

Titles & Abstracts

Free Will and Causality

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Mathieu Baril (McGill University): A Case for the Non-Causal Approach to Agency

Abstract: There are, in the philosophy of agency, three main approaches to causation: the event-causal, the agent-causal, and the non-causal approaches. In this paper, I develop a non-causal approach to agency and argue that it is stronger than the two alternatives.

The event-causal approach, as exemplified by the causal theory of action, has been developed by philosophers like Davidson, Bishop, Velleman, and Mele.[1] It is by far the most influential account. The main reason for its popularity is that it is compatible with the natural event-causal order, that is, with the scientific worldview. The causal theory of action, however, has been subject to many critiques, two of the most recurrent being the problem of internal deviance[2] and the problem of the disappearing agent.[3] Because of these difficulties, some philosophers such as Chisholm, R. Taylor, Lowe, and Mayr[4] have been attracted to another causal approach, namely, the agent-causal view. While this second approach is often said to avoid the two problems previously discussed, its main weakness is that it is not compatible with the scientific worldview.

Finally, there is a third approach: the non-causal approach.[5] The non-causal approach has been developed by people like Von Wright, Wilson, and Ginet[6] but one of the most convincing non-causal account is, in my view, that of Frankfurt.[7] In this paper, I develop a frankfurtian account of agency, and argue that it is compatible with the natural event-causal order while it avoids the problem of internal deviance and the problem of the disappearing agent. Thus, with respect to these issues, the non-causal view appears as much stronger than the two alternatives.

The account of agency that I shall put forward here is a modification of Frankfurt's account. My account is, just like his, non-causal, volitional, and hierarchical. My main disagreement with Frankfurt, however, concerns the concepts of choice and decision. While Frankfurt focuses on the actual act of choosing and deciding, I shall argue that what is crucial is the notion of a disposition to choose or decide. This focus on mental dispositions has two main advantages: first, it allows us to account for habitual actions and, second, it allows us to solve the regress objection. As I will show, in spite of what is generally believed in the secondary literature,[8] Frankfurt was very close to solving the regress objection. The reason why he failed is because he focused on actual choices and decisions. I shall argue that a focus on the notion of a disposition to choose or decide allows us to solve the problem.

In the first section of this paper, I provide an exposition of the three different approaches to causation, and explain why the non-causal approach is compatible with naturalism. In the second part, I spell out the two main problems that the causal theory of action faces: the problem of internal deviance and the problem of the disappearing agent. In the third part, I focus on the problem of internal deviance and explain how a non-causal approach can avoid it. In the last section, I argue that when we combine a volitional account of agency to this non-causal approach, we can solve the problem of the disappearing agent. Moreover, I argue that the regress objection, as developed by Ryle,[9] is particularly problematic for a volitional account of agency that is based on the event-causal approach, but that the non-causal approach can avoid it.

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[1] Davidson 1963, Bishop 1989, Velleman 1992, Mele 1992.

[2] The problem of internal deviance has been exposed by many philosophers. See Chisholm 1964, Taylor 1966, and Davidson 1971.

[3] See, for example, Melden 1961, Taylor 1966, Frankfurt 1976, Velleman 1992.

[4] Chisholm 1964, Taylor 1966, Lowe 2008, Mayr 2011.

[5] The event-causal and agent-causal approaches are sometimes opposed to "teleological anticausalism" (Mele 2003) and "intentionalism" (Mayr 2011). These later views can be characterized as non-causal as well. But a non-causal account need not be teleological nor focused on intentions. This is the reason why I prefer the more encompassing expression "non-causal approaches."

[6] Von Wright 1971, Wilson 1989, Ginet 1990.

[7] See especially Frankfurt 1978. A few philosophers have argued that Frankfurt's account is a causal one. For example, Velleman argues that Frankfurt is looking for a reductive event-causal solution to the problem of natural agency (Velleman 1992, p. 470). Mayr, on the other hand, suggests that Frankfurt's account is based on the notion of sustained causation (Mayr 2011, p. 121). And finally, Stout argues that Frankfurt develops an Aristotelian account of causation (Stout 2010, p. 163). These interpretations are, in my view, all mistaken. I will not, however, develop a detailed critique of all of these interpretations here. I will simply show that Frankfurt's central notion of guidance, or what I shall call "standby intervention control," is a non-causal one.

[8] Most commentators believe that Frankfurt failed to solve the regress problem. See, for example, Watson 1982, Friedman 1986, Christman 1989, Velleman 1992, and J. S. Taylor 2005.

[9] Ryle 1949.

Sander Beckers (LMU Munich): Causation and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities

Abstract: The past two decades have seen substantial progress on formalizing the concept of actual causation, aka token causation. This concept is of fundamental importance for the attribution of moral responsibility for some outcome to an agent. Yet there is almost no work that translates the insights gained in the formal causation literature to the problem of moral responsibility. In this talk I present a formalization of two necessary conditions that are required for moral responsibility, both of which

involve causation and both of which are inspired by Braham and van Hees. The first condition focusses on the causal relation that has to hold between an agent's act and the outcome, the second condition focusses on the beliefs that an agent must have regarding that causal relation. On basis of the first condition I argue that, contrary to the view of most authors, actual causation is not a necessary condition for responsibility. On basis of the second condition I argue that a nuanced version of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities survives the Frankfurt-type cases unscathed. The result will be a partial definition of moral responsibility for an outcome that relies on a variant of the NESS definition of causation.

Artem Besedin (Moscow State University): Attentiveness Requirement for Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Abstract: Sometimes people blame others for inattentiveness to something important for them: e.g. someone doesn't say hello to a person when entering a room, and is reproached for his or her inattentiveness. However, lack of attention, induced by some overwhelming factor, may be an excuse. Someone doesn't notice you can be excused if, for example, she is in sorrow, and her attention is disseminated, or if she has just received good news and her attention is exclusively concentrated on it. I call the features of the circumstances, inattentiveness to which can be reproachable, *person-related features* (PRF). I'll explore the importance of attention for moral responsibility and free will.

