

Semicompatibilism: No Ability to Do Otherwise Required

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Abstract In this paper, I argue that it is open to semicompatibilists to maintain that no ability to do otherwise is required for moral responsibility. This is significant for two reasons. First, it undermines Christopher Evan Franklin's recent claim that *everyone* thinks that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and moral responsibility. Second, it reveals an important difference between John Martin Fischer's semicompatibilism and Kadri Vihvelin's version of classical compatibilism, which shows that the dispute between them is not merely (or even largely) a verbal dispute. Along the way, I give special attention to the notion of general abilities, and, though I defend the distinctiveness of Fischer's semicompatibilism against the verbal dispute charge, I also use the discussion of the nature of general abilities to argue for the falsity of a certain claim that Fischer and coauthor Mark Ravizza have made about their account (namely that "reactivity is all of a piece").

Keywords ability, alternative possibility, new dispositionalism, semicompatibilism

1. Introduction

It is typically assumed by the parties of certain debates in the literature on free will and moral responsibility that there is disagreement about whether the ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and/or moral responsibility. The consequence argument, for example, aims to show that the ability to do otherwise is precluded by causal determinism, and Frankfurt-style cases, for another example, aim to show that one can be morally responsible for an action without having the ability to do otherwise than that action. (More on this argument and these cases to come.) Many incompatibilists (*leeway* incompatibilists, in particular) and some compatibilists (such as classical compatibilists and Humean compatibilists) agree with one another that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and moral responsibility, though they disagree on whether causal determinism would preclude the ability to do otherwise. Other incompatibilists (*source* incompatibilists, in particular) and compatibilists (such as Frankfurt-style compatibilists and semicompatibilists) deny that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and/or moral responsibility. Or so it would seem.

Recently, however, Christopher Evan Franklin (2015) has argued that, contrary to this typical assumption (and even contrary to the explicit claims made by parties of these debates), it turns out that *everyone* thinks that *some* ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and moral responsibility. Franklin's aim is to show that since every account of freedom and responsibility requires alternatives at some place or other, the question is not whether *the* ability to do otherwise is necessary for freedom and responsibility but rather *which* ability to do otherwise is necessary. Now, if there is anyone who denies that an ability to do otherwise is required for freedom or responsibility, surely John Martin Fischer (at times, with Mark Ravizza) does, for Fischer is a *semicompatibilist*—someone who thinks that moral responsibility is compatible with causal determinism even if determinism precludes *the ability to do otherwise*.¹ If it turns out that Fischer's view *does* involve a requirement that agents have an ability to do otherwise in order to be morally responsible, this would not only be a striking result but would also give us strong reason for thinking that *no one* denies that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility.² Thus, Franklin considers Fischer's semicompatibilism and

¹ Fischer (1994, 2006, 2012) has done the most to defend this position, sometimes with coauthor Mark Ravizza, as in Fischer and Ravizza (1998). Fischer sometimes puts his position as I have stated it here but replacing “ability to do otherwise” with “freedom to do otherwise.” See, for example, Fischer (1994: 180). To keep things simple, and because Fischer's semicompatibilism is about the compatibility of *moral responsibility* and causal determinism, I am hereafter setting aside *free will*. (If you think “free will” just is whatever freedom is required in order to be morally responsible, then what I say in this paper will apply to free will as well.)

² I agree with Franklin that Fischer “is surely the first to come to philosophers' minds when they consider prominent philosophers who putatively deny that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility” (2015: 2095). I also think, however, that there is at least one philosopher who is even less likely to be committed to a requirement of an ability to do otherwise, and that is Carolina Sartorio, who provides an account of reasons-sensitivity (and thus of the freedom required for moral responsibility) by appealing to the absence of certain reasons in the actual sequence leading to action (rather than by appealing to the agent's response to reasons in other worlds)—see especially Sartorio (2015). The existence of Sartorio's view is another problem for Franklin's claim that everyone thinks that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for free will and moral responsibility, but I will not press this point any further.

attempts to show that even this view requires an ability to do otherwise, since it requires that an agent has certain alternatives. Moreover, since certain other compatibilists, such as Kadri Vihvelin, distinguish their views from Fischer's by *requiring* the ability to do otherwise for moral responsibility, Franklin thinks that the dispute between them and Fischer (concerning the ability to do otherwise) is largely a verbal one; even though they appear to be making contradictory claims about the ability to do otherwise, they actually *agree* that *some* ability to do otherwise is necessary for freedom and responsibility. Once we distinguish between senses of ability, Franklin thinks, it will become clear that Fischer's view and Vihvelin's view *both* require a certain ability to do otherwise, and so any dispute about *the* ability to do otherwise (and whether it is required for freedom and moral responsibility) is merely a verbal one.

