

## **Events, agents, and settling whether and how one intervenes**

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**Abstract:** Event-causal libertarians maintain that an agent's settling of whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion can be reduced to the causing of events (e.g., bodily motions, coming to a resolution) by certain mental events or states, such as certain desires, beliefs and/or intentions. Agent-causal libertarians disagree. A common critique against event-causal libertarian accounts is that the agent's role of settling matters is left unfilled and the agent "disappears" from such accounts—a problem known as the disappearing agent problem. Recently, Christopher Franklin (2014) has argued that an "enriched" event-causal account can overcome this problem. Franklin, however, doesn't consider whether, as Derk Pereboom (2015) argues, the agent as decider of "torn decisions" disappears from even enriched accounts. As I show here, Franklin's enriched account takes some modifying if it is to overcome Pereboom's torn decision problem—a special case of the disappearing agent problem. However, as I also show, there is a more fundamental problem facing event-causal libertarian accounts. It is implausible that an agent *qua* event or state simultaneously settles whether and how she intervenes. The upshot is that events and/or states lack an ability essential to completely fulfilling an agent's role *qua* settler. This isn't a problem for agent-causal accounts like the one offered by Helen Steward (2012) because in as much as an agent *qua* substance settles whether her body moves in certain ways on certain occasions she simultaneously settles whether and how she intervenes. As a consequence, event-causal libertarians face a dilemma, or rather several, that agent-causal libertarians do not. This may ultimately be explained by the irreducibility of causation by agents to causation by events.

## 1. Two libertarian accounts of agent settling

Both event-causal and agent-causal libertarians agree that exercising free will requires being able to settle whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion. They, further, agree that those matters settled by exercising free will are left undetermined by antecedent causal conditions. They, however, disagree on exactly who or what exercises free will and thereby settles certain matters.

According to agent-causal libertarians, an agent as a self-moving, persisting substance settles whether certain states-of-affairs obtain (e.g., whether her body moves in certain ways) on particular occasions (cf. Pereboom 2015). As Helen Steward has recently put it, the kinds of things “up to” the agent *qua* substance, and which she settles “by acting”, are *whether* she *Vs*,<sup>1</sup> *when* she *Vs*, *how* she *Vs* and *where* she *Vs* (Steward 2012, 36-8). An agent’s action “just is” a matter of it being the settling of “at least one from a range of possible *other* things that are up to the agent” (36). And, at the moment of *Ving* purposively or intentionally, an agent can settle multiple matters at once (37). For example, a person might settle whether, when, where and how they buy a train ticket to London by buying a ticket at 10:36am on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 using a credit card.

Notice that, according to such accounts, what the agent settles is not her action.<sup>2</sup> Rather, in cases like the buying of a train ticket, an agent’s actions are “bodily *movings*” or, that is, the causing of certain bodily motions, and the causing of certain other changes as a result, *by her* at a certain point in time (33-35; cf. von Wright 1963, 39-41; Hornsby 1980, 3; Hyman 2006).<sup>3</sup> The resulting changes, including the resulting motion of her body, are effects caused *by her* when she moves her body at that time. In this way, an agent settles whether certain events or states-of-affairs obtain *by acting* in a certain way. “[B]y acting”—and, thus, by causing change—an agent “close[s] off all possibilities

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<sup>1</sup> I use *V* in place of a verb.

<sup>2</sup> While there have been versions of agent-causalism wherein agents cause their actions these versions have grown less popular as there are a number of problems facing this idea (for e.g., see O’Connor 1995, 182; Alvarez and Hyman 1998; Steward 2012, 37-8).

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity sake, and because it is given the most attention in the relevant literature, I will focus on what might be called *productive* action—action that involves bringing about, effecting, producing or causing some change. This isn’t to imply that there aren’t other kinds of action, such as *sustaining* action (action that involves sustaining or maintaining something as it is) or *preventing* action (action that involves preventing change or keeping change at bay; for e.g., see von Wright 1974, 40).

except one” (39). And she can do this pertaining to multiple matters at once, with one action that has “a variety of descriptions, at least one of which will generally be a description in terms of the agent’s moving of her own body or part of it” (34; cf. Anscombe 1957; Davidson 1971). She, thus, settles “the answers to a variety of questions whose answers are (therefore) not already settled”. To return to my example, one’s buying of a train ticket may appropriately be described in terms of one’s causing of one’s arm and hand to move. It may equally be described in terms of one’s settling of whether one’s body moves as well as one’s settling of when, how and where one’s body moves. So according to agent-causalists like Steward, at least in a broad number of cases, an agent’s action is her causing of certain changes and thereby her settling of multiple matters.

According to event-causal libertarians, an agent’s settling of whether certain states-of-affairs obtain should be understood in terms of, or reduced to, the causing of events (e.g., bodily motions, coming to a resolution) by certain mental events or states, such as certain desires, beliefs and/or intentions (see for e.g. Velleman 1992, 2000; Ekstrom 1993, 1999; Kane 1996, 1999). In short, the causal relation that, according to agent-causalists like Steward, holds between substances and certain motions and/or other changes should be understood in terms of the causal relation between events and/or states. However, a common critique of event-causal libertarian accounts is that the agent’s role of settling matters is left unfilled and the agent “disappears” from such accounts (e.g., Pereboom 2004; 2015; Griffith 2010; O’Connor 2000). This problem is often referred to as the disappearing agent problem.

