
11. The Disappearing Agent

FILIP ČEČ

The notion of libertarian freedom by definition invokes some kind of indeterminism in the process of decision making. The traditional libertarian thinks that without indeterminism we are merely puppets whose strings are being pulled by various deterministic processes over which we have no control. Therefore, a natural solution to resolve this deadlock is to invoke the alternative – indeterminism, and to claim that we now have the prerequisite for unchaining ourselves, to be free and morally responsible for what we do. The “only” thing a libertarian has to do now is to explain how one can have control over an indeterministic process. The libertarian thinker has invoked various solutions, but all have been criticized in the same manner: indeterminism does not help. It adds nothing, it only makes things even worse. It precludes the possibility of causal determination of an action, it makes its happening random and thus it is an unpredictable, uncontrollable, inexplicable and arbitrary process therefore it represents a dangerous add-on to the deliberation process. These worries have been voiced in various ways through various forms of the luck argument¹ which capture one specific aspect of what a critic thinks that goes wrong when one bases his account of free agency on indeterminism. In this paper I will address a specific luck argument that has been put forward against event causal libertarianism: the disappearing agent objection. I will show why some replies are unsatisfactory while dealing with this objection and, by criticizing the notion of settling and the conception of selfhood invoked by this objection I’ll suggest that the event causal libertarian should reject the objection as it rests on an unacceptable ontology and that consequently, he should bite the bullet and admit that there is some residual arbitrariness in

¹ The incompatibility of indeterminism and free will has been criticized throughout the history of philosophy. Contemporary formulations of the luck argument are numerous and differ according to what they suggest is unavailable when we appeal to indeterminism. Some will claim that libertarian decisions do not ensure enough control (see, for example, Mele 1999), or are a matter of chance (Van Inwagen 2000), or are inexplicable (Haji 2001). For a detailed overview see (Clarke 2003, Mele 2006, Schlosser 2014).

torn decision making. In the first section of the paper I'll explain the difference between agent causal and event causal libertarianism, and I'll clarify the notion of torn decision making that characterizes some event causal accounts. The disappearing agent objection will be presented in the second part of the paper, while the various strategies a libertarian can adhere to will be presented in the third section. In the fourth section I'll analyze the notion of settling and whether it presupposes some kind of agent causal power for its realization. Finally, in the last section of the paper I'll offer what I think an event libertarian should commit himself to in order to be able to reply to the objection.

1.

Roughly speaking until the '80 of the last century the dominant libertarian views were the agent causal ones which attributed some kind of special causal power to the agent, who could, on the bases of it, bring about a specific decision without being determined to do so (Chisholm 1966; O'Connor 2000, 2009; Clarke 1993, 2003; Griffith 2010; Steward 2012). The core idea of the agent-causal account is rather simple and it boils down to the following: "a directly free action is caused by the agent" (Clarke 2003: 185); or "free will of the sort required for moral responsibility is accounted for by the existence of agents who as substances have the power to cause decisions without being causally determined to do so." (Pereboom 2014: 30) The notion of causation invoked by the agent-causalist is not reducible to causation among events involving the agent. Rather, the notion invokes an ontologically specific kind of selfhood, the agent-as-substance, an entity which has the capacity to cause free choices, and which is irreducible to event ontology. Therefore, according to most agent-causal libertarian theories the decision is up to the agent qua substance: a special form of selfhood capable of producing different outcomes in equal scenarios.

The traditional libertarian standpoint was revised and the debate was altered when novel libertarian accounts entered the arena. Accounts that do not rely on ontologically irreducible entities as the agent-as-substance or agent causation were introduced by various authors; some of them opted for an ontological framework based exclusively on states and events involving the agent and thus gave birth to what is now called event causal libertarianism. According to event causal libertarians (Kane 1996; Ekstrom 2000; Balaguer 2010; Franklin 2011)² a free action will be a prod-

² Many other event causal authors could be added to the list, as well as some that embrace event ontology without committing themselves to the truth or falsity of (in)determinism as for example Albert Mele (2006).

uct of indeterministic, agent involving mental events or states which do not rely on any ontologically specific form of selfhood or specific forms of causation. The event causal libertarian will rely on event causal theories of action according to which “self-determination is to be solely analyzed in terms of, and reduced to, states and events involving the agent—such as his desires and beliefs—determining the action.” (Franklin 2014: 413) According to the event causal libertarian when analyzing the causal relationship between various states or events involving the agent, and the selfhood of the agent, one doesn’t have to invoke, as the agent causal framework does, a conception of the agent as irreducibly causally involved in the causation process.