But, as I argue in this paper, it is open to Fischer to deny that his semicompatibilism requires any ability to do otherwise. To show this, I first argue that there are alternatives and then there are alternatives; the mere possibility that something could go differently for an agent (or for the mechanism from which she acts) in some other possible world does not amount to the agent's having an ability to do otherwise. By considering what it takes to have an ability, even in the most minimal sense, we can see that *having an ability to do otherwise* can come apart from *having an alternative possibility* (or the mere possibility that something go differently for an agent), where the latter outstrips the former (and so having an ability to do otherwise entails having an alternative possibility, but having an alternative possibility does not entail having an ability to do otherwise).³ Once we distinguish these two types of alternatives, it will become

³ This is not a novel distinction. Fischer (1994, 2006) suggests it in his critique of what he calls the "flicker of freedom" strategy for responding to Frankfurt-style cases, though he sometimes uses 'alternative possibility' in the way that Franklin does, as synonymous with 'ability to do otherwise'. Being precise here will allow for a clearer exposition of Fischer's own view and also for a reply to Franklin's claim that the view requires an ability to do otherwise.

evident that, *contra* Franklin, not everyone thinks that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility, even if everyone requires—in order for an agent to be morally responsible—the mere possibility that something could go differently (in some sense) for the agent. Furthermore, by distinguishing between an ability to do otherwise and the possibility that something go differently for an agent, the differences between Fischer’s semicompatibilism and the so-called “new dispositionalism” of Vihvelin (and others) become clearer, which makes it possible to see exactly why the dispute (concerning the ability to do otherwise) between Fischer and the new dispositionalists is not merely—or even largely—a verbal one.⁴

To these ends, I begin, in section 2, by discussing the way that *the* ability to do otherwise is talked about in certain debates and why Franklin thinks that such talk is mistaken. Then, in section 3, I articulate the distinction between having an ability to do otherwise and having an alternative possibility. With this distinction on the table, I argue in section 4 that Fischer’s account does not require an ability to do otherwise. Finally, in section 5, I briefly explain the relevance of the result from the preceding discussion for the dispute between Fischer and Vihvelin.

2. *The Ability to Do Otherwise?*

As Franklin notes, two issues often disputed in the literature on free will and moral responsibility are the soundness of the consequence argument and the success of Frankfurt-style cases (FSCs). From the way that the various parties of the debate talk about these issues, it would seem that they are assuming that there is a certain ability, “*the* ability to do otherwise,” which the

⁴ For reasons that will become clear in section 4 of this paper, Clarke (2009) introduces the term “the new dispositionalism” to label the approach by Vihvelin (2004) and also Smith (2003) and Fara (2008). See Clarke (2009), Whittle (2010), and Franklin (2011) for critical discussions of the new dispositionalism.

consequence argument purports to show to be ruled out by causal determinism and which FSCs purport to show to be unnecessary for moral responsibility. Indeed, Fischer claims that FSCs succeed and that we could be morally responsible even if our world is deterministic and the consequence argument is sound. In order to see the implications of these commitments for Fischer's position on the ability to do otherwise, let us consider a brief sketch of the consequence argument and of FSCs.

One common way of articulating the consequence argument (or, if you like, one member of the family of arguments called "the consequent argument") is as follows: If determinism is true, then propositions describing all of our actions are entailed by propositions expressing the laws of nature and propositions about the intrinsic state of the world long before we existed. In order for us to have the ability to do otherwise than what we in fact do, we would need to have a choice about either the laws of nature or the intrinsic state of the world in the distant past. But no one has a choice about those things, so, if determinism is true, we lack the ability to do otherwise than we what we actually do.⁵ Sometimes added to this is the claim that given the truth of the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP), which states that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility, causal determinism and moral responsibility are incompatible.

FSCs aim to show that PAP is false; they are hypothetical scenarios in which an agent (apparently) lacks the ability to do otherwise than what she in fact does and yet in which she is intuitively morally responsible for acting as she does. Here is a sample FSC:

Black wishes Jones to cast his vote for presidential candidate A. In order to ensure that Jones does this, he implants a chip in Jones's brain which allows him to control Jones's behavior in the voting booth. (Jones has no idea about any of this.) Black prefers that

⁵ See van Inwagen (1983), Ginet (1990), and Fischer (1994).

Jones vote for candidate A on his own. But if Jones starts to become inclined to vote for anyone other than A, Black will immediately use his chip to cause Jones to vote for candidate A instead. As it turns out, though, Jones votes for candidate A on his own and Black never exerts any causal influence on Jones's behavior.⁶

Given Black's presence, Jones (apparently) lacks the ability to do otherwise than to vote for candidate A, yet intuitively Jones is nevertheless morally responsible for voting for candidate A.

According to Franklin, however, it is a mistake to think of these debates as about *the* ability to do otherwise, since everyone thinks that *some* ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility. To see why Franklin thinks that no one denies that some ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility, we need to consider Fischer's semicompatibilism, which is a likely candidate for a view that denies that any ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility.⁷ Since this view requires that there be certain agent-involving alternatives, Franklin thinks that this view requires an ability to do otherwise for moral responsibility, even if it is not the same kind of ability to do otherwise as is required by other accounts of free will and moral responsibility. And if Fischer's account requires an ability to do otherwise, then we have good reason for thinking that everyone thinks that some ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility.

