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Causation and the Grounds of Freedom

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RESUMEN

En este artículo examino críticamente el libro de Sartorio *Causation and free will*. Sartorio ofrece una detallada defensa de una concepción de secuencia real de la libertad, que presta una minuciosa atención a cuestiones de filosofía de la causalidad y su relación con la libertad. Lo que defiende es que, aunque poner el foco en la causalidad es iluminador, el proyecto de Sartorio se enfrenta a serios problemas. Quizás el más preocupante de todos ellos es si la explicación sensible a razones y basada en el agente propuesta por Sartorio es consistente con los casos tipo Frankfurt; es decir, los casos que se proponen como la única razón para defender una concepción de secuencia real de la libertad. Asimismo, sugiero que, dado que habilidades y causalidad están tan íntimamente relacionadas, se desdibuja el debate si se las concibe como rivales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *libertad, causalidad, habilidades*.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I take a critical look at Sartorio's book *Causation and Free Will* (2016). Sartorio offers a rich defence of an actual-sequence view of freedom, which pays close attention to issues in the philosophy of causation and how they relate to freedom. I argue that although this focus on causation is illuminating, Sartorio's project nevertheless runs into some serious difficulties. Perhaps most worrying amongst them is whether the agent-based reason-sensitivity account, offered by Sartorio, is consistent with Frankfurt-style cases – the very cases which are provided as the sole reason to endorse an actual-sequence view of freedom. I suggest that given that powers and causation are so intimately bound together, the debate is skewed somewhat by thinking of these as rivals.

KEYWORDS: *Freedom, Causation, Abilities*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sartorio's book, *Causation and Free Will* (2016), has a bold and elegant ambition: that of showing that the grounds of freedom rest entirely

in the actual causal history of the action. At its core, lies a defence of this supervenience claim:

(S) An agent's freedom with respect to X supervenes on those elements of the sequence issuing in X that ground the agent's freedom [p. 29].

where this supervenience claim is understood as a proxy for the more difficult to analyse relation of grounding.

Sartorio's dismissal of a freedom that requires that we have options to act and refrain from acting is brief. Drawing on Frankfurt's seminal paper (1969), she argues that (S) is motivated by our reaction to Frankfurt-style cases (FSCs): namely, the thought that Frank is free to kill Furt, despite the inactive presence of the neuroscientist's device ensuring that Frank had no option but to kill Furt. At this point, many philosophers will be getting off the boat, but, given Sartorio's aims, it seems justifiable to side-line this issue to make headway on the best formulation of source compatibilism. Moreover, Sartorio's focus on capturing the intuitive appeal of FSCs, which is taken to be the claim that '(ACS) all that matters to the freedom of an act is how the agent came to perform that act, or the actual history of that act' [p. 18], is impressive. By using tools and philosophical claims from the philosophy of causation, she crafts an original position which promises to improve upon other major source compatibilist positions.

Sartorio's book is rich with ideas and argument and so a short discussion piece such as this will fail to offer a comprehensive coverage of the issues. Instead, I shall focus on three areas which I think illustrate that the project, as developed by Sartorio, runs into some difficulties.

II: THE FRAMEWORK OF THE DEBATE

In chapter one, Sartorio provides the framework for the debate by offering a characterisation of the views she aims to defend and deny. Sartorio proposes to defend this thesis:

The Actual-sequences Answer [ASA]: When agents are free, their freedom is grounded only in facts pertaining to the actual processes or sequences of events issuing in their behaviour [p. 9].

ASA is contrasted with the alternative-possibilities answer, a thesis which Sartorio wishes to reject,

The alternatives-possibilities answer [AP]: When agents are free, their freedom is grounded, at least partly, in the fact that they are able to do otherwise [p. 9].

Sartorio presents ASA and AP as two opposing views, arguing that,

Alternative-possibilities views assign a central role to certain kinds of facts that are not typically thought to pertain to actual sequences. In contrast, actual-sequence views assign no such role to facts of that kind; according to the actual-sequence views, facts pertaining to actual sequences do all the work grounding freedom [p. 11].