In what follows, I review the disappearing agent problem before discussing similar attempts by J. David Velleman (1992; 2000) and Christopher Franklin (2014) at providing, what Franklin calls, an “enriched” event-causal libertarian account of agent settling that overcomes this problem. As we will see with the help of Derk Pereboom (2015), both of these accounts face a special case of the disappearing agent problem. In both, it seems that the settler of “torn decisions”—or that is, roughly put, decisions made when an individual finds each alternative equally appealing—disappears. But, as we will also see, a slightly modified form of Franklin’s account seems able to overcome this problem. However, there is a more fundamental problem facing event-causal

libertarianism. Events and states lack an ability essential to completely fulfilling an agent's role *qua* settler. Specifically, it is implausible that an agent *qua* event or state simultaneously settles whether and how she intervenes. This isn't a problem for agent-causal accounts like the one offered by Steward because, granted an agent *qua* substance settles whether her body moves in certain ways on a given occasion, she simultaneously settles whether and how she intervenes. As a consequence, event-causal libertarians face a dilemma, or rather several dilemmas, which agent-causal libertarians do not.

## 2. *The disappearing agent problem*

Since the pivotal work of Donald Davidson (1963), event-causalists have traditionally maintained that our role as agents is exhausted by the role(s) played by certain antecedent mental events and/or states (e.g., beliefs, desires and/or intentions). And libertarians maintain that the occurrence of our free actions<sup>4</sup> are left undetermined, and thus not settled, by *antecedent* causal conditions, which include mental events or states relevant to the occurrence of our actions. So it would seem that, to be consistent, event-causal libertarians must maintain that nothing about us settles whether our free actions occur.

As Pereboom illustrates:

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

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<sup>4</sup> For simplicity sake, and in keeping with a common practice in the relevant literature, by "action" I mean the exercise of any agential ability (cf. Franklin 2014, 414).

the decision will occur, and she therefore will lack the control required for moral responsibility for it. (Pereboom 2004; cf. O'Connor 2008)

In short, if antecedent mental events and/or states do not settle whether our free actions or decisions occur, and our role as agents is exhausted by causal roles played by these events or states, there is nothing about us that settles whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion. Our agential role *qua* settler is nowhere to be found in event-causal libertarian accounts—or so the argument goes. The agent *qua* settler disappears. As a consequence, whether our free actions occur seems to be out of our hands. Doing all we can leaves whether our free actions occur unsettled, out of our control and a matter of luck (Pereboom 2004; Griffith 2010; Franklin 2014). Thus, we aren't morally responsible for their occurrence. And this is the disappearing agent problem for event-causal libertarianism.

### *3. Pereboom's torn decision problem: a special case of the disappearing agent problem*

In response to the disappearing agent problem, a number of theorists have argued that an event-causal libertarian can consistently uphold the idea an agent settles whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion by upholding that the agent, in her functional role of settling the matter, can plausibly be identified with—or are plausibly identical to—a certain mental state that settles the matter (e.g., Velleman 1992; Ekstrom 2000, 2003). As Velleman maintains:

Although the agent must possess an identity apart from the substantive motives competing for influence over his behavior, he needn't possess an identity apart from the attitude that animates the activity of judging such competitions. If there is such an attitude, then its contribution to the competition's outcome can qualify as his—not because he identifies with it but rather because it is functionally identical to him. (Velleman 1992, 480)

So, according to Velleman, an agent's functional role of settling matters could be fulfilled by a certain attitude with which the agent is "functionally identical", and this would "qualify" as the agent's fulfillment of this role. Velleman, further, thinks the desire to behave in accordance with what one holds to be the best reasons (1992, 478-9; 2000, 14, n. 20; 2009)—which he thinks of as an enduring attitudinal state—fits the bill. As he states:

We say that the agent turns his thoughts to the various motives that give him reason to act; but in fact, the agent's thoughts are turned in this direction by the desire to act in accordance with reasons. We say that the agent calculates the relative strengths of the reasons before him; but in fact, these calculations are driven by his desire to act in accordance with reasons. We say that the agent throws his weight behind the motives that provide the strongest reason; but what is thrown behind those motives, in fact, is the additional motivating force of the desire to act in accordance with reasons. For when a desire appears to provide the strongest reason for acting, then the desire to act in accordance with reasons becomes a motive to act on that desire, and the desire's motivational influence is consequently reinforced. The agent is moved to his action, not only by his original motive for it, but also by his desire to act on the original motive, because of its superior rational force. This latter contribution to the agent's behavior is the contribution of an attitude that performs the functions definitive of agency; it is therefore, functionally speaking, the agent's contribution to the causal order. (Velleman 2000, 141)

Given Velleman's view, while there are no antecedent conditions that settle whether our free actions occur, the occurrence of these actions are settled by us at the moment they are settled by an attitude with which we are functionally identical.

