

Free Will, Agent Causation, and “Disappearing Agents”

Randolph Clarke

Until quite recently, few philosophers endorsed the view that there is causation by substances that is ontologically fundamental. Moreover, among the few who did advance this claim, most invoked such causation only with respect to purposive agency, or free will, or moral responsibility, accepting that elsewhere all causation is fundamentally causation by events or states.¹ The claimed exception was widely regarded as a prime example of “the obscure and panicky metaphysics of libertarianism” (Strawson 2003: 93).²

The situation has changed significantly in the last couple of decades. A growing number of philosophers now endorse, or at least take seriously, the idea of irreducible, fundamental causation by substances. Some maintain that, fundamentally, *all* causation is substance causation.³ Others advance causal pluralism, on which entities of a variety of different categories—the list includes substances, events, properties, features, aspects, and facts—cause things, and causation by each of these kinds of thing is equally fundamental.⁴ Often one or another of these positions is advanced on grounds that are entirely independent of purposive agency, having to do with the nature of causation and causal powers generally. Fundamental substance causation is held to be ubiquitous, constituting the activity of substances animate and inanimate, macro and micro.⁵ In other cases, it is specifically with respect to agency, or free will, or moral responsibility that such causation is invoked.⁶ Interestingly, the current proponents of fundamental agent causation include compatibilists⁷ as well as incompatibilists.

A comprehensive examination of this trend would be an interesting and worthwhile undertaking. I offer here only a small contribution to such a project. Several authors have argued

that without agent causation, an agent and her agency—or at least agency of some special kind—disappears. I'll examine one of these “disappearing agent” arguments that is concerned specifically with free will.

I'll begin with some remarks on fundamentality as it concerns the ontology of causation and theories of action. I'll then turn to a disappearing agent argument that Derk Pereboom has advanced against event-causal libertarian theories. I'll argue that, as it stands, Pereboom's argument fails, and I'll identify two lines of response that might be followed by a proponent of the argument to remedy its deficiency. I'll examine as well the view, advanced by Pereboom and repeated by others, that his objection raises what is called “the problem of present luck.” As I see it, the latter problem is distinct from the one raised by Pereboom's objection. I'll close with some observations on the prospects for success of a disappearing agent argument concerned not just with free will but with action *tout court*.

1. *Fundamentality*

Solvents dissolve things. Water, for example, dissolves sugar. When some volume of water dissolves some bit of sugar, the water causes the sugar to dissolve. Similarly, wrecking balls wreck things, breaking walls to pieces and knocking them down. When a wrecking ball wrecks a wall, it causes the wall to break into pieces and fall down. So says commonsense.

On an ordinary, undemanding conception of substance, a volume of water or a wrecking ball counts as a substance. Each instantiates properties and is not itself something instantiated by any further thing; each persists through time, undergoing change, thus participating in events.⁸ Of course, there are stricter notions of substance on which a cup of water, for example, fails to qualify. The water is mere aggregate, not a true unity. Nevertheless, such an aggregate doesn't

belong to any of the categories that opponents of substance causation favor as causes, and proponents often employ the more relaxed notion of substance.

If we do the same, then (in deference to commonsense) we may accept that substance causation is ubiquitous. However, accepting this view leaves open the question of whether causation by substances is ontologically fundamental or, instead, reducible to or realized in causation by, for example, events or states, including, of course, changes undergone by and states of such things as volumes of water and wrecking balls.

To be clear, the issue here is not whether *causation* is reducible to noncausal phenomena, such as regularities or counterfactual dependence. Questions about the ontological category of causes arise for both reductive and nonreductive accounts of causation. For example, even if we opt for a primitivist account on which causation is the manifestation of causal powers, with causal powers taken as metaphysically basic, there remains the question: fundamentally, are causes the *substances* that possess these powers, are causes the *powers*, or are causes *events* or *states of affairs*—the acquisitions or havings of these powers by these substances at certain times?⁹

Nor is the question here whether purposive agents, wrecking balls, and so forth are mere bundles of properties or congeries of events. It may be granted on both sides of the dispute that the basic ontological categories of the world include substance. The question is whether, fundamentally, causation is ever causation by things of this category. Further, if there are composite substances, they may depend, in some respect, on the things that compose them, in a way that the composing things don't depend on these composites. But even if we have such dependence, that doesn't foreclose the possibility that causation by these composite things is fundamentally causation by substances.

Causation by substances is non-fundamental if it can be reductively analyzed in terms of causation by things of one or more other categories. In this light, consider the following schema relating substance-causal claims to event-causal claims:

Substance s caused event e_2 just in case there was some event, e_1 , such that e_1 involved s and e_1 caused e_2 .¹⁰

An event's involving a substance might be understood as that event's being a change undergone by that substance. The reducibility of substance causation to event causation might then be said to come to the following. First, each substance-causal claim that is an instance of the left-hand side of the biconditional is equivalent in meaning to an event-causal claim that instances the right-hand side. Further, the right-hand side enjoys a conceptual priority; it provides an analysis of the substance-causal concept employed in the left-hand side. Substance causation thus lacks conceptual fundamentality.

But an ontological reduction cannot end here. It must add that in any given case, the instance of the right-hand side of the biconditional tells us what the substance causation consists in. The latter is thus said to lack ontological fundamentality. Semantic or conceptual inquiry cannot provide reasons for making this further claim. If there are grounds for it, presumably they come from consideration of the metaphysics of causation.

It is sometimes held that even if reduction of this sort is generally available, it isn't available in the case of what many have called *agent causation*. This expression may be reserved to refer not just to any causation by a substance—perhaps not even just to any causation by something that is a purposive agent—but specifically to manifestations of an agent's capacities

to act purposively.¹¹ If an agent or other substance might cause something by, for example, being pushed against another object, we do not have in that case agent causation in the restricted sense. We have this only when an agent exercises a capacity to act purposively, only when she performs an action.

It is widely recognized that there can be causation of bodily motions by agent-involving events of the sort favored by event-causal theories of action without yielding an instance of action. The causal process from mental event to bodily motion might be wayward or deviant, running via states of nervousness or the intentions of other agents.¹² A reductive analysis of agent causation, in its restricted sense—as what we have when an agent exercises a capacity to act purposively—would have to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for action, without resort to an unanalyzed notion of agency or agent causation, that would rule out deviant causation of the problematic sort. It is a contested matter whether any such analysis is possible.¹³

However, even if agent causation (in the restricted sense) is conceptually primitive, it lacks ontological fundamentality if each instance of it is fully realized in what are ultimately sequences of causation by events or states.¹⁴ Realization is commonly held to be an asymmetric (and hence irreflexive) relation of ontological dependence and determination. It is thought to allow for multiple realizability: any instance of the realized phenomenon requires some instance of the realizing phenomenon to realize it, but different kinds of realizers can realize instances of the same kind of realized phenomenon. The latter multiplicity stands in the way of any easy non-disjunctive specification of conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for the realized phenomenon in terms of the realizing phenomenon. A claim of realization may thus be available even when a reductive analysis is not.

