

# **PSEUDO-REACTIVE: A FISCHER AND RAVIZZA CRITIQUE OF MORAL AGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

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## **Introduction**

Reality check: the society is committed to compatibilism and it shows in how policies operate and are implemented. This paper seeks to present a critique of moral agency in the Philippine Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) framework using Fischer and Ravizza's theory of guidance control. The paper first expounds on Fisher and Ravizza's compatibilist takes, and delineates CSE's origin and current form as situated in the Philippine context. Then it proceeds to examine Philippine CSE using Fischer & Ravizza's philosophical conceptualization.

### **1. Fischer & Ravizza in advancing the compatibilist project**

To commit to compatibilism is to acknowledge the enduring uncertainty surrounding the truth of causal determinism. And consistent in the debate is that beliefs about freedom and determinism shape how individuals understand themselves and how societies govern human conduct. The contention, then, is not merely that determinism is true (or false), but that human agency and responsibility can and should remain meaningful regardless. Fischer and Ravizza (F&R) begin precisely from this conviction. They argue that there exists a compelling reason to preserve the notion of personhood and that individuals remain the appropriate bearers of moral responsibility, even if determinism proves to be true.

Foremost, F&R advances semicompatibilism: even if determinism is incompatible with the freedom to do otherwise, it remains compatible with the kind of freedom necessary for moral responsibility (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, 51). F&R argue that responsibility is anchored on an agent's *guidance control*, or their capacity to act through a mechanism that appropriately tracks

moral reasons. This form of control satisfies the freedom-relevant condition of responsibility as it captures the agent's ability to act in accordance with their own standpoint, even within a causally determined world. And, because guidance control is compatible with determinism, so is moral responsibility.

Guidance control is explained in terms of an agent's *responsiveness to reasons*. It pertains to the actual-sequence of events that causally lead to an action. To provide an actual-sequence analysis, one must attend to the properties of the mechanism through which the agent brings about the action. By mechanism, they meant "the way the action comes about" (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, 38). And so, a mechanism can be said to be reasons-responsive if, under counterfactual circumstances where various reasons are presented and the mechanism operates without interference, it would react appropriately to those reasons. Reasons-responsiveness is a dispositional feature of the mechanism itself; moral responsibility is thus associated with modal properties (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, 53). This distinction is particularly salient with Frankfurt-style cases. As in the classic 'Assassin' example, Jones pulls the trigger on Matt without requiring Black's intervention; had Jones hesitated, Black would have ensured the same outcome. Here, Jones possesses guidance control: the actual sequence proceeds entirely from his own mechanism, even though a counterfactual intervener stood ready. Importantly, responsibility does not depend on responsiveness in this *particular moment* but on whether the mechanism is generally reasons-responsive. Thus, even if Jones failed to heed reasons in the actual world, his mechanism retains the capacity to recognize and react to reasons across possible scenarios.

F&R further notes that mechanisms can exhibit degrees of responsiveness to reasons, and the most philosophically ideal is one that is moderate. Moderate reasons-responsiveness (MRR) underwrites moral responsibility without demanding either perfect rationality or implausible freedom. Before expounding on this, it is first crucial to understand receptivity and reactivity as capacities that characterize MRR. Receptivity concerns the agent's capacity to recognize, evaluate, and discriminate among various reasons for action, such as moral, prudential, and emotional. Reactivity is the agent's capacity to act in accordance with those reasons once recognized. These two are asymmetric: receptivity bears more weight than reactivity. Strong receptivity ensures that the agent's evaluative mechanism is intelligible and that their actions can be traced to a coherent pattern of reasoning. This regularity allows observers to see the agent as someone who grasps the normative landscape, including moral reasons. And weak reactivity for the mechanism must only be capable of producing a different action in response to sufficient reason in at least one possible scenario.