The paradigmatic notion of libertarian event-causal decision making is exemplified in various instances of torn decision making.³ The result of the torn decision making process will be a free action which will be a causal product of certain agent involving mental events which are, in part, indeterministic. Robert Kane is famous for postulating the notion of self-forming actions, decisions which “occur at difficult times of life when we are torn between competing visions of what we should do or become.” (Kane 2007: 26)⁴ Due to the inner struggle between two distinct sets of conflicting motives we feel torn, we experience uncertainty about what to do and consequently this uncertainty ensures that the outcome of the decision making process is not determined by influences of the past. At the same time the conflicting sets of motives will guarantee that the outcome is willed, rationally and voluntary either way we choose. (Kane 2007: 26-27) Mark Balaguer, another libertarian whose event casual account includes the notion of torn decision defines them in the following way:

[A torn decision is] a decision in which the agent (a) has reasons for two or more options and feels torn as to which set of reasons is stronger, that is, has no conscious belief as to which option is best, given her reasons; and that (b) decides without resolving the conflict—that is, the person has the experience of “just choosing.” (Balaguer 2010: 71)

An important distinction between Kane’s and Balaguer’s conception of torn decision is that the former defines self-forming actions as being undetermined, while the latter defines them in terms of phenomenology. Balaguer argues that we know from personal experience that we make torn

³ Not all event causal libertarians adhere to torn decision making. However this essay will focus on the authors that do rely on such conception notably: Kane (1996, 2007), Balaguer (2010), Franklin (2014).

⁴ Kane has presented and refined his influential notion of event causal libertarianism on numerous occasions (Kane 1996, 2005, 2007, etc.). For the purposes of this paper I rely on one of his most popular recent elaborations of his view (Kane 2007).

decisions but it is an empirical question whether they are undetermined. (Balaguer 2009: 73-74)⁵⁶ There are other important differences between Balaguer's and Kane's conceptions of torn decision⁷ but for the purposes of this paper it I will use the following concept of torn decisions:

- a) the agent has a feeling of being torn between two or more options;
- b) the outcome is not causally determined by influences of the past (it is not a deterministically produced event);
- c) the decision is probabilistically caused by agent involving events;
- d) the indeterministic event is part of the decision itself, it does not happen before the process of decision making;⁸
- e) the options are in a motivational equipoise: if two options are open, option A and option B, then there is 50% chance that the agent will choose option A and 50% chance that he'll choose option B.
- f) the act of deciding has to be analyzed on the basis of a causal theory of action.

Let me offer an example of torn decision making. Suppose that Alberto is in love with Ernest and that they have been in a relationship for quite a long period of time. They have been keeping their relationship in secret because of the homophobic society they live in. This has been a major obstacle for both of them and their daily life has been a mess due to all the compromises and secrecies they have to adhere to and endure. Alberto, being an open person, is tired of keeping their relationship in secret and he'd like to break this prison they are in and publicly affirm their love. However, whenever he suggested something like that to Ernest, Ernest discouraged him as Ernest's job, as well as his relationship with his parents depends on maintaining this pretense. Alberto has come to an impasse. He is torn on what to do and is deliberating between two options. Whether he should maintain this situation they are in, and thus prevent any possible negative outcome that might succumb them, or whether he should give an ultimatum to Ernest,

⁵ Balaguer's account can also be read in a different way, as departing from the usual event libertarian picture and adhering to a third class of libertarian accounts, to the class of non-causal libertarianism. Derk Pereboom reads it in that way (Pereboom 2014: 36-38). In this paper I'll interpret Balaguer's position as an event-causal one.

⁶ According to Carl Ginet's non-causal view an act is free when it is uncaused, it has an agent as a subject and has an actish phenomenological quality for the agent. (Ginet 1990, 1996, 2007) Other noteworthy contributions to the non-causal libertarian account have been given by Hugh McCann (McCann 1998) and Stuart Goetz (Goetz 2008).

⁷ For more details see Balaguer 2010: 73-75.

⁸ Some authors will say that such a decision is a directly free decision. An action is directly free just in case it is free and its freedom does not derive from the freedom of any other action. (Clarke 2011: 331)

probably something like: “either we get out of the closet or I’m leaving.” Alberto’s process of deliberation has raised a feeling of being torn between the options, and as both sets of reasons are of equal strength there is a 50% chance that Alberto will decide to give an ultimatum, and 50% chance that he will not act in that way. The final outcome will be made by Alberto on the bases of an indeterministic decision process grounded on the reasons he has, for the reason he has. After several days of painful deliberation he finally decides and gives an ultimatum to Ernest. According to the event causal libertarian in the exactly same scenario Alberto could have decided otherwise and opted to maintain the relationship he is in as it is.