Pereboom (2015) has recently argued that proposals of the kind put forth by Velleman aren't able to account for cases where an agent makes a decision between alternatives despite having equal desires for, or attitudes in favor of or preferences toward, each alternative. That is, such proposals can't account for "torn decisions"; or decisions made when a person is in what Pereboom calls "motivational equipoise". Pereboom

argues that if we maintain that an agent's role *qua* settler is exclusively played by her desire to behave in accordance with what she takes to be the best reasons—as Velleman proposes—there can be nothing about a person that settles which alternative she chooses when torn equally between alternatives (i.e., while having equal desires for, or attitudes in favor of or preferences toward, either alternative). Accordingly, the agent *qua* settler of torn decisions—decisions made while in motivational equipoise—disappears given accounts like Velleman's wherein an agent's role *qua* settler is fulfilled by a desire, attitude or preference in favor of one alternative.<sup>5</sup>

To illustrate the problem, Pereboom draws upon an example developed by Mark Balaguer:

Ralph is deciding whether to stay in Mayberry or move to New York. Favoring the move to New York are his desire to play for the Giants, and his desire to star on Broadway. Favoring staying in Mayberry are his desire to marry Robbi Anna, and his desire to manage the local *Der Weinerschnitzel*. Suppose Ralph makes the torn decision to move to New York—he just decides to move to New York. (2009, 72)

In this example, Ralph simply decides to move to New York—he just chooses this alternative—without having any desire, preference or attitude tipping the scales, so to speak, toward the move. That is, he makes the torn decision to move to New York. Ralph makes this decision despite experiencing motivational equipoise. And we typically think people can make these kinds of torn decisions. The problem—according to Pereboom—is, given event-causal libertarian accounts of the kind proposed by Velleman, when a person is in motivational equipoise concerning her alternatives she is on the fence about, and out of resources for settling, what to do. There is no desire, attitude or

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<sup>5</sup> Pereboom presents the same case against Laura Ekstrom's (1993; 2000; 2003) account. Ekstrom proposes that certain general preferences in favor of certain alternatives—namely, those an agent forms and maintains as a result of her non-coerced and undetermined deliberations, thought processes and other agential conduct—might be functionally identified with the agent and fulfill her role of settler. But, as Pereboom (2015) argues, if we maintain that an agent's role *qua* settler is exclusively played by a general preference for a certain alternative—as Ekstrom proposes—there can be nothing about a person that settles how she behaves when torn equally between alternatives (i.e., while having equal desires for, or attitudes in favor of or preferences toward, either alternative). Thus, the agent *qua* decider of torn decisions disappears given Ekstrom's account.

preference in favor of one alternative to settle what she does. Thus, given accounts like Velleman's wherein a person's role *qua* settler is fulfilled by a desire, attitude or preference in favor of one alternative, how a person behaves whenever equally torn between her alternatives is left unsettled by her, out of her control and a matter of luck. In short, Velleman's proposal doesn't seem able to account for the making of torn decisions. Rather, the disappearance of the agent *qua* settler of torn decisions presents a special case of the disappearing agent problem for proposals wherein a person's role *qua* settler is fulfilled by a desire, attitude or preference in favor of one alternative.

#### *4. Franklin's enriched event-causal libertarian account*

Recently, Franklin (2014) has argued that, what he calls, an "enriched" event-causal libertarian account can avoid the disappearing agent problem. However, as will become apparent in this section, Velleman's account is an example of the kind of account Franklin has in mind. And in keeping with observations made above concerning Velleman's account, as we will eventually see in section 5, accounts enriched in the way Franklin has in mind are susceptible to Pereboom's special case of the disappearing agent problem: i.e.—the torn decision problem. To see this, let's start by summarizing Franklin's argument.

As a first approximation, Franklin maintains that an event-causal account of an agent settling whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion can be given if it is enriched by the inclusion of an event or state that not only "plays [the agent's] functional role" *qua* settler but "in so doing *counts* as *his* playing his functional role" (2014, 418); or, that is, "amounts to his playing his functional role" (419). Franklin, further, argues that the playing of a functional role by an event or state amounts to the agent playing her functional role as long as the agent is (a) identical to this event or state or (b) is identified with this event or state (419), which he argues is plausible.

Franklin develops his position by, first, drawing a lesson from well-known responses to the causal exclusion argument. To glean this lesson we need only sketch out this argument here. In very general terms, according to the causal exclusion argument,



given we accept certain premises about the physical world and that mental causes depend upon physical causes—for example, that they supervene on physical causes (Kim 2005, ch. 8)—at every point in time that there is a mental cause for some physical effect there is also a physical cause in competition with the mental cause for causing the effect (cf. Franklin 2014, 418-19). The upshot is that mental causes seem to be excluded from having any physical effects. There are, however, two well-known approaches to resolving the exclusion problem: the *identity solution* and the *inheritance solution*.

According to the identity solution, mental causes are identical to certain physical causes (e.g., see Block and Salnaker 1999; Kim 2005). There, thus, only *appears* to be competition between mental and physical causes. According to the inheritance solution, mental causes are so intimately connected with certain physical causes—for instance, mental causes are constituted (Pereboom 2002) or realized (Shoemaker 2003a, b) by physical causes—they inherit their causal powers (cf. Robb and Heil 2008). In this case, the causing of certain events by certain physical causes *counts* as the causing of certain events by certain mental causes.

The lesson Franklin wants us to draw from the identity and inheritance solutions to the exclusion argument is that certain events or states could plausibly fulfill an agent's functional role *qua* settler, and by doing so count as the agent fulfilling her functional role, if the agent is either:

(a) *identical* to certain events or states analogous to the way mental causes have been postulated to be identical with physical causes,

or is

(b) *identified* with certain events or states analogous to the way mental causes have been postulated to be constituted or realized by physical causes.

