

Etika

CAUSAL DETERMINANTS, REASONS, AND SUBSTANTIVE AUTONOMY: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO AGENCY*

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Although the notion of agency presents itself as an attractive solution to the puzzle of free will, it faces a problem vis-à-vis the nature of reasons that are purported to lie behind actions. In this paper, I first point out the significance of a paradigm shift that emerges with the agency view. Then I argue that the agency theories nonetheless fail in general to give a satisfactory account of various sorts of reasons underlying our actions and choices. In trying to enlighten the multi-faceted nature of actions and agency, I define a novel concept, “substantive autonomy,” and claim that it is a basic fact valid for all animals, not only humans, that are capable of initiating action. Reasons may indeed be lying behind our actions in a non-deterministic and ubiquitous manner, but agency often works in the absence of sophisticated (discursive) reasons which are evidently characteristic of humans.

Keywords: agency, event causation, free will, reasons, substantive autonomy.

Introduction

Naturalistically-minded people generally believe that “the space-time system is all that there is” (Armstrong 1997, p. 5), and that whatever happens in our (mezzo) universe is invariably caused by certain antecedent physical events. According to this “scientific characterization” of the world, our bo-

dies are extremely complex physical systems too, and as such they are part of the mechanical world order in which they are placed. Human bodies and other physical objects are subject to the laws of nature alike, and everything that happens in our bodies are determined by antecedent physical (that is, physiological) states. Quite naturally, then, our *decisions* are also a result of whatever is taking place in our bodies, viz., physical processes that are being governed by mind-independent laws of nature. But if this is correct – if the decisions that we ordinarily make are not the products of some disembodied

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spirit but simply of our physiology whose workings are determined causally or nomologically – then it becomes difficult to see how a human subject *is* actually free to choose one particular course of action than another. If, on the other hand, human beings are somehow able to stand outside this giant objective, causal mechanism, it is not clear how this can make us free. For if the subject's choices and actions are, say, uncaused occurrences, they seem to be unconstrained and uncontrolled events. The unsettling upshot of all this is that either way we do not seem to get a satisfactory account of the possibility of free will. Of course, one way out of this predicament would be to deny that we have free will. Although there have been philosophers in the history of thought who made this claim, it is a rather moot point that one can comfortably settle with a position that depicts human beings as non-autonomous (and, as a natural consequence, non-moral) entities.

In this paper, I turn to an old and baffling philosophical question with an aim to provide some critical reflections. I will first briefly expose some of the central ideas and accounts found in the literature on free will. Then I will focus on certain well-known theories of agency and point out a possible explanatory weakness of them. My conclusion will be that even though the agency accounts present themselves as the most promising candidate in solving the conundrum of free will, there are certain important philosophical issues that have been overlooked by the defenders of the agency view. In Section "A Critique: Substantive Autonomy and Reasons" of this paper, I describe the concept of *substantive autonomy*, and maintain that it expresses a basic truth applicable to all animals, not only *Homo sapiens*, that are capable of initiating action. Even if reasons lie behind our actions in a non-deterministic fashion as convincingly defended by a number of metaphysicians, agency often functions in the absence of sophisticated (discursive) reasons which are evidently characteristic of humans. It is my main intention in this paper to explicate, and display the consequences of, this significant facet of the concept of agency.

Determinism, Indeterminism, and Free Will

While the debate on the *truth* of determinism, with its scientific and philosophical aspects, is by itself a sufficiently important one, a different and equally significant sort of question, pertinent to the present discussion, is about the possibility of free will *given* the thesis of determinism – or, succinctly, about the possibility of "soft determinism"¹. Now, let us first recall that one striking implication of determinism, construed strictly, is that given any moment in the history, there can be only one physically possible future (Van Inwagen 1993, 186–187). P. van Inwagen, who strongly rejects compatibilism, invites us to consider the following *No Choice Principle*:

Suppose that *p* and that no one has (or ever had) any choice about whether *p*. And suppose also that the following conditional (if-then) statement is true and that no one has (or ever had) any choice about whether it is true: if *p*, then *q*. It follows from these two suppositions that *q* and that no one has (or ever had) any choice about whether *q*. (*ibid.*, p. 189–191)