Proponents of AP, however, have reason to dispute this characterisation. Abilities to do otherwise are commonly thought of as grounded, in large part, in the intrinsic properties of agents plus facts about their circumstances.¹ So, there seems no reason to claim that special significance is given to facts that aren't typically thought to pertain to the actual sequences. Although the truth conditions of ability claims standardly appeal to possible worlds, that doesn't mean that these claims aren't made true by facts about the causal history of the action including, most importantly, the agent themselves. What abilities the agent has, understood as local properties of the agent, are precisely what AP views are interested in.

To illustrate, imagine that John saw a child drowning but made no attempt to rescue her. Whether or not he has the ability to do otherwise depends largely on his intrinsic properties: does he have the physical constitution such that he can swim in waters such as these? Does his mental life display any debilitating phobia of water, children, etc. which might rob him of the ability to decide to jump in? Granted, then, the reasonable assumption that the abilities of agents are largely grounded in an agent's intrinsic constitution, changes to the actual sequence will typically occur when those abilities alter.² So facts about agent's abilities will be highly relevant to the constitution of actual sequences.

Why does this matter? Sartorio claims that '(N) The freedom of agents is not grounded in anything other than actual sequences' [p. 18] suffices to mark the contrast between ASA and AP, but this contrast is insufficient. On ASA, no less than AP, appeal will be made to the laws of nature which are arguably not intrinsic to the actual sequences. And until

we have a firm grasp of what constitutes these actual sequences — what circumstances surrounding the agent can legitimately be included for instance (see footnote 2) — it will be unclear whether or not this marks a significant divide. By arguing that facts concerning what someone can and cannot do are grounded in the actual causal history of the action, (N) can be maintained by AP.

This lack of a clear contrast has two ramifications. First, Sartorio claims that ASA, (N) and related (S), are motivated primarily by FSCs. But if, as I have suggested, an AP can accommodate (N) and (S), then that should not be thought of as the lesson of FSCs. This is not the obvious conclusion to draw, rather it is the much simpler one that abilities to do otherwise are not necessary for moral responsibility. This conclusion, not its failure to capture (N), is why FSCs cause so much trouble for AP. Second, (N), I submit, sounds rather plausible. It seems odd to think that what is going on in alternative possible worlds plays a key role in grounding facts about our freedom. But this interpretation of AP is uncharitable. If we see the abilities of agents as grounded in facts on the ground, so to speak, then they will affect the actual sequences of our actions. So (N) could be claimed by both Sartorio and her opponents.

III. THE DIFFERENCE-MAKING PRINCIPLE

In chapter two, Sartorio discusses a number of apparent counterexamples to the core supervenience thesis (S). Consider, for instance, this pair of cases [pp. 56-7]:

Not All Roads Lead to Rome (NARR): Ryder is riding a runaway horse. He can't get the horse to stop, but he can steer him in different directions. When Ryder approaches a cross-road he realises that only one road leads to Rome. He steers his horse in this direction because he hates Romans and wants them to be hurt by his runaway horse. Sure enough, Romans are hurt.

All Roads Lead to Rome (ARR): Everything is the same as it is in NARR except for, unbeknownst to Ryder, he is wrong, all roads lead to Rome.³

This pair of cases poses a threat to (S), since it seems that the causal history of Ryder's action in the two cases is identical. In each case, he de-

cides to steer his horse in a particular direction for, what we can assume are, identical reasons. But in ARR, intuitively, he doesn't freely hurt the Romans in his path, whereas in NARR he does. So, Ryder's freedom is not just grounded in facts about the causal history of the act. Something extrinsic to that causal history, namely the fact that not/all roads lead to Rome, is grounding Ryder's freedom in this case.

An AP proponent might be tempted to say that the difference concerns Ryder's abilities: in NARR, unlike ARR, Ryder was able to avoid hurting the Romans and this grounds the difference in freedom. An ASA proponent is precluded from saying this, but Sartorio provides an ingenious solution. By appealing to the extrinsicness of causation, she argues that there is a difference in causal histories here:

Extrinsicness: A causal relation between C and E may obtain, in part, owing to factors that are extrinsic to the causal process linking C and E [p. 71].