That is, if either (a) or (b) is the case, a reductive account of an agent settling whether certain states-of-affairs obtain on a particular occasion is plausible. Here, it should be noted that Franklin favors and develops the theory that agents are identified with, rather

than identical to, certain events or states since this allows the sidelining of questions about the nature of the agent in question (e.g., we need not come to a position concerning whether agents are substances or bundles of mental states; Franklin 2014, 420).

Given it is plausible we are identified with (or identical to) certain events or states that fulfill our functional role *qua* settler, the next natural question is which events or states might both we be identified with and fulfill this role. Franklin notes that event-causalists have put forth a number of proposals. As he points out:

The early Frankfurt (1988) argued that we are identified with our higher-order desires, while the later Frankfurt (1999), joined by Shoemaker (2003a) and Jaworska (2007), argued that we are identified with (a special subset of) our cares. Bratman (2007a) has argued that we are identified with our self-governing policies and Watson (1975; cf. Stump 1988; Ekstrom 1993) that we are identified with our system of evaluative beliefs. (420)

Franklin thinks the various kinds of proposals he mentions “have merit” (420), and he doesn’t want to saddle his enriched reductive account of agent settling with any specific view concerning the events or states with which we might be identified. Nevertheless, as a “working hypothesis”, which he offers as a way to “give more flesh to” his account, Franklin favors Velleman’s proposal that our “desire to act for what [we take] to be [our] strongest reasons” fulfills our role of settling matters and that its doing so counts as our fulfillment of this role (421; cf. Velleman 2000, 14n.20).

To illustrate his working hypothesis, Franklin has us suppose that a thief has reasons for stealing and for refraining from stealing, and “whichever choice he makes will be caused, in the appropriate way, by the relevant set of desires and beliefs” (423). This thief:

comes to view his desire to refrain as providing the strongest reason for action. In this case, the motivational force of the thief’s desire and beliefs that favor refraining will be supplemented with the thief’s motivational force in the form of his desire to act for what he takes to be the best reasons and, in this way, the desire introduces a new

causal influence. The thief plays a causal role over and above the causal role played by his desires and beliefs for action, and this supplementation amounts to his “throwing his weight” behind the desires and beliefs that led to action. (423)

According to Franklin’s proposal, it is the supplementary “motivational force” of the thief’s desire to behave for what he sees as the best reasons that settles whether he steals or refrains from stealing on the occasion in question. And the thief can be identified with this desire. Thus, the desire’s settling of whether the thief steals or refrains from stealing counts as the thief’s settling of this matter.

Franklin is careful to note that, given event-causal libertarianism, the thief’s refraining is “undetermined” (423). It, thus, isn’t settled in advance by any of the thief’s mental events or states, anything having to do with the thief, or by anything else. So on the occasion in question, though the thief refrained from stealing, he may have stolen despite his “judgment about what he had the most reason to do”. The motivational force of the thief’s desire to behave for what he takes to be the best reasons may have *not* been supplied on the occasion in question. Thus, according to Franklin, the thief could have not “intervened” and not played “a causal role over and above the causal role played by his specific desires and beliefs for action” (426). And, if the thief hadn’t *intervened* (i.e., if the motivational force of his desire to behave for what he takes to be the best reasons had not been supplied), the thief would have, on this occasion, left whether he stole or refrained from stealing unsettled. He may, in this case, have stolen or he may have, nevertheless, refrained from stealing on the occasion in question; but, either way, he would *not* have settled whether he stole or refrained. The reason: “there would be no attitude among the causes of his deciding to steal both that he is identified with and plays his functional role” (423).

I should clarify that Franklin is not claiming that whether an agent intervenes is contingent upon the occurrence of a mental state or event that is sometimes present and sometimes not. Rather, in line with Velleman’s view, Franklin maintains that whether an agent intervenes depends on whether the *motivational force* of a certain kind of desire, conceived of as an enduring attitudinal state, is supplied.<sup>6</sup> And, since he is offering a

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<sup>6</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the importance of this point.

libertarian account, whether the motivational force of this desire is supplied on any occasion must be left undetermined, and, thus, unsettled, by *antecedent* causal conditions if the desire is to fulfill the role of the agent *qua* settler by supplying motivational force.

Finally, I should also point out that Franklin is careful to note that—breaking with traditional event-causal theories—given his enriched theory, the supplying of a motivational force by the desire to act for what one takes to be the best reasons shouldn't be thought of as an *antecedent* to the agent's settling of matters. Rather, in keeping with Velleman's account (see section 3), Franklin maintains that the settling of a matter by this desire constitutes the agent's settling of a matter (425-9). So the moment this desire settles a matter by supplying the requisite motivational force is also the moment the agent settles the matter (425). And the idea that the settling of a matter by a mental state or event constitutes the settling of the matter by an agent, and thus that both occur simultaneously, is at the crux of an enriched event-causal libertarian account as laid out by Franklin (426).

##### *5. Problems for enriched event-causal libertarian accounts*

At this point, the contours of Franklin's position have been sufficiently outlined for us to recognize two problems facing it. One problem is particular to the theory—Velleman's theory—which Franklin uses "to give more flesh to" his underlying enriched event-causal libertarian account of agent settling. The other is a more fundamental problem for all such accounts. Let's start with the first.