We have obviously no choice about what had happened a million years ago. Furthermore, by determinism, if things were so and so a million years ago, then I am looking at a computer screen and writing a paper right now; and I cannot have any choice about the truth of this conditional statement either. In a nutshell, No Choice Principle tells us that free will is an illusion. One may quite naturally

¹ Let me quickly provide a list of some of the most important definitions pertaining to this literature. *The Principle of Universal Causation* is "the thesis that every event (or fact, change, or state of affairs) has a cause" (Van Inwagen 1989, p. 3). *Determinism* is the claim that "in case of everything that exist, there are antecedent conditions, known or unknown, which, because they are given, mean that thing could not be other than they are. More loosely, it says that everything ... [is] causally determined" (Taylor 1992, p. 36). *Compatibilism* claims that truth of determinism does not exclude the possibility of free will. *Libertarianism* is the affirmation of incompatibilism with a denial of determinism. *Soft Determinism* is the conjunction of determinism and compatibilism. *Hard Determinism* is the conjunction of determinism and incompatibilism.

wonder, at this point, how the determinist thesis is juxtaposed with the idea of free will to yield a compatibilist position. Soft determinism has it that voluntary behavior is *nonetheless* free to the extent that it is unconstrained and also that in the absence of such constraints, the causes of voluntary behavior are certain states, events, or conditions within the agent himself (Taylor 1992, p. 44). But consider the following scenario: A scientist places an electronic chip within my cerebral cortex, and sends signals to the chip by means of a remote control device in order to manipulate my inner desires and volitions. For instance, he presses a certain button and I suddenly exhibit aggressive behavior. It is sufficiently clear in this example that there is nothing *external* to restrain me from what I am doing. Nevertheless, one cannot plausibly claim that in this instance I have free will. If this is the case, determinism does seem like a real threat to the possibility of free will after all.

Despite the fact that plain compatibilism is not the most popular perspective among philosophers, there are not great *prima facie* prospects for *indeterminism* either vis-a-vis the problem of free will. One substantial reason for this is that a mere denial of determinism (call this “simple indeterminism”) apparently amounts to the suspicious claim that free will is possible because a person’s actions or inner states are *uncaused*. Obviously, this can hardly solve the problem. Suppose my inner states are completely uncaused. I am walking in the street and suddenly, *as a response* to some of my (uncaused) inner states, I find myself shouting furiously. Such “uncausedness” of my inner states might add much color to my life; yet it certainly cannot give us what we want for my inner states would then be totally out of my control. Now, imagine another case, suggested by G. Strawson (1995), where a subject *S* is about to pick up either a black pen or a blue pen which are placed side by side on a desk. If this imminent action of *S* is a rational and deliberate one (unlike, e.g., reflex actions), there must be some reason behind, and an explanation of, why she acted this way but not the other. How she acts in this case – and in the other cases of (allegedly) free action – is a function of (determined by) how she mentally

is at that given moment. Thus, if *S* is to be responsible for her choosing the black pen, *S* must be able to choose how she is at the moment of decision. But in order to do make such a choice, *S* must have some further or higher principles of choice that she can employ consciously. These principles, in turn, must be chosen in a deliberate fashion, requiring further principles of choice, and so on. Since it is impossible for *S* to perform such an infinite task of choosing the principles of choice, she cannot determine how she is. Consequently, it becomes impossible for her to be a “self-determining agent.” And it is not clear how in the absence of “self-determination” *S* can act freely.

It is a critical point in the argument given above that falsity of determinism is not sufficient to show that the libertarian is right, i.e., that we have free will. The libertarian owes us an explanation as to how an indeterministic event taking place somewhere along the causal link connecting cognitive agent’s existent reasons (beliefs, desires, and so on) to a particular resultant action makes that action free. That is to say, if the libertarian is to argue for an action’s being free, he must “locate an indeterministic occurrence among the antecedents of any free action – and [he must] show how its presence helps to make the action free” (*ibid.*, p. 18). Such an indeterministic occurrence, Strawson thinks, may not take place simultaneously with (but independently of) a “reason state” or between such a state and the relevant free action. This is because, in such a case, the reason state would not explain the action rationally. Therefore, the indeterministic occurrence should precede the reason state but should not be unconnected with it. But how *this* can make an action free is a problem the libertarian has to tackle.