It is worth noting that Franklin apparently conceives of *having an ability to do otherwise* as synonymous with *having alternative possibilities*. In his discussion of Fischer's account, the focus is on the latter, but his conclusion (and the title of his paper) is about the former. If the two

⁶ This example is from Swenson (2015) and is very similar to the one originally given by Frankfurt (1969).

⁷ Again, if *anyone* denies that the ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility, surely Fischer does, so it makes sense to consider Fischer's view in the way Franklin does. (Though see my comment on this in n. 2.)

are distinct, then we cannot conclude that everyone (including Fischer) thinks that an *ability to do otherwise* is necessary for moral responsibility, for it remains a possibility that someone (perhaps Fischer) thinks that some alternative possibilities are necessary for moral responsibility *but not any* ability to do otherwise. This should be kept in mind as we consider what alternatives are required by Fischer's account of moral responsibility.

On Fischer's "actual-sequence" view, in order for an agent to be morally responsible for an action, that action must issue from the agent's own reasons-responsive mechanism.⁸ This requirement has two parts: 1) the agent's operative mechanism must be reasons-responsive, and 2) that mechanism must be the agent's own. Only the first part of the requirement is relevant for our purposes. A mechanism is reasons-responsive in the sense required by Fischer's account just in case it is both moderately receptive to reasons and at least weakly reactive to reasons, and we will focus on the latter (the reactivity component).⁹ In order for a mechanism to be at least weakly reactive to reasons, on Fischer's view, there must be "some possible world in which there is a sufficient reason to do otherwise, the agent's actual mechanism operates, and the agent does otherwise" (2006: 68). So, in order for an agent's mechanism to be appropriately reactive to

⁸ This requirement captures what Fischer calls "guidance control," and it is what Fischer takes to be the "control condition" (or "freedom-relevant condition") on moral responsibility. And though I am, for simplicity's sake, focusing here on moral responsibility for *actions*, the account applies to moral responsibility for omissions and consequences as well.

⁹ The receptivity component is interestingly different from the reactivity component. The former is a more robust condition, requiring that the agent's mechanism recognize sufficient reasons in an appropriately patterned way, both actually and hypothetically; the latter (the reactivity component) is less stringent, only requiring that the agent's mechanism react differently to an actual reason to do otherwise in some other possible world. While the receptivity component requires that a wide range of possible scenarios be a certain way, the reactivity component only requires that a single possible world be a certain way. Only the latter is concerned with "translating" reasons into choices (and then subsequent behavior), so I take it that if an ability to do otherwise is required by the account, then it enters the picture with the reasons-reactivity requirement. For more on these features of Fischer's account, see Fischer and Ravizza (1998, ch. 3).

reasons—and thus appropriately reasons-responsive, and thus for the agent to be morally responsible for some action in the actual world—there must be some possible world in which the agent’s mechanism behaves differently than it does in the actual world.

As Franklin points out, this requirement that an agent’s mechanism respond differently to reasons in some possible world is tantamount to a requirement that the *agent herself* respond differently in another possible world. Franklin explains:

Agents make choices, act, and are morally responsible in virtue of the activity of their mechanisms. This is a familiar move in the philosophy of action and a move that everyone must make unless they allow for the possibility of irreducible agent-causation, understood as agents being fundamentally causally involved in their agency...Most compatibilists (and philosophers for that matter) reject agent-causation thus conceived and Fischer certainly does...on his account agents are causally relevant in virtue of being properly related to their mechanisms that issued in action. If the agent’s mechanism is able to do otherwise, then the agent is, in virtue of taking responsibility for the mechanism, able to do otherwise. A central contention, therefore, of Fischer’s theory of moral responsibility is that agents are morally responsible only if they possess an ability to do otherwise. (2015: 2097)¹⁰

Since Fischer’s account requires that an agent’s *mechanism* be appropriately responsive to reasons, and since this requirement includes a component requiring that an agent’s mechanism behave differently in some other possible world, Franklin thinks that this commits Fischer to

¹⁰ Here Franklin talks about a mechanism’s *ability to do otherwise*, but we have not been given any reason to suppose that Fischer’s account requires that the mechanism (nor the agent) have such an ability. For all that has been said, the account requires that things go differently for an agent’s mechanism in some other possible world (and thus that things go differently for the *agent* in some other possible world, in virtue of things going differently for her mechanism).

requiring that *agents themselves* have alternative possibilities in order for them to be morally responsible. And, since he takes *having alternative possibilities* to be synonymous with *having an ability to do otherwise*, Franklin concludes that even Fischer's semicompatibilist account requires an ability to do otherwise.