2.

Many have argued that the indeterminism involved in the process of torn decision making undermines control. One might feel uncomfortable, to put it mildly, with a decision making process during which an agent ultimately forms a decision by “just choosing” an option between two (or more) sets of competing motives. It seems that what happens is a matter of luck. The choice that is the product of torn-decision making is in its core arbitrary.

Of course, event causal libertarians are aware of this problem and therefore rely on various solutions that grant the much needed control to the agent. Kane invokes the notion of *plural voluntary control* of the agent over his options:

Agents have plural voluntary control over a set of options (...) when they are able to bring about *whichever* of the options they will, *when* they will to do so, *for* the reasons they will to do so, *on* purpose, rather than accidentally or by mistake, *without* being coerced or compelled in doing so or willing to do so, or otherwise controlled in doing or willing to do so by any other agents or mechanisms. (...) The conditions can be summed up by saying that the agents can choose either way *at will*. In other words, the choices are “will-setting”: We set our wills one way or the other in the act of deciding itself, and not before. (Kane 2007: 30)

Balaguer adopts a similar tactic: he uses the notion of appropriate non-randomness⁹ and combines it a phenomenological feeling that we experience while deciding and rather bluntly concludes:

It is Ralph [the agent] who does the just-picking (...) at the moment of choice, nothing external to Ralph’s conscious reasons and thought has any

⁹ According to Balaguer “the central requirement that a decision needs to satisfy in order to count as appropriately nonrandom is that of having been authored and controlled by the agent in question; that is, it has to have been her decision, and she has to have controlled which option was chosen.” (Balaguer 2010: 66)

causal influence over his choice (...) Ralph chooses — consciously, intentionally, and purposefully — without being casually influenced by anything external to his conscious reasons and thought. (Balaguer 2010: 97)

Both Kane and Balaguer argue that the competing sets of reasons are the ones which provide the voluntariness and purposefulness of the resulting decision, and given that the decision is brought about consciously, by someone's own will, without any outside interference then we must conclude that the outcome is something done by, and under control of the agent.

Still, many will not be impressed by these replies as they might feel that the control expressed by the agent is insufficient. One might argue that the agent himself should be able to give the final verdict upon what to do and that the process of torn decision making does not secure that. They will insist that the agent must be the source of the decision. Moreover, someone might say that the agent isn't even present during such a decision making process. To be precise this is exactly what Derk Pereboom has in mind when he offers his version of the luck objection against event causal libertarians: the disappearing agent objection. This objection has been voiced by Pereboom on numerous occasions (Pereboom 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015) a recent one being the one presented in his 2014 book *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in life* where he presents it in the following manner:

Consider a decision that occurs in a context in which the agent's moral motivations favor that decision, and her prudential motivations favor her refraining from making it, and the strengths of these motivations are in equipoise. On an event-causal libertarian picture, the relevant causal conditions antecedent to the decision, i.e., the occurrence of certain agent-involving events, do not settle whether the decision will occur, but only render the occurrence of the decision about 50% probable. In fact, because no occurrence of antecedent events settles whether the decision will occur, and only antecedent events are causally relevant, nothing settles whether the decision will occur. Thus it can't be that the agent or anything about the agent settles whether the decision will occur, and she therefore will lack the control required for basic desert moral responsibility for it. (Pereboom 2014: 32)

What Pereboom wants to say is obvious: if during the decision making process an indeterministic event occurs which terminates the conflict within the agent by bringing about a decision then it is this event which does the deciding and not the agent, moreover the agent isn't even present in this stage of the decision making process, she disappears due to the fact that it is the indeterministic event the one which gives the final touch, the closure and terminates the unfortunate process by forming the decision. The agent is not present, metaphorically speaking – she disappears.

Christopher Evan Franklin while scrutinizing Pereboom's argument summed it up in the following way:

- (1) On event-causal libertarianism, there is nothing about the agent that settles which decision he makes.
- (2) If nothing about the agent settles which decision he makes, then the decision he makes is a matter of luck.
- (3) If the decision the agent makes is a matter of luck, then he is not free with respect to or morally responsible for the decision.