The rationale behind F&R's weak reactivity can best be understood with a scenario. Alexis attends a party, becomes intoxicated, and drives himself home, only to crash into a roadside small business. The incident causes significant property damage and endangers the lives of nearby bystanders. If Alexis has a history of acknowledging the dangers of drunk driving, the value of others' safety, etc., and he generally acts in accordance with them, then his mechanism exhibits a regular receptivity. His decision to drive while intoxicated, though reckless and blameworthy, does not reflect a fundamental failure to recognize moral reasons, but rather a lapse in translating them into action. And this is precisely where weak reactivity suffices: MRR does not require that Alexis always act on the reasons he recognizes, only that his mechanism

could, under some realistic conditions, lead him to choose differently. If, for example, a friend had offered to call him a cab or reminded him of the consequences, and Alexis accepted, then his mechanism meets the threshold for weak reactivity. So, despite his failure in this instance, Alexis remains morally responsible because his evaluative structure is intact and his mechanism retains the capacity to respond to sufficient reason in at least some circumstances. Simply, F&R's MRR grounds responsibility in the agent's evaluative structure rather than in moment-to-moment behavioral conformity.

To culminate their project, F&R proffered the ownership of the mechanism. Ownership here means that the agent has come to regard the mechanism through which they act as their own. It involves recognizing that one's actions flow from a particular evaluative structure of reasons, acknowledging oneself as the legitimate source of that structure's operation, and accepting that others may rightly hold one accountable for it. This sense of ownership develops through education, social exposure, and deliberate thought, which then builds an individual's understanding of themselves as a participant within a moral community. Hence, it is crucial for one to *identify* with their reasons-responsive mechanism.

Fischer and Ravizza's compatibilism offers a normative account of agency in a realistic society. Their framework becomes especially relevant when examining policy frameworks governing educational and moral reform, where individuals act within a structure that defines their agency. Because their account is essentially historical, they make quite a case on how formative structures of social and institutional life make or break an agent's ownership of responsibility.

## 2. Philippine Comprehensive Sexuality Education's protectionist logic

UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) defines comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to *equip* children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable them to realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect themselves and others; and understand and protect their rights throughout their lives. The length of this definition encapsulates how *comprehensive* the policy aims to be. It situates sexuality within a holistic framework that integrates both known and underrecognized aspects. Particularly, the positive dimensions of sexuality, such as intimacy and pleasure. These, according to ITGSE, must be understood within a framework of *mutual respect and equality*. The implications of this ensure that sexuality is taught not only as a healthy part of human development but also as one that is inseparable from principles of non-discrimination: CSE recognizes the full spectrum of actors and circumstances that can either enable or hinder the flourishing of an individual's sexuality.

The Philippine's version of CSE has its lineage to the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health (RPRH) Act of 2012. Consequently, its take on sexuality education departs greatly from the global benchmark. The emphasized motivation of the law is on reproductive health outcomes, mostly preventing teenage pregnancy, and lowering HIV and STI infection cases. Thus, it is reasonable to infer that its pedagogical translation highlights methods perceived to directly achieve these outcomes. In practice, this often indicates conservative guidance and abstinence-focused instruction as they best align with the law's preventive orientation. To

understand Philippine CSE better is to now consider how DepEd interprets and implements the RPRH Act's legal mandate.

The Department of Education (DepEd) introduced CSE through DepEd Order No. 31, s. 2018. This policy formally defines CSE in the following terms:

A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality that is scientific, age-and-developmentally appropriate, culturally and gender responsive, and with rights-based approach. It aims to equip the learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity.

It teaches life skills among learners to help them develop critical thinking in relation to risky behaviors related to poor reproductive health outcomes, enhance self-esteem and develop respectful intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships that enable them to deal with the complex changes happening in them throughout their lives. The implementation of CSE likewise benefits from consultations from parents-teachers-community associations, school officials, civil society organizations and other interest groups that ensures cultural acceptability, efficiency and appropriateness of key concepts and messages. (p. 5)

The first paragraph of DepEd's definition of CSE essentially adopts UNESCO's ITGSE. Every sentence is almost verbatim, from the description of CSE to its emphasis on the basis or

approach the pedagogy will be using. By adopting UNESCO's wording, DepEd not only legitimizes its policy but also situates Philippine sexuality education within a global discourse. This alignment projects the education system as progressive and internationally attuned, thereby at an advantage to make CSE appear less controversial and more necessary in the local context. Aligning with international standards is a common strategy in education policy, particularly in contexts where reforms are contested. For instance, in the case of the Philippines, policies often gain traction when endorsed as keeping pace with international norms.

