges. The Islamic philosophical tradition does not merely offer historical interest in this regard; it provides a living counterexample to the assumption that responsibility must either be absolute or collapse. It shows, instead, that responsibility can be finite without being fragile, limited without being empty, and genuinely human in scope.

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