The upshot of Strawson’s argument is that since self-determination is not possible, the determinist cannot show that our actions are free. Our antecedent beliefs, desires, and volitions, to the extent that they are deterministic, can rationally explain our actions, but unfortunately they deprive us of freedom with respect to those actions. If, on the other hand, our freedom is alleged to spring from

our ability to make “belief/desire disengaged choices,” they are left unexplained and mysterious (*ibid.*, p. 26). Thus, if a process is wholly or partly indeterministic, it seems impossible to have a choice or control over it.

A Different Paradigm

One fundamental assumption lying behind the discussion given above is that *decision-making* and *deliberate action* are causal processes. Causes of particular decisions and actions are found in the antecedent inner states (beliefs, desires, volitions, etc.) of the cognitive agent. If the cognizer is acting in a conscious manner and if she is to be held responsible for her actions, there must in principle be some *objective* explanation which refers to those causal relations between inner states of a person and a relevant action. Naturally, then, we cannot accept statements like “I did *q* rather than *p*, because this is how I decided or chose” as explanations. This is not an admissible explanation for it explains nothing: the same sort of explanation could have been used to explain why that person did *p* rather than *q* (Nagel 1986, p. 38–39). One interesting point to note in this context is that as long as we are unable to provide such explanations, that is, to determine the causal link between the antecedent states and the actions, we may not plausibly claim that we are free in our decisions. But, ironically, if we move in this direction and eventually get fully objective (causal) explanations for our actions, we get totally deprived of our freedom once again. The entire process is then a determined event and, given Strawson’s argument about the impossibility of “self-determining,” it is very difficult to see how one can find a place for freedom in such a fully causal process of decision-making and acting. The paradigm within which the opponent of indeterminism (that is, the skeptic) works gives us in the end a considerably grim picture.

Of course, this is not the way we *feel* about our actions. Subjectively speaking, we have little doubt that we are free and that we could, at least in some cases, have decided and acted other than what we

actually did. Still, it is not easy to ignore the “objective” perspective according to which decision-making is essentially a causal process. But perhaps this apparent tension or conflict between the “scientific” and “phenomenological” aspects of the matter is a bit misleading. It may be that the double vision caused by some kind of Cartesian miasma is not the only option lying before us. Thus, if we can view the entire situation from a different perspective, we might offer a more viable account of free will.

Theories of *agency* basically have it that people are sometimes the causes of their own behavior, and that if an action is free there must be no antecedent conditions sufficient for the agent’s performing it². The agent does have certain reasons for acting (rationally and deliberately) in a particular way; but these reasons do not deterministically constitute “the cause” of the action. This way of regarding the matter accords well with our ordinary concept of “agency”: when we say that *S* has chosen the black pen rather than the blue one, what we have in mind is something like “*S* caused her hand to pick up the black pen,” rather than “*S*’s inner states caused her hand to pick up the black pen.” In such a case, *S* is “a cause, without being an antecedent sufficient condition” (Taylor 1992, p. 52). In fact, it might be better not to use the term ‘cause’ but simply to say “*S* performs (or initiates, originates, etc.) her own acts.” Furthermore, *S*’s decision is an indeterministic process in the sense that she could have chosen to take the blue pen. In other words, “the laws of nature and the way things were when the process was initiated were consistent with its terminating in her [picking up the blue pen]” (Van Inwagen 1993, p. 194).