Moral responsibility is attributed to the agent from the second-person standpoint. As a person, I am in right to demand some specific attitude to me, and to hold you responsible for satisfying or not satisfying my demand. The basic demand of a person is the demand for attention to PRF. It is basic in a twofold sense. (1) It is basic for other demands: it doesn't make sense to ask for respect to my person if you don't even pay attention to PRFs. (2) The basic concept of attention as a cognitive process is meant here. I demand that some relevant information about me should be processed by your cognitive system in an appropriate way: in such a way that it can influence your behavior, be stored in your memory etc. This is the basic kind of attention demanded by a crying newborn from the parents. Do we lose this demand when grow up?

Ability of meeting this demand — paying attention to PRF — is a condition for moral responsibility. Let's call it *attentiveness requirement* (AR). It is neither a species of the epistemic requirement, nor of the control requirement: paying attention to something is not a kind of knowledge and not a thing that is subject to direct voluntary control. I can arbitrary switch my attention from one object to another that are already noticed by me, but the fact that something is attended by me is out of my control. For the demonstration that AR is not a kind of control condition, consider the case of the *perfect attender* — a person who uncontrollably pays attention to all PRFs in all circumstances. Then the perfect attender can use the information he pays attention to in different ways: for good or for bad. But it seems that we would not suspend his responsibility for those actions for the reason that he could not help paying attention to PRFs. It seems that AR is a *sui generis* condition of moral responsibility.

AR is also a non-causal condition of free action requisite for moral responsibility. To perform an action, an agent should be aware of possible ways of actions. Some ways of action would be considered appropriate in certain circumstances, and some inappropriate. If an agent fails to recognize the appropriate ways of action because of the lack of attention, responsibility may be suspended. Attentiveness to some important features of the circumstances is required.

Lack of attention sometimes is an excuse, and sometimes is not. It seems that I can demand attention to my person only if my demand can be met in some particular situation. You do not pay attention to me; then my reproach to you would be appropriate only if, in that circumstance, you could have done it. Also my demand is that, in the future, you should be attentive. We do not have direct control over attention. But we can indirectly modify the way our attention is distributed, e.g. by training. Then my demand is legitimate if your cognitive system can be indirectly modified by some acceptable means in such a way that you would be more attentive to PRF, and, in particular situation, there is no overwhelming factor that distracts your attention.

AR is not a requirement for empathy: a *perfect attender* may be not empathic at all, i.e. AR can be observed without empathy. Attention is crucial for consciousness. Thus AR shows how free will and moral responsibility are related to consciousness.

Gunnar Björnsson (Stockholm University): The Unbearable Lightness of Agent Causation

Abstract: In this talk, I argue that the notion of causation inherent in our understanding of ourselves as free and responsible agents is an everyday notion of a causal explanans: a metaphysically lightweight notion, strongly influenced by pragmatics in both its structure and its application.

The talk has three parts, each spelling out how some puzzling phenomena central to our sense of agency and responsibility can be explained if we understand this sense as involving this everyday notion of causation:

Counterfactual dependence, processes, absences: Notoriously, the ordinary, everyday, notion of a causal explanans displays bewildering patterns, sometimes seemingly tracking whether effects are counterfactually dependent on their causes but at other times recognizing causal overdetermination; sometimes seemingly tracking causal processes, but at other times recognizing causation by omission or absences. Elsewhere, I have argued that these patterns, although metaphysically unkempt, can be well explained if we understand the notion in question as shaped by our needs for instrumental reasoning. What matters here, however, is that our sense of responsibility for actions and outcomes displays strongly parallel patterns. In the first section of the talk, I spell out these parallels and suggest that they give us reason to think that the notion of responsibility involves the everyday notion of a causal explanans.

Incompatibilist or skeptical intuitions: As is clear from both the philosophical literature and empirical studies, many take it as obvious that responsibility is undermined by determinism. Moreover, many philosophers have similarly been worried that indeterminism, although providing a certain kind of freedom, would undermine agency and responsibility. Still, the sense that responsibility is undermined by determinism and indeterministic luck is not universal, and even some who recognize the pre-theoretical pull of incompatibilism or of worries about luck think that it can be resisted without conceptual confusion.

Elsewhere, I have argued in detail that standard sources of skepticism about agency and responsibility—reflections on determinism, regress arguments, generalization arguments, arguments from luck—can be well accounted for if we take judgments of responsibility and agency to be a certain kind of explanatory judgment, involving the ordinary notion of a causal explanans. In the second section of the talk, I sketch how such accounts go. The general idea has three parts: (1) Causal-explanatory judgments are made from one explanatory perspective or another, a perspective involving certain explanatory interests and employing a specific explanatory model. In the case of responsibility judgments, the default model is one treating certain agential features as values of independent variables. (2) The sort of considerations that prompt incompatibilist or skeptical judgments are considerations that change explanatory perspectives, thus making us no longer see the relevant agential features as what explains the putative object of responsibility. (3) Our sense that an agent is responsible, including our basic retributive tendencies, is directly tied to seeing the relevant agential features as what explains the object of responsibility. This sense is thus directly undermined when our explanatory perspectives change.

Though this can explain why many feel that attributions of responsibility are undermined by determinism or find appealing the premises of standard arguments for incompatibilism or responsibility skepticism, it also explains why incompatibilism and skepticism can be resisted. For it is conceptually possible to retain or revert to the default explanatory perspective from which agents can seem responsible: although incompatibilist or skeptical arguments tend to prompt other perspectives, they do not strictly speaking contradict the default perspective.