3. Abilities to Do Otherwise and Alternatives Possibilities

As I will argue, however, having an alternative possibility is not the same as having an ability to do otherwise.¹¹ While it is clear that Fischer's account requires that an agent's mechanism have certain modal characteristics (such that it would respond differently in some other possible world) in order for the agent to be morally responsible, I will argue that this is not the same as requiring that the agent's mechanism (nor the agent herself) possess any ability to do otherwise. In order to show that Fischer's account does not require an ability to do otherwise, we first need to consider various ways to understand the 'ability' in 'ability to do otherwise'. This will take up the remainder of this section. In the next section, I will present a case in which an agent counts as acting from her own reasons-responsive mechanism (and so is morally responsible for what she does) and yet lacks every kind of ability to do otherwise. Showing this will require that we look more closely at how Fischer characterizes the reactivity component of the reasons-responsiveness requirement of his account. Upon doing all of this, it will become

¹¹ On the one hand, Franklin's argument apparently relies on denying this distinction, and he claims that Fischer means the same by both items: "Although Fischer tends to write more of 'the freedom to do otherwise' and 'alternative possibilities' than 'the ability to do otherwise', it is clear that these are just his preferred descriptions—by 'freedom to do otherwise' or 'alternative possibilities' he clearly has in mind 'the ability to do otherwise'" (2015: 2096). But, on the other hand, Franklin also notes that Fischer does *not* mean the same by these items: "Alternative possibilities for Fischer include but go beyond the ability to do otherwise" (2015: 2096, n. 4). This latter reading of Fischer is correct, which is problematic for Franklin's argument.

clear that it is false that, on Fischer's account, an ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility.

It is common to distinguish between what I will call 'general abilities' and 'specific abilities'.¹² To borrow an example Franklin uses, consider the case of Ann, who is a world-renowned pianist but is currently in an airplane (which is too small to house her grand piano). Does Ann have the ability to play the piano? You might be inclined to say both 'yes' and 'no', which would be the correct answers if we were asking about Ann's general and specific abilities, respectively. Ann has the general ability to play the piano in virtue of her intrinsic properties, and these do not mysteriously vanish when Ann is not at her piano. But the specific ability to play the piano is not so general and requires that Ann be able to play the piano *now* (or at some other specified time), and Ann lacks this ability when on the plane.

So far, so simple. But 'specific ability' can be used in two different ways. On the one hand, as J. L. Austin notes, "of course it follows merely from the premise that he does it, that he has the ability to do it, according to ordinary English" (1970: 227).¹³ An agent has this sort of "ability" to perform a certain action just in case there is *some* possible world in which the agent performs that action, and this does not require any corresponding general ability. Call this a 'flimsy ability'. On the other hand, we often reserve ascriptions of ability for cases in which agents possess both the general ability to do the thing in question and also the opportunity to exercise that general ability on a particular occasion, as when Ann, a world-renowned pianist, is seated at her piano. I will use 'specific ability' to refer to abilities of this kind.

¹² See, for example, Mele (2003) and Whittle (2010).

¹³ As will become clear in a moment, I disagree with Austin about how 'ability' is used in ordinary English, though I would grant that it follows from the premise that he does it, that he is *able* to do it, according to ordinary English.

Now, in order to see that Fischer's account of moral responsibility does not require that an agent have any of these kinds of abilities to do otherwise than she does, we only need to consider general abilities in more detail. Specific abilities require general abilities, so if it is shown that an agent can satisfy Fischer's conditions for moral responsibility without having any general ability to do otherwise, then it follows that an agent can satisfy Fischer's conditions for moral responsibility without having any specific ability to do otherwise. Moreover, what I have called "flimsy abilities" are also irrelevant, for these are not genuine abilities. On this proposal, if it is *possible* that I win the lottery, then I have the ability (in this sense) to win the lottery. But, in my view, even if there is a sense in which I *can* win the lottery, or I *could* win it, surely I do not have the ability to win the lottery.¹⁴ Its being merely *possible* that I perform some action is not sufficient for my having the *ability* to perform that action. As Vihvelin puts the point:

There are many different ways to do something. One way is by having the ability.

Another way it by accident or lucky fluke. Yet another way is by having one's brain and body moved, puppetlike, in the appropriate ways by a sorcerer. Doing something by accident or lucky fluke does not entail having the ability to do it; doing something by direct manipulation by someone else does not entail having the ability to do it. This shows that the fact that S does A does *not* entail that S has the *ability* to do A. (2013:

199)

Succeeding in performing an action (even if that success occurs in the actual world) is not sufficient for having an ability to perform that action, so "flimsy abilities" are not genuine abilities and can be set aside here.¹⁵

¹⁴ This case is taken from Vihvelin (2013: 7).