Therefore,

- (4) An agent who merely satisfies event-causal libertarianism is neither free with respect to nor morally responsible for any of his decisions. (Franklin 2014: 414)

Pereboom wants to stress out that one cannot be a fit subject for attribution of moral responsibility unless he possesses a specific kind of control which in turn "requires the agent to settle which of the options for decision actually occurs." (Pereboom 2012: 4) Since the torn decision making process, as formulated by the event causal libertarian, cannot secure this kind of control there is nothing left than to discard this position as unsatisfactory for attribution of moral responsibility. It must be stressed out that the objection wants to meet the control requirements as postulated by event causal libertarians. It satisfies Kane's notion of plural voluntary control as well as Balaguer's conception of appropriate non-randomness and thus maintains the idea that the agent has some kind of role in the decision making process. However, he has it only until a certain point of it, to be more specific until the point in which an indeterministic event occurs, takes over, nullifies the role of the agent and determines the outcome. That's the main reason why Pereboom thinks that the agent disappears and therefore it cannot be said that the decision was his own doing.

Alberto's case can be presented in the following manner: Alberto has two sets of competing reasons; according to one set he should give an ultimatum to Ernest, according to the other set of reasons he should keep the relationship he is in as it is. Since he is in a motivational equipoise, he cannot decide. What does the deciding is an indeterministic event which happens at the moment of equipoise, and when it happens, then the decision will be done, but Alberto will not have any influence in it since he was – undecided. Therefore, Alberto hasn't been the one who settled the matter. Alberto disappeared.

3.

There are various ways in which one may try to reply to the disappearing agent objection. In my opinion, the options available for the event causal libertarian are the following ones:

1. Formulate an answer that relies on specific events or states that fulfill the functional role of the agent. Velleman (1992) and Franklin (2014) opt for this solution.
2. Appeal to phenomenology by claiming that the decision is attributable to the agent because there is a special phenomenological feeling that only the one who decides can have. Balaguer (2010) adopts this option and perhaps Kane (2007) can be interpreted as appealing to it.
3. Devise an enriched event-causal account which will ultimately explain why the agent has not lost control over the decision making process.
4. Discard the disappearing agent objection as it relies on a form of control of the decision making process available only to agent causal theories, thus making it (1) unacceptable because of the metaphysical burden it brings along, (2) incompatible with the concept of torn decision making, (3) incompatible with the concept of motivational equipoise.
5. Bite the bullet and stick to the idea that something gets lost if one adheres to event causal libertarianism.

A counterargument to the disappearing agent objection usually boils down to a combination of several options from the list given above. However, one might rely just on one option as for example Velleman does. He opts for the first solution and argues that the agent does not disappear from the decision making process as he has identified himself with an attitude with which he is functionally identical. The attitude the agent has identified with, in Velleman case, is “the additional motivating force of the desire to act in accordance with reasons.” (Velleman 1992: 479) Velleman’s reply can be exemplified in the following manner: Alberto has calculated the strengths of his reasons and he noticed that he favors the ultimatum scenario. Previously he has identified himself with the desire to act in accord with his reasons. The identification brings about that the set of ultimatum reasons is additionally reinforced by the desire to act in accord with his reasons. Thus he is able to break the deadlock, ends the torn decision making process and he decides to give an ultimatum to Ernest. As long as Alberto is identified with the desire to act in accordance with his reasons, that desire will be part of Alberto’s decision making process, it will fulfill Alberto’s functional role as the one who does the deciding and therefore

will guarantee that the outcome can be attributed to him. It might seem that the indeterministic event nullified Alberto's control over the decision making process, but in fact, that event is only a part of the whole process which functionally is Alberto's own doing.

However, the above mentioned reply is confronted with a serious flaw. As Runyan relying on Pereboom (2015), correctly, in my opinion, stresses out:

When a person is in motivational equipoise concerning her alternatives she is on the fence about, and out of resources for settling, what to do. There is no desire, attitude or preference in favor of one alternative. (Runyan 2015: 1634)

When an agent finds himself torn between two or more options, then all the reasons are already included in the deliberation process and that is why the resulting situation is a situation of motivational equipoise. There is nothing additional that the agent can add to the equation, no desire has been left out, adding a desire or desires to act in accordance with one's own reasons is not possible as these are, if they exist, already included in the deliberation process. What is suggested, to rephrase, is that if we are in a motivational equipoise the desire to act with one's reasons is already part of the motivational system and therefore cannot function as the "thing" that puts an end to the equipoise. Nothing can tip the scale. The only thing that can resolve the issue, the situation of being torn between two or more options, is the indeterministic event. The fifth condition of the definition of what a torn decision is prevents Velleman's solution from functioning. In a different scenario in which the chances of the available options are not tied, a scenario in which the agent is not in a motivational equipoise, the desire to act in accordance with reasons will successfully bring to a decision that can be attributed to the agent. If Alberto's reasons for handing out an ultimatum to Ernest have a 60% chance of happening then adding the desire to act in accordance with reasons would make that particular set of reasons occur by raising the probabilities to a 100% chance of happening. But this scenario cannot arise in the case of torn decision making.