The fact that there are no sufficient causal conditions for the performance of an action does not mean that it is arbitrary or random. According to Chisholm, it is possible that in the absence of such conditions there exist “several ways in which other events may contribute causally to that undertaking” (1993, p. 99). Suppose our agent *S* hears her friend

² Taylor 1992, p. 51. *Vide* Clarke (1997) who provides a very useful bibliographical summary of various agency views.

shouting “Quick! Fetch me a pen!” and immediately grabs the black pen. In this case, there is a sufficient causal condition for *S*’s action even though there might be none for picking up *that* particular pen. Rather, the fact that *S*’s friend shouted made a *causal contribution* to *that* event. The important point to stress here is that for Chisholm agent causation is a “subspecies” of event causation. Consequently, just as we can talk about how *S*’s undertaking, which is an event, contributes causally to another event, we can justifiably talk about how *S* (*the agent*) contributes causally to an event.

In renouncing traditional versions of determinism and indeterminism, one strategy for the agency theorist is to insist that not all rational explanations are of *nomic* nature. C. Ginet, for instance, argues for this point by offering an account of *anomic* sufficient conditions for a “reasons explanation.” In the words of C. Ginet, “if an action is not a purely chance or random event, if it is influenced by or has an explanation in terms of the agent’s reasons or motives for doing it, then it is *ipso facto* determined” (Ginet 1995, p. 73–74). Suppose a person flips a switch to turn the lights on. The reasons explanation in this instance is as follows: “concurrently with his action of flipping the switch, he intended by that action to turn on the lights” (*ibid.*, p. 81). To put it in a more striking fashion, the agent’s reason for flipping the switch is *identical* to his intention to turn on the lights. Two points must be observed here: In this explanation, (1) there are sufficient conditions, and, (2) these conditions do *not* entail that there is a law covering the process. There is, Ginet believes, “an *internal* relation between the explaining factor and the explained action” (*ibid.*, p. 84).

Although the libertarian thesis is an attractive one, it is admittedly a difficult task to provide a positive account of the indeterministic process of free action. In other words, it is a desideratum that the philosopher say something more than just “the person has chosen this way and, hence, he has become the cause (or “initiator”) of his own action.” In this sense, R. Nozick’s account deserves special attention as he attempts to fulfill this desideratum by of-

fering a relatively more thorough analysis. It is a crucial point in Nozick’s argument that an event’s being caused does *not* imply that it is causally determined. To see how this is so, let us go back to our example. *S* is to choose between the black pen and the blue pen, and she picks up the former. What would be an explanation of the causal process of her decision and action? According to Nozick, it goes as follows: Before *S* makes a decision, a number of reasons pertinent to her action are present in her mind – call them “ R_{BLACK} ” and “ R_{BLUE} ”. As *S* is about to make her decision, she *weighs* these reasons. But there is more to it: in the course of decision making, *S* also *weights* R_{BLACK} and R_{BLUE} . However, and this is the critical point, “there is no prior causal determination of the precise weight each reason will have in competition with others (Nozick 1981, p. 295). R_{BLACK} and R_{BLUE} are *available* to *S* at the moment of decision; they do *not* determine her relevant action. Thus, if *S* decides to pick up the black pen, R_{BLACK} is said to be (or, rather, *become*) the cause of her action. But suppose *S* chose to pick up the blue pen. In this case, counterfactually speaking, R_{BLUE} would have been the cause of her action. Besides, “[a]lthough we can retrospectively identify a cause, this does not mean our action was causally determined ...” (*ibid.*, p. 296); had *S* picked up the blue pen (which was an open alternative to her), she would have identified, retrospectively, R_{BLUE} as the cause of her action.

According to Nozick, determination of the “weights” that attach to reasons can occur concurrently with a pertinent decision. Suppose next day *S* finds herself in exactly the same situation, that is, she is to take either the black or the blue pen. She chooses to pick up the blue one. In such a case, it is appropriate to say that *S* weigh(t)ed R_{BLACK} and R_{BLUE} , and that as she chooses the blue one this time, R_{BLUE} “wins out” and becomes the cause of her resultant action. Consequently, we can state that “[t]he existence of the cause is not under her control and does *not* originate with her, but the fact that it causes her act is and does” (*ibid.*, p. 315).