A case that agent causation is realized in causation by events or states might be made by showing that the relation of the former to the latter has one or more of several features that are commonly cited as characteristic of realization.¹⁵ First, agent causation, when present, may be said to be present *in virtue of* the presence of an instance of a certain kind of process of causation by events or states. Second, an instance of agent causation may be said to *consist in* the particular process of causation by events or states that suffices for it. (Indeed, there might be claimed to be *an identity of token instances* of causation here.)¹⁶ Third, a causal process's being some specific kind of process of causation by events or states that suffices for agent causation may be said to be *a way of being* an instance of agent causation; the relation may be said to be that of *determinate to determinable*.¹⁷ Again, if there is warrant for these claims, it will presumably come from consideration of the fundamental metaphysics of causation. But if we have that warrant, then although affirming agent causation, we may fairly say that any given instance of it is nothing over and above a certain process of causation by events or states—it is no addition of being.¹⁸

I take it that the aim of a disappearing agent argument is to show that for agency, or for free will, or for moral responsibility, agent causation that is *fundamental* is required. It might be thought that in construing such arguments this way, I am saddling agent-causalists with an unfair burden. Proponents of agent causation, it might be said, don't make so strong a claim.

But several quite explicitly do. E. J. Lowe, for example, maintains that “all causation is fundamentally substance causation—the causation of events by substances” (2008: 162). Lowe proposes a reduction of event causation to substance causation. The latter, he argues, is both conceptually and ontologically prior.¹⁹ Some causal pluralists also favor the claim of

fundamentality. Speaking of the debate about which of event causation or substance causation reduces to the other, John Hyman suggests:

The truth is probably that the two kinds of causation are interdependent, and partisans on both sides are seeing one side of a symmetric relation. Roughly speaking, events can only acquire the status of causes by participating in action by agents, and agents can only exercise causal powers by dint of events. (2015: 42)²⁰

The interdependence of substance causation and event causation would rule out the realization of the former by the latter, since such realization would give us an asymmetric dependence of substance causation on event causation.

Pereboom appeals to agent causation with respect to free will, arguing that an adequate theory will have to posit “an agent who possesses a causal power, fundamentally as a substance, to cause a decision” (2014: 51). On such an agent-causal theory, Pereboom says, “what is metaphysically fundamental is that the agent substance-causes the decision” (54). Substance causation that was reducible to or realized in causation by events or states would not be metaphysically fundamental. Hence what Pereboom appeals to appears to be causation by a substance that is fundamental in the sense I have sketched.²¹

On the other side, theorists defending event-causal theories of free will are sometimes happy to affirm agent causation. Robert Kane, for example, characterizes agent-causation (hyphenated) as “the causation of action by a *thing* or *substance* (the self or agent) that cannot be explained as the causation of occurrences or events *by other occurrences or events* (i.e., by ‘states’ or ‘changes’)” (1996: 120). Since realization as well as reduction provides for

explanation, such agent-causation would be fundamental in the sense sketched here. Kane then asserts:

Doing without agent-causation in the nonoccurrent sense does not mean denying *agent causation* (unhyphenated) in the ordinary sense that agents act, bring things about, produce things, make choices, form their own characters and motives, and so on. Any theory of free agency, libertarian or otherwise, must give an account of what it means for agents to do things and to bring things about, and this means giving an account of what it means to be an agent or self that is...a “source of motion or activity” in the world. In this ordinary sense of agent causation, the notion is needed in any account of free agency, libertarian or nonlibertarian. (122)

The requirement of fundamentality enables us to distinguish event-causal theories like Kane’s from certain competing theories of agency and free will.²²

If some proponent of agent causation does *not* require the agent causation to which she appeals to be fundamental in the way explained, that would be interesting to know. I’ll proceed here under the presumption that if disappearing agent arguments are to succeed in showing the need for agent causation, it is the need for *fundamental* agent causation that these argument must show.

2. A Settling Requirement for Free Will

In a number of works since the mid-1990s, Pereboom has advanced a skeptical position on free will.²³ At issue in philosophical debate about free will, he maintains, is “the strongest sort of

control in action required for a core sense of moral responsibility” (2014: 2). He spells out this sense as follows:

For an agent to be morally responsible for an action in this sense is for it to be hers in such a way that she would deserve to be blamed if she understood that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve to be praised if she understood that it was morally exemplary. The desert at issue here is basic in the sense that the agent would deserve to be blamed or praised just because she has performed the action, given an understanding of its moral status, and not, for example, merely by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations. (2)

The free will required to be responsible in this sense, Pereboom argues, is incompatible with determinism, and even if indeterminism is true, it is unlikely that conditions sufficient to secure it are satisfied. We should not believe that we have it; we should not believe that we are morally responsible in the basic-desert sense. This is the gist of what he calls free-will skepticism.

Pereboom argues that if actions are caused solely by events, then even if the causal production of our behavior is indeterministic, this does not suffice for free will. Event-causal libertarian theories are inadequate, then, even if the indeterminism that they require exists. Pereboom’s argument for this claim is what he calls the “*disappearing agent objection*”:

Consider a decision that occurs in a context in which the agent’s moral motivations favor that decision, and her prudential motivations favor her refraining from making it, and the strengths of these motivations are in equipoise.