Franklin combines two options from the list given above: he uses and improves Velleman's account and offers an "enriched" event causal account that includes a reductive theory of self-determination in which "the activity of the self-determining agent is reduced to a state or event that plays the self-determining agent functional role" and that "in so doing counts as *his* playing his functional role." (Franklin 2014: 418) In this way we have a reductionist picture of the agent, one to which Velleman doesn't commit himself, in which the states or events that count as his play the role of the settler. The states or events of relevance here are similar to the ones employed by Velleman:

[the agent] plays a causal role *over and above* the causal role played by his desires and beliefs for action, and this supplementation amounts to his “throwing his weight” behind the desires and beliefs that led to action. It is this additional participation of the agent in action that transforms mere action into self-determined action. (Franklin 2014: 423)

Is the motivational equipoise a problem for Franklin? It depends on the interpretation of what “throwing his weight” actually means. The equipoise doesn’t have to be a problem if we interpret the idea of “throwing our own weight” as a will to settle the standstill even if we are undecided. Perhaps it would amount to Alberto saying: “I really have to resolve this state I’m in. I have no inclination towards one of the alternatives but I’ll pick the ultimatum option and we’ll see what happens.” However in this case a certain degree of randomness will remain. I doubt that Franklin would adhere to this solution as it seems that the phrase “throwing his weight” must be read in a different manner. Let me explain.

Perhaps the idea of “throwing his weight” should be read in a manner akin to Velleman’s interpretation? Then the settling would be done according to the desire to act in accordance with the best reasons one has. We find plenty of passages in Franklin in which he implores this idea. For example:

On my account, in addition to the desires and beliefs for action playing a causal role, the desire to act in accordance with the strongest reasons—a desire that is functionally identical to the agent and with which he is identified—also plays, or could have played, a causal role. It is in light of this additional causal role that the agent determines, or could have determined, and thus settled, what he would do. (Franklin 2014: 427)

But then Franklin’s response is inadequate because his theory, like Velleman’s, seems unable to give a proper reply to Pereboom’s critique for the same reasons that were present in Velleman’s case. I’m inclined to think that Velleman’s and Franklin’s suggestions fail to fulfill the role that the disappearing agent objection seems to require: the role of settling. In the fourth and fifth section of this paper I will argue that this role cannot be fulfilled in an event causal universe, and that fulfilling that role is a futile job, a job that the event causalist shouldn’t even try to adhere to. However, before doing so I’d like to explore another option that the event causalist might appeal to when replying to the disappearing agent objection.

In his 2010 book *Free will as an open scientific problem* Mark Balaguer presented his event casual theory which has been directly criticized by Derk Pereboom several times. (Pereboom 2012, 2013, 2014) Balaguer addresses the disappearing agent objection in a recent paper (Balaguer 2012) and offers a very detailed reply to Pereboom’s critique. He begins his argumentation by arguing that:

- (A) Ralph's [the agent's] choice was conscious, intentional, and purposeful, with an actish phenomenology (...)
- (B) the choice flowed out of Ralph's conscious reasons and thought in a nondeterministically event-causal way; and
- (C) nothing external to Ralph's conscious reasons and thought had any significant causal influence over how he chose. (Balaguer 2012: 10)

According to Balaguer if these conditions are present then we may conclude that the agent authored and controlled the decision, they are indeterminate but appropriately non-random (Balaguer 2010: 66). However he is aware that such a reply might not satisfy Pereboom:

One of the central claims in Pereboom's disappearing agent objection is that authorship and control require the agent to settle the matter. I am OK with that way of putting things. But it seems to me that if the event that settles the matter is the agent's conscious decision, then, at the very least, there is a sense in which the agent does settle it. There might be other senses—most notably, agent causal senses—in which the agent does not settle it. (Balaguer 2012: 14)

And this is exactly what Pereboom has in mind when he replies to Balaguer by saying:

The objection is not that agents will have no causal role in producing decisions, but that the causal role that is available to agents will be insufficient for the control moral responsibility demands. (Pereboom 2013: 27)