This sounds like a tenable solution to the problem of free will. Unfortunately, it leaves us with a

serious problem: what can we say about that entity or process which bestows those weights upon reasons? Is it determined or controlled by the cognizer who performs the actions? If the answer is “no,” one can easily raise the well-known objections that we have considered in the preceding section. If, however, the answer is “yes,” Nozick has to encounter Strawson’s argument against the possibility of self-determination.

Nozick’s response is that the very act of weigh(t)ing reasons may be responsible for fixing “general principles that mandate not only the relevant act but also the bestowing of those (or similar) weights” (*ibid.*, p. 300). Hence, it is misguided to try to find those principles above and beyond the particular acts of decision. But if this is the case, Strawson is wrong in thinking that “we cannot determine how we are.” The picture of the agent Nozick is attempting to develop is something like that: As we make decisions and bestow weights upon reasons, our *selves* are formed around those acts of bestowing weights – thus, what is brought about as a result of those processes of “weight assignments” is a general (but presumably rather complex) principle like “I value things in this way” (*ibid.*, p. 306). Then, the “mechanism” that performs the decision-making can be regarded as having been formed or constructed by nothing other than the particular acts of the cognizer. This evidently answers Strawson’s criticism because, under these circumstances, what makes self-determination possible is simply the acts of weigh(t)ing the reasons in individual circumstances. Since this mechanism is “self-determined,” we overcome the problem posed by Strawson and obtain the desired result: even though our choices and actions are caused, they are *not* determined by factors outside our volitions.

This may sound too good to be true, and Nozick is well aware of this fact (*ibid.*, p. 305). In particular, he realizes that it sounds like a philosophical trick to say that “free decision is reflexive.” According to this latter idea, “[a]n explanation of why the act was chosen will have to refer to its being chosen” (*ibid.*, p. 304). The bestowal of weights yields not only the action (as a subsumption), but, more curiously, that very besto-

wal – a contention that may easily make one think that Nozick is using here “a shiny tool” that gets us out of the trouble in an almost magical way. Let us note here that while Nozick refrains from overestimating what his theory actually accomplishes, he still believes that use of notions like self-subsumption and reflexivity in explicating the nature of free choice and action sets us on the right track, despite all its vagueness.

As we have seen above, there exists a critical tension between the role played by antecedent physical states in our actions and the role of the person *qua* autonomous agent – a tension that is often associated with an alarming sort of “duality” (Nagel 1986, p. 39–41; Van Inwagen 1993, p. 197). In dealing with this dualistic picture, some theorists of agency have chosen to employ a somewhat unusual, but apparently promising, version of compatibilism. R. Clarke has more recently argued that while *the agent* is involved in the production of free action, the “reality” of agent-causation does not exclude the involvement of another, equally important sort: event causation. Seen from a certain (naturalistic) point of view, prior *events* nondeterministically (i.e., probabilistically) cause the action of a person. But agent causation is definitely not reducible to event causation (Clarke 1997, p. 277). In agent causation, the first relatum is a substance, not an event. This means that although the subject’s actions are governed by laws, she is nevertheless a completely free agent. Clarke’s explication is the following. Consider a particular case of human action where there are two prior events, R1 and R2, consisting of the agent’s beliefs and desires. Furthermore, R1 and R2 are *probabilistically* the causes of actions A1 and A2, respectively. Since these relata are connected by means of *nondeterministic* causal relations, it is just open to the agent to perform either A1 or A2. Suppose the agent performs A2. Under those circumstances, we should say that the agent’s action is caused by her, *and* it is nondeterministically caused by R2. Consequently, Clarke contends, human agents have free will in a physical, causally structured world. In other words, we can abandon the traditional paradigm with its doub-

le vision and the notorious in-out distinction often considered to be inherent in human action.

