

Moral Responsibility

——The Implications of Psychiatry and Behavioral Genetics

Chien-Chang Wu*

Abstract

Laws or social customs of most countries do not hold insane people liable for what they have done because they lack moral responsibility. Nonetheless, science and technology might evolve new contents of and criteria for insanity. This essay focuses on whether breakthroughs in psychiatry and behavioral genetics could influence the judgment of moral responsibility and what the influence might be if the answer to the previous question is yes. This essay showed that common law insanity criteria have changed over time like the swing of a pendulum and that various philosophy of mind theories compete with each other. Both phenomena implied the “subjectivity” of the institution of responsibility that co-developed with society. Compatibilism seems to be a feasible solution for the conflict between scientific determinism and responsibility that upholds human autonomy. However, as science encounters issues of responsibility, it must confront its own “subjectivity” problem. In addition, although biological psychiatry and behavioral genetics have made great progresses, their materialism vocabularies

* Attending Physician in Taipei City Psychiatric Center. (M.B., LL.B., LL.M., Ph.D.)
Email:chien.chang.wu.88@gmail.com.

Received: January 8, 2006; accepted: March 27, 2006

could not grasp the abundance of mind phenomena. Therefore, the essay's preliminary conclusion is that the combination of folk psychology and psychopathology, though subjective, must not be downgraded. But, results of scientific research might change expectations of human behavior and thus gradually modify the connotations of moral responsibility.

Keywords: moral responsibility, psychiatry, behavioral genetics, philosophy of mind, insanity, folk psychology, complexity, determinism, indeterminism, compatibilism.