The second paragraph, on the other hand, more visibly reveals the imprint of RPRH. In itself, the law emphasizes "reproductive health outcomes," a phrase that DepEd reproduces in its conceptualization of CSE as stated. Moreover, the latter part of the paragraph on consultation reiterates Section 14 of RPRH, which requires that sexuality education be developed in negotiation with parents, teachers, and other interest stakeholders. There is nothing inherently wrong with emphasizing consultation. Dialogue is always a good practice in developing what will be taught to children to cater sensitivity to cultural contexts and parental concerns. However, the absence of explicit reference to other government agencies and specialized organizations raises questions about the extent and quality of consultation. Agencies such as the Department of Health, women and children's rights advocates, and LGBTQ+ organizations can contribute extensive perspectives crucial to sexuality education. While DepEd mentions "civil society groups," it also refers to "other interest groups," a phrasing that implies no clear limitations and may risk privileging sentiments that are not fact-based. Moreover, the apparent weight given to teachers-parent associations suggests that consultation may be skewed toward appeasing parental authority.

Included also in the DepEd order is the framework-guide structured around three components: core contents and standards, the curriculum support system, and the monitoring and evaluation system. Central to this is the ‘integration strategy’ (Feliza, 2025), a curricular approach where CSE concepts are integrated across existing subjects, such as Araling Panlipunan (AP) and Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (EsP), rather than being taught as a separate course. DepEd further claims that the content of CSE was designed to “naturally blend” with the competencies of the subjects in which they are integrated. In other words, sexuality education is not introduced as a distinct area but as a topic that organically fits within Science, Health, Social Studies, and Values.

DepEd’s strategy here presents advantages. First, it offers a purportedly seamless way to implement CSE, since it operates within existing curriculum structures. Second, it may be the most economically practical approach for a developing country, as it minimizes the need for additional resources, teachers, or subject hours. However, the disadvantages are difficult to ignore. The integration of CSE across different subjects risks fragmentation, inconsistency, and dilution of content; nothing prevents the primary subject matter from overshadowing the specifics of sexuality education. Empirical studies have shown that integration often leads to uneven delivery, with some topics marginalized or skipped altogether (Feliza, 2025; Kim et al., 2023; Navarro & Natividad, 2025). In this sense, the integration strategy functions less as a pedagogical tool and more as an expedient. Such that it avoids the controversy of introducing “sex education” as an independent subject. But the consequence of all these compromises is the coherence and *comprehensiveness* of the curriculum.

So far, three problematic aspects of the Philippine CSE have been identified: the assimilation of UNESCO's ITGSE with the RPRH provisions, the consultative tone of its definition, and the integration strategy of its framework. Taken together, these three reveal how DepEd's CSE is consistently framed around protection and prevention. The very system in which CSE is situated reflects this orientation. Specifically, in borrowing the comprehensive discourse of ITGSE while remaining tethered to the risk-reduction imperatives of RPRH, PH CSE attempts to occupy a middle ground. The tension from here produces uneven implementation: some schools may continue to emphasize abstinence and conservative guidance, while others attempt to integrate the holistic vision of sexuality. However, as it upholds an accommodative tone and practices the integration strategy, such 'uneven' implementation is justified because it becomes inevitable. A contradiction thus persists: the language suggests empowerment, but the motivation emphasizes risk avoidance.

The 'protection' emphasis of PH CSE is not only evident in its overall orientation but also in the specific words and phrases used throughout the curriculum guideline. For example, the phrase "develop the skills to reduce risks..." positions sexuality education primarily as a defensive intervention, where skills are considered as mechanisms for risk avoidance. Another phrase, which is even more concerning, appears under the core topic of Sexual and Reproductive health: "Consequences of early pregnancy and STIs and HIV-AIDS." Notice how the focus is only on consequences. The implication here is that sexuality is a site of danger and burden, while leaving unexplored the causes, including gender inequality, lack of access to contraception and informed choices, or sexual coercion. Such selective discussion reinforces the notion that

sexuality is understood primarily through its negative outcomes. The framework does not sustain the very ‘comprehensive’ character it professes, and instead collapses into yet another cautionary warning rendered in institutional form. With this framing, sexuality education becomes a topic of danger, where learners are taught to fear consequences rather than to critically engage with causes, contexts, and possibilities.

All these are not to completely disregard the favorable aspect of DepEd’s CSE framework guidelines. The key strength is that CSE is being introduced into the Philippine school system, and Filipino society is being exposed to its framework. Within a largely conservative and religious context where abstinence has traditionally been versed across generations, the integration of CSE represents a significant shift towards progressive takes. Although initial resistance was expected, recent survey data indicate a growing public acceptance of CSE, with the newer generation recognizing the benefits of providing accurate and age-appropriate information about sexuality (Abad, 2025). The challenge that now emerges is to ensure that the framework’s content and philosophical foundations are aligned with its commitment to promoting human and children’s rights.