In ARR, there is no causal relation between Ryder's steering the horse in a particular direction and his hurting Romans. Why? Well if he had tried to steer the horse away from the Romans, then he still would have hurt Romans. So, his hurting Romans is not counterfactually dependent upon his steering the horse in any particular direction. The same is not true in the case of NARR. Here, if he had steered the horse in a particular direction, then Romans wouldn't have been hurt. There is the right relation of counterfactual dependence between the two events and so, plausibly, there is a relation of causation between them.

I am tempted by Sartorio's analysis of this case and think it is helpful to liken it to switching cases in causation. In other work [Whittle, (forthcoming)] I argue for the similar claim that if A is morally responsible for e then e is either an act or omission of A's or is a causal consequence of an act or omission for which A is morally responsible. So, in ARR, Ryder is not morally responsible for hurting Romans, only for failing to try to not hurt Romans. However, again, I don't think there need be a significant divide here between AP and ASA. The former can argue that because Ryder lacked the ability to keep Romans safe from harm, his steering his horse in a particular direction was not a manifestation of any ability he had to keep Romans safe. So, he could not be the cause. Whereas in NARR, Ryder failed to manifest an ability that he had to protect the Romans, and this is precisely why we think that Ryder is morally responsible for this consequence.

We can give this suggestion a little more flesh by linking it to the

causal modelling framework in the philosophy of causation. On this view, causes are relativized to causal models, where these causal models display our conceptualization of the particular situation in which the causal claim is made.⁴ What variables are taken to be part of that model largely depend upon what possibilities are taken ‘seriously’. So, to borrow an example of McDermott (1995), p. 525, suppose we have a fielder catching a cricket ball. Between the fielder and the window stands a high wall. Does the fielder prevent the ball from hitting the window? Intuitively not, as the wall has the capacity to stop the window from being hit by any ball in all (normal) circumstances, so the fielder action’s makes no difference. Consequently, the fact that there is no serious possibility of the fielder’s ball hitting the window, and so no causal relation between the two, is largely grounded in facts about the wall’s capacities. Similarly, I would suggest, that the agent has the abilities she does grounds facts about what causal relations she stands in to events in the world.

Let’s turn now, however, to a rather glaring problem clearly articulated by Sartorio. If we allow that facts extrinsic to the causal relation can effect whether or not something is a cause, why shouldn’t we apply the same reasoning to a FSC? In the case of switching offered, ARR, Sartorio argues that Ryder is not a cause because of some factor extrinsic to the causal history – namely that all roads lead to Rome. So, switching direction makes no difference to the effect. Similarly, in our FSC, we might argue, Frank’s not deciding to kill Furt just switches the route via which Furt is killed – from one which doesn’t involve the triggering of the device to one that does. Either way, it makes no difference to the eventual outcome.

At this juncture, Sartorio’s Difference-Making principle, presented as a necessary condition of causation, plays a crucial role:

Difference-Making (Causes) [CDM]: Causes make a difference to their effects in that the effects wouldn’t have been caused by the absence of their causes [p. 94].

But at first glance at least, it is unclear how CDM helps, since well-known pre-emption cases, of which FSCs are an instance, seem to pose obvious counterexamples. Take, for instance, this variation of the Frank FSC:

Similar Process FSC: Frank is deliberating whether or not to kill Furt. Unbeknownst to him, there is an internal device situated in

his brain. If Frank decides not to kill Furt at t (or if he just hasn't made up his mind yet by t), then the device will be triggered. Once triggered, the device would recreate the very sequence that would have occurred in Frank had he made the decision to kill Furt. In light of this decision (however caused), Frank kills Furt.

The problem here is clear: it seems that the effect, the death of Furt, will occur in the same way (excepting the trigger) given the cause and the absence of the cause, since the absence of the cause will trigger the device, which will recreate the same causal process that would have been triggered by Frank's deciding to kill Furt. So, in this case, it seems that the effect would have been caused by the absence of its cause, contrary to CDM. We can back up this claim by arguing that there is a relation of counterfactual dependence between Frank's not deciding to kill Furt and the device's causing Frank to kill Furt, since this is precisely what triggers the device.

One reply offered by Sartorio is to say that there is still *some* difference in the way that the cause comes about, given the absence, versus the presence, of the decision [pp.98-9]. And so, there is a difference in causal relations here. This is enough to ensure that CDM is satisfied, according to Sartorio, since the principle only asserts that,

a cause makes a difference by determining not the events that occur in the actual and counterfactual scenarios, but the causal relations that obtain in the actual and counterfactual scenarios: whether a cause occurs makes a difference to whether there is a causal relation linking an event or its absence (according as the event is present or absent) to the effect [p. 76].