The sense that agents provide independent input into the unfolding of events: According to empirical studies, most people deny that their decisions and actions are deterministically caused and seem to think that the sense they have that they are free to decide or act in either of two ways would be mistaken if determinism is correct. In the third section of the talk, I detail how the explanation of why people tend to be subject to incompatibilist or skeptical worries about responsibility extends to the sense that the freedom we have in decision and action is incompatible with determinism. In this case, it is not how causal-explanatory judgments are connected to retributive tendencies that explain the worries, but how

they are connected to the self-understanding necessarily operative in core first-personal deliberation, decision, and action.

Hans Briegel (University of Innsbruck & University of Constance): A Stochastic Process Model for Free Agency under Indeterminism*

Abstract: The aim of this talk is to establish that free agency, which is a capacity of many animals including human beings, is compatible with indeterminism: an indeterministic world allows for the existence of free agency. The question of the compatibility of free agency and indeterminism is less discussed than its mirror image, the question of the compatibility of free agency and determinism. It is, however, of great importance for our self-conception as free agents in our (arguably) indeterministic world. We begin by explicating the notions of indeterminism and free agency and by clarifying the interrelation of free agency and the human-specific notion of free will. We then situate our claim of the compatibility of free agency and indeterminism precisely in the landscape of the current debate on freedom and determinism, exposing an unhappy asymmetry in that debate. Then we proceed to make our case by describing the mathematically precise, physically motivated model of projective simulation, which employs indeterminism as a central resource for agency modeling. We argue that an indeterministic process of deliberation modeled by the dynamics of projective simulation can exemplify free agency under indeterminism, thereby establishing our compatibility claim: Free agency can develop and thrive in an indeterministic world.

*Joint work with Thomas Müller (Dialectica 72, 2 (2018), pp. 219–252)

Laura Ekstrom (College of William & Mary in Virginia): Indeterminist Free Will

Abstract: TBA

Nadine Elzein (University of Oxford): Causal Explanation and Alternative Possibilities

Abstract: Incompatibilists face two serious problems in relation to indeterminism and free will. The first is the Luck Problem: This is the problem of explaining how free choice could even be consistent with free will. The second is the Enhancement Problem: This is the problem of explaining how, even if indeterminism doesn't *undermine* freedom, it might actually be thought to enhance it. My prime goal will be to sketch a solution to the Enhancement problem. The core issue is showing that it may be intelligible for the processes involved in deliberation and decision-making to not merely cause one choice or another, but to *settle* which choice is made. I aim to provide a sketch of what this might mean and why it might be taken to matter, while maintaining a broadly event causal framework.

Alexander Gebharter & Gerhard Schurz (University of Groningen & University of Duesseldorf, DCLPS): Free Will, Control, and the Possibility to Do Otherwise from a Causal Modeler's Perspective

Abstract: Strong notions of free will are closely connected to the possibility to do otherwise as well as to an agent's ability to causally influence her environment via her decisions controlling her actions. In this paper we employ techniques from the causal modeling literature to investigate whether a notion of free will subscribing to one or both of these requirements is compatible with naturalistic views of the world such as non-reductive physicalism to the background of determinism and indeterminism. We

argue that from a causal modeler's perspective the only possibility to get both requirements consists in subscribing to reductive physicalism and indeterminism.

Jingbo Hu (University of Sheffield): Is Reasons-Responsiveness Causally Irrelevant?

Abstract: Reasons-responsiveness theory proposes that the relevant free agency required by moral responsibility is the capacity to respond to reasons and that such a capacity is compatible with determinism. Usually, a reasons-responsiveness theorist commits to two distinct views. The first is the *actual-sequence view*, according to which, whether an agent is acting free wholly depends on how the action comes about in the actual causal history. This view is motivated by the Frankfurt Cases, which is a type of thought experiment first composed by Frankfurt (1969). The conclusion from Frankfurt Cases is that agents can be morally responsible even if their freedom to do otherwise is ruled out by the presence of counterfactual interveners. The second one is the *modal view*, according to which, the notion of reasons-responsiveness should be analyzed in modal terms. For example, Fischer and Ravizza (1998) defend a sophisticated reasons-responsiveness theory by committing these two views at the same time. First, they hold that an action is free if it is generated through a proper actual sequence, namely, a reasons-responsive mechanism. Second, they further analyze the notion of reasons-responsiveness in modal terms. Roughly, a mechanism is reasons-responsive if in some possible scenarios in which there were sufficient reasons for the agent to do otherwise, the mechanism would recognize those reasons and enable the agent to react to those reasons.

However, these two views seem to be in tension: according to the the actual-sequence view, free agency is entirely grounded on the *actual sequence* while according to the modal view, free agency should be analyzed in terms of *possible scenarios*. Recently this worry has been presented in detail by Sartorio (2015; 2016). Her claim is that since reasons-responsiveness is a modal property, it is not a part of the actual causal history. Because the actual-sequence view is supported by Frankfurt Cases, which provide powerful and compelling intuitive support, Sartorio suggests that it is the modal view that should be abandoned.

My aim in this paper is show that, contra Sartorio, the actual-sequence and modal views can be combined; and thus defend the sophisticated view presented by Fischer & Ravizza (1998).

First, I contend that the nature of Sartorio's criticism of the modal analysis boils down to the point that reasons-responsiveness, if understood as a modal property, is causally irrelevant and in effect cannot ground moral responsibility and free agency. Recall that the actual-sequence view is motivated by Frankfurt cases. The moral from these thought experiments is that what influences the assignment of agent's moral responsibility must be causally explanatory to the occurrence of the action. Fischer, who is convinced by Frankfurt cases, characterizes this idea with his Irrelevance Principe (IP):

(IP) If a fact is irrelevant to a correct account of the causal explanation of the person's action, then this fact is irrelevant to the issue of the person's moral responsibility. (Fischer 2015)

According to IP, the challenge is to show that reasons-responsiveness, understood as a modal property, is relevant to the causal explanation of the person's action. I argue that whether reasons-responsiveness is causally relevant depends on which models of causal explanation are employed. Specifically, a modal conception of reasons-responsiveness will be explanatorily irrelevant if the strict model is presumed:

[The Strict Model]: To explain an event E is to cite the relevant events/properties which are causally operational in the actual causal history issuing in.

