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Twenty-Seventh Annual Midwest Philosophy Colloquium, 2002-2003

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Everyone is cordially invited to the second session of

THE 27TH
MIDWEST PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Michael McKenna

(Associate Professor of Philosophy, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY)
Will Present

**“Free Will, Agency Meaning, and the
Conditions of Morally Responsible Agency”**

October 21, 7:00 p.m., Federated Church
200 South Columbia Avenue, Morris

Professor McKenna will develop an “expressive” account of free will and responsible agency according to which attitudes such as praise, blame, resentment, and indignation are incipient forms of communication.

Doctor McKenna will also present a paper, “**Expressive Theories of Moral Responsibility and an Agent Meaning Theory**,” at 2:30 p.m., Prairie Lounge, UMM, October 21. All are cordially invited.

These lectures are made possible by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Dean, UMM

Program Notes

We are very fortunate and tremendously pleased to have with us tonight:

Michael McKenna

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

He will present

“Free Will, Agency Meaning, and the Conditions of Morally Responsible Agency”

Professor McKenna will develop a variation of a novel account of free will and responsible agency, what he calls a “communication-based” or “expressive” theory. When we regard someone as a responsible agent, we typically react to the person with certain feelings or attitudes such as praise, blame, resentment, indignation, or love. On the expressive theory, these so-called “reactive attitudes” are incipient forms of communication. The theory invites us to think of blame or resentment, for example, as a demand from the party who has been ill treated for reasonable regard. This demand is addressed to the individual who is believed to be at fault and who is assumed to be capable of understanding the demand. The reactive attitudes are looked upon as a form of moral address, and the relevant parties are regarded as participants in a “moral conversation.” McKenna will propose that the expressive account has several applications to contemporary moral life. The account, for example, helps to explain why young children are not taken to be responsible agents acting of their own free will: such children lack an understanding of the effects of their behavior on others, and hence are not apt partners in the moral conversation.

This evening's lecture is made possible by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Dean, UMM

Bibliography

Michael McKenna, “Toward A Speaker Meaning Theory of Moral Responsibility.” In Ton van den Beld, ed., *Responsibility and Ontology*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, 247-58.

Michael McKenna, “The Limits of Evil and the Role of Moral Address: A Defense of Strawsonian Compatibilism.” *The Journal of Ethics* 2, 1998: 123-42.



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Program Notes

We are very fortunate and tremendously pleased to have with us tonight:

Michael Zimmerman

Professor of Philosophy
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

He will present

“Taking Luck Seriously”

Professor Zimmerman will examine the influence of luck on freedom and responsibility. The thesis that freedom is important to moral responsibility because we cannot be responsible for what is not in our control is widely accepted. This thesis, restated, is simply that luck is irrelevant to moral responsibility. Zimmerman will first argue that if an assassin's plot to kill an innocent person is foiled by a lucky turn of events—a truck pulls up and blocks the assassin's line of fire—the would-be assassin is just as responsible as she would have been had luck not intervened and her vile attempt succeeded. For it is true that she would have shot and killed the innocent but for some feature of the case (the truck's appearance) over which she had absolutely no control. Drawing from lessons gleaned from such cases, Zimmerman will then propose that the common view that luck cannot affect the responsibility that we bear implies that two claims, prominent in recent discussions on responsibility, are mistaken: there can be no moral responsibility if we lacked freedom to do otherwise, and there can be no moral responsibility if all our choices and actions are determined by facts of the past and the laws of nature.

This evening's lecture is made possible by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Minnesota State Legislature, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Dean, UMM

Bibliography

Michael J. Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility, Freedom, and Alternate Possibilities,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (1982): 243-254.

Michael J. Zimmerman, “Luck and Moral Responsibility,” *Ethics* 97 (1987): 374-386.

Michael J. Zimmerman, *An Essay on Moral Responsibility*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988.

Michael J. Zimmerman, “Responsibility,” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. By L.C. Becker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992).

Michael J. Zimmerman, “The Moral Significance of Alternate Possibilities,” in *Freedom, Responsibility, and Agency: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, ed. By Michael McKenna and David Widerker (London: Ashgate Press), 2002.