So explicated, however, CDM risks looking trivial. Nothing interesting is being said about difference-making if we just claim that when C causes E , we have a cause C which we wouldn't have had without C causing E . If C causes E , then just in virtue of C 's being a cause, it will obviously make a difference to the causal relations that obtain, since now we have a causal relation which we wouldn't have had. Not just any difference in causal relations seems to be enough then. To be interesting, CDM must say more, something like: once the purported cause has occurred, then in virtue of its occurring, there must be some difference in the causal relations that obtain. But this is precisely what is in question in Similar Process FSC.

A better option, which Sartorio appeals to later [p. 104], is to utilise another of her commitments – the intransitivity of causation. Because, according to Sartorio, causation is not a transitive relation, we can say that the triggering event is caused by Frank’s failure to make that decision at t , which causes the killing of Furt, but Frank’s failure to make that decision at t is not a cause of Furt’s death. So, the absence of that act has different causes from its presence. Now, however, we are left wondering why this should be a case where transitivity fails? Appealing to CDM is of no use to Sartorio here, because CDM can only be preserved by denying transitivity and we have no independent reason, i.e. apart from that given by CDM, that we can appeal to.

Sartorio might reply at this point by arguing that it’s just intuitive to say that Frank’s failure to decide at t is not a cause of Furt’s death. So, we have reason to deny transitivity. This intuition can be backed up further by the thought that by failing to decide to kill Furt at t , Frank creates a threat to the occurrence of the effect. In Yablo’s terminology [Yablo (2002)], this failure creates a need which is only fulfilled by the actions of the device. So, because we have a threat-cancellation scenario here, it is right to think that the absence of the decision is not a cause of the effect.

We can vary the case a little, however, to unsettle our intuitions:

Weak-Willed Frank: Frank is terribly weak-willed. If he decides to kill Furt at t , then this will automatically disable the device, but there is still a chance, given his weak-will, that he won’t kill Furt. If he doesn’t decide to kill Furt at t , then the device will automatically kick in and will ensure that he will kill Furt. Frank decides to kill Furt at t and carries out his plan.

In this case, Frank’s deciding to kill Furt at t is arguably a cause (since we have the right kind of process and a step-wise counterfactual dependence). But his failing to decide to kill Furt at t is also arguably a cause because then the device, which will guarantee the effect, will kick in. So, by not deciding, Frank thereby raises the probability of the effect, switching the route to a much steadier one and thereby ensuring Furt’s death. Arguably, then, CDM is false and the relation is transitive because Frank’s not deciding makes the result more likely.

There are, then, grounds for thinking that CDM is not a necessary condition of causation. Perhaps we shouldn’t take these intuitions seriously, but in the absence of a more comprehensive analysis of causation

which justifies setting these intuitions aside, there seems no obvious reason to do so. Sartorio, however, does have one more card up her sleeve. Drawing upon earlier work (2013), she argues that CDM is central to moral responsibility. She writes,

it seems clear that, if a fact makes the agent deserve the expression of a certain reactive attitude, say, blame, the absence of that fact couldn't also make the agent deserve the expression of the same attitude...it couldn't be the case that a fact and its very absence would make the agent equally deserving of blame [Sartorio (2013), p. 206-7].

Consequently, Sartorio (2016) argues, 'if the relevant concept of cause is one that bears the right kinds of connections to moral responsibility, it must be one that satisfies Difference-Making (Causes)' [p.96]. So, we might argue that because CDM is required for moral responsibility, we are wedded to an analysis of causation that respects it, and so we must find some way of dealing with contrary intuitions.

It is not clear, however, that this is true. Take another, slight variation of the FSC case:

Wiley Frank: Franks want to kill Furt but doesn't want to be blamed for it. He finds out about the neuroscientist's plan and decides to use it to his advantage. So, he ensures that he doesn't decide to kill Furt at *t* (e.g. he puts on a gripping film to distract himself from such deliberations at the relevant time) and thereby just waits for the device to kick in. Then, if he is caught, he has the perfect excuse to get him off the hook.

