

Review of Carolina Sartorio's *Causation and Free Will*

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Carolina Sartorio, *Causation and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 188 pages. ISBN: 9780198746799 (hbk.). Hardback: \$65.00.

In her excellent book, *Causation and Free Will*, Carolina Sartorio defends an actual-sequence compatibilist account of freedom (in the tradition of Harry Frankfurt and John Martin Fischer, among others). Sartorio's view is distinctive in that it is a *causal* version of the actual-sequence view, which is to say that it takes freedom to be "exclusively a function of the relevant actual causal sequences" (p. 3). Following Sartorio, I will refer to her actual-causal-sequence view as ACS. In articulating and defending ACS, Sartorio provides an important contribution to the free will debate—one that introduces several subtle arguments (against extant actual-sequence views and in favor of ACS) and that offers new characterizations of crucial elements of the free will debate by attending to the metaphysics of causation. Still, some questions for and potential challenges to Sartorio's project are left unaddressed, and, after summarizing the book, I will briefly discuss one such question and one such challenge.

In chapter 1, Sartorio offers a novel way to distinguish actual-sequence views (including ACS) from alternative views: according to actual-sequence views, an agent's freedom is grounded only in facts pertaining to the actual sequence, whereas rival "alternative-possibilities" views maintain that an agent's freedom is at least partly grounded in the fact that she is able to do otherwise (p. 9). The former type of view (including ACS) is typically motivated by appeal to "Frankfurt scenarios"—cases in which an agent, Frank, makes a certain choice on his own but would have been forced to make the choice by a neuroscientist if that neuroscientist had predicted that Frank would not have made the choice on his own. Intuitively, Frank freely makes the choice despite lacking the ability to do otherwise. Sartorio argues that, besides its relative simplicity and elegance (especially in comparison to Fischer's view), ACS is well-suited to account for the common intuition about Frankfurt scenarios.

To show this, Sartorio argues that actual-sequence views rely on both a positive and negative claim about the grounds of freedom (p. 18). The positive grounding claim says that an agent's freedom is at least partly grounded in actual sequences (and their grounds), and the negative grounding claim says that an agent's freedom is not grounded in anything other than actual sequences (and their grounds). Together, these grounding claims entail a supervenience claim:

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

This supervenience claim, Sartorio argues, is a way of expressing the rationale for thinking that, in the Frankfurt scenario, how Frank actually came to perform the act is what determines whether he is in control of his act. Ideally, then, it will be possible to reconcile actual-sequence views with the supervenience claim, such that they are properly motivated by Frankfurt scenarios, and Sartorio argues in later chapters that rival views must give up supervenience but that ACS can be reconciled with it.

In chapters 2 and 3, Sartorio presents the metaphysical basis for ACS. Here and throughout the book, Sartorio appeals to various *properties* of causation without relying on any particular *theory* of causation (p. 45). Moreover, Sartorio's view is consistent with the possibility

that the properties that she takes to be feature of causation are instead features of some suitably related metaphysical relation (e.g., quasi-causation); what matters, for Sartorio's purposes, is only that certain properties are had by whatever relation plays the theoretical role typically attributed to causation (pp. 48-50). The first part of chapter 2 introduces the properties that lie behind the positive grounding claim, including that absences can enter in causal relations (pp. 46-50) and that effects need not counterfactually depend on their causes (pp. 50-54). The remainder of chapter 2 addresses a worry for the negative grounding claim that is generated by cases involving omissions and outcomes but that are otherwise structurally similar to Frankfurt scenarios (which involve actions); Sartorio argues that the worry is intractable for extant actual-sequence views but can be solved by appealing to the extrinsicness of causation. Chapter 3 then completes the picture by discussing three other important features of causation: certain kinds of luck (which result from taking causation to be extrinsic), the necessity of difference-making for causation, and the intransitivity of causation. Crucial to Sartorio's picture is the thesis that there are important asymmetries between actions and omissions, such that the latter are more subject to luck, and such that certain actions (such as those in Frankfurt scenarios) can be difference-makers when relevantly similar omissions are not. I return to this point below.