Basically the disappearing agent objection boils down to the assumption that whichever answer an event libertarian might produce, the control that he envisages will not be thick enough. Pereboom's objection is grounded on the idea that the notion of control that the event causal libertarian is offering is simply too thin due to the nature of the decision making process the event causalist is relying upon: the torn decision itself. The causal role of the agent that various event causal libertarians try to secure will result as insufficient if one or a combination of the first three options from the list given above is chosen. Therefore, it seems obvious that the disappearing agent objection must rely on a different, stronger conception of control, a kind of control that can be secured only by agent causal theories. If this consequence hasn't been made clear by the discussion that I provided so far, it will be crystal clear once we analyze the following quote concerning the force of the disappearing agent objection when applied to Balaguer's event causal proposal:

But the one concern is that if the just-choosing is what secures Ralph's control, and control is a causal matter, then what is being specified is that a causal relation obtains between Ralph himself and the decision. However, the event-causal libertarian allows only causal relations among events, and not a fundamental causal relation between agent and event. (Pereboom 2014: 36)

Obviously the fundamental causal relation between agent and event that Pereboom has in mind boils down to an agent causal form of decision making. Franklin formulates this worry explicitly:

It is hard to read this objection as anything else but a bald assertion that the agent qua substance must fundamentally cause his decision, and if he does not, then he does not play the role that is required of him in free action.

Therefore, it seems that a confutation of the disappearing agent objection must rely on the fourth or the fifth option from the above given list. Enriching the event causal account doesn't seem to suffice. (Franklin 2013: 427)

4.

The fourth option is grounded on the presumption that the disappearing agent objection can be rejected as it relies on a form of control available only to agent causal theories. A form of control that is, supposedly, indispensable for the attribution of moral responsibility but unavailable to the event causal conception of the agent. Why is it so? What is it that the agent should be capable of doing in order to be an eligible subject for the attribution of moral responsibility? What kind of control does the objection presuppose? A closer look to the notion of settling as used by Pereboom and other authors will help to understand what kind of causal powers an agent must possess in order to have that form of control, and what are the necessary metaphysical presuppositions that render this particular form of control possible. Pereboom argues the following:

The disappearing agent objection counts against the supposition that this [event causal] account secures the control required for moral responsibility. Intuitively, this sort of control requires *the agent* to settle which of the options for decision actually occurs. (Pereboom 2012: 4)

What Pereboom wants to say when he claims that an agent settles which option will actually occur? Broadly speaking it can be said that settling the matter implies a definite resolution of a situation in a certain way by choosing between different options available to the agent. Therefore, it seems that the notion of settling the matter is inconsistent with universal determinism.¹⁰ Helen Steward nicely illustrates this claim by means of the following argument:

For example, if an utterly deterministic process leads via a successive chain of causes $c_1 \dots c_n$ to effect e , then c_n cannot count as having settled an event of any of the types that e instantiates occurs, even though c_n is es-

¹⁰ This claim has been disputed, for example by Clarke (2014), however this issue has no relevance for the purposes of this paper hence I will not tackle with it.

sential to the occurrence of e , since it was already settled at the time of c_1 's occurrence that e would occur. An event can only settle a matter at the time at which it occurs, if that matter is not already settled before that time. (...) If there is ever any settling of matters in time, then universal determinism cannot be true, since according to universal determinism, everything is already settled at the start (whatever exactly we are to understand by "the start"). (Steward 2012: 40)

It is obvious, from the previous passage that the notion of settling is libertarian in its core because it requires open futures. By definition, acting by settling requires choosing between options that are available to the agent to choose from. Or as Steward expresses it "an agent's action 'just is' a matter of it being the settling of at least one from a range of possible other things that are up to the agent." (Steward 2012: 36) Furthermore, the notion of settling as used by Steward and Pereboom is not only libertarian, in the sense that it requires open futures it is also a metaphysically extremely demanding one. It seems that it presupposes some kind of agent causation because:

... one cannot hope to analyse what it is for an agent to act in terms merely of the causation of her bodily movements by various of her mental states, because her action has to be a part of this story, the part that connects those non active mental antecedents to her bodily movements. It is the agent who has to settle the question whether those mental antecedents will result in a movement or not. That is the way commonsense psychology tells the story of action, and it cannot be retold at this level of ontology without her participation. (Steward 2012: 65)

From the quote given above it is evident that the selfhood as used by event causal theories cannot possibly settle because it is built upon agent involving mental events or states which, according to Steward do not count as an eligible possibility when we try to analyze the notion of acting. Only an *agent* can. The agent does not bring about an event according to her picture of agency but rather:

What, properly speaking, is up to me in the usual sort of action situation is not a particular event, but rather the answers to a whole range of questions that are settled by my action when I act. (Steward 2012: 37)

