

Book Note of Shaun Nichols's *Bound*

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Nichols, Shaun, *Bound: Essays on Free Will and Responsibility*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, viii + 188, \$68.99 AUD (hardback).

In this excellent book readers can expect ample discussion of fascinating scientific research, subtle philosophical analysis, and insightful theory-building. There's some recycling of previously published articles, but the subtitle misleadingly suggests a mere collection of discontinuous essays.

Bound proceeds through the lens of ordinary thinking: whether we're free and responsible depends in part on how we conceive of these phenomena. Nichols argues that we develop our notion of choice in what we assume is an indeterministic world, because we implicitly think (erroneously) that we'd be able to tell if our decisions were determined.

Our actions may well be determined, says Nichols, but we needn't reject freedom and responsibility. Sometimes successfully referring to these phenomena requires that we're talking about an undetermined ability to choose. But free will is like other entities we can sensibly countenance even if our folk theories about them are partly in error (e.g. memory, solidity). According to Nichols, there's a sense in which we lack free will and a sense in which it's just not quite what we thought it was.

If we abandon indeterminism, can we justify punishing people only because they *deserve* it? Nichols argues that such retributivism is intuitive but difficult to debunk. It's based on emotional reactions, but we can't demand that a reliable belief-forming process in ethics be free of emotion. And, unlike incompatibilism, retributivism is just too entrenched in our moral framework—it's widespread, inferentially basic, and grounded in emotion (particularly anger).

Won't anger at wrongdoing, and thus blame, eventually fade upon accepting determinism? Nichols shows that this weakening of blame only results from temporarily distracting the emotion system with vivid descriptions of the perpetrator as victim (for example, of an abusive childhood). Accepting determinism won't have a similar effect. Moreover, other emotions (like moral sadness) can't do the work of moral anger, which includes attitudes like resentment that respond to perceived injustices and motivate retaliation.

Of course, Nichols's theory and its defense aren't flawless. The view can seem overly convoluted, although why expect simplicity in such topics? Ideally, there'd at least be more discussion of alternatives. Nevertheless, *Bound* advances the discussion in novel and intriguing ways. The result is another valuable contribution from one of the best empirically-informed and experimental philosophers around.

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