Here it seems that Frank is intending to cause Furt's death in a deviant way – that the device kicks in and forces him to kill Furt is all part of his master plan. In this case, I think it is plausible to say that Frank is morally responsible for the death. Since Frank does seem morally responsible for the death if he decides or doesn't decide (given these special circumstances), it's not evident that CDM is the principle that bears the right connections to moral responsibility.

But what of the intuitive thought that 'it couldn't be the case that a fact and its very absence would make the agent equally deserving of blame' [Sartorio (2013), p.27]? We can reply that Frank is deserving of blame because of his underlying, murderous intent and it's right to say that he wouldn't have been equally deserving of blame in the absence of

this murderous intent. But, given the unusual set-up, Frank can choose to implement his murderous intent by deciding to kill or not deciding to kill and he decides, in this case, to do it in the latter way. Blameworthiness for the original murderous intent is thus transmitted to failing to make that decision, as this is the means by which he has decided to carry out Furt's death.

CDM, then, is problematic. Contrary intuitions give us reason to doubt both that it is necessary for causation and that it is required for moral responsibility. This matters to Sartorio's wider argument since she uses CDM to justify the claim that there is no causation in ARR, because of the extrinsic factor of all roads leading to Rome, but there is causation in FSCs, despite the extrinsic presence of the device. But if CDM is not necessary for causation, then ARR and FSCs are put on an equal footing – there is no more reason to think that the causal status of Frank's decision is immune to the presence of the device than there is to think that Ryder's hurting Romans is unaffected by the number of roads that lead to Rome.

The worry, however, goes deeper than this. For even if I am wrong and CDM is a necessary condition of causation, it is still not clear that it serves to distinguish between FSCs and cases like ARR. Sartorio argues that it does because, in the case of Frank's decision, we are taking away something which makes an important contribution to the outcome and changes the way the cause comes about. In contrast, in ARR we are just switching the route via which the Romans will be hurt. But the previous discussion gives us grounds for thinking that this doesn't provide a clear, principled distinction between the two cases. First, in FSCs, no less than in ARR, we can assume that the device's kicking in renders it inevitable that Furt will die. Moreover, if we switch the case to Weak-Willed Frank, it seems we are not taking any important contribution away from the effect, indeed, Frank is rendering it less likely by deciding to shoot Furt. Second, as in Similar Process FSC, we can stipulate it so that everything about the causal process is identical apart from the initial trigger. So, it's highly questionable whether the difference the actual cause makes need be significantly greater in an FSC than in a case of switching. After all, in ARR there is still *some* difference made to the causal process initiated by Ryder's steering his horse down one road rather than another, since the horse travels down a numerically different path to cause its eventual harm.

In short, it is still unclear, given the justifications offered, why FSCs should be immune from extrinsic factors whilst NARR/ARR are not. Why does this matter? Because it means that Sartorio's defence of (S) – the su-

pervenience thesis – undermines her case for FSCs – which is offered as the sole motivation for (S). So, this is a significant issue for Sartorio.

IV. SARTORIO'S POSITIVE PROPOSAL

In chapter four Sartorio offers her positive proposal – an actual sequence view of basic freedom. Sartorio takes reason-sensitivity to be the crucial necessary condition of freedom, the basic idea being that a free agent is one that can respond in the appropriate way to a wide range of reasons. In Part One of chapter 4, she is thus keen to show why her predecessors don't get it quite right — in particular McKenna (2013) and Fischer and Ravizza (1998) — thereby motivating her new and improved account in Part Two.

Sartorio's reason-sensitivity analysis is unique in employing not only reasons, but also the absences of reasons. The key idea is that when we are acting freely, and responding appropriately to reasons, we are not only responding to reasons but also to their absence. So, for instance, it might have been the case that had Frank known that Furt had five children, this would have prevented him from shooting Furt. So, the absence of this reason – not knowing that Furt had children or knowing that he had some number less than five – is a cause of his action. Sartorio thus offers a new necessary condition of reason-sensitivity, incorporating the role of absences,

CRS (causal reasons-sensitivity): An 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 [p. 132].