Therefore, the self that is compatible with the notion of settling, the self that can settle must be one of a non-reductive cast similar to the ones presupposed by agent causal theories: a mover unmoved, an agent-as-substance. Randolph Clarke's interpretation of Steward's account can be used to further explicate some important details of her account:

(S) An action a that is performed at time t settles at t whether p iff (i) either it is impossible that a be performed then and the actual laws of nature hold and p , or it is impossible that a be performed then and the actual laws hold and not- p , and (ii) there is nothing existing at any time t' prior to t such that

either it is impossible that that thing exist at t' and the actual laws hold and p , or it is impossible that that thing exist at t' and the actual laws hold and not- p . (Clarke 2014: 522)

Clarke offers the following example of an action that will bring to the settling of a matter:

...when I raise my arm at a certain time, t , my action of raising my arm might settle at t whether I raise my arm then, provided that nothing prior to that time suffices for its being the case that I raise my arm then. And given that my action of raising my arm settles at t whether I raise my arm then, it might be said that I settle at t whether I raise my arm then, and that I settle this matter at t by raising my arm then. (Clarke 2014: 522)

Evidently, the action of settling cannot be reduced to event ontology. The thing that does the settling is not an event or a state of affairs that involves the agent, but rather the agent himself: a non-reductive notion of selfhood. It is obvious that the concept of torn decisions as usually employed by the event causal libertarian is incompatible with the concept of settling for the following reasons:

- (1) There is no “I” who does the settling. In the reductionist ontology of the event causalist agents qua substances are inexistent. The objection requires more than the event causal picture can possibly offer.
- (2) The concept of settling contradicts with the concept of torn decision making. One important characteristic of settling is that nothing prior to the settling itself suffices for the production of the action. Nothing prior to the raising of my arm *suffices* for the raising of my arm, as Clarke invites us to think in his example. However, the concept of torn decision making implies that the situation of motivational equipoise is *sufficient* for the production of a decision. Nothing more can be added to the picture. Therefore we have two concepts that do not combine: according to the concept of settling nothing prior to the act of the agent suffices for the act, while according to the concept of torn decision making the situation of motivational equipoise suffices for the act.¹¹
- (3) The second point can be further expanded. It seems strange to say that the situation of motivational equipoise should be resolved by the agent. The point is that the agent himself is in such a state and he does not prefer one option over another. If he had a preference then he would

¹¹ It is important to stress out that according to the event causal picture the equipoise will be resolved by the indeterministic event of decision making. The notion of torn decision making is a process that lasts in time and incorporates both the motivational equipoise and the indeterministic event of resolving the issue by deciding. There are no interventions brought about by the agent or some other event external to the agent that could lead to what the disappearing objection wants: settling.

not be in a state of motivational equipoise. Therefore a question arises: how could the agent, even an agent-as-substance end the motivational equipoise?¹² For what reasons? What would motivate him to choose option A over B? It seems that the reason for settling is inexplicable. If that is the case then the agent causal libertarian is in the same trouble as the event causal one.

The final point leads to a further problem that is usually invoked against agent causal theories: they fail to resolve the problem of luck.

Agent causal theories employ metaphysically problematic concepts in the sense that they appeal to specific, peculiar entities such as special forms of causation or the agents-as-substances that are irreducible to other entities that inhabit the world we live in. By doing so they add novel *kind* of entities to the ontological inventory of what there is. Why? The reason is simple: then we can explain the specific process of decision making and discern it from the usual casual pathways present in the world. However why should we invoke a solution that has dubious metaphysical implications if it adds nothing?¹³ Why burden our ontology with peculiar kinds of entities if these entities do not help us resolve the problem we are dealing with, in this case the problem of libertarian luck? Balaguer, among others questions what is to be gained if we appeal to agent causal theories:

I would just like to offer one quick argument against the idea that authorship and control should be thought of as requiring agent causation. Let me put the argument in the form of a challenge to advocates of agent-causal analyses of authorship and control. The challenge is to say what exactly is to be gained by requiring agent causation. On the view I have in mind, we say that Ralph [the agent] authored and controlled his decision (...) because (roughly) the event that settled which option was chosen was the conscious

¹² As seen in the third section of this paper Pereboom suggests that Velleman's and Franklin's suggestions fail to meet the task given by the disappearing agent objection as the agent is in motivation equipoise and therefore a desire to decide in accordance with the strongest set of reasons will not do the trick. Something else must be added so that the agent can settle the matter. But the problem might be that nothing that can settle can be added, at least not in the event casual ontological picture. One solution that might be offered is for the agent to identify himself with a desire to end the decision process if it ends in motivational equipoise then and there by deciding. According to this proposal the agent would be the one to functionally end the equipoise however a residual arbitrariness would remain as no set of reasons would be preferred over the other.