However, I will argue that this model is too demanding and cannot accommodate the pragmatic dimension of causal explanation. I suggest that a more tenable model for explanation is Lewis's liberal model:

[The Liberal Model]: To explain an event E is to provide some information about its causal history. (Lewis 1986)

With Lewis's model, we can account for the explanatory relevance of some particular elements which cannot be handled by the strict model of explanation. Specifically, the notion of reasons-responsiveness is explanatory within the liberal model. My paper fills a gap in the literature by showing how the modal view and the actual-sequence view can both be endorsed in an account of reasons-responsiveness.

Alex Kaiserman (University of Oxford): Causation, Reasons-Sensitivity, and Degrees of Free Will

Some actions are free and others are not. But free will also comes in degrees. The actions of a severe addict are less free than those of someone with a milder addiction, for example. Yet despite this, most of the philosophical work on free will has tended to focus on the "yes or no" question of what makes an action free *simpliciter* (and in particular, whether free action is compatible with determinism), neglecting almost completely the question of what might underlie these comparative judgements.

The aim of this paper is to address this lacuna. My starting point is the popular idea that an agent was free to the extent to which she was sensitive to *reasons*. I start by considering two recent accounts of degrees of reasons-sensitivity, due to Coates and Swenson (2013) and Montminy and Tinney (2018), respectively, which both take as their starting point Fischer and Ravizza's (1998) modal theory of the control condition on moral responsibility. According to Coates and Swenson, an agent's degree of reasons-sensitivity in acting is a function of the *distance* from actuality of the closest possible world in which she responds to a sufficient reason to act otherwise; according to Montminy and Tinney, meanwhile, an agent's degree of reasons-sensitivity is a function of the *fraction* of nearby possible worlds in which she responds to a sufficient reason to act otherwise. I'll argue that both of these accounts – and, by extension, all modal accounts of degrees of reasons-sensitivity – fail, for two main reasons: they are susceptible to Frankfurt-style counterexamples; and they implausibly imply that an agent is *less than fully free* in acting if she had (indeed, *in virtue* of her having) a sufficient reason to act otherwise. I'll then consider an alternative *causal* account of degrees of reasons-sensitivity, due to Sartorio (2016, 2018). On her view, "[a]n agent is reasons-sensitive in acting in a certain way when the agent acts on the basis of, perhaps in addition to the presence of reasons to act in the relevant way, the *absence* of sufficient reasons to refrain from acting in that way, for an appropriately wide range of such reasons" (Sartorio 2016: 132), where to act 'on the basis of' a the presence or absence of a reason is for that presence or absence to have "caused the act *in a certain kind of way*" (Sartorio 2016: 134), i.e. not via a 'deviant causal chain'. This suggests that "reasons-sensitivity will be a function of something like the ratio or proportion of the reasons to which the agent is...sensitive to the total number of reasons that the agent has or could have" (Sartorio 2016: 142). I try to make this idea more precise, noting along the way that it's not at all clear that the crucial notion of an *absence of a sufficient reason* is really coherent. In any case, while the resulting account might avoid the Frankfurt-style counterexamples to the modal accounts, I argue that it too should be rejected, for three main reasons: like the modal accounts, it implies that those who fail to do what they have most reason to do are less than fully free; it gets the wrong results in cases of overdetermination; and it gets the wrong results in cases where there was no possible sufficient reason to act otherwise.

In the final section of the talk, I'll motivate an alternative approach. On the view I will defend, an agent's degree of reasons-sensitivity in acting depends, not on *how many* reasons caused her action, but on *how much reasons contributed*, compared to non-reason-conferring features of the agent's environment, to bringing the action about. I'll argue that this view avoids many of the problems faced by its rivals. In particular, since actions can be *fully* caused by *bad* reasons, this account distinguishes cleanly, in a way the other accounts fail to do, between the assessment of an agent's degree of reasons-sensitivity in acting, and the assessment of the degree of rationality of her action. If there's time, I'll end with some reflections on the consequences of such an account for the current debate over the significance for free will of the situationist literature, a series of studies in psychology purporting to show that situational factors play a larger role in producing actions than we typically assume.

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John Lemos (Coe College) : A Modified Nozickian Model of Free Will

Abstract: Event-causal libertarians believe that some of our free willed acts must be caused but not determined by mental states in the agent. Different versions of event-causal libertarianism have been proposed, such as Alfred Mele’s modest libertarianism (1995) and his daring libertarianism (2006, 2017) and Mark Balaguer’s view (2004, 2010) as well as Robert Kane’s much discussed dual-efforts view (1996, 2007, 2011). In this paper, I will argue that Kane’s view is superior in significant respects to these other event-causal libertarian views, but I will also show that it suffers from problems which were originally noted by Laura Ekstrom (2003) and Randolph Clarke (2003). I will go on to develop what I call a “modified Nozickian model” of libertarian free will grounded on the notion of assigning of weight to reasons. I argue that Robert Nozick’s theory as stated in his *Philosophical Explanations* (1981) is flawed in significant respects, but if appropriately modified it offers some of the advantages of Kane’s view while avoiding the kinds of problems presented by Ekstrom and Clarke.

Christian Loew (Umeå University): Doing Otherwise in a Deterministic World

Abstract: There is a plausible principle linking abilities and possible worlds. This principle says that an agent has the ability to perform an action A in circumstances C, only if there is a possible world in which C obtains and the agent performs A. Call this principle the “Co-Possibility Principle.” The Co-Possibility Principle underlies a number of forceful arguments for the incompatibility of free will and determinism. According to these arguments, agents in a deterministic world lack free will because there are no metaphysically possible worlds with the same laws and the same past as their actual world yet where the agents do otherwise. Hence, agents in deterministic worlds lack the ability to do otherwise given their actual circumstances, which include the past and the laws of nature, and so lack free will. In this paper, I will argue that the Co-Possibility Principle is false and, in doing so, develop an underexplored option for maintaining the compatibility of free will and determinism.