¹⁵ An additional (and, to my mind, decisive) problem for this kind of "ability," for reasons that I am about to discuss (when motivating a certain understanding of general abilities), is that it

We have seen that we can set aside flimsy “abilities” and specific abilities. This leaves only general abilities to consider. Fortunately, there has recently been a lot of good work on what it is to have a general ability, and the majority view of philosophers working on the metaphysics of agency and free will is that we can apply recent work on the metaphysics of dispositions to an analysis of general abilities, which is to say that a *dispositional analysis* of such abilities can be given.¹⁶ Perhaps it will help to consider some motivation for appropriating recent work from the metaphysics of dispositions. You might have thought (and some philosophers certainly *have* thought) that an agent counts as having a general ability to *A* just in case the agent would *A* if she attempted to *A*; that is, you might have thought that we could give a simple conditional analysis of this kind of ability.¹⁷ But, as Vihvelin (2004) has persuasively argued, such an analysis faces many problems, including that the truth of the claims like ‘if an agent *S* chose (or attempted) at time *t* to do *A*, *S* would do *A*’ are neither necessary nor sufficient for the truth of claims like ‘*S* has the ability at *t* to do *A*’.¹⁸ On the one hand, I can have the finkish ability to whistle even if it is false that, were I to choose to whistle, I would whistle; a sorcerer (who hates it when people whistle) might be standing by, ready to intervene (to stop me from whistling) were I to choose to whistle. On the other hand, I can have the finkish lack of an ability to wiggle my ears even if it is true that, were I to choose to wiggle my ears, I would wiggle them; I cannot actually wiggle my

would suffer the same problems as the simple conditional analysis of general abilities. See note 19.

¹⁶ See, for example, the work of the so-called “new dispositionalists”: Smith (2003), Vihvelin (2004, 2013), and Fara (2008). For other recent approaches to giving something similar to a dispositional analysis of general abilities, see Dennett (2004) and Maier (2015).

¹⁷ I borrow the term ‘simple conditional analysis’ from Vihvelin (2004), who provides both a brief history of the use of this analysis and arguments for its falsity.

¹⁸ Vihvelin’s arguments against this analysis of ability are modeled after Lewis’s (1997) response to a simple conditional analysis of dispositions in general. The following examples are based on Vihvelin’s, which are themselves based on Lewis’s.

ears, but a sorcerer might be standing by, ready to intervene (to make me wiggle my ears) were I to choose to wiggle them.¹⁹

To avoid the problems associated with the simple conditional analysis, we can use recent developments in the metaphysics of dispositions. Rather than appeal to a single conditional, we can provide an analysis of general abilities as follows:

General Ability: *S* has the general ability to *A* iff, in a wide range (or suitable proportion) of circumstances, holding fixed *S*'s intrinsic properties, if *S* were to choose (or attempt) to *A*, then *S* would *A*.²⁰

This analysis avoids the problems mentioned above for the simple conditional analysis; because *General Ability* requires that *S* succeeds when she chooses to *A* *in a wide range of circumstances*, we can abstract away from cases like the ones discussed above involving finkish abilities and finkish lacks of abilities. To say that I have the ability to whistle is to say that, in a wide range of circumstances, if I were to choose to whistle, then I would whistle; that is, in a wide range of possible worlds in which I choose to whistle, I do whistle. Crucially, on this analysis, an agent does not count as having a general ability to *A* if there is only one possible world (or a narrow range of possible worlds) in which, when she attempts to *A*, she does *A*.²¹

¹⁹ This last case provides another reason for thinking that the “flimsy abilities” dismissed in the last paragraph are not genuine abilities. For example, suppose that, although I’ve never succeeded in wiggling my ears and haven’t thought about wiggling my ears since I was a young child, a sorcerer would make me wiggle my ears if I chose to wiggle them now; intuitively I lack the *ability* to wiggle my ears, yet it remains *possible* that I wiggle my ears. So an action’s being possible for me, while that may be sufficient for it being the case that I *could* do it, is not sufficient for my having the *ability* to do it.

²⁰ On Vihvelin’s view, this dispositional analysis of general abilities needs to be slightly modified (since most abilities are *bundles* of dispositions), but the details of her account are not relevant quite yet. (I will return to her account in a later section.)

²¹ One might think that if an agent does *A* in *some* world, then there will be an infinite number of worlds in which she does *A* (think here of possible minor changes to distant galaxies). Still, it is

According to *General Ability*, in order for an agent to have the ability to *A*, there must be a *wide range* (or *suitable proportion*) of possible worlds in which *S* succeeds in doing *A* when she attempts to *A*.²² For our purposes, it does not matter exactly how wide this range must be (nor how suitable the proportion must be); what matters is that, in order for an analysis of general abilities to avoid the problems associated with the simple conditional analysis, it will have to be the case that the analysis requires that a wide range of possible worlds be a certain way, rather than a single possible world (or a narrow range of possible worlds).

4. Does Semicompatibilism Require a General Ability to Do Otherwise?

We can now return to Fischer's account and assess whether it requires general abilities to do otherwise in order for agents to be morally responsible. To make this assessment, I will first present a case in which an agent counts as morally responsible on Fischer's account, and I will then argue that this agent also lacks any ability to do otherwise. This will require a closer examination of the reasons-reactivity requirement of the account. In doing this, we will discover that the account itself calls into question a certain claim that Fischer has made concerning his view; Fischer has claimed that "reactivity is all of a piece," but his account itself gives us reason to think that this is not the case (and the account need not be committed to this claim anyway). Once this need for clarification is brought to light and dealt with, it will be clear that the case is

clear that we can distinguish between a) the set of worlds in which I purchase a lottery ticket and win, on the one hand, and b) the set of worlds in which I choose to raise my arm and succeed in doing so, on the other. Despite the fact that each set is infinite, we may plausibly distinguish these cases by appealing to the width of the *ranges* of the sets. Hence, on the analysis of general abilities I am discussing, the range of worlds in which I win the lottery is too narrow a range of possible worlds for me to count as having the general ability to win the lottery.