Having established that Philippine CSE is consistently oriented within a protection framing, next is to examine this protective orientation through the lens of a compatibilist account, specifically, Fischer and Ravizza’s.

### **3. The Metaphysics of Protection in the Philippine CSE**

Every policy rests on an implicit assumption: that the individuals and institutions it governs possess the capacity to act, choose, and respond in accordance with the expectations it

sets. Instigating how action is regulated, even as it presupposes responsible agents operating within systems characterized by varying constraints. It is this complexity that makes it reasonable, and even necessary, to situate public policies within a compatibilist lens. The tension between the structural determinants embedded in policy design and the assumed agency of actors mirrors the philosophical nuances of free will and determinism that compatibilism seeks to reconcile. A compatibilist account makes visible whether the responsibilities assigned by a policy are coherent and justifiable.

In policy discourse, *protection* is not merely a descriptive term; it is a normative directive. When public institutions issue orders of this form, one of the clearest indications is that they frame citizens as vulnerable agents. In the case of the Philippine CSE, the primary function of “protection” is the management and containment of risks related to “poor reproductive health outcomes” (DepEd, 2018, 2). By extension, it constructs ‘sexuality’ as a domain of inherent danger, and puts forth an educational goal of instilling caution. This protection-oriented framework does not address youth as full agents, but primarily as “at-risk” subjects whose identity is defined by their vulnerability to negative outcomes. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong about recognizing vulnerability. In fact, it is by doing so that humans learned to develop and adapt. However, it is not a one-size-fits-all perspective. There are dimensions of human experience where entrapping people solely as vulnerable becomes limiting, even counterproductive. And sexuality is one of these dimensions. When sexuality is reduced to vulnerability, the discourse definitively shifts away from growth and empowerment. Consequently, the CSE policy’s purpose becomes the construction of the youth as an ‘at-risk subject,’ defined by their need to be safeguarded against both external (diseases, stigma,

coercion) and internal (desires, attitudes, perceptions) threats, rather than about cultivating a much-needed holistic understanding.

A protectionist policy embodies a form of soft determinism. In the case of the Philippine CSE framework, it accepts determinism as true by assuming the causal inevitability of negative outcomes related to sexuality, and also asserts moral responsibility by implicitly assigning it. However, notice that an important component of the definition is elided: the framework constitutes an external mechanism. As it tries to shape the conditions under which action occurs, it positions itself as the mechanism that intervenes. And since the PH CSE framework heavily emphasizes control over action, the need to develop one's will and capacity for reflective judgment becomes overlooked. With that approach, not only does it intervene, but it also becomes an external constraint.

#### **4. Pseudo-something**

The CSE framework, as a guiding document for drafting curricula, explicitly aims to shape behavior, attitudes, and values. It makes claims about what constitutes 'responsible' parenthood, for instance. Because the policy seems to prioritize producing learners who can be held accountable for their sexual and reproductive health choices, it must be judged by a coherent standard of what constitutes fair ascriptions of responsibility. This paper argues that the Philippine CSE framework, due to its protectionist logic, enacts a philosophically illegitimate and disproportionate distribution of moral responsibility: it places the primary burden of avoiding negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes on youth and fails to provide the conditions necessary for a responsible agency, as highlighted by F&R.

First, recall that MRR requires strong receptivity, the capacity to recognize and discriminate among a full spectrum of moral, prudential, and relational reasons; and weak