(1) Borrowing from Velleman's account, Franklin theorizes that the settling of a matter by an agent's desire to behave for what she takes to be the best reasons counts as the agent's settling of a matter (420). As a result, Franklin's theory—like Velleman's—seems unable to meet Pereboom's torn decision challenge.

Recall that—as we saw in section 3—Pereboom has us consider cases where an agent is in motivational equipoise concerning her alternatives. She is on the fence about what to do. In such cases, the desire to behave for what one sees to be the best reasons—the state Franklin, like Velleman, theorizes as being the one that fulfills our role *qua*

settler—will be of no help in settling whether certain states-of-affairs obtain. The reason is simple: in motivational equipoise one doesn't see any of one's alternatives as being more reasonable, and so the desire to behave for the best reasons won't provide motivational force to tip the scales toward any of them. Thus, if our desire to behave for what we see to be the best reasons is the only mental state or event to fulfill our role *qua* settler, we are unable to settle whether certain states-of-affairs obtain when, in our eyes, we have equal reasons for behaving in alternative ways. So it would seem that the agent *qua* settler of torn decisions disappears given Franklin's theory.

We must, however, remember that Franklin is open to the idea that there are other mental states or events with which we can be functionally identified that fulfill our role of settling matters. And, given this, there does seem to be a way of modifying Franklin's theory to provide an enriched event-causal libertarian account that meets Pereboom's torn decision challenge.

In addition to postulating that the settling of a matter by an agent's desire to behave for what she sees to be the best reasons can amount to the agent settling a matter, we might also postulate that the settling of a matter by an agent's desire to *just go for one* alternative—rather than remain in a state of indecision—can, likewise, amount to the agent settling a matter. In this case, our desire to just go for one alternative could provide the motivational force to settle a matter even when we are in motivational equipoise concerning our alternatives; and, thus, when the desire to behave for the best reasons can't provide this motivational force. So we could settle what we do even when facing torn decisions. This at least seems a plausible way to proceed.

(2) There is, however, another, more fundamental, problem for enriched accounts as Franklin conceives of them. As observed in section 4, according to such accounts, when an agent “intervenes” and thereby settles a matter not already settled (423), she does so “in virtue of the power of” a certain state or event, with which she is identified (426). When this state or event doesn't supply the “motivational force” to supplement an agent's desires and beliefs that favor a certain way of behaving, she doesn't “intervene” and leaves whether she behaves in this way or some other way unsettled (423). So, in general terms, given an enriched account:

(i) an agent settles matters, which are not already settled, *via* a *certain* state or event, with which she is identified, supplying motivational force.

Further, as also observed in section 4, given event-causal *libertarianism*:

(ii) on any given occasion, *whether* the force by which an agent settles matters is supplied is undetermined and, thus, not settled in advance (423).

And here is where a problem arises. Given (i) and (ii), we are faced with a dilemma: either we accept an infinite regress or an agent doesn't control *whether* she "intervenes" and thereby settles a matter *on any given occasion*.<sup>7</sup>

Given (i), an agent settles a matter *via* a motivational force being supplied by a certain state or event. But additionally, given (i), if the agent is to settle *whether* this motivational force is supplied—and whether she intervenes—*on a certain occasion*, a certain state or event with which she is identified needs to supply a secondary motivational force that fulfills the agent's functional role of settling that the primary motivational force is supplied *on this occasion*. The reason is—according to (i)—agents settle matters *via* a state or event supplying motivational force. The problem is to settle whether this primary motivational force is supplied *on a certain occasion*, the agent will also need to settle that this secondary motivational force is supplied *on that occasion*. The reason is the agent settles whether this primary force is supplied *via* this secondary force. Thus, if she doesn't settle *whether* this secondary force is supplied on the occasion in question, she equally doesn't settle whether this primary force is supplied. In this case, again given (i), if the agent is to settle that this primary force is supplied, and, thus, that she intervenes, *on a certain occasion*, in addition to a secondary motivational force, a tertiary motivational force will need to be supplied—this one settling that the secondary motivational force is supplied. However, for the same reasons this tertiary force is needed, a motivational force is needed to settle that this tertiary force is supplied; and the same goes for this force and every subsequent force in this ensuing series, *ad infinitum*, if

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<sup>7</sup> Here, it should be kept in mind that an agent may settle a matter on a certain occasion without aiming to settle this matter at a certain point in time. For example, a person may settle that she buys a train ticket on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at 10:36am without aiming to do so at this specific time.

the agent is to settle that the primary motivational force is supplied, and, thus, that she settles whether she intervenes and settles a matter, on a certain occasion.

Thus, given enriched event-causal libertarianism, if an agent is to settle whether she intervenes on a certain occasion, a certain state or event with which she is identified needs to supply a series of motivational forces, and the supplying of each needs to count as the agent's settling of whether the subsequent motivational force is supplied, *ad infinitum*; thereby settling she intervenes on a certain occasion. As this is implausible, an agent can't settle whether she intervenes and settles a matter on a certain occasion. And if an agent can't settle whether she intervenes on a certain occasion, given (ii), even when doing all she can, an agent leaves whether she intervenes on a particular occasion unsettled and a matter of luck. Whether she intervenes on any given occasion is out of her control. An agent may, at times, settle certain matters but she can't control on which occasions she does this settling.