Three key benefits are claimed for CRS: first, 'it avoids counterfactuals altogether' [p. 134]. Second, because 'CRS focuses on actual causes' [ibid.], the analysis is robust enough to ground freedom. Finally, unlike Fischer and Ravizza's account, it is a purely agent based account and has no need for mechanisms. It thus avoids the tricky issue of mechanism individuation which plagues Fischer and Ravizza's analysis. In what follows, I shall raise a concern for each of these proposed advantages of CRS.

The first advantage is critical to Sartorio, since she writes that her aim is to offer a radically different account of reason sensitivity, 'one that doesn't understand reason-sensitivity in counterfactual or modal terms,

but exclusively in terms of actual causal histories' [p. 122]. However, at least as conceived by Sartorio, there is no sharp distinction between causal histories and counterfactual considerations — causal histories have counterfactual and modal facts at their heart. This is evident from the example she offers: why should we say that the absence of reason R (Furt's having five children) is a cause of Frank's action? There need be, recall, no property of Frank which corresponds to the absence of R, as Sartorio is clear that the absence of R need not enter into Frank's consciousness at all. So, we can assume that there is no mental state of awareness of the absence of R that enters into Biff or Oomphy relations in a causal chain, typical of what is sometimes known as productive causation.⁵ The only reason cited for thinking of it as a cause is a counterfactual one: if he had thought of R, then he wouldn't have killed Furt. Notice how similar this is to Fischer and Ravizza's proposal:

there is some possible scenario (or possible world) – with the same laws as the actual world – in which there is a sufficient reason to do otherwise, the agent recognizes that reason, and the agent does otherwise [Fischer and Ravizza (1998), p.63].

Using Sartorio's example, this could be glossed as: there is some possible world where Frank recognizes that Furt has 5 children, he recognizes that this is a sufficient reason not to kill Furt, and so he does not kill Furt. Either way, counterfactual or modal facts about what the agent would do in different circumstances seem at the heart of both analyses.

This is relevant to Sartorio's second proposed advantage of CRS. It is not clear that absences of reasons 'avoids the problem of robustness' [p. 134], because in the absence of an account of absences, it is not clear what they are. One well worked out view of omissions is that omissions just are possibilities [see Bernstein (2014)]. So, by talking about the absences of reasons, we are just talking about possible reasons we might have had. In this context, this view seems preferable to one that treats absences as nothing at all [Clarke (2014)], or as some positive event described in a negative way (especially given there need be no consciousness of the absence of a reason – so no conscious event which could be under a negative description). What seems crucial in this case is that, given the actual psychological state of Frank, in a not too distant possible world, it is possible that the thought of R occur to Frank, and this would have then caused him not to kill Furt. This counterfactual explanation of what is

going on seems more basic than one that appeals to the absences of reasons, since we explain the absence of reasons in terms of it.

In light of this, one might reasonably think that the counterfactual facts are better placed to account for facts about our freedom than those concerning absences of reasons, since the counterfactual facts make true or ground the facts about absences of reasons. Both, I would suggest however, should only be viewed as important to reasons-sensitive accounts insofar as they help illuminate the key abilities an agent is required to have on this view. Sartorio criticises McKenna for tying a reasons-sensitivity account to an analysis of dispositions, arguing that it would be safer to find some alternative [p. 118]. But since reasons-sensitivity accounts are in the business of explaining how it is that we are *able* to respond to reasons differently, it seems that we should be trying to work out what the right analysis of these abilities are.

Finally, what of the claim that CRS avoids the tricky issue of mechanism individuation, since it is a purely agent-based account? At this point, the argument is unclear. Any standard FSC creates a problem for CRS, as Sartorio discusses, since given the presence of the device, we do not have any relation of counterfactual dependence to justify the claim that the absence of R really was a cause. If we add the presence of the device, then Frank would not have responded to R and so it seems that not-R isn't a cause of killing Furt. Consequently, CRS isn't satisfied and so Frank is not free.