A Critique: Substantive Autonomy and Reasons

One of the most innovative and striking claims of the theoreticians of agency is that free decision is a reflexive phenomenon. In this section, I want to take a closer look at the nature of such reflexivity and provide a critical assessment of a certain important aspect of the accounts we have seen above. Recall that it is essential to the libertarian view that human agents do have free will and their actions are not wholly determined by antecedent physical states or conditions. Those who believe that there is a “person” or “agent” behind actions maintain that there are no sufficient physical conditions determining deliberate actions of human beings. As Ginet insists, there is an internal relation between the action actually performed by the agent and the factor that explains the action in question. This is another way of reading the statement that the person is a substance, not just a locus of certain physiological occurrences.

Despite its credibility and obvious explanatory power, I am inclined to think that there is something missing, perhaps even misleading, in this portrayal of the connection between ordinary actions and causes/reasons that explain them. The problem arises because of a general failure to distinguish various classes or sorts of causes that can be said to lie behind our actions. A notable class, peculiar to *Homo sapiens* who possess complex cognitive and linguistic abilities, comprises those reasons which enable us to carry out sophisticated thinking and to make choices that are only possible through deliberation. When a person performs a particular action after having decided on her future career or what to have for breakfast or which turn to take while driving on a highway, she has to “weigh” a number of reasons before the actual performance of the action in question. But, recalling Nozick’s terminology and main thesis, it is unlikely that the *weighting* of reasons in this instance is concurrently

and completely done at the very moment the pertinent action is performed. For example, when somebody decides to have scrambled eggs instead of cereals for her breakfast, the weights of relevant reasons associated with these alternatives must already be residing within her cognitive system albeit perhaps in an incomplete, vague or inexact manner. Immediately before a person makes a choice between cereals and eggs, he has a particular set of “inclinations” determined not only by inner physiological states such as physical needs and deficiencies but also by a vast amount of experiential background comprising abstract intensional (e.g., cultural) as well as basic empirical elements which must be operative in every single “significant choice.” Such choices are paradigmatic instances of contexts in which we can safely talk about the presence of *reasons* playing the major role in a person’s acting in a certain way rather than another.

Compare and contrast this with another class of actions where such sophisticated processes of decision-making and world knowledge seem to be absent from the picture. Suppose I keep sitting on a chair and, after a while, I cross my legs without ever thinking about it. Now, happenings of this sort do not exactly fall under the category of entirely involuntary, unavoidable physical occurrences such as knee jerks and facial tics. A tic or a knee jerk cannot be prevented even by an agent who has extraordinary will power. Obviously, crossing legs (without paying attention to it) is not like that. This does not mean that one finds elements of reflection and deliberation behind the actual instances of spontaneously crossing legs. The difference is that while tics are not initiated by agents, crossing legs (non-reflectively) *somehow* is. Consider also the following: A conscious human agent’s crossing legs is fundamentally different from a programmed robot’s doing the same thing in that the internal “mechanism” of the latter literally *necessitates* the performance of the action physically. The question, then, arises as to the relation between those common human actions performed without deliberation and the main theses of the agency view. Shifting our emphasis from such examples as “turning on a switch inten-

tionally” to “non-deliberately crossing legs,” we may ask what exactly it would mean to say that there are causes or reasons behind such actions.

As far as ordinary spontaneous movements of bodily parts are concerned, human beings are not any different from most other animals. Even if there *are* antecedent physical conditions pertaining to an animal’s possible actions, those conditions do *not* mechanistically “determine” or “fix” it to act in a certain way. It is not an extraordinary claim that human beings *qua* cognitive creatures are not substantially different from most of other animals. In our post-cognitive age people in general have a laudable awareness of the fact the Cartesian picture of animals as complex machines is fundamental mistaken and that there is no absolute, categorical gap between humans and the other primates in terms of their cognitive capacities – recognizing, of course, the seemingly unbridgeable gaps related to many higher functions, e.g., advanced symbol manipulation, abstract reasoning, etc. Empirical studies done on animals for the last half century make it abundantly clear that human agents and other mammals exhibit commonalities, at a basic level, with respect to their cognition³. Basic kinds of cognitive performances invariably involve *decision making processes* which are rudimentarily found in many other species as well. Furthermore, most animals are “action-initiators” or “performers” in ordinary circumstances just like human beings in that, with respect to their simple actions, they could have done otherwise. When an animal performs a particular behavior, it is in general not just that certain physiological events within its corporeal system cause another event, that is, the resultant behavior. The animal is actually being, in a restricted sense, an agent or substance just the way, for instance, Clarke describes in his treatment of the agency view. Let me call this “phenomenon” (or, more precisely, “minimal capacity”), which is arguably found in most animals, *substantive autonomy*. A human