So, given the account in question, for an agent to have control over whether she settles a matter on any given occasion, motivational forces must be supplied in an endless series, which is implausible. We are, thus, left with the conclusion that an agent, *while doing all she can*, leaves whether she intervenes and settles a matter unsettled and up to something or someone else. She never controls whether she intervenes. The problem is if we never control whether we intervene, we are never morally responsible for *not* intervening, or for our behavior while not intervening. We, for instance, can't justifiably hold an agent morally responsible for *not* intervening to stop a pickpocket, for *not* intervening to blow the whistle on corporate corruption, or for *not* intervening to warn others of impending danger. Whether individuals intervene and settle whether they do these things, or anything else, on any given occasion is out of their hands. In this case, though we regularly hold individuals morally responsible for not intervening when we think they should have, we wrongly do so.

To provide one more illustration of the problem at hand, I will return to Franklin's thief example. Given enriched event-causal libertarianism, if a thief settles whether he refrains from stealing, a supplementary motivational force must be supplied by a certain state or event (i.e., one that fulfills the thief's functional role of settling the matter and by doing so amounts to him settling the matter; 423). However, given such an account, on

any occasion that a thief settles that he refrains, the thief might instead either steal or refrain *without* this force being supplied; and thus while having left whether he steals or refrains from stealing *unsettled* (424). In the latter case, the thief's behavior would be settled by something or someone else. Further, as we have just seen, given enriched event-causal libertarianism, the only way for the thief to control whether such a force is supplied on a given occasion is for an endless series of motivational forces to be supplied by a certain state or event thereby endlessly fulfilling his role *qua* settler. As this is implausible, the thief can't plausibly control whether he "intervenes" and settles whether he refrains from stealing on any given occasion. While, on certain occasions, he may settle whether he refrains from stealing, the thief can't control on which occasions these may be. As a result, at no time does he exercise control over whether or not he intervenes and settles that he refrains (and, when he doesn't intervene, he may either steal or refrain). He is, thus, never morally responsible for whether he intervenes and settles this matter, or, then, for *not* intervening—or for his behavior (whether stealing or refraining) when not intervening. The reason he can't be morally responsible for his behavior when not intervening is because, not only can he not control whether he intervenes, when he doesn't intervene whether he steals or refrains is left unsettled by him and a matter of luck. This is a problem since we often hold people morally responsible for not intervening, and, thus, for their behavior while not intervening.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Franklin doesn't address the issue I raise above, which shouldn't be confused with whether his enriched account is consistent with the idea agents have "plural voluntary control", an issue he does address (423-4). As Franklin notes, according to Robert Kane (1996; 2011), when given the choice between two alternatives, people are said to have plural voluntary control when they "have the power to make either choice be or not be at the time, voluntarily, on purpose and for reasons, and merely by accident" (2011, 397). Franklin claims that, given his account, agents can have this power. Using his thief example to illustrate, he maintains that, regardless of whether (a) the thief (by virtue of the power of his desire to do what he thinks he has the best reasons for doing) *settles* that he refrains from stealing (what he thinks he has the best reasons for doing) or (b) the thief *doesn't* settle this matter and steals, the thief's behavior is voluntary "on purpose and for reasons, and not merely by accident". So, without offering any real argument for this claim, Franklin maintains that, given event-causal libertarianism, behaving "voluntarily, on purpose and for reasons, and not merely by accident" isn't contingent upon settling how one behaves (424). However, given event-causal libertarian commitments, on occasions when a person doesn't settle whether she behaves in a certain way, whether she behaves in that way is a matter of luck (see section 2). And it seems contentious to maintain that behavior that occurs by luck is voluntary, engaged in "on purpose and for reasons" and doesn't occur "merely by accident" (but see note 10). Regardless, the issue I have raised above doesn't have to do with whether, given event-causal libertarian commitments, exercising voluntary control is contingent on settling how one behaves; or whether an enriched account is consistent with plural voluntary control. Rather, the issue I have raised has to do with whether, given an enriched account, an agent ever settles *whether* she settles a matter.



I can see one way an enriched event-causal libertarian account might be modified in order to avoid facing the dilemma, illustrated above, concerning an agent's ability to settle and thereby control whether she intervenes. It might be postulated that—rather than settling matters *via* a *certain* state or event supplying motivational force—an agent settles matters *via* one of *various* states or events, with which the agent is identified, supplying motivational force thereby fulfilling the agent's functional role *qua* settler. It might, further, be postulated that, on any given occasion, whether an agent behaves in a certain way depends on which of these states or events supplies this motivational force. Upholding these two postulations would allow the event-causal libertarian to uphold the plausible position that—as is often thought to be the case for many abilities<sup>9</sup>—the ability to settle whether a certain state-of-affairs obtains on a particular occasion is an ability exercised whenever the opportunity arises.<sup>10</sup> So, quite simply, an agent settles a matter, in one way or another, every opportunity she gets. There is never a question about whether an agent settles a matter given she has the opportunity to do so.

Taking this modified position seems, at least *prima facie*, a plausible way for event-causal libertarians to deny they must face the dilemma concerning an agent's ability to control *whether* she intervenes—a dilemma that, as we saw above, faces them if, with Franklin, they accept premises (i) and (ii) as stated above. The problem, however, is if we take this modified position we are faced with a different dilemma. This time concerning an agent's ability to settle and thereby control *how* she intervenes.