On an event-causal libertarian picture, the relevant causal conditions antecedent to the decision, i.e., the occurrence of certain agent-involving events, do not settle whether the decision will occur, but only render the occurrence of the decision about 50% probable. In fact, because no occurrence of antecedent events settles whether the decision will occur, and only antecedent events are causally relevant, *nothing* settles whether the decision will occur. Thus it can't be that the agent or anything about the agent settles whether the decision will occur, and she therefore will lack the control required for basic desert moral responsibility for it. (2014: 32)

It isn't altogether clear why Pereboom names the objection as he does. The expression "disappearing agent" stems, as far as I can tell, from a 1992 paper by David Velleman.²⁴ There Velleman criticized what he called "the standard story of human action," which he characterized as follows:

There is something that the agent wants, and there is an action that he believes conducive to its attainment. His desire for the end, and his belief in the action as a means, justify taking the action, and they jointly cause an intention to take it, which in turn causes the corresponding movements of the agent's body. Provided that these causal processes take their normal course, the agent's movements consummate an action, and his motivating desire and belief constitute his reason for acting. (2000b: 123)

The standard story is, of course, a broadly Davidsonian theory of action, the bare bones of an event-causal theory. Velleman objected that

In this story, reasons cause an intention, and an intention causes bodily movements, but nobody—that is, no person—does anything. Psychological and physiological events take place inside a person, but the person serves merely as the arena for these events: he takes no active part. (123)

The rhetoric notwithstanding, Velleman’s complaint *wasn’t* that the standard story fails to identify sufficient conditions for *action*. On the contrary, he conceded that it does.²⁵ The phenomenon with which he was concerned, Velleman explained, was not action *tout court* but “human action *par excellence*” (124) or “full-blooded human action” (127).²⁶

Velleman’s proposed solution to the problem he raised was not an appeal to fundamental agent causation. Rather, he argued, the standard story needs to be supplemented with a tale of causation by a further state of the agent. In cases of full-blooded human action, a desire to act in accordance with reasons plays the causal role that we commonly attribute to agents in such cases. That desire is “functionally identical to the agent” (2000b: 137), and causation by the agent may be understood as causation by that state of the agent.

Unlike Velleman, Pereboom doesn’t claim that, given things as set out on the theory he is examining, “nobody—that is, no person—does anything,” or that “the person serves merely as the arena for these events: he takes no active part.”²⁷ His central claim is that, given the kind of theory at issue, the agent doesn’t settle—and nothing settles—whether a certain decision will

occur. Perhaps the thought is that settling such a matter is precisely the role—or at least an essential part of the role—that an agent must play in making a decision, if her doing so is to be an exercise of free will. Since, given the theory in question, there is (Pereboom says) nothing that plays this settling role, the agent disappears on this view.²⁸ However, to present the case as one in which a *decision* is made is tacitly to recognize the presence of an agent, since if a decision is made, then there is an agent who makes that decision.²⁹

Be that as it may, a comment on Pereboom's statement of the objection is in order before I turn to an assessment. As he puts it, given the theory in question, nothing settles whether the decision *will* occur. I do not think that he has any grounds for rejecting a restatement in *present tense*: nothing settles whether the decision *occurs*. Standard libertarian accounts—including standard event-causal libertarian views—require that directly free decisions aren't determined by anything that precedes them.³⁰ Proponents of such views, if they accept a settling requirement, will take it to require that when an agent exercises free will in making a decision, the settling takes place *when the decision in question is made*, not prior to that time. Thus, I'll take it that what is at issue in the objection is whether, given an event-causal libertarian theory, the following settling requirement can be satisfied:

(SR) If an agent *S* freely decides at time *t* to *A*, then *S* settles at *t* whether that decision is made then.³¹

Freely deciding should be understood here, and in the subsequent discussion, as exercising free will in deciding. If we construe the latter as exercising the strongest sort of control, in the making of a decision, that is required for basic-desert moral responsibility, then SR states the settling

requirement that Pereboom's disappearing agent objection relies on. Satisfaction of SR is said to be a necessary condition for exercising free will in making a decision.³²

Suppose, then, that the agent, *S*, in the case in question decides at *t* to *A*.³³ Consider the following rejoinder to Pereboom's objection:

(The Rejoinder) The making of the decision by *S* at *t* to *A* settles at *t* whether that decision is made then. After all, that matter is not settled by anything prior to *t* (for the decision is not determined by anything prior to *t*); and nothing more than the making of the decision at *t* is needed to settle the matter then. Further, since it is *S* who makes the decision, *S*, in making that decision, settles at *t* whether that decision is made then. For given that nothing prior to *t* settles whether that decision is made then, *S* need not do anything more than decide at *t* to *A* in order to settle at *t* whether that decision is made then. An event-causal libertarian theory, then, has the resources to satisfy the settling requirement SR.

To clarify, by 'the making of the decision', what is meant is simply the occurrence of the mental action of deciding. If such a mental action occurs, then a making of a decision takes place; the latter is nothing more and nothing less than—it *is*—the former. Similarly, by '*S* makes the decision to *A*', what is meant is simply that *S* decides to *A*. There is nothing fancy hidden in the expressions that appear in The Rejoinder. In effect, what it claims is simply that if it is granted that an event-causal libertarian theory provides what is needed for there to be decisions—for the makings of decisions—then it should be accepted that such a theory provides all that is needed to satisfy SR.

Similarly, there is nothing fancy in The Rejoinder's use of *settles whether*. This is an expression of ordinary English, and we may take it to be used here in a way consistent with one or another of its ordinary meanings. Indeed, we may take the following entry from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* as our guide:

settle vt 5a: to fix or resolve conclusively <~ the question>.

Generalizing from the particular case to which The Rejoinder responds, we may read it as relying on the following general claims:

(MS) If nothing prior to t settles whether S decides at t to A , and if S decides at t to A , then the making of that decision by S at t settles at t whether that decision is made then; and

(AS) If nothing prior to t settles whether S decides at t to A , and if S decides at t to A , then S , in making that decision, settles at t whether that decision is made then.³⁴

Reading *settles whether* as *fixes or resolves conclusively the question whether*, these are certainly credible claims.^{35, 36}

Simple as it is, The Rejoinder nevertheless serves as a useful foil. It invites a proponent of the disappearing agent objection to spell out what she means by the key expression, *settles whether*, for evidently she understands the expression in some quite different way, such that MS

and AS are mistaken. Having the intended meaning before us will put us in a better position to evaluate the objection.³⁷

In partial clarification of his intended meaning, Pereboom has proposed the following necessary condition for an agent's settling whether some action occurs:

(S-AC) An agent settles whether an action occurs only if she agent-causes it for certain reasons, where the absence of her agent-causing the action for those reasons would not have caused the action.³⁸

If we take the proposal to cover decisions as well as other kinds of actions, it might be thought that it secures a defense of the disappearing agent objection from The Rejoinder.

But in fact it does not. As I observed in section 1, proponents of event-causal theories of action, or of free will, need not—and some do not—deny that agents cause things. What such theories deny is that there is causation by agents that is ontologically fundamental. It is consistent with these theories that agents cause things for reasons, as long as their doing so is reducible to or realized in causation by events. The Rejoinder, then, is not undermined by S-AC.

A broader agent-causal construal of *settles whether* likewise fails to undermine The Rejoinder. It might be claimed, less specifically than S-AC, that an agent's settling some matter consists at least partly in that agent's making something happen or bringing something about, and that making something happen or bringing something about is causing something.³⁹ An agent's settling some matter, it might then be said, consists in that agent's causing something. But event-causal libertarians can accept that when agents exercise free will in making decisions, they cause things. Such theorists will add, of course, that in each instance an agent's causing

something reduces to, or is realized in, the causing of things by events or states. These theorists, then, can accept a broadly agent-causal construal of *settles whether* and still maintain that, on their views, the settling requirement SR can be satisfied.