²² And this is a good result since, as I mentioned above, I could get lucky and win the lottery, but it does not follow from this that I have an *ability*, even a general one, to win the lottery.

one in which an agent lacks any ability to do otherwise and yet counts as morally responsible on Fischer's account.

Imagine that Brown is a weak-willed individual with a strong craving for the nonaddictive drug "Plezu."²³ Brown is regularly receptive to reasons—he shows an appropriate pattern of (actual and hypothetical) reasons-recognition—but is only *weakly* reactive to them.²⁴ Suppose that, out of all the possible worlds in which Brown chooses and tries, there is only one possible world in which Brown responds to a sufficient reason not to take the drug: imagine that, though he recognizes all sorts of reasons not to take the drug and waste the day away, the only scenario in which he would refrain from taking the drug (out of all the scenarios in which he chose and tried to do so) and would do something else instead is one in which the drug costs exactly one thousand dollars.²⁵ This does not happen in the actual world, so Brown takes Plezu. Nevertheless, since there is such a possible world in which Brown reacts to a sufficient reason to do otherwise, the mechanism which issues in Brown's action is weakly reasons-reactive (and, as we have stipulated, regularly reasons-receptive), and thus, provided that he satisfies the other

²³ Fischer and Ravizza (1998, ch. 3) use this case to motivate the asymmetry between the receptivity and reactivity components of reasons-responsiveness. Following Fischer and Ravizza, to say that Plezu is "nonaddictive" is to say "that it does *not* issue in *irresistible* urges to take it" (1998: 69), yet the drug "is so powerful that its [pleasurable] effects last for hours and, during this time, it renders the user unable to do anything except recline on the sofa and enjoy himself" (1998: 69).

²⁴ To say that *Brown* is weakly reactive to reasons is just to say that *the mechanism Brown owns* is weakly reactive to reasons. Similar remarks apply to the agent's ability to do otherwise, for, as Franklin says in the passage that I quoted in section 2, Fischer's account says that "agents are causally relevant in virtue of being properly related to their mechanisms that issued in action," and so: "If the agent's mechanism is able to do otherwise, then the agent is, in virtue of taking responsibility for the mechanism, able to do otherwise" (2015: 2097).

²⁵ Fischer and Ravizza (1998: 75) consider exactly this possibility, granting that Brown counts as both moderately reasons-receptive and weakly reasons-reactive.

conditions on moral responsibility (and we can stipulate here that he does), Brown is morally responsible for taking Plezu.

Nevertheless, in this scenario, Brown does not have even the general ability to do otherwise than take Plezu. In order to have the general ability to refrain from taking Plezu, it would have to be the case that in a wide range (or suitable proportion) of circumstances, holding fixed Brown's intrinsic properties, if Brown were to choose (or attempt) to refrain from taking Plezu, then Brown would refrain from taking Plezu. But Brown would only act in accordance with the choice to refrain from taking Plezu in a *single* possible world (or the narrow range of worlds in which the drug costs exactly one thousand dollars), not in a range of circumstances that would be sufficiently wide to generate a general ability to refrain from taking the drug. Nevertheless, if Brown meets the other conditions on moral responsibility required by Fischer's account, then Brown can be morally responsible without even a general ability to do otherwise.

To make it clear that Brown counts as reasons-responsive on Fischer's account, we need to examine more closely the reasons-reactivity component of the account and to address a problematic claim that has been made concerning reasons-reactivity. As mentioned earlier, unlike the reasons-receptivity component—which is a more robust requirement—only *weak* reasons-reactivity is required by Fischer's account. In order for a mechanism to be at least weakly reactive to reasons, there must be “some possible world in which there is a sufficient reason to do otherwise, the agent's actual mechanism operates, and the agent does otherwise” (2006: 68).²⁶ But Fischer (and coauthor Ravizza) also make a stronger claim about reasons-reactivity, namely that “reactivity is all of a piece” (1998: 73):

²⁶ As it turns out, some have argued that this requirement is *too weak*. For example, Mele (2000) presents a case of an agoraphobic man who satisfies this condition (and the others required by guidance control) with respect to some behavior and yet does not seem (to Mele) to be morally

...we believe that if an agent's mechanism reacts to *some* incentive to (say) do other than he actually does, this shows that the mechanism *can* react to *any* incentive to do otherwise. Our contention, then, is that a mechanism's reacting differently to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in some other possible world shows that the same kind of mechanism can react differently to the *actual* reason to do otherwise. (1998: 73)