agent’s crossing legs without paying any attention to it, a duck’s changing directions arbitrarily during swimming (i.e., in the absence of “interesting” external stimuli that might affect and determine the animal’s instantaneous “choices” pertaining to the direction of its motion) are paradigmatic instances of substantive autonomy. According to this idea, an agent’s next spontaneous movement could not be causally predicted even if all empirical data pertaining to antecedent physical (including physiological) conditions were given. This is because there exists an internal relation between the action being performed and the agent’s intending by that action to bring about the pertinent result. One can also say, employing Nozick’s terminology, that there is no prior causal determination of the pertinent weights before performing the action. And the moment the agent acts in the specified manner, the *reasons* are weigh(t)ed and made the actual causes of the action in question. This can be regarded as harmless terminology and a useful characterization as long as we bear in mind the different senses or connotations that can be associated with the term ‘reason’. Substantive autonomy, the way I understand it, is a minimal notion involving the role of causes or reasons at a very basic cognitive level. Of course, the concept of reason is ordinarily associated with “significant” decisions of cognitively sophisticated, social beings like humans. The point I want to stress is that substantive autonomy, as I propound it, brings to bear “reasons” which are operative in spontaneous actions of the creatures standing, in evolutionary terms, at a sufficiently high stage of general cognitive performance. In this latter sense, humans cannot justifiably be regarded as the only kind that possesses substantive autonomy. Minimally speaking, birds and horses, in addition to human beings, *are* agents or substances in terms of originating motion – as opposed to being merely the seat of a bunch of physical occurrences. While animals clearly do not have free will the way humans ordinarily do, they are also radically different from trees and pre-programmed robots by virtue of having intentionality at a very simple, non-discursive level. We cannot make sense of the plain fact that animals

³ *Vide*, e.g., Benjafield (1992), Best (1995), Hampson and Morris (1996), Matlin and Foley (1997), Shanks (1995).

are vastly different from plants and AI products if fail to understand the sort of “agency” that can be attributed to them. This is why we have to insist that some sort of “weighting that is concurrent with action,” no matter how elementary and simple, must be taking place in the cognitive network of organic beings capable of initiating *kinesis*. “Free decision” is indeed reflexive, but, in the *broader* sense explained above, it is not exclusively a human capacity.

According to the main thesis of indeterminism, our actions can – at least in some cases – occur simultaneously with the formation of the pertinent intention (Ginet). Now it stands to reasons that indeterminism is valid for animals that are simpler than human cognizers as well. The way a dog “chooses” to move in this rather than that direction seems to suggest that it is actually *originating* (or initiating) a particular action concurrently with its intention to move that way. Nozick offers an interesting analogy to make a similar point: just like a measurement in Quantum Mechanics reduces the superposition of states to a single, determined state, the process of decision reduces a number of relevant, indeterminate reasons for action to a single one (which can later be identified as the cause of that action). The *prima facie* plausibility of such considerations clearly lends support to the libertarian account. My point, however, is that we must appreciate different senses or complexity-levels of “choosing” and give a more accurate characterization of actions and their initiation by agents. In particular, we must pay special attention to diverse ways in which agents are autonomous *substances* as opposed to just being some loci of remarkable physical events. I have claimed that although humans are agents or substances in a very distinctive and apparently superior sense due to a capacity to carry out cognitive operations against discursive backgrounds, there is another and seemingly more basic sense of “agency” that stems from being (literally) *auto-nomous* vis-à-vis the causes of ordinary non-deliberative movements common to all sufficiently developed organisms in nature. It is somewhat surprising that people who theorized on free will, agency, and reasons have usually worked under the unquestio-

ned assumption that the reasons-explanation can be provided only within the special domain of discursive capacities and practices. This tendency, I think, is prone to give rise to a rather misleading portrayal of the concept of agency.