To pursue the suggested line of response to the rejoinder, something like the following stronger claim will be required:

(S-FAC) An agent settles whether an action occurs only if (i) she agent-causes it for certain reasons, where the absence of her agent-causing the action for those reasons would not have caused the action, and (ii) her agent-causing her action for those reasons is ontologically fundamental.

Again, the proposal may be taken to cover decisions as well as other kinds of actions, and to partly specify what is meant in saying that an agent settles whether a certain decision is made at a certain time. With *settles whether* so understood, the settling requirement SR plainly cannot be satisfied by an event-causal libertarian theory. The Rejoinder may be dismissed.

But just as plainly, to stipulate that S-FAC partly defines the key expression in the disappearing agent objection would be dialectically futile. Given this stipulation, proponents of event-causal libertarian theories may simply reject SR as a requirement on exercising free will in making a decision. For with an agent's settling some matter understood as now stipulated, advancing SR as a necessary condition for deciding freely simply begs the question against event-causal theories.

S-FAC might be advanced not as a stipulative partial definition but as a substantive claim about a necessary condition for an agent's settling some matter. The latter strategy would avoid

the charge of question begging. As such a substantive claim, S-FAC would require argument in its support. In this regard, consider the following:

P1) An agent's settling whether a certain decision is made by her is a matter of the agent's causing something.

P2) If an agent's causing something is non-fundamental, grounded in causation by events or states, then in causing that thing the agent settles whether a certain decision is made by her only if certain prior events or states—those whose causing something grounds the agent's causing something—settle whether that decision is made.

P3) But in the cases under consideration, no prior events or states settle whether the decision in question is made, since the pre-decision history leaves open a significant probability that the agent not make that decision.

C) Thus, in the cases under consideration, agent causation that is non-fundamental, grounded in causation by events or states, does not yield the agent's settling whether a certain decision is made by her.⁴⁰

It is, of course, a further claim that *fundamental* agent causation would secure the required settling, but the negative conclusion C would suffice to secure the disappearing agent objection.

Although some theorists might balk at premise P1, I have suggested that proponents of event-causal theories can accept it. Such theorists can, and some do, accept that when agents act, they cause things. And it can be accepted, further, that if, in acting, an agent settles whether something or other is so, her doing so is a matter of her causing something. Hence I will not dispute premise P1. And premise P3 is indisputable; given that the decisions in question are undetermined, P3 seems true on any reasonable understanding of *settles whether*.

It is premise P2 that I will dispute. Despite its prima facie plausibility, on a quite ordinary understanding of *settles whether*, this claim, I believe, is mistaken.

Making the case requires a brief discussion of the nature of action, and of decision in particular. I have so far avoided specifics about *what* an agent should be said to cause in making a decision or performing some other kind of action. Pereboom himself takes an agent-causal theory to hold that agents cause their *actions*; in the case of the act of deciding, the agent causes her *decision*. An alternative favored by many proponents of agent-causal theories has it that an action is *an agent's causing something*. For example, raising one's arm is causing an upward motion of one's arm; deciding to *A* is causing one's coming to have an intention to *A*. In favor of this latter version over the one articulated by Pereboom, Timothy O'Connor observes, "my causal production of certain events internal to myself would seem to be my activity par excellence" (2000: 51).⁴¹ On this alternative, then, actions are not *events caused by agents*; rather, they are *agent-causings of events*. Since this alternative is available, and since it may be advantageous to an event-causal theorist who accepts that there is non-fundamental agent causation to construe the view in this way, I'll consider in what follows how a view of this kind offers a way of responding to premise P2 of the argument.

Now, an event-causal theorist who construes in this way the place of non-fundamental agent causation in decision making would do well to opt for a similar view of the place of event causation. That is, a decision might better be seen not as something caused (fundamentally) by mental events of certain kinds, but rather as a causing (fundamentally by mental events) of the acquisition of an intention. Taking this option marks a departure from familiar versions of event-causal theories of action, but some proponents of event-causal theories have argued for this variant on grounds independent of our concerns here.^{42, 43}

Against this background, let us return to consideration of premise P2. Recall the second of the general claims, AS, on which The Rejoinder may be seen to rely. It says that when an agent makes a certain decision, the agent, in making that decision, settles at that time whether that decision is made then (provided that nothing prior to the time of the decision settles that matter). For, given the proviso, there is nothing more that the agent need do to settle this matter than make that decision then. As I claimed earlier, given an understanding of *settles whether* as *fixes or resolves conclusively the question whether*, AS is a credible claim.

Now assume that a decision is an agent's causing her coming to have a certain intention, with the agent-causing reducible to or realized in event-causings. Since, (with the proviso assumed) in making the decision at a certain time the agent settles at that time whether that decision is made then, and since the making of the decision is an agent-causing, it may be said that the agent's settling this question is a matter of her agent causing something, viz., her coming to have the intention in question.

However, even given the supposition that the agent-causing is reducible to or realized in event-causings, the events in question do not themselves settle whether the decision is made. Since (in the cases under consideration) causation by these events is indeterministic, these events

might occur then and the causings not come about, the decision not be made. Thus the events in question don't settle whether the decision is made.

Premise P2 is thus mistaken, on an ordinary understanding of *settles whether*. Even though we have assumed that an agent's settling some question is a matter of her agent causing something, and we have imagined that agent causation is non-fundamental, reducible to or realized in causation by events, we may have an agent, in making a decision at a certain time, settling whether that decision is made then, without the events in question settling that matter.

In so arguing, I have kept to a quite ordinary understanding of *settles whether*. To advance S-FAC against The Rejoinder, I suggest that some different construal of this key expression must be offered. Pereboom has not offered an understanding of the expression that serves this purpose.

There is a second line of response to The Rejoinder that might be pursued. Event-causal libertarian theories, it might be said, fail to provide sufficient conditions for decisions and other actions. Thus, The Rejoinder is mistaken in claiming that, in the case under consideration, *S* makes a decision.