Anne Sophie Meincke (University of Vienna): Towards a Process Ontology of Actions and Agents

Abstract: Though disagreeing on what it is that *causes* actions – events or agents, event causal and agent causal theories of action causation do agree on which ontological category actions belong to: actions are commonly taken to be events. This orthodoxy has recently been questioned. Helen Steward [2012a, 2012b] has claimed that actions are processes rather than events. According to Steward [2016], acknowledging the processual nature of actions offers a solution to the so-called ‘problem of the disappearing agent’ that avoids the shortcomings of standard agent-causal accounts. The actions-as-processes view thus is taken to provide a powerful means to resist the reductionism of the event-causal ‘standard story of human action’ and to pave the way for a convincing libertarian defence of free will. My paper assesses these theses. I argue that actions are indeed processes but that some even more radical revision of the ontology of agency is needed in order to bring about the progress envisaged by Steward. This revision is in fact required by Steward’s own basic assumptions about the nature of agency in our world. Human agents, as Steward has argued, are bioagents, organisms endowed with the power to act. However, according to a growing number of philosophers of biology [Bickhard (2011), Dupré (2012), Nicholson & Dupré (2018)], organisms are processes rather than things or substances, namely

interactively self-stabilising biological processes. It follows that, as far as bio-agency is concerned, not only actions are processes but agents too. Opposing Steward's leanings towards substance ontology, I claim that only a consistent commitment to a process ontology of both actions and agents will actually successfully remove common obstacles for a convincing libertarian account of free will.

First, the agent does not disappear into some series of events: self-organising stabilised processes are sources of active change – and they are more plausibly so than things the default state of which is stasis (substances). Organisms are 'autonomous' in the sense that they actively and constructively interact with the environment, instead of being passive victims of changes in the environment [Moreno & Mossio (2015)]. Agency is a manifestation of autonomy. Thinking of both actions and agents as processes thereby also elucidates the (causal and temporal) co-presence of agent and actions emphasised by Steward.

Second, actions are not mysterious outputs of causally isolated agent-things. On the contrary, bio-agents depend for their existence on their ongoing inter-actions with the environment. Actions are part of a bio-agent's identity rather than being a change that is extrinsic to the agent. This entails that the sharp and neat boundaries the substance view draws between the agent and the environment as well as between the agent and her actions disappear in favour of a dynamic and, to some extent, fuzzy picture: organisms demarcate themselves from surrounding processes through continuous inter-actions with these.

Third, bio-agency is naturally situated within the interactive space co-generated by the bioagent and the environment. Each action can be located within the ongoing process of agent – environment interactions, i.e., be assessed in the light of the history of this process and of its actual shape including its wider conditions. Such a naturalised account of agent causation makes alternative possibilities intelligible as being embedded in the limited interactive space of biological (and social) niches. This is the key to a convincing libertarian view of free will that avoids the pitfalls of standard libertarianism (most importantly, the so-called problem of luck).

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Timothy O'Connor (Indiana University): Probabilistic Explanation and Free Will

Abstract: I sketch an indeterministic account of freely-willed actions within a causal powers-based metaphysics of the natural world. I then consider five recent objections to this sort of account, all of which see problems of explanation or control in its acceptance of objective probabilities governing free actions. In the course of rebutting these explanations, I contend that some of the terms under which much of the recent debate concerning libertarian theories of freedom has been conducted are misconceived, rooted in confused handling of metaphysical elements of competing theories or implausible (or at least underdeveloped) theories of explanation.

Abstract: Agent causalist theories hold that actions may be free only if they are caused by the agent themselves and, consequently, they are often criticised for their reliance on *substance causation*, namely the view that some events, namely free actions or choices, are caused not by other events, but by certain substances, namely agents. Indeed, however the causal relation between a substance as a cause and an event as its effect is spelled out, problems loom large. Clarke suggests an integrated account in which event and substance causation work in parallel, so every free action or choice is caused both by an event and an agent (Clarke 2003, 133-49). Yet critiques rightly point out that such parallel event causation renders agent-causation redundant (Ginet 2002, 397) and threatens freedom (O'Connor 2000, 78). O'Connor's own view seems to be that only substances are causes (O'Connor 2014, 33-34), but Clarke raises ten objections against the very possibility of substance causation (most of which also apply to his own integrated account) and cautiously concludes that 'there are, on balance, reasons to think that substance causation is impossible' (Clarke 2003, 221).

In this paper, I suggest grounding agent causation in the theory of *fact causation*, according to which the causal relata are neither events nor substances – but facts, namely true propositions. Following Bennett (1988) and Mellor (1995), I take the causal relata to be *abstract* so they cannot be described in spatiotemporal terms. Under this view, spatiotemporal entities, such as events, are only truth-makers for the causal relata, but not the relata themselves (as only facts are). Consequently, the causal relation is also not located in the space and time. These causal relata may well be real, as long as other abstract entities such as numbers may be real, and the causal relation may be fundamental, namely that it is irreducible to other non-causal phenomena or unanalysable in non-causal terms such as regularities of counterfactual dependencies. Proponents of fact causation hold that its major advantage over event causation is its ability to account for causation by absences without denying that it is genuine causation (Bennett 1988, 140-41; Mellor 1995, 131-5; for responses, see, e.g., Dowe 2000, ch 6).