According to the modified account that I laid out above:

(i') an agent settles matters, which are not already settled, *via* one of *various* states or events, with which she is identified, supplying motivational force.

And given event-causal *libertarianism*:

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<sup>9</sup> For example, those who accept a conditional analysis of abilities maintain that abilities are exercised whenever the opportunity arises (e.g., Ryle 1949; Molnar 2003, ch. 4; Bird 2007, ch. 2).

<sup>10</sup> Upholding these two propositions also provides a way of avoiding the contentious issue as to whether, given Franklin's unmodified account, agents have "plural voluntary control" (see note 8). It avoids this issue since, given these propositions, an agent settles that she *Vs* or that she doesn't *V* whenever she has an opportunity to settle that she *Vs*.

(ii') on any given occasion, *which* state or event supplies the force by which an agent settles matters is undetermined and, thus, not settled in advance.

The problem, now, becomes that, given (i'), if we are to settle *how* we settle a matter, one or more of various states or events with which we are identified needs to supply a series of motivational forces, and the supplying of each needs to count as our settling of *which* subsequent motivational force is supplied, *ad infinitum*; thereby *settling* the means by which we settle a matter. This is implausible. So we are left to conclude that we can't settle the means by which we settle a matter. And since we can't settle the means by which we settle a matter, given (ii'), even when we do all we can, the means by which we settle a matter and thereby intervene is left unsettled by us and a matter of luck. It is out of our control. We are, thus, not morally responsible for *how* we intervene.

To return once more to Franklin's thief example—given (i')—while we can maintain that a thief settles whether he steals or refrains from stealing, and that he can do so in virtue of the “motivational force” supplied by (a) the desire to act for what he sees to be the best reasons, or, for instance, (b) the desire to just go for one alternative, we can't plausibly maintain that the thief settles *how* he comes to either steal or refrain from stealing as this would require an endless series of forces being supplied. As a result—given (ii')—we must conclude that the thief, *doing all he can*, leaves how he intervenes and comes to either steal or refrain from stealing unsettled and a matter of luck. In this case, we can't justifiably hold the thief morally responsible for *how* he intervenes and comes to either steal or refrain from stealing. The problem is we regularly hold people morally responsible for how they come to do something. For example, we generally hold people morally responsible for whether they come to do something out of wanting what is best or wanting what they desire most.

Therefore, it seems that postulating that whenever an agent has an opportunity to settle a matter, she settles the matter by virtue of “the power of” one of various states or events amounts to kicking the can—or the dilemma as it were—down the road. It may, perhaps, provide a way of avoiding the dilemma facing event-causal libertarians who maintain that an agent settles matters *via a certain* state or event supplying motivational force—a dilemma concerning an agent's ability to control *whether* she settles a matter.

But this dilemma is replaced with another dilemma concerning an agent's ability to control *how* she intervenes and comes to do something. For, as observed in the preceding paragraphs, if we hypothesize that whenever an agent has an opportunity to settle a matter she settles the matter by virtue of "the power of" one of various states or events, either her ability to control how she intervenes disappears (one horn of the dilemma) or we must accept an infinite regress (the other horn).

#### *6. An underlying issue for event-causal libertarian accounts*

If the observations made in section 5 are correct, postulating that an agent's role *qua* settler is fulfilled by a state or event with which the agent can be identified leads to a dilemma concerning either:

(a) an agent's ability to control *whether* she intervenes (if we postulate that the ability to settle matters isn't exercised every time the opportunity arises),

or

(b) an agent's ability to control *how* she intervenes (if we postulate that the ability to settle matters is an ability exercised every time the opportunity arises).

These dilemmas arise independent of the content of the mental state or event postulated to fulfill an agent's role of agent settler. And which of the above dilemmas to face presents a second-order dilemma for event-causal libertarians.

I believe these dilemmas point toward an issue inextricably linked to event-causal libertarian accounts of agent settling. These dilemmas arise as a result of how, according to event-causal accounts, an agent intervenes. Given libertarian accounts wherein our intervening and settling of matters is explained in terms of the supplying of a force by certain states or events, if we postulate that the ability to settle matters isn't exercised every time the opportunity arises (as Franklin does), we must either postulate that certain

*forces are supplied in an endless series* or conclude that *whether* an agent intervenes *on any given occasion* is outside of her control. On the other hand, if we postulate that the ability to settle matters is an ability exercised whenever the opportunity arises, we must, similarly, postulate that certain *forces are supplied in an endless series* or conclude that *how* an agent intervenes *on any given occasion* is outside of her control.

At this point, we might ask whether agent-causal libertarians face the same, or similar, dilemmas, and whether what I have identified here is a general problem for libertarians. In response, it will be helpful to return to some initial observations we made about agent-causal libertarianism in section 1.