We should note, first, that the minimal requirement for reasons-reactivity is endorsed here. In order for an agent's mechanism to be sufficiently (weakly) reactive to reasons, it must be the case that that mechanism reacts to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in *some* possible world. This requirement is satisfied when an agent's mechanism responds to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in a single possible world (or narrow range of possible worlds). But we should also note that Fischer also implicitly makes a claim about *other* worlds. The claim is that if a mechanism reacts to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in some other possible world, then this shows that the mechanism *can* react differently to the actual reason to do otherwise, which is to say that reactivity is all of a piece. And this suggests that if an agent's mechanism is even weakly reasons-reactive, then that agent will (in virtue of her mechanism) possess *some* ability to do

responsible for the behavior. In response, Fischer (2012: 187-192) claims that, on his view, the agent is morally responsible but not blameworthy for the behavior, but he also suggests that we could accept Mele's criticism and modify the reasons-reactivity component of the account in light of the criticism (presumably by requiring that the agent react to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in a larger set of the relevant worlds). I mention this because if Fischer were to endorse this further suggestion (rather than relying on his distinction between moral responsibility and blameworthiness) in response to Mele's criticism, then I would need to say more about whether or not the modified view would require a general ability to do otherwise. This would be tricky, given the difficulty in knowing how large a set of relevant worlds must be in order for an agent to have a general ability, and Fischer does not attempt to specify this. Given what Fischer has said (and refrained from endorsing), then, we may set this issue aside here. Thanks to Hannah Tierney for pointing out the need to clarify this bit of Fischer scholarship.

otherwise in every case, since it will be possible for her mechanism to respond to a sufficient reason to do otherwise in a wide range of circumstances.

But there is reason to think that reactivity is not (always) all of a piece. As the case of Brown shows, it is possible for there to be only a single world (or narrow range of worlds—the ones in which a drug costs exactly one thousand dollars) in which Brown’s mechanism reacts to a sufficient reason to do otherwise. This reaction of Brown’s mechanism is sufficient for it to count as weakly reasons-reactive, yet it is not sufficient for thinking that a wide range of worlds will be such that Brown reacts to sufficient reasons to do otherwise; in fact, as is stipulated in the case, there are no other such worlds. But if he doesn’t respond to a reason to do otherwise in a wide range of circumstances, then it is not the case that he can react to any *other* reason to do otherwise; that is, there being a world where he responds to a reason concerning the exact price of one thousand dollars does not imply that there’s a world where he responds to some *other* reason to do otherwise. This gives us reason to think that reactivity is not always all of a piece. Moreover, given that reactivity’s being all of a piece is not required by the account’s reasons-reactivity component, the account need not be committed to this requirement anyway.²⁷

²⁷ As an anonymous referee has pointed out to me, one reason for thinking that Fischer and Ravizza’s account is committed to the “all of a piece” claim is that they invoke it in order to address a certain skeptical response to their account of reasons-reactivity—see the speech attributed to Brown on Fischer and Ravizza (1998: 73). As I mentioned in note 26, the weakness of Fischer and Ravizza’s reactivity component *does* give rise to an objection. One way for Fischer and Ravizza to respond is by distinguishing between moral responsibility and blameworthiness and by taking weak reactivity as sufficient reactivity only for the former, and this response is consistent with the denial of the “all of a piece” claim. An alternative is to keep the “all of a piece claim” and to revise the reactivity component, which, as I mentioned in note 26, may result in a general-ability-to-do-otherswise requirement. It should be noted, however, that Fischer and Ravizza do *not* revise the reactivity component as would be needed in order to maintain that reactivity is all of a piece. In any case, my point in the body of the text is that Fischer and Ravizza’s argument for reactivity’s being all of a piece does not succeed, and this is for the better, I think, as it makes it clear how Fischer’s semicompatibilism is distinct from rival (classical) compatibilist accounts.

This is not to say, of course, that Fischer and Ravizza must deny that, in ordinary cases, reactivity is all of a piece, for there is no reason for them to deny that agents typically are such that, when they react to a sufficient reason to do otherwise, they would have done so in a sufficient number of worlds to generate a general ability to do otherwise. It is consistent with what I have said here that these cases are the norm and that we typically have the general ability to do all sorts of things that we do not actually do, even if our world is deterministic and the consequence argument sound. Still, it does not follow from this that reactivity's being all of a piece is *necessary* for moral responsibility, and I have tried to show that Fischer and Ravizza's semicompatibilist account is not in fact committed to this stronger claim.

Ultimately, I have been calling attention to a difference between two requirements: a requirement of recent analyses of general abilities, on the one hand, and a requirement of Fischer's account of moral responsibility, on the other hand. The former requires that a wide range of possible worlds be a certain way, whereas the latter requires only that a single world (or narrow range of worlds) be a certain way. As the case of Brown shows, there can be cases in which an agent does otherwise in only a single possible world—and so lacks the general ability to do otherwise—and yet counts as morally responsible on Fischer's account.