This second line of response is not Pereboom's. On the contrary, his disappearing agent objection presumes that, even without fundamental agent causation, the agent in question makes a decision. It accepts, then, that agent causation that is ontologically fundamental is not required for it to be the case that agents make decisions (and presumably perform other actions).⁴⁴

Pereboom does mention, in a note, that he is "cautiously sympathetic" (2014: 32 n. 1) to "a more general objection to event-causal theories of action" (32). "But," he says, "I don't need to endorse [this more general objection] in order to affirm the disappearing agent argument that targets the claim that event-causal libertarianism can secure the free will required for basic-desert

moral responsibility” (32 n. 1). I take it that the “more general objection” is one purporting to show that action *tout court* requires agent causation that is fundamental. If this reading is correct, then short of carrying through with the first line of response, Pereboom may indeed have to endorse this more general objection—and *show that it succeeds*—if he is to sustain his disappearing agent objection to event-causal libertarian theories.

3. *The Problem of Present Luck*

I have not argued that an event-causal libertarian theory can adequately characterize free will. Such theories face a problem of luck—the problem of present luck, it is called—and I have not argued that any such theory provides a solution to this problem.

The problem can be presented as follows. We’ve imagined that, in actuality, *S* decides at *t* to *A*. Let us imagine, further, that just prior to *t*, and following careful consideration, *S* had judged that it was best to *A* straightaway. Still, we imagine, the decision at *t* to *A* is not determined by anything prior to *t*. There are, then, possible worlds with the same laws as the actual laws and the same pre-*t* history as the actual world—including the same considered judgment—in which *S* doesn’t decide at *t* to *A*. Let us suppose that in some such world, *W*, *S* decides at *t* not to *A*. Consider the difference between the actual world, in which *S* decides at *t* to *A*, in accord with her considered judgment, and world *W*, in which *S* decides at *t* not to *A*, contrary to her considered judgment. Isn’t this difference between the actual world and world *W* just a matter of luck? And if this difference between these worlds is just a matter of luck, does it not seem that *S*’s decision can’t be one in the making of which *S* exercises free will or one for which *S* is morally responsible?^{45, 46}

The settling requirement SR sets out a necessary condition for exercising free will in making a decision. But it appears that satisfaction of this necessary condition does not suffice to solve the problem of present luck.

Suppose that, in actuality, in deciding at t to A , S settles at t whether that decision is made then. As well, in world W , in deciding at t not to A , S settles at t whether *that* decision is made then. Indeed, given these suppositions, it appears that in *both* worlds, S settles *both* of these matters at t . However, S settles the matters *differently* in the two worlds. Consider the difference between the two worlds with respect to *how* or *in which way* S settles these matters at t . Is this difference not just a matter of luck? And if this difference is just a matter of luck, does it not seem that S 's decision can't be one in the making of which S exercises free will or one for which S is morally responsible?⁴⁷ Supposing the settling of matters resolved, the problem of present luck remains.

In earlier works, Pereboom had suggested that the problem raised by the "luck objection" might be called "the problem of the disappearing agent" (2004: 276; 2007: 102).⁴⁸ Subsequent responses to Pereboom (e.g., Franklin 2014), and responses to these responses (e.g., Runyan 2016) have repeated the claim of equivalence. It seems to me that two distinct problems have been conflated.

Note that, in advancing this view, I haven't relied on any specific construal of the key expression *settles whether* in the disappearing agent objection. But a case for the distinction can be made by giving the expression one or another of certain specific construals.

Plainly, if *settles whether* is understood in such a way that The Rejoinder succeeds, (and if, as Pereboom's presentation of the disappearing agent objection presumes, an event-causal theory provides all that is needed for the makings of decisions), then the problem raised by that

objection is readily solved, while the problem of present luck remains to be addressed. The problems are then distinct.

Second, consider Pereboom's position on what it takes to solve the problem raised by the disappearing agent objection:

What would need to be added to the event-causal libertarian account is involvement of the agent in the making of her decision that would enhance her control so that she can settle whether the decision occurs, and thereby have the control in making a [decision] required for moral responsibility. Agent-causal libertarianism proposes to satisfy this requirement by reintroducing the agent as a cause, not merely as involved in events, but rather fundamentally as a substance.... What the agent-causal libertarian posits is an agent who possesses a causal power, fundamentally as a substance, to cause a decision. (2014: 50-51)⁴⁹

As a further requirement, Pereboom maintains that

to answer the disappearing agent objection, the causal powers exercised by agents as substances must be of a different sort from those of the physical events that are causally relevant to the action, and on the occasion of a free decision, the exercise of the agent-causal power must be token-distinct from the exercise of the causal powers of these events. (67)

If agent causation is fundamentally causation by a substance, then, trivially, the causal powers exercised by agents as substances are of a different sort from those of any causally relevant events, since the former, but not the latter, are powers exercised fundamentally by substances. Similarly, the exercise of such a power is, trivially, token distinct from any token of event causation. So this further claim may not seem to add any further requirement.

However, it is clear from his discussion that Pereboom takes it to do just that. For he advances this claim in the course of arguing that the disappearing agent objection is answered only if fundamental agent causation is not subject to laws of nature that cover the causally relevant events, even if the laws in question are indeterministic. Indeed, Pereboom's view seems to be that, for free will, there must be fundamental agent causation that is not subject to any laws of nature at all.⁵⁰

I've argued elsewhere (Clarke 2010) that no good argument has been advanced for this last claim. But set this issue aside. Suppose that we have all that Pereboom appeals to here, and let us grant that it suffices to solve the disappearing agent objection. If *S*'s decision at *t* to *A* is undetermined by anything prior to *t* and is caused by *S* in this manner, then *S* settles at *t* whether that decision is made then. My contention is that present luck remains problematic.

We are supposing, now, that in the actual world, *S*'s decision at *t* is caused by *S*, anomalously and fundamentally as a substance, and likewise for the decision that *S* makes at *t* in world *W*. There is no pre-*t* difference between the actual world and *W*. Consider the difference between the actual world, in which *S*, anomalously and fundamentally as a substance, causes the decision at *t* to *A*, in accord with her considered judgment, and world *W*, in which *S*, anomalously and fundamentally as a substance, causes the decision at *t* not to *A*, contrary to her considered judgment. Isn't this difference between the actual world and *W* just a matter of luck? And if this

difference between these worlds is just a matter of luck, does it not seem that *S*'s decision can't be one in the making of which *S* exercises free will or one for which *S* is morally responsible?⁵¹

Pereboom (2014: 51-54) argues that the questions can be satisfactorily answered in defense of his agent-causal theory. Even if he is correct, my point stands: *it takes further argument to address the problem of present luck*. If we take the positing of anomic, fundamental agent causation to plainly solve the problem raised by the disappearing agent objection but to require further argument to deal with the luck problem, then we have good reason to distinguish these problems.

There is an understanding of *settles whether* on which anything that solves one of the problems solves the other. Consider:

(SL) When an agent makes a decision, she settles whether that decision is made then if and only if she exercises in making that decision a kind of control sufficient to solve the problem of present luck.