An agent causalist theory that is based on fact causation would not take the causal relation to hold between the agent itself as a concrete substance and the event of their freely choosing a certain course of action. Instead, the causal relation would hold between two relata of the same nature: the cause is the fact that (a) a certain agent exists and (b) the conditions that *enable* the agent to freely choose between certain courses of action are satisfied, and the effect is the fact that they freely chose to act in a certain way. After briefly outlining what such an agent causal theory of free will would look like, I would turn to examine whether it can overcome the objections levelled against substance causation, and in particular, the three major problems that Clarke identifies ('the temporality of causation, the influence that causes have on the probability of their future effects, and the structured nature of entities that are directed in time', Clarke 2003, 209). I would seek to show that these objections stem from the dubious connection that substance causation makes between two entities of different ontological type (substance and event), and, consequently, an agent causal theory of free will that is based on fact causation is not vulnerable to these objections.

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Maria Sekatskaya & Gerhard Schurz (University of Duesseldorf, DCLPS): Alternative Possibilities and the Meaning of ‘Can’

Abstract: We will provide a new account of free will which incorporates the criteria of sourcehood with the criteria of availability of alternative possibilities. Our account combines conditional analysis of abilities with a Frankfurt-style sourcehood psychological approach and has three advantages: 1) it answers the objections against standard versions of classical conditional analysis of ‘can’ by demanding coherence of what one can freely do with one’s personality frame; 2) it is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism as metaphysical background assumptions; 3) it is immune to the Consequence Argument (CA) and solves the Luck Problem.

George Stamets (University of Leeds): Powers, Agency, and Freedom

Abstract: My aim in this talk is to articulate and defend parameters for a satisfactory account of free agency – i.e., for the kind of agency which it is natural to think distinguishes human beings from less sophisticated creatures, and which is *prima facie* a prerequisite for moral responsibility. An adequate account of free and responsible agency, I argue, ought to take seriously the notion of *powers*, including in particular a power *to choose how to act* – and must carefully attend to the kinds of qualities, in particular mental qualities, which might possibly serve as truthmakers for ascriptions of such a power. I begin the first half of my talk by briefly defending an account of *powers* generally. I consider options for explicating the notion of a *power to act* in the first place, before moving to reject the way that powers are typically characterized in the contemporary literature by theorists on both sides of the ‘categoricalism’ vs. ‘powers realism’ debate. I maintain that propositions which ascribe powers to things are made true, when indeed they are true, by *qualities* which those things possess; qualities, in other words, are the *truthmakers* for (true) power-ascriptions, and thus might be said to ‘bestow’ or ‘give rise to’ powers. Unlike most other theorists who accord powers an indispensable place in an overall metaphysics, however, I reject the idea that powers themselves should be *reified* – that is, understood as properties or features of the things which ‘have’ them. I therefore reject pandispositionalism, the identity (or ‘powerful qualities’) theory, and a mixed or dualist view about properties and powers, even when these latter views are understood in terms of my preferred way of explicating the notion of power.

Having set out my ‘truthmaking’ account of powers, I suggest that all agency, in the most general sense, is simply the exercise or manifestation of some power to act. I then present a novel argument for the claim that it is only *individual objects* – including inanimate objects ranging from the subatomic to the macro level – which, strictly speaking, ever *act* or *do* anything. Implicit in this more general argument is an argument for a strong version of substance causation – in particular, the view that, fundamentally, all genuine causation is causation by individual objects, rather than such items as events, properties, or facts. I conclude this half of the talk by quickly considering how accounts of laws of nature and modality can be derived from this general approach to powers and agency.

In the second half of my talk, I reconstruct the free will debate in terms of the overall metaphysics just offered. I note, first, how an appropriate approach to laws and modality restores the threat to free agency which, until recently, most have thought to be posed by causal determinism – a threat which becomes hollow upon the adoption of a neo-Humean metaphysics. I thus defend incompatibilism, suggesting that very many recent theorists have been drawn to compatibilism in part by the acceptance of views about laws and modality which are themselves ultimately hollow.

I then give reason for thinking that any instance of free and intentional agency – agency which is in some meaningful sense ‘up to’ the relevant agent – must either consist in or else involve the exercise of a power to consciously choose how to act. Such a mental power, I argue, must be a *two-way power*, in a sense to be carefully explained. In carefully characterizing it, I aim to make clear how exercises of this sort of power would be *wholly determined* by the relevant agent (who thus counts as the *author* of her action, in a very real sense), usually in the light of reasons for (and against) action, and thus not susceptible to objections involving luck or randomness. This power is not, it seems, a *causal* power, insofar as it seems possible for a person to choose how to act, yet *not* cause anything at all to happen by so choosing. Rather, we freely cause things to happen just in those cases where our power to choose

how to act ‘triggers’ or ‘stimulates’ (i.e. causes) the manifestation of some other power of ours, such as a power to move our body in some specific way.

I conclude by posing, and then beginning to answer, the explanatory question imposed by my account of powers: just *what* kinds of qualities, mental or otherwise, could serve as the truthmakers for true ascriptions of such a power?

John Thorp (Western University): Causality and Explanatory Priority: Could the Mind Sometimes Run the Brain?

Abstract: Often, for sure, the chemistry of the brain seems to drive the state of the mind: take an aspirin, and the resulting blocking of prostaglandin will soften your headache. At other times, though, the relationship between mind and brain chemistry seems to run in the other direction: turn your mind to the anticipation of success, and the flow of dopamine is enhanced; there are even mental tricks (“gamification”) to increase the dopamine flow. We have an instinctive suspicion, however, that these momentary intimations of mind-over-brain will turn out to be illusions. We need to think carefully about this.

The first step is a point of clarification. It isn’t ultimately brain *chemistry* that is in play here; rather it is *neural* activity: the story about the various hormones and enzymes always turns out to be that they are neurotransmitters, or neuro-inhibitors: they facilitate or hinder the transmission of electrical charge between nerve cells. So, at the interface between mind and brain, between personal and subpersonal, the *top* layer of the subpersonal is not chemical but electrical, neurological: it is the occurrence, or not, of action potentials in given neurons. The question is, what is the relation between these electrical states and their concomitant conscious states? Is it a causal relation?