I want to conclude by making a few general remarks about the difficulties surrounding the issues of reasons, causes, and free will. Although contemporary philosophy has a (mostly justified) tendency to treat any form of Cartesianism as a dead horse which has been sufficiently beaten, there is perhaps an understandable initial attraction in Descartes’s whole approach to subjectivity. And this often crops up in discussions of free will and the dualistic picture that seems to emerge out of those discussions. On the one hand, human agents can be viewed objectively, externally, and scientifically. From that point of view, our decisions and actions are causally determined by antecedent inner states. On the other hand, we can view, so to speak, our decisions and actions subjectively or internally, which gives rise to a feeling like “it is up to me (the agent) how to act in particular situations” (Taylor 1992, p. 40). But isn’t this, skeptics would ask, a good reason to contend that the very notion of free will is paradoxical or incoherent? The libertarian rejoinder, which I have presented above, is that the agent herself (or the agent’s bestowal of weights upon certain courses of action) can plausibly be the cause of her deciding and acting in a particular way, thus rendering free will possible. But still one might wonder if *this* sort of explanation is really an explanation of free choices and actions. The answer to this question depends on our understanding of an “explanation.” If we are comfortable with the idea that legitimate explanations can be other than the deductive-nomological sort, we must admit those peculiar explanations for free actions given in terms of agency or an agent’s assigning weights to reasons (see Nozick 1981, p. 301–302). In this sense, the libertarian may have a point in insisting that her inability (or refusal) to give, say, *nomie* explanations does not undermine her project.

If libertarianism can be made a sufficiently coherent and tenable thesis, “causation” seems not to

be a threat for free will. Without doubt, indeterminism in the form of, say, the theory of agency makes our powers to perform free decisions/actions rather mysterious (Taylor 1992, p. 53; Van Inwagen 1993, p. 194). Yet, as Van Inwagen remarks, mysteries *do* exist. As far as this particular mystery is concerned, it is reasonable to expect some progress in

this metaphysical issue as physiology and experimental psychology inform us better about the structures and processes involved in decision-making and action. Still, it is bound to be a *normative* project, in the traditional philosophical sense of the term, to solve or resolve this ancient and fascinating question.

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KAUZALINIAI VEIKSNIAI, VEIKSMO PASKATOS IR SUBSTANTYVI AUTONOMIJA: KRITINIS POŽIŪRIS Į MORALINĮ AGENTĄ

Murat Baç

Santrauka

Nors agento kaip autonomiško veikėjo (*agency*) sąvoka atrodo patrauklus laisvos valios galvosūkių sprendimas, ji susiduria *vis-à-vis* su klausimu apie tai, koks yra tariamų veiksmo paskatų pobūdis. Šiame straipsnyje aš pirmiausia aptariu paradigmą posūkių, susijusių su agentu kaip autonomišku veikėju, reikšmę. Tačiau mano požiūriu, agento autonomijos teorijos vis dėlto nepajėgia patenkinamai paaiškinti daugelio mūsų veiksmų ir pasirinkimų paskatų. Siekdamas paaiškinti daugiopą veiksmų ir veikėjų prigimtį, aš pavartoju naują „substanyvios autonomi-

jos“ sąvoką ir tvirtinu, jog tai pamatinis ne tik žmogaus, bet ir visų gyvūnų, gebančių imtis veiksmo, prigimties ypatumas. Priežastys, lemiančios mūsų veiksmus, iš tiesų gali būti su jais susijusios nedeterministiškai ir visaapimančiai, tačiau autonomiškas veikėjas neretai veikia neturėdamas tam jokių sudėtingų (diskursyvių) paskatų, kuriomis neabejotinai remiasi žmonės.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: autonomiškas veikėjas (*agency*), įvykių priežastinis sąlygojimas, laisva valia, paskatos, substanyvi autonomija.

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