Perhaps Pereboom holds that SL is correct.⁵² But as far as I can see, he offers no argument in support of it, and (again, as far as I can see) neither do other writers who equate the problem concerning settling with the problem of luck. Short of such an argument, I contend that the problems are distinct.

The demand for an argument in support of SL presumes that SL is advanced as a substantive claim. Suppose, instead, that it is meant as simply stipulating the intended meaning of *settles whether*, stating it in terms of resolution of the luck problem. We might then ignore

ordinary usage in our reading of this expression in the disappearing agent objection and simply read it as stipulated.

This approach would drain all utility from the disappearing agent objection. For now any content that we associate with the key expression will derive from our prior understanding, such as it is, of what is needed to solve the luck problem. Rather than the notion of a disappearing agent providing us with a tool for adjudicating the luck problem, it is a solution to the latter that we must use to adjudicate the former.

4. *What Might a Disappearing Agent Argument Accomplish?*

I've argued that Pereboom's disappearing agent objection, as it stands, is ineffective, and one reason for thinking this is so is that the objection is not sufficiently ambitious. It presumes that fundamental agent causation is not needed for action *tout court* but purports to show the need of it for free will. Short of offering a construal of *settles whether* that allows us to dismiss The Rejoinder, I argued, a proponent of a disappearing agent objection will need to establish the general need of fundamental agent causation for action.⁵³

What are the prospects for successful pursuit of this strategy? I think we can consider the question under two different suppositions.

First, suppose that fundamental substance causation is required for action not because of any distinctive feature of action, but because substance causation everywhere is fundamental. The latter might be so because, fundamentally, all causation is causation by substances, or because things of several categories, including substance, can be causes, and causation by each kind of thing is equally fundamental.

On this supposition, it is not to be expected that a focus on action or purposive agency is uniquely suited to show the need for fundamental substance causation. A disappearing solvent objection should be equally effective at demonstrating that need. For fundamental substance causation would constitute the activity of any substance, animate or inanimate, macro or micro. What would be needed to show that this is so, it seems, is consideration of the metaphysics of causation.

Alternatively, suppose that fundamental substance causation isn't ubiquitous. The aim of a disappearing agent argument, we might think, is to show that something distinctive in the nature of action requires an ontological difference with respect to the kind of causation involved in this phenomenon.

On this supposition, the burden that must be met by a disappearing agent argument is, I think, quite heavy. If considerations of the metaphysics of causation support the view that, purposive agency aside, causation is fundamentally a matter of causation by events or states, then there is a strong presumption in favor of the view that, in the case of purposive agency, agent causation is reducible to or realized in causation by events or states. A successful disappearing agent argument must overcome a reasonable presumption against the purported metaphysical exceptionalism with respect to purposive agency.

Whether any disappearing agent argument meets this burden can be assessed, of course, only by looking closely at such arguments. But when we do so, we must bear in mind that it is ontologically fundamental agent causation, and not agent causation per se, that is in question. For on the more relaxed use of the expression, we may all claim to be agent-causalists.⁵⁴

Notes

¹ See, for example, the agent-causal accounts advanced in Chisholm (2003), O'Connor (2000), and Taylor (1966), and the account presented (but not endorsed) by Clarke (2003).

² It isn't clear what Strawson meant to refer to with this expression, or that he meant it to cover fundamental agent causation. But he is sometimes taken to have done so. For example, Dennett (1984: 76) quotes the expression in his critique of Chisholm's agent-causal theory of free will.

³ See, for example, Jacobs and O'Connor (2013), Lowe (2008: 143-46), O'Connor (2014), and Swinburne (1997 and 2006). The compatibilist agent-causal view of free will that Nelkin (2011: ch. 4) suggests is also one on which all causes are substances.

⁴ See, for example, Alvarez & Hyman (1998), Hyman (2015: 40-42), Mayr (2011: 229-30), and Steward (2012: 207-16).

⁵ See, for example, Hyman (2015: ch. 2) and Lowe (ch. 7).

⁶ See, for example, Nida-Rümelin (2007) and Pereboom (2014: ch. 3).

⁷ See, for example, Markosian (1999 and 2012) and Nelkin (2011: ch. 4). Pereboom (2015) argues for the compatibility of determinism and a view on which agent causation is ontologically fundamental.

⁸ Whittle (2016: 2) suggests that a conception of this sort is the one to employ in the debate about whether substances are causes.

⁹ Lowe (2008: ch. 7) and Mumford and Anjum (2011) alike construe causation as the manifestation of irreducible causal powers, but they disagree about the ontology of causation. Lowe holds that, fundamentally, all causation is by substances, whereas Mumford and Anjum claim that "it is properties that do the causal work, and they do so because they are powerful" (2011: 1).

¹⁰ Lowe (2008: 143) suggests such a schema as a first approximation to a proposed equivalence. Revision would be required to accommodate, for example, the fact that in some cases when a substance s may be said to cause some effect, that effect is caused by *several* events involving s .

Lowe himself argues that it is *substance* causation that is primary. It is, he maintains, both conceptually and ontologically fundamental. Where acting is understood simply as undergoing a change, Lowe proposes the following reduction of event causation:

Event e_1 caused event e_2 just in case there was some substance, s_1 , and some substance, s_2 , and some manner of acting, F , and some manner of acting, G , such that e_1 consisted in s_1 's F ing and e_2 consisted in s_2 's G ing and s_1 , by F ing, caused s_2 to G . (2008: 145)

A reduction of causation by states along similar lines might refer to s_1 causing s_2 to G in virtue of (s_1 's) being in state F .

¹¹ Hornsby (2010) takes causation by an agent to be an agent's exercise of a capacity to act. Nida-Rümelin (2007) appeals to agent causation only with respect to doings in which a subject of experience is active.

¹² For examples, see Bishop (1989: 156-60) and Davidson (1980: 79).

¹³ It is not just the exercise of agents' capacities to act that present this difficulty for analysis. On some occasion, water might cause sugar to dissolve without manifesting its disposition to dissolve sugar, for a wizard might be provoked by the presence of the water to dissolve the sugar. It is not sufficient for a manifestation of the water's disposition to dissolve sugar, then, that some event involving the water, or state of the water, causes the sugar to

dissolve. It is not enough, even, that the state in question is the water's disposition to dissolve sugar; it might be that it was the wizard's seeing that the water had that disposition that provoked the wizard. (Hyman [2015: 116] observes the parallel.)