I make two assumptions. The first is that no conscious state ever lacks a neural concomitant: every state of the mind is underwritten by a state of the brain. The second assumption is that conscious states and their concomitant brain states are simultaneous. Perhaps this amounts to a version of the old identity theory; if so it is a minimal, basic, pared-down one, with type-type identity only fine-grained enough to ground the science of neuropsychology, as rough as that is.

Since a mind state and its concomitant brain state are simultaneous, neither is the cause of the other, in any ordinary sense of “cause”. But something analogous is possible. I call it “explanatory priority”. I develop this notion using an analogy that is remote from matters of mind and brain.

Consider a child’s toy, a friction-engine car. (I suppose these are rarities nowadays, with all toys being battery-powered!) You hold the car and run it rapidly forward on the floor a few times—vroom! vroom! vroom!—; then let it go; under its own steam it will travel to the other side of the room. It has wheels and axles, and these are connected, inside the car, to a mechanism of gears and cogs, and ultimately to a flywheel. As you initially hold the car and run it against the floor a few times, you are building up the speed of the flywheel. When you let the car go, the momentum of the flywheel keeps the car travelling. If we think about the motion of the car, there seem to be two possible descriptions of it. One is “the car travels”. The other description is “the flywheels and cogs turn in such-and-such a way”. These two descriptions of the process are concomitant. One cannot hold without the other. We might call them the external description and the internal description.

Since these are descriptions of one and the same event or process, we cannot say that the one is the cause of the other. And yet there is an *explanatory* asymmetry between them. Moreover, the asymmetry changes direction under different conditions. When the car is being pushed by hand, the cogs turn *because* the car travels; when it is let go, the car travels *because* the cogs turn. The relationship between the two descriptions of the process, is explanatory; it is not causal but—might we say?—*be-causal*. Sometimes the external description has explanatory priority over the internal one, and sometimes it is the other way around.

My paper explores this model and extends it to thinking about consciousness and the brain. It supposes that—whatever else may be needed for an adequate account of free will—one thing that is needed is that (*pace* Libet) the mind should sometimes run the brain. And it asks, in the light of this *be-causal* model, whether that might sometimes be possible. Indeterminism plays into the answer in a quite surprising way.

Caroline Touborg (Lund University): The Causal Role of Beliefs about Freedom

Abstract: When we deliberate, we see ourselves as choosing freely within a range of options. Does this way of seeing ourselves make sense on the assumption that determinism is true? We can understand this question in two ways. First, we may take it as a question about whether this way of seeing ourselves is *consistent* with determinism. It seems clear that the answer to this question is ‘yes’: seeing ourselves as choosing freely between a range of options simply consists in having certain beliefs etc., and there is no reason to think that determinism rules out having those beliefs. Second, however, we may take the question to be about whether this way of seeing ourselves *makes sense* or can be *justified* on the assumption of determinism. This second question is more difficult. I will argue that it does make sense to take up this perspective, (even) on the assumption of determinism.

The key, I think, is the idea that (under normal circumstances) our actions are, in part, *caused* precisely by our beliefs – and, in particular, by our beliefs about the range of options we are free to choose between. Thus, an agent who believes she can choose freely between the options in one range of options will act differently from an otherwise similar agent who believes that she can choose freely between the options in a different range of options, or who believes that she cannot choose freely at all. We can now compare these otherwise similar agents in terms of how well they manage to achieve what they care about.

Under normal circumstances (and all else being equal), I suggest that agents do better when they have a particular set of beliefs about which range of options they are free to choose within: an agent does better when an option A is included in her range iff it is the case that, if she were to decide to carry out this option, and make an effort to do so, she would succeed in carrying out this option, or at least have a significant chance of success. We may say that a range of options is correctly calibrated when it includes just these options.

My proposal is that seeing oneself as choosing freely within a certain range of options makes sense and can be justified, also on the assumption of determinism, just when the range of options is correctly calibrated: in this case, the agent is *practically justified* in adopting the belief that she is free to choose within this range of options, since this is what works best in terms of achieving what she cares about, under normal circumstances (and all else being equal).

Furthermore, I suggest that the meaning of saying that an agent is free to choose within a certain range of options is exhausted by the above: the claim that ‘an agent is free to choose within a certain range of options’ is true just in case this range of options is correctly calibrated. Thus, the practical justification given above is not undermined by other considerations, such as the argument that if the laws are deterministic, the agent *really* is not free to choose between any options at all.

Louis Vervoort (School of Advanced Studies, University of Tyumen): Free Will, Causation and Bell’s Theorem

Abstract: In this talk I discuss how causation, free will and determinism are construed in the only chapter of physics that explicitly deals with *all* these concepts, namely Bell’s theorem. I propose an account of these concepts compatible with the physics results available, and compare it to some of the most relevant metaphysical theories of causation, determinism, and free will.

Whether the world is ultimately deterministic or indeterministic is one of philosophy’s favorite questions, asked already in antiquity. The atomists Democritus and Leucippus were determinists, while Aristotle was arguably one of the first indeterminists, believing in irreducible chance. The hypothesis, worldview or principle of (physical or nomological) determinism has been given different definitions, for instance as stating that the laws of nature and the initial conditions of the universe necessitate a unique, fixed evolution of all its systems; or that all (physical) events are ultimately determined by causes from which they follow with necessity. The opposing thesis, indeterminism (or probabilism), assumes that at bottom physical phenomena are irreducibly probabilistic. From a scientific point of view the strongest arguments for indeterminism stem, arguably, from the Copenhagen interpretation of

