

Moral Impossibility: Rethinking Choice and Conflict

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Silvia Caprioglio Panizza

(University of Pardubice)

WHAT is moral impossibility?

Everything that is not part of our **perceived** range of **possibilities** when we think, choose, and act – for **moral reasons**

This distinguishes moral impossibilities from a) empirical and b) psychological limitations

Q: How do we tell the difference?

These reasons are typically neither overt nor conscious

Q: How do we know these reasons are there?

Moral possibilities are a) subject dependent and b) contextual

Q: What makes something possible a) for me and not for you and b) now but not yesterday

Possibilities are inherently and necessarily limited in moral thinking

TYPES of moral impossibility

THE UNTHINKABLE

What we struggle to even *imagine* or *fully conceive*

THE UNCONCEIVED

What we haven't thought about as a possibility

INCAPACITY

What we can imagine and conceive, but cannot bring ourselves to *do*

SILENCING

What does not occur to us because the right choice is already clear

Domains of investigation: imagination, deliberation, action

WHY does it matter?

- The range of possibilities we choose among determines the available options
- There is always something we do not consider for moral reasons: that tells us something about our moral vision
- Often, the discourse of impossibility covertly indicates a moral, not a logical or empirical impossibility
- Bringing such impossibility to light is important to clarify what choices we are actually making
- Framing some conflicts in terms of impossibility rather than simple disagreement may help to understand why some conflicts are intractable