¹³ Various criticisms have been invoked along that line of thought: why should we encumber our ontology with dubious notions of selfhood such as the "substance-as-a-cause" or specific forms of causation as agent causation. In his book *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* Randolph Clarke offers an overview of various criticisms that have been voiced against the agent-causal view. (Clarke 2003: 185-212)

decision itself. If you demand that Ralph caused option O to be chosen (or that he causally settled which option was chosen), then it seems to me that you have gained nothing; you have simply moved everything back a step. For now there is a second event, on top of the conscious decision—namely, the event of Ralph agent-causing the decision—and we can ask the very same question about this event that Pereboom wants to ask about the conscious decision; that is, we can ask what caused the agent-causal event to occur. And, of course, the agent-causal response is going to be that nothing caused it to occur. (Balaguer 2012: 14)

Balaguer's argument echoes a worry that has been present in the debate for a long time. A worry that Gary Watson nicely elucidates: "Agent-causation simply labels, not illuminates, what the libertarian needs." (Watson 1982: 10)

According to the argumentation given above the agent causalist doesn't fare much better than the event causalist. On the contrary! If he cannot explain why and how an agent settles then his position is worse than the event causal one because he has committed himself to a much richer ontology. If that is the case, then we should adhere to a less demanding ontological framework: the event causal one.

I do not want to offer a knock-down argument against agent causal theories. This is not the purpose of this paper. What I want to stress out when invoking these arguments and the questions that have been put forward is twofold. On one hand, what is suggested is that the event causal libertarian can ignore the disappearing agent objection and, on the other hand it should suggest that there are no reasons why he should follow the agent causal route and/or adhere to the metaphysical standards imposed by such a theory. It doesn't help. These arguments should motivate one to explore another possible route, the event causal one, and accept its limitations.

5.

This brings us to the fifth option that an event causal libertarian can adhere to when trying to reply to the disappearing agent objection: he should bite the bullet and stick to the idea that something gets lost if one adheres to event causal libertarianism.

As exposed in the previous section of the paper adhering to the standards imposed by the concept of settling is not something that can be achieved in an event causal ontology. Therefore the answer to the question "Should an event causal libertarian settle?" is simple: no. An event causal libertarian should explain how a free decision looks like, why it is attributable to an agent, explain the functional role of the agent's in it, how it is

incorporated in other parts of his mental life, etc.¹⁴ He has to do so in order to demonstrate that the residual arbitrariness isn't an obstacle in the production of free decisions and attribution of moral responsibility.

On the other hand he should admit if a decision making process is grounded on probabilistically caused agent involving events then there will be some residual arbitrariness present in the decision making process. Is that an obstacle? Does the agent disappear? In order to answer that the libertarian must ask himself why does he adhere to indeterminism in the first place? What can an indeterministic world offer? One obvious answer is that such a world provides open futures in which an agent can create or follow novel causal pathways. But as already seen indeterminism is a dangerous toy to play with. Following that path does not mean that the journey will be without perils. No wonder that Randolph Clarke spoke of it as a of horror story. (Clarke 2011: 331) The horror of indeterminism is even more disturbing if one adheres to event ontology. No noumenal selves, selves-as-substances or special forms of causation are available and because of that the possibility of settling is precluded in such a world. However, the world picture of the event causal libertarian isn't that frightening, after all it is a parsimonious and intelligible ontology: no special, unique, non-reductive and unexplainable, agent-as-substances entities are being invoked. Then again, there is no settling, at least not as demanding as the disappearing agent objection requires. Consequently some residual arbitrariness will be present in the decision making process because it rests on the idea of motivational equipoise which gets resolved by an agent involving indeterministic event. The indeterminism is here to stay but to implement Balaguer's term it will be appropriately non-random. (Balaguer 2010: 66) It will be the agent's own doing.¹⁵ Alberto will not disappear.

Therefore the event causal libertarian should bite the bullet and assume a humble approach by admitting that there is a bit of residual arbitrariness in his ontology. Toying with indeterminism demands a price to be paid.

¹⁴ Some of these questions, without adhering to event causal libertarianism, are addressed in Malatesti and Čeč (forthcoming)

¹⁵ More can and should be said regarding the issue why the torn decision making process is attributable to the agent. In my opinion an argument akin to the one presented in the eleventh footnote, the identification with a desire to end the decision making process no matter what could be good candidate, however that goal is beyond the scope of this paper.

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