

# Indeterministic Agency in a Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics

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## I Freedom and neo-Humeanism

Neo-Humean metaphysics:

- causal facts and the laws of nature are *reducible* to facts concerning the global spatiotemporal arrangement of fundamental natural, non-dispositional properties. Laws are the best system of generalizations over such natural facts, where bestness is determined by the optimal balance of simplicity and 'strength' (explanatory power). Causation is a kind of counterfactual dependency.
- Intentional human agency is CF dependence of behavior on beliefs, desires, or intentions.

I assume: metaphysical freedom & moral responsibility are incompatible with causal determinism.

Problem for neo-Humean account of free agency: by taking the fact of A's being a cause of B to be a reducible, massively *extrinsic* relation—grounded in what occurs elsewhere and elsewhere—we empty the fundamental idea that A “produces” or “brings about” B of any clear content. Since agency is a causal notion, the implausibility carries over: on a neo-Humean analysis, my beliefs and desires here and now do not in any ordinary sense *bring about* my present action.

## II A Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics & Event-Causal Libertarianism

Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics: natural properties are irreducible causal powers of their bearers.

Causation is the exercise of a causal power.

Q: How to understand *indeterministic* causation within the neo-Aristotelian metaphysics?

- (1) as *causation of probability*: Causes do not cause the undetermined *outcome* of an indeterministic process, but instead cause the outcome's objective chance of occurring. [Here rejected.]
- (2) as *probability of causation*: Causes produce event outcomes though they need not have done so: they are *propensities* towards a plurality of possible effects. Every indeterministic event is produced, though none is necessitated.

Event-causal libertarianism:

When an agent freely acts, her web of motivational states is disposed towards two or more choices, to varying degrees. Whichever choice is made, it will have been caused by some relevant motivation of the agent. The exercise of agent-control consists in the causal efficacy of one's motivations.

Problem: while agents, on this account, do not have any *less* control over what they do than agents in a corresponding deterministic scenario, they also do not have *more*. Indeterminism in the causal link between motivations and choice opens up a plurality of alternatives, but the *agent* does not *settle* which of the options is taken in a sense robust enough for her to be morally responsible.

## III The Standard Agent-Causal Alternative

Agent causalism: freedom requires an enhanced *kind* of control from the causal efficacy of internal motivational states—ontologically fundamental causation of an action-guiding intention by the agent.

While undetermined agent causings are *unproduced* by other events, they are probabilistically *structured* by myriad factors, especially the agent's own motivational states. As a result, agents have a continuously evolving, objective propensity to cause intentions to act in ways they take to be suited to their ends. Having motivations is to have a certain kind of causal power: power to alter an agent's active propensities. But it is the agent herself who causes the intention or choice to act.

#### IV A Modified Causal Powers Metaphysics & the Analysis of Freedom

An alternative account of *causation*, on which the causes of *all* events are *substances*:

A substance's having a property is its having a causal power of a specific sort. A substance's causing an effect is its manifesting such a power or its co-manifesting a power with other substances. In indeterministic cases, exercise of more than one power is possible and each is probable to some degree.

Q: What becomes of 'agent causalist' accounts of free action on this general account of causation?

Some claims carry over:

(1) agents are causes of their intentions to act. (2) nothing produces an agent's causing of an intention.

However, also some changes:

(1) Having of reasons are causally *relevant* but are not causes.

(2) ideological simplification: do not need notion of reasons as mere causes of probability, and agent causation is not a fundamentally distinct kind of causation.

What is distinctive about agent causation among other varieties of substance causation on this view is merely that the cause is conscious, intentional, and freely chooses the ends for which it will act.

#### V Revisiting the Alleged Problems of Explanation and Control

*Agent Causation and the Indeterminist's 'Problem of Action Explanation'*

Problem:

Where an event is undetermined, there was some chance that an alternative event might have occurred. So, the cause cannot explain why the actual event obtained *rather than* the possible alternative. Further inferred: the cause cannot, after all, fully explain the actual event itself, since to fully explain why an event occurred is *inter alia* to explain why it occurred rather than any alternative.

Reply:

Not all causal explanations of events must be contrastive ("Why P rather than Q?") or imply the availability of contrastive explanations, for every possible contrast.

In an indeterministic world, contrastive explanation will fail wherever P and Q are mutually exclusive, each had a substantial chance of occurring, and P was not significantly more probable than Q.

But it does not follow that there can be no explanation of P, or that whatever noncontrastive explanation there may be of P will be somehow deficient—of a lesser variety of explanation than contrastive explanation. We explain—fully explain—an indeterministic outcome P by citing and describing the causal factor(s) that brought it about. We can even explain why there can be no true contrastive explanation of the fact that P occurred rather than Q by underscoring the indeterministic nature of the of the propensities at play (both manifested and not).

*Agent Causation and the Indeterminist's 'Problem of Agent Control'*

Problem:

There is *nothing* whatsoever *about* the one agent, right up to the moment of the choice, that makes the difference to what she does. Inferred: seems a 'matter of chance', which is inconsistent with control.

Reply:

Unlike in purely event-causal worlds, the agent, herself, consciously and intentionally brought about the effect in the world she inhabits, as does her counterpart. We needn't advert to something distinctive *about* each of the agents—direct causation, consciously and intentionally exercised, is a sufficiently robust form of control to ground freedom and responsibility.