¹⁴ Bishop (1989: esp. 96) advanced this suggestion some years ago. Although he argued that the problem of causal deviance can be solved, he took the resulting account to cover only agency in worlds with naturalistic ontologies, and thus to fall short of a conceptual analysis of agent causation, in the restricted sense identified in my text. Bishop's suggestion that agent causation might nevertheless be fully realized in causation by events or states is available also to theorists who think the problem of causal deviance unsolvable.

¹⁵ In philosophy of mind, it is commonly properties, states, or events that are said to be realized. However, realization is often taken to be not a single relation but a family of similar grounding relations. (See, for example, Baysan [2015].) The suggestion here is that some member of that family might relate causation by events or states and causation by agents.

¹⁶ On these first three characteristics, see Kim's discussion of realization in Kim (2005), esp. p. 579.

¹⁷ Yablo's (1992) proposal that mental properties and events are related to physical properties and events as determinables to determinates offers a view of the mental as realized in the physical.

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, if the causation by events or states that realizes some instance of agent causation is, in turn, realized in causation by substances, then substance causation may, after all, be fundamental. For the purposes of the discussion here, I assume that the claimed realization of substance causation in causation by events or states rules out any such further realization in causation by substances.

¹⁹ See note 10 above.

²⁰ Hyman uses 'agent' and 'action' in broad senses. An agent may be a human being, a wasp, or some inanimate material, such as soap; "every substance capable of causing change" qualifies (2015: 30). An action is an agent's causing a change (33).

²¹ It is not entirely clear that Pereboom considers a view on which action is said not to be analyzable in terms of causation by events or states but to be realized in such causal processes. In his critique of event-causal libertarian theories, he sometimes takes his opponents to hold that "all talk about agents making decisions is to be cashed out in event-causal terms" (2014: 45) and to hold that sentences such as 'Ralph decides to move to New York' are "to be analyzed along the lines of 'Ralph-involving events E1 and E2 probabilistically cause the decision to move to New York'" (45). A libertarian might affirm the realization claim but deny the possibility of such analysis.

As I indicate below, I take Pereboom to aim to undermine even the latter position. If in fact he finds it acceptable, that would be interesting to know, for those responding to his disappearing agent objection generally interpret him in line with my reading.

²² It is the view advanced by Kane in his 1996 book (and many subsequent papers) that I take as my example here. Some of his recent work (e.g., Kane 2014, esp. 204-6) suggests that he has altered his view, now taking causation by events and causation by agents to be equally fundamental.

²³ The published work begins with Pereboom (1995) and includes Pereboom (2001), as well as other work by Pereboom cited in the present paper.

²⁴ The paper is reprinted in Velleman 2000a, and citations here give page numbers of the latter.

²⁵ Velleman subsequently changed his terminology, reserving 'action' for what he had previously called human action *par excellence* and using 'activity' for what he had earlier characterized as mere action. Using the terms in this later fashion, he says: "The standard model is a model of activity but not of action" (2000a: 10). In the Introduction to his 2000a collection of essays, he sometimes uses 'autonomous action' interchangeably with 'action'.

²⁶ Velleman explained that his target phenomenon was *not* coextensive with action for which one is morally responsible; one might be morally responsible for an action that was not an instance of human action *par excellence* (2000b: 127 n. 13). Further, he indicated that he took the issue that concerned him in that paper to be distinct from the problem of free will (127 n. 14).

²⁷ Indeed, Pereboom doesn't cite Velleman as a source of disappearing agent arguments, but rather as someone who responds to such an argument in defense of an event-causal theory of action. (Velleman is, of course, both a source and a respondent of this kind.) Pereboom says that his objection is related to objections advanced by Hornsby (2004a and 2004b) and Nida-Rümelin (2007) against event-causal theories of action. Hornsby advances several objections with claims about disappearing agents. Nida-Rümelin does not use the expression in her 2007 paper.

²⁸ Pereboom writes: "If only events are causes and the context is indeterministic, the agent disappears when it needs to be settled whether the decision will occur" (2014: 55).

²⁹ Perhaps Pereboom's objection might be better called the *faded* agent objection, since the agent might be said to remain visible but barely so. By the same token, Velleman's allusion to a "disappearing agent" is misleading, since he accepts that the standard story of action provides all that is needed for action (or, in his later terminology, purposive activity), even if not enough for a special kind of action.

³⁰ Pereboom (2014: 32) agrees that this is the way that a libertarian theory should be formulated.

³¹ S , t , and A are used here as variables ranging over agents, times, and action-types, respectively. The quantification is universal, and we should take the modality of SR to be necessity.

³² A few further remarks. First, the objection should not be seen to turn on the specific feature of the example that the conflict within the agent is one between *moral* motives and *prudential* motives. A case in which the conflict is one between moral motives favoring one alternative and moral motives favoring another should serve just as well, as should a case of conflict between prudential motives favoring one alternative and prudential motives favoring another. Nor should the specific probability cited be thought to matter. If there is a problem for the libertarian theory in question, it should be equally a problem if the probabilities of the alternatives are 60/40 or 80/20. Additionally, of course, it is not relevant that there are just two open alternatives that are being considered.

³³ We're considering a particular case here, and thus S , t , and A refer here to a particular agent, time, and action-type, respectively.

³⁴ Again, S , t , and A are used here as variables ranging over agents, times, and action-types, respectively. The quantification, again, is universal, and we should take the modality of MS and AS to be necessity.

³⁵ Note that AS, in particular, is in line with the view that "actions are agents' settlements of hitherto unsettled questions" (Steward 2012: Abstract to ch. 3 [online at <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552054.001.0001/acprof-9780199552054-chapter-3?rskey=icrv3d&result=1>]).

³⁶ Pereboom's disappearing agent objection concerns, not actions of any kind, but decisions specifically, as does SR. And The Rejoinder might be bolstered with two observations concerning features of decisions that distinguish them from actions of some other kinds. First, a decision to A is an intentional action; indeed, as some writers see it, when one decides to A , one intentionally decides to A . (On this conception of decision, see, e.g., McCann [1998] and Mele [2000].) If this view is correct, then The Rejoinder can't be dismissed on the grounds that despite deciding at t to A , S might fail to settle at t whether that decision is made then, for S might *unintentionally* make that decision. Second, a decision to A does not ever consist in an effort to decide to A , which might or might not succeed, plus the lucky success of that effort. Decisions are not, in part, efforts that might or might not succeed. One can, of course, make an effort to make up one's mind whether to A , and this effort might or might not succeed. But this effort is no part of one's decision to A , if one then proceeds to make that decision. Rather, an effort of this sort would be something that preceded the decision. In contrast, hitting a bull's-eye with a dart from 2.37 meters is something that consists partly in an effort to hit the bull's-eye, an effort that might or might not succeed. For many of us, the success of such an effort would be very lucky. Perhaps it might be said that when an unskilled player hits a bull's eye with a dart, she doesn't herself settle whether she hits the bull-eye, because of the high degree of luck involved. But there is no luck

of this sort involved in the making of a decision to *A*. (I consider in section 3 whether there might be luck of another sort involved in the making of a decision.)