reactivity, the capacity to act differently in response to reasons in at least some possible scenarios (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998, 69). The Philippine CSE framework, however, fails to articulate both strong receptivity and weak reactivity. The emphasis on consequences (pregnancy, STIs, HIV/AIDS) narrows sexuality to danger and repercussions, leaving no intelligible pattern of responsiveness beyond avoidance; receptivity is almost exclusively built with a single class of prudential, fear-based reasons. F&R claim that strong receptivity requires being able to weigh diversified reasons, but the CSE framework provides a singular, overpowering one: the avoidance of risks. DepEd's CSE endorses topics that revolve around consequences (DepEd, 2018, 7), and such serves as a pedagogical tool to make the 'reason' more salient. Additionally, the approach of the Philippine CSE is primarily concerned with regulating one's capacity to act in accordance with recognized reasons, or reactivity (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998; Hu, 2025; McKenna & Coates, 2004; Strawson, 1963). Relative to the prioritized view on the negative reproductive health outcomes, the ideals of abstinence and avoidance are imposed. This framing forecloses the possibility of alternative actions, even in cases where sufficient reasons (e.g., contraceptives, informed choice, mutual consent, respectful relationships) would warrant them. In the domain of sexuality, the capacity to pursue alternative actions depends heavily on one's knowledge of the availability of those options. If weak reactivity is the minimal threshold, as demanded by Fischer and Ravizza, and the Philippine CSE framework fails to meet it, then doesn't the framework merely shape a pseudo-reactivity?

One of the primary sources of opposition and controversy surrounding the pedagogy of sex education is the disinformation that CSE promotes sexual activity by encouraging early sexual awakening (Abad, 2025; Cabato, 2025; Dela Cruz, 2025). Such suggests that sexuality is inherently wrong and reinforces abstinence and avoidance as the 'reasonable' or 'moral'

responses. The result of this narrowing is a curriculum that underdevelops or omits receptivity to reasons central to a holistic sexual ethic, such as reasons of consent, relational intimacy, and mutual respect; reasons of pleasure, autonomy, and positive self-regard; and reasons arising from critical gender analysis and power dynamics. Other legitimate reasons for sexual education, like empowerment, equality, or health literacy, are likewise precluded. Put simply, the Filipino youth's evaluative mechanism is stunted. While they are taught to be hyper-aware of dangers, they lack the nuanced receptivity to navigate the complex *reasons* that constitute ethical sexual relationships. Thus, the CSE fails to equip youth with the reasons-responsive mechanism required for full moral agency.

Secondly, the Philippine CSE framework systematically hinders the development of the Filipino youth's *ownership of mechanism*. The protection-oriented language of DepEd's CSE externalizes the center of control over sexuality and makes identification with one's sexual decision-making mechanism exigent. DepEd's recurring use of "risk," "danger," and "consequences" to frame sexuality teaches youth to view their own feelings as external threats to be managed, rather than as involved, integral parts of their personhood. A clear instance of this is the tendency to conceptualize the self as apart from the sexual self (Mangandi-Escobar, 2024). When students are taught that the proper response to sexual feelings is suppression or risk-calculation, the operative psychological mechanism becomes fear-based avoidance. It thus becomes difficult for a young person to authentically identify with a mechanism whose function is taught to be policing a core dimension of their experience. Such difficulty is further compounded by the absence of positive dimensions in the Philippine CSE framework. The omission of discussions on intimacy, pleasure, and mutual consent, along with the stigma reinforced by conservative groups, deprives Filipino youth of the vocabulary and concepts

necessary to reflect constructively on their sexuality. To *own* a mechanism, in F&R's sense, is to see oneself as the legitimate source of its operations. However, if the instructional emphasis is that the most 'responsible' relationship to one's sexuality is one of caution and restraint, then it inevitably discourages youth from affirming it as a constituent part of themselves. There is difficulty in taking full ownership of a mechanism whose parameters and purposes have been narrowly defined for it, not by it.

## **Conclusion**

The Philippine CSE framework with its protectionist-logic cannot produce the integrated condition for legitimate responsibility because it does not sustain a mechanism with balanced receptivity. This is not to say that the framework fails to shape responsiveness among the youth altogether. However, because the emphasis on risk reduction is not only reflected in the policy's language but also, in public discourse, domestic settings, and instructional implementation, the youth's guidance control is built to be responsive only to a narrow set of reasons. Specifically, they are taught to be hyper-responsive to one type of reason (risks) and under-responsive to others. In effect, the framework constructs a constrained form of agency that cannot satisfy the MRR conditions for moral responsibility.

The language and approach of DepEd's CSE impose the normative burden of responsibility (avoid negative outcomes) while withholding the agential conditions that would make bearing that burden legitimate. It demands that youth exercise a form of control, even though its necessary components are pedagogically lacking. The distribution is therefore disproportionate because the demand and the capacity are philosophically disconnected. That is,

the weight of accountability is placed upon a subject whose conditions of agency lack adequate elaboration.

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