In chapter 4, after criticizing rival accounts of agents' sensitivity to reasons, Sartorio develops an account that relies on certain of the properties of causation discussed in chapters 2 and 3. In particular, Sartorio argues that an agent's sensitivity to reasons out to be analyzed partly in terms of which *absences* of reasons were part of her causal history. Her view allows that two actual sequences can differ (such that one grounds freedom while the other does not) simply because "whereas one causal history contains the absence of a certain reason as a cause, the other doesn't" (p. 126). This in turn (and in conjunction with the claims about certain features of causation from earlier chapters) allows Sartorio to maintain that certain agents (such as those acting under compulsion) are not free even though other agents whose actions are done for the same reasons are nevertheless free (because their actions are caused by the absence of certain reasons—absences that were not causes in the former case).

Finally, in chapter 5, Sartorio completes her defense of ACS by addressing three types of "source incompatibilist" arguments—"arguments that aim to show that determinism undermines freedom, not because it rules out the ability to do otherwise, but because of the kind of *causal sources* that our acts would have if determinism were true" (p. 147). While her responses can be adopted by compatibilists who reject ACS, they are nonetheless an important element of Sartorio's project since the source incompatibilist arguments pose a threat to the viability of actual-sequence views, and to the viability of ACS in particular. Sartorio responds to the first two types—ultimacy arguments and direct arguments—by arguing that they beg the question against the compatibilist in the dialectical context (pp.148-156).

The final type of argument is the manipulation argument, one version of which aims to show that certain manipulated agents (who are intuitively unfree) nevertheless satisfy standard compatibilist conditions on freedom. In response, Sartorio endorses a "hard-line" reply, denying that certain manipulated agents are unfree (pp. 160-167). Sartorio's response includes an error theory for our intuitively taking the manipulated agents to be unfree (pp. 167-170). On her view, there may be a dubious "dilution of responsibility" effect in the cases of manipulation, which is to say that, in taking the manipulated agent to be absolved of responsibility, we are mistakenly thinking that another agent's involvement detracts from (or undermines) the original agent's responsibility. As Sartorio explains, however, ubiquitous as this psychological effect may be,

arguably it is only an appearance that responsibility dilutes, and we might say the same for a parallel “dilution of control” effect in the manipulation cases.

While I agree with most of Sartorio’s claims, I will conclude by raising both a question for and a challenge to her project. Recall that Sartorio distinguishes actual-sequence views from alternative-possibility views by appealing to *grounding*. In some places (pp. 10-12). Sartorio suggests that views of both types can agree that certain counterfactual facts play a grounding role in agents’ freedom; they disagree, she says, on the centrality of the role of certain kinds of counterfactual facts (p. 12), though it remains unclear to me what this amounts to. In other places (p. 133), Sartorio claims that, on ACS (which, of course, is an actual-sequence view), the counterfactual facts associated with the constitution of the actual causal sequence are themselves grounded *by* the actual sequence. These suggestions are importantly different, and the nature of ACS seems to depend on which is correct. How exactly should we think of the relation between 1) what constitutes an actual causal sequence and 2) the role of certain counterfactual facts?

A potential challenge to Sartorio’s project arises from cases of action-omission identity. (For more on this challenge, see my “Moral Responsibility for Actions and Omissions: A New Challenge to the Asymmetry Thesis,” *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming.) Suppose that, after having witnessed a certain crime, I am asked to raise my arm if I did indeed witness the crime, and suppose that I omit to raise my arm. That omission is plausibly identical to my action of holding perfectly still at that time. Such cases appear to present a problem for views like Sartorio’s that (as we saw above) treat actions and omissions as importantly different, since one and the same thing (e.g., my holding still/omitting to raise my arm) will have to be treated differently.

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