³⁷ In fact, some of Pereboom's remarks in response to another critique of his disappearing agent objection are entirely in line with The Rejoinder. He says, "one settles...whether the *decision* to *A*...occurs by settling or determining whether to *A* or not-*A*." (forthcoming). Settling whether to *A* or not-*A* is, it seems to me, simply deciding whether to *A* or not-*A*. We then have: One settles whether the decision to *A* occurs by deciding whether to *A*. With an added proviso, this gives us AS.

³⁸ Pereboom (2015: 291).

³⁹ Pereboom (2014: 40 and 2015: 286) makes the second of these claims.

⁴⁰ Remarks by Pereboom in correspondence suggested this argument.

⁴¹ Other proponents of the view of actions as agent-causings include Hornsby (2004a), Hyman (2015: 55), Mayr (2011: 150), and Steward (2012: 200).

⁴² See, for example, Bach (1980).

⁴³ It might be wondered whether, on this kind of theory, the mental events whose causing of the intention acquisition is said to be the decision should be said to occur *prior* to the decision. There is no consensus on how the time of a causing is to be determined. One plausible view is that a causing of an effect *e* doesn't begin until *e* begins. If it is further assumed that event-causes precede their effects, even if ever so slightly, then when event *e*₁ causes event *e*₂, *e*₁ occurs prior to *e*₁'s causing *e*₂. The mental events that an event-causal theory identifies as the key causes in an account of action may still be said to occur prior to the actions in question.

Suppose, instead, that a causing by an event *e* begins when *e* begins. In this case, the event causes to which an event-causal theory of action appeals will not all precede the actions in which they figure. It is still the case that premise P3 is correct, for it concerns only events that precede the decision in question. Further, the causing events that are now included in the decision do not, simply with their occurrence, settle whether the decision occurs. For with their occurrence it remains open that the decision not be made. The argument to follow thus goes through on this alternative view of the matter.

⁴⁴ I refer here to the objection as it appears in Pereboom (2014). In Pereboom (2015), he advances a similar objection with respect to action *tout court*, arguing that the phenomenology of agency supports a view of action as involving fundamental agent causation. In my view, if it is accepted that there might be agent causation that is not ontologically fundamental, it is *prima facie* doubtful that the phenomenology of agency can favor the former over the latter.

⁴⁵ This problem of present luck is presented by Mele (2006: 7-9). He takes the problem not to be an argument against libertarianism but to require (of libertarianism) an explanation. What needs to be explained is either: (i) how the difference in question is not just a matter of luck, or, barring that, (ii) how, even though this difference is just a matter of luck, the decision can nevertheless be one in the making of which the agent exercises free will and for which the agent can be morally responsible. Mele himself (ch. 5) offers a solution to the problem within the context of an event-causal libertarian theory.

⁴⁶ Note that in raising a question about whether *S* can be morally responsible for making the decision, it is *direct* moral responsibility that I am asking about. Direct responsibility for a decision is responsibility for that decision that is not derived from one's responsibility for any prior thing.

⁴⁷ The problem of present luck can be expressed in different terms. Instead of considering a *difference between worlds* at a certain time, we can consider a certain *contrastive fact*. In the case at hand, a key contrastive fact is *that S decides at t to A, in accord with her considered judgment, rather than deciding at t not to A, contrary to that judgment*. We can ask: Is it not just a matter of luck that *S* does the first rather than doing the second? (Mele [2006: 8] takes these two formulations to be equivalent. I don't find the equivalence obvious.)

In these terms, as well, just as the problem can be pressed with respect to *an agent's making one decision rather than making another*, so it can be pressed with respect to *her settling some matter one way rather than settling it another way*. Given that there is no difference between the actual world and world *W* prior to *t*, is it not just a matter of luck that the agent settles the matter at *t* this way rather than settling it that way? Securing the claim that she settles the matter at the moment in question leaves this question to be answered.

⁴⁸ In his 2014, Pereboom characterizes luck objections as reflecting a concern presented by Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Pereboom says that he takes the disappearing agent objection to be “the objection in this family that reveals the deepest problem for event-causal libertarianism” (32). I take it that by ‘this family’ he means the family of luck objections. He later refers to “the luck objection—and the disappearing agent version in particular” (52).

⁴⁹ In the last clause of the first sentence, Pereboom suggests that satisfying the settling requirement SR would *suffice* for having free will. Note that the suggestion is an addition to what is claimed in the disappearing agent objection, where SR is advanced as a *necessary* condition for free will. If we take it that we have enough for free will only if we have a solution to the problem of present luck, then my discussion in the text to follow may be taken as an argument that the sufficiency claim requires supporting argument.

Note, as well, that Pereboom appears to see the agent-causalist as *adding* fundamental agent causation to an event-causal theory. One alternative move would be to *replace* causation by events in the theory of free will with fundamental causation by agents. A further move would be to maintain that *all* causation is fundamentally causation by substances.

⁵⁰ He says, “In my view it is precisely the non-law-governed causal relation that would have to be invoked by the agent-causal libertarian” (2014: 42).

⁵¹ Mele (2006: ch. 3) argues at length that appealing to agent causation fails to solve the problem of present luck.

Again, we can raise the key question in terms of a contrast. In the actual world, *S* exercises her anomic, fundamental substance-causal power one way, causing at *t* a decision to *A*, in accord with her considered judgment, while in *W* *S* exercises her anomic, fundamental substance-causal power a different way, causing at *t* a decision not to *A*, contrary to her considered judgment. Is it not just a matter of luck that, in fact, *S* exercises her anomic, fundamental substance-causal power the way she does rather than exercising it the way she doesn't?

⁵² Mele (forthcoming) suggests that perhaps it is Pereboom's intention that “settling whether one will decide to *A* is supposed to be such that it involves no luck.”

⁵³ Since Pereboom's disappearing agent objection concerns decisions, an intermediate position that might be taken is that, although action of various kinds does not require ontologically fundamental agent causation, decision does. I think it would be interesting to see an argument for this position. But note that it would leave Pereboom's critique of event-causal libertarianism in an odd position, with an argument against such a theory's adequacy for free decisions but no argument—at least none yet advanced—against its adequacy for free actions of other kinds.

⁵⁴ Thanks to Robert Kane, Michael McKenna, Alfred Mele, and Derk Pereboom for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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