quantum mechanics, and from the standard interpretation of Bell's theorem and a few related theorems (Wuethrich 2011; Vervoort 2013, 2019). These are standardly seen as offering strong support for the fact that quantum probabilities are irreducible in general, meaning that they cannot be understood as emerging from a deeper-lying deterministic level, in other words, that they cannot be explained by hidden causes. Especially Bell's seminal theoretical work (Bell 1964) has given rise to an impressive body of articles reporting ever more sophisticated experiments, systematically concluding that "determinism is now definitely ruled out" or something in this vein. Notwithstanding a relative dominance of the indeterministic position, especially in the quantum philosophy and quantum physics communities, a respectable part of thinkers seem not overly impressed by the orthodox rationale. Typically, they invoke philosophical arguments – for instance: is it really possible that a quantum event, say an electron acquiring a spin = +1 (and not -1), is based on nothing, on no reason, on no cause? To many, absolute randomness at the deepest level of reality remains unlikely; many others, of course, hail it as the ultimate safeguard of the consistency of physics and of such appreciable features of human existence as free will. But recent research, investigating notably the theorem of Bell, has come to the conclusion that the debate determinism versus indeterminism is undecided (Wuethrich 2011; Vervoort 2013, 2019).

Here, I will present an account of physical causation that can be extracted almost immediately from the professional literature on Bell's theorem, and show that it comes very close to accounts of causation that have been studied by various philosophers, including Schlick, Suppes, Hausman and Woodward, and Hitchcock. This account also allows us to construe a precise theory of determinism, and compare that to popular accounts of determinism in the philosophy of science (e.g. Earman 1986). This has value in itself, since in philosophy of science there is an ongoing debate whether determinism is the same as 'causalism'. Next, I will spell out in a non-technical but yet precise way how Bell's theorem *presupposes the existence of free will*. Indeed, it is a remarkable and often overlooked fact that the main physics-based argument for indeterminism, Bell's theorem, hinges on the assumption that experimenters, in general agents, possess free will. Thus it appears that one of the most hotly debated topics in science, the determinism versus indeterminism debate, is solidly intertwined with the metaphysics of free will. Finally, I will discuss which theories of free will might be compatible with the theory of causation proposed.

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Valentin Widmann (University of Innsbruck): Why Agent Causality is Needed for Libertarian Free Will

Abstract: In the recent action-theoretic debate there has been a remarkable resurgence of teleological explanations of actions. This is due the compelling explanatory difficulties classical causalist explanations of actions – the standard-theory of action since Davidson (1963) – are faced with in explaining what *acting* resp. human agency means.

Exponents of both camps agree that reasons play a pivotal role for understanding human agency. Equally do both parties agree that reasons are rationalizing our behavior in the sense that they make our actions plausible and comprehensible. There is also common consensus that explanations generally refer to relations between propositional contents whereas causation focuses on the relations between spatio-temporal events. However there is widespread disagreement when it comes to the question whether reasons possess a distinctive causal role in terms of a relatum of causal relations. Causalists hold that that the *primary reason* for an action is identically equal to the cause of the action. The causalists'

program thus resembles a naturalistic approach to human agency whereas, on the other hand, authors like Horn (2010), Löhner (2010), Schueler (2003), Wilson (1989), and Sehon (1997) hold that action-explanations exhibit a irreducibly teleological structure.

The causal theory of action is perfectly suitable for taking into account the propositional content of reasons in an appropriate manner. Furthermore it seems well-suited for anchoring human actions as natural phenomena in the physical world. On the other hand the endeavor of identifying reasons and causes founders on the fact that the particular relata of the rationalizing relationship and the causal relationship do not coincide. This is simply because reasons and causes tend to *explain* different things. Moreover there is a legit suspicion that causal theory of action is ill-suited for describing the aspect of execution of an action by the agent.

Georg H. von Wright (1971) put it straight: What is explained [through the causal theory of action] is *why parts of his body move*, under the causal influence of stimulations of his nervous system, and not *why he moves parts of his body*.^[1]

In the recent action-theoretic as well as causal-theoretic debate *Dispositional Realism* is getting more and more popular. Exponents of dispositional realism (such as Brian Ellis, Stephen Mumford, Erasmus Mayr, Michael Esfeld) hold that causation is not about the relationship of spatio-temporal events. Causation rather appears in the manifestation of causal powers and abilities. Abilities are dispositional properties, which are part of the ontological structure of nature. However, there are keen discussions about whether causal powers should be attributed to human persons as well as living organisms in general and even to anorganic natural objects.

In this paper it will (1) be argued that only a synthesis of teleological explanations of action and theories, which assume irreducible causal powers and abilities, is able to account for the essence of actions as well as the significant role of the agent in a proper way. Furthermore it will (2) be argued that only the notion of agent causation can guarantee a robust conception of libertarian free will. For that purpose it will be hold that the causal momentum of the agent *must be* due to his irreducible causal abilities, which are *exclusively* under the agent's control. Pointing this out helps to distinguish my approach from approaches, which base the actualization of causal abilities on *further datable factors* (Mayr:2011) in order to avoid the pertinent *datability* objection. This move results in the undesirable consequence that the crucial momentum of initiating a causal chain is losing grip.

In addition it will (3) be pointed out that the datability objection only emerges if the paradigm of event-ontology is presupposed and imposed on the person's ontology. Thereby it will be shown that the objection of datability is a variant form of the famous *Randomness Objection*, which is directed against the *indeterministic event-causal* notion of libertarian free will and does therefore not concern the idea of agent causation. Yet it might turn out that the objection of datability hits particularly those libertarians, who want to stick to the paradigm of event causation by force and who originally brought it into play against the exponents of agent causation (Keil:2013).

Finally it is (4) dealt with the very common objection that agent causation is a *mysterious* kind of causation *sui generis*. This argument will be neutralised by pointing out that our experience of causation is based on our everyday practice and begins with the quotidian intervention in the course of the world through human agents. Furthermore it will be argued that the assumption of agent causation does not necessarily conflict with the physical law of conservation and is therefore perfectly consistent with the scientific world view.

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