It follows from what I have been arguing that, on Fischer's account, no ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility. This explains why Fischer is concerned with both the soundness of the consequence argument—which aims to show that determinism precludes the ability to do otherwise—as well as the success of FSCs—which aim to show that the ability to do otherwise is not necessary for moral responsibility. Fischer's account *does* require that the agent have some alternative possibility (in just the sense Franklin explains: in virtue of her mechanism's capacity to react differently to a sufficient reason to do otherwise), but I have

shown that this does not rise to the level of a requirement that an agent have *any* ability to do otherwise, not even a general ability. In other words, we have seen that *having an ability to do otherwise* can come apart from *having an alternative possibility*, and it is possible, on Fischer's account, for an agent to lack the former, even construed as a mere general (and not specific) ability, and nevertheless be morally responsible, since the account only requires an alternative possibility of a certain sort (the kind required to be weakly reasons-reactive). Of course, this is not to say that, if the consequence argument is sound and our world is deterministic, we in fact always lack the general ability to do otherwise than we do; on the contrary, Fischer's account is consistent with saying that (even if the consequence argument is sound and determinism true) we possess all sorts of capabilities to do otherwise than we do. Instead, what I have been arguing is that such general abilities are *not* (on Fischer's account) *necessary* for moral responsibility. And this suffices to show that Franklin has failed to establish that everyone thinks that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility.

5. Semicompatibilism and the "New Dispositionalism"

If it is possible that one can be morally responsible, on Fischer's account, without having any ability to do otherwise, as I have been arguing is possible, then this is a feature of Fischer's account that distinguishes it from views like Vihvelin's that have been called the "new dispositionalism." On such a view, a certain ability to do otherwise *is* necessary for freedom and moral responsibility but is *not* precluded by causal determinism. Fischer's account privileges the actual sequence, and not even a general ability to do otherwise is essential, on his account, to being morally responsible. For Vihvelin, however, who has developed the most sophisticated version of the "new dispositionalism," certain abilities to do otherwise (which turn out to be related to general abilities as I have characterized them) are necessary for free will and moral

responsibility.²⁸ So the dispute between Fischer and the “new dispositionalists” is substantive—not merely (or even largely) a verbal one—and what I have said so far provides the groundwork for clarifying their point of disagreement. To show this, I will first provide a sketch of Vihvelin’s account and then briefly contrast it with Fischer’s account.

On Vihvelin’s view, there are “narrow abilities” (which correspond to those picked out by *General Ability*) and “wide abilities” (which correspond to what I called “specific abilities”):

Your narrow abilities are those abilities that you have in virtue of facts about your *intrinsic properties*; you may think of them, roughly, as those abilities you have in virtue of the size and shape of your body or what you are like beneath your skin. [Endnote omitted.] Your wide abilities are those abilities you have in virtue of your narrow abilities, together with *further facts about your surroundings*. You can rob a person of his wide abilities simply by changing his surroundings—by locking a door, breaking a piano, chaining the person to a chair, or simply by standing by, ready to prevent him from doing the things he tries to do. To remove someone’s narrow abilities, however, you must cause physical, or at least intrinsic, changes in the person—break his bones, damage or disable his brain and/or his mind, and so on. (2013: 11-12)

To return to an example of Franklin’s, Ann is a pianist in a piano-less plane; does she have the ability to play the piano? On Vihvelin’s view, Ann has the narrow ability to play the piano but lacks the wide ability to play the piano. Ann has the former ability in virtue of her intrinsic properties, and these are not affected by her flight. But Ann’s environment (which lacks a piano)

²⁸ I focus on Vihvelin’s view because it is the most sophisticated version of this type of view, but what I say here applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Smith (2003) and Fara (2008).

robs her of the wide ability to play the piano. So far, so simple; and Fischer could accept the *taxonomy* of abilities that Vihvelin offers.

But, on Vihvelin's view, for us to have free will (and thus, on her view, for us to be morally responsible), we must have wide abilities to do otherwise than we do. According to Vihvelin, having free will is "having some relevant bundle of dispositions and by being in surroundings that are suitably friendly with respect to the manifestation of these dispositions" (2013: 169), which is just to say that having free will requires having certain wide abilities to do otherwise than we actually do. Vihvelin goes on to argue that neither narrow nor wide abilities to do otherwise than we do are precluded by determinism, hence she is a classical compatibilist—claiming that we would have the ability to do otherwise even in a deterministic world—rather than a semicompatibilist.

At this point (especially given what I argued in the previous section), a major difference between Fischer's and Vihvelin's accounts should be clear: only the latter thinks that an ability to do otherwise is necessary for moral responsibility. As we have seen, while Fischer's semicompatibilism requires that the agent have a certain alternative (since it requires that things go differently for the agent's operative mechanism in another possible world), it does not require that the agent (nor her mechanism) have the ability to do otherwise in order for her to be morally responsible. On Vihvelin's view, though, an agent must have the wide ability (which encompasses a narrow ability) to do otherwise in order to have free will (and thus to be morally responsible). And the two are not talking past each other; on Fischer's view, not even the narrow ability to do otherwise (much less the wide ability to do otherwise) is necessary for moral responsibility.

So not only does Fischer's semicompatibilism not require the ability to do otherwise, but the absence of this requirement also distinguishes Fischer's view from Vihvelin's version of classical compatibilism, revealing that the dispute between them is not merely (or even largely) a verbal one.

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