Sartorio responds to this problem by utilising the previously discussed Difference-Making principle (III). The idea is that in an FSC, the absence of R is still a cause since, 'intuitively, the absence of R does not make a contribution to Frank's choice that R itself would not have made if R had obtained.' [p. 131]. But now assume that in this FSC, the device is internally lodged in Frank, in one sense part of him, something akin to a blockage like a tumour [see Pereboom (2001), pp. 27-8]. Leaving aside aforementioned problems, CDM requires us to consider what different contribution the absence of R would have played in the act's causal history. And here is the natural reply one might give: consider Frank's deliberation process at *t*, if R had been present, then Frank would not have decided to kill Furt via that deliberation process (the device would have to have kicked in instead, or the deliberation process would have been blocked by the tumour, etc.) and so not-R makes a difference to the causal history. But note this explanation appeals to a mechanism – Frank's deliberation process – linking Frank to his action. If we remove this, and just appeal to the agent as a whole, this explanation of the difference in the contribution of

not-R versus R does not seem to work. So now we have: consider Frank and his reasons, including not-R, at t. If R had been present, then Frank would still have decided to kill Furt and so not-R doesn't make a difference to the causal history.

The point here is that it is not clear how we get a difference in the causal history of the contributions of R and not-R, unless we home in on something more fine-grained than the agent himself – something like a process that leads up to the decision. For only then can we duplicate that mechanism and consider whether, given different reasons (i.e. R instead of not-R) he would have responded differently. Once the device/tumour has been embedded within the agent, the agent considered as a whole seems entirely unresponsive to reasons – absences and all. We need to do some fancy footwork to avoid this conclusion, and talk of R and not-R making different contributions to Frank's decision just seems to be a way of inadvertently slipping mechanisms or processes back into a theory of freedom.

V. CONCLUSION

Sartorio's book offers a rich and detailed defence of an actual-sequence view of freedom. In doing so, she attempts to provide the basis of a compatibilist analysis of freedom and moral responsibility. Since only a necessary condition is offered, Sartorio's analysis doesn't exclude the possibility that necessary and sufficient conditions of freedom will have to add indeterminism into the mix. But her discussion of incompatibilist source arguments (chapter 5) provides some reason to hope that it won't.

Sartorio's focus on causation and how it relates to freedom is illuminating and clearly worth pursuing. I am sceptical, however, that there is a clear divide between issues surrounding causation and those of powers/abilities, and so I think the debate is skewed somewhat by thinking of these as rivals. Given that powers and causation are so intimately bound together, a strategy which views all three in tandem – powers/abilities, causation and freedom – may yet prove even more fruitful.⁶

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NOTES

¹ See, for example Vihvelin's view [Vihvelin (2013), p. 187], where the abilities which are relevant to freedom are largely grounded in the intrinsic properties of agents. Other dispositional compatibilists, such as Fara (2008), also share this view.

² This won't always be the case. There could be some change to the agent's abilities without a change to their intrinsic properties, so the relation is not one of supervenience. For instance, an agent may go from being not vulnerable to vulnerable because of some extrinsic threat. But even in such cases, we can still see the agent's vulnerability as a local property of the actual sequence, so Sartorio's claim that the AP 'assigns a central role to certain kinds of facts that are not typically thought to pertain to actual sequences' is unjustified. In this, it is like Sartorio's cause-makers: those extrinsic factors that need to be in place for some event to count as a cause (see III and the examples of ARR and NARR). That these extrinsic cause-makers are required does not, according to Sartorio, undermine (S) or (N), since those causes are still part of the actual causal sequence and we are entitled to include 'the grounds of actual sequences' [p. 18] in our supervenience base. Similarly, then, the agent's vulnerability can be seen as a feature of the actual causal sequence, even if one of its truthmakers is extrinsic to that sequence.

³ In the causation literature, examples such as ARR are often referred to as 'switching cases' [see Sartorio (2016) p. 72]. I shall follow Sartorio in adopting this usage. Key to the structure of these examples is that although the causal route via which the outcome is brought about is altered or switched by some intervention, the effect will occur whichever route is taken.

⁴ See, for instance, Halpern and Pearl (2005).

⁵ See Hall (2002) for an analysis of two concepts of causation – productive and counterfactual. Sartorio makes it clear that she is not interested in a kind of causation which excludes omissions and is intrinsic (see chapter 2 §1), and so she rules out this productive relation.

⁶ Many thanks to Jon Bebb, Helen Beebee, Ángel García Rodríguez, Carolina Sartorio and Joel Smith.

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