As observed at the outset with Steward's help, given agent-causal libertarianism, an agent *qua* substance, or *self-mover*, can settle matters *by moving her body or part of it* (Steward 2012, 32-6). An agent performs actions that may appropriately be described as *her moving* of her body—and as *her causing* of her body to move—in certain ways at a certain point in time; and, equally, as *her settling* that her body moves in certain ways on this occasion (34-6). These actions can also be described in multiple other ways (34; cf. Anscombe 1957; von Wright 1963). As a result, unlike what is the case for states and events, given an agent *qua* substance can settle matters by moving her body in certain ways—as agent-causal libertarians maintain—she can settle whether her body moves in certain ways *on a particular occasion*, whether she intervenes and settles a matter *on a particular occasion*, and *how* she intervenes, at once, with one fell swoop. The reason is a *single action* performed by the agent at a certain point in time may appropriately be described as *her settling* of these various matters at that time. The upshot is that by moving her body or part of it in a certain way—and at the instance of moving her body in this way—an agent settles whether her body moves in certain ways, whether she intervenes at a certain point in time, and whether she does so by certain means. *The agent supplies force once* thereby accomplishing all of these things. To borrow Steward's words, she settles “the answers to a variety of questions whose answers are (therefore) not already settled” pertaining to what obtains at a certain point in time (39).

So, by moving her body in a certain way at a certain point in time, an agent doesn't leave whether her body moves in certain ways, or whether she intervenes in a certain way, to luck. Rather, in as much as she settles whether her body moves on any

given occasion she equally settles whether and how she intervenes on that occasion. Thus, once we—along with the agent-causal libertarian—admit an agent *qua* substance settles whether her body moves we also admit she settles whether and how she intervenes. To illustrate, an agent *qua* substance may settle whether she intervenes to settle a dispute—as well as whether she does so by appealing to a common interest shared by the disputing parties—at a certain point in the argument (and in time), at the moment she moves parts of her body in certain ways (e.g., lips, mouth, larynx) and shares her perspective with the disputing parties.

Let me provide one more illustration by returning to an example I used at the outset. An agent's action of reaching into her pocket, pulling out her credit card, extending her hand and placing it into the hands of a train conductor on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at 10:36am (if, indeed, this is all one action) may appropriately be described in terms of the agent's moving of her body in certain ways at this time, in terms of the agent's buying of a train ticket by credit card at this time, and in terms of the agent's intervening in a certain state-of-affairs at this time such that she now has a train ticket. Thus, given agent-causal libertarianism, at the moment of performing this action, which may appropriately be described in multiple ways, the agent settles whether her arms and hands move in certain ways as well as whether and how she intervenes. Her action may appropriately be described as her settling of any of these matters on a particular occasion.

The pivotal difference between agent-causal and event-causal accounts is that, according to the first, when an agent acts the relevant causal relations exist between a substance and certain bodily motion and/or other changes. An agent *qua* substance causes or brings about these events. However, according to the second, the relevant causal relations exist between events and/or states. An agent *qua* event and/or state supplies a force thereby causing, or bringing about, other events and/or states. And upholding this second view along with libertarian commitments leads to a serious problem not faced by libertarians who uphold the first view.

On the one hand, according to event-causal libertarians, an agent settles matters *via events or states supplying forces* that cause certain other events (e.g., the movement of her body). The consequence, as we have seen, is that if an agent is to control whether such a force is supplied (and *whether* she intervenes)—or which force is supplied (and

*how* she intervenes)—on a certain occasion, events or states must supply *an endless series* of such forces, each settling that the prior force in the series is supplied on that occasion.

On the other hand, according to agent-causal libertarians, an agent *qua* substance causes change and thereby settles matters. Whether and how an agent *qua* substance settles a matter on a particular occasion is settled *by the agent* when she performs *an act* that may appropriately be described in multiple ways, including in terms of her moving of her body in certain ways, as well as in terms of her interfering in certain states-of-affairs in a certain way, on that occasion. By acting, *the agent* causes certain bodily motions as well as other changes; and, when she does, she settles multiple matters that had up to that point not been settled (including whether and how she would intervene at that point in time). Thus, while impossible for an agent *qua* state or event, an agent *qua* substance can simultaneously settle *whether* she intervenes, and *how* she does so, on a particular occasion. In this case, given an agent-causal account, an agent has an ability a state or event can't plausibly have:

the ability to simultaneously settle whether and how she intervenes.

Exercising this ability is, thus, a role a state or event can't fulfill. It, of course, might be argued that there is no substance in existence that actually fulfills the role of exercising this ability; or that it isn't even conceivable that there would be an agent *qua* substance, or settler *qua* substance. However, as we've seen, once we admit an agent *qua* substance settles whether her body moves we also admit she settles whether and how she intervenes. So an argument against agent-causal libertarianism would need to be an argument against the very existence or conceivability of substances *qua* settlers. And it would be up to the agent-causalist to counter this argument. But, regardless, what we have seen here is that it is implausible that states or events fulfill the role of an agent *qua* settler of both whether and how she intervenes on a particular occasion. It, thus, seems a kind of agent does after all disappear in event-causal *libertarian* accounts; namely—an agent who simultaneously settles, and thereby controls, whether and how she intervenes. The upshot is event-causal libertarians face several dilemmas that agent-causal libertarians

don't; and, in order to plausibly maintain that agents simultaneously control whether and how they intervene, libertarians need to be agent-causalists. So it would seem that event-causal libertarianism affords less and is far less appealing than agent-causal varieties. Event-causal libertarianism even seems implausible. And—in keeping with Steward's and likeminded incompatibilist analyses of action—this implausibility may ultimately be explained by the irreducibility of causation by agents to causation by events.

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