
Causal History Matters, but Not for Individuation

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Introduction

In 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,' Harry Frankfurt introduces a scenario aimed at showing that the having of alternative possibilities is not required for moral responsibility. According to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), an agent is morally responsible for her action only if she could have done otherwise; Frankfurt thinks his scenario shows that PAP is, in fact, false. Frankfurt also thinks that the denial of PAP gives credence to compatibilism, the thesis that an agent could both be causally determined in all her actions and yet be morally responsible.¹ Since its introduction, Frankfurt's original ex-

1 According to Frankfurt, 'counterexamples to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities do not actually show that attributions of moral responsibility are compatible with determinism. They do go a long way, I think, to making compatibilism plausible' ('Reply to John Martin Fischer,' in *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*, Sarah Buss and Lee Overton, eds. [Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2002], 28). Similarly, John Martin Fischer writes that 'the success of the Frankfurt-type strategy should not be judged on the basis of whether the Frankfurt-type cases in themselves decisively establish that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism. That they do not do *all* the work does not show that they do not do *some* important work' ('Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism,' *Contours of Agency*, 8f.

ample has generated a voluminous literature, including a plethora of other, more complicated, Frankfurt-style examples (FSEs). Commenting on the immense literature focused on FSEs, Kadri Vihvelin writes:

It is difficult to explain, to someone not working in this area, just how peculiar the situation is. On the one hand, Frankfurt stories, as they have come to be called, have had an impact in free will circles that is comparable to the impact of Gettier stories in epistemology. On the other hand, after over thirty years of debate and discussion, it is *still* controversial whether Frankfurt or any of his followers have succeeded in providing a genuine counterexample to PAP.²

By and large, most compatibilists have been willing to accept Frankfurt's conclusion since it means that determinism would not rule out moral responsibility in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilities.³ As might be expected, incompatibilist appraisals of Frankfurt's conclusion are much more varied. There are three major responses that incompatibilists give to FSEs. Some incompatibilists argue that FSEs only impugn PAP if they implicitly presuppose the truth of causal determinism, and thus beg the question against the incompatibilist.⁴ Other incompatibilists agree that PAP is false, but think that incompatibilism doesn't require PAP. These incompatibilists think that the truth of causal determinism would rule out moral responsibility for some reason other than eliminating alternative possibilities.⁵ The third general incompati-

2 Kadri Vihvelin, 'Freedom, Foreknowledge, and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2000), 1f.

3 However, some compatibilists still maintain that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise. See Joseph Keim Campbell, 'A Compatibilist Theory of Alternative Possibilities,' *Philosophical Studies* 88 (1997) 319-30; Kadri Vihvelin, 'Freedom, Foreknowledge, and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities'; and Bernard Berofsky, 'Classical Compatibilism: Not Yet Dead,' in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, Michael McKenna and David Widerker, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2003) 107-26.

4 For representative samples, see Robert Kane, 'Responsibility, Indeterminism and Frankfurt-style Cases,' in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*: 91-105; David Widerker, 'Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities,' *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995) 247-61; and Carl Ginet, 'In Defense of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: Why I Don't Find Frankfurt's Argument Convincing,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996) 403-17. However, compare John Martin Fischer, 'Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism.'

5 See, for instance, Eleonore Stump, 'Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities,' in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 139-58; Eleonore Stump, 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility: The Flicker of Freedom,' *Journal of Ethics* 3 (1999) 299-324; Linda Zagzebski, 'Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternative Possibilities?' *Philosophical Perspectives* 14, Action and Freedom (2000)

bilist response is to challenge FSEs directly and to argue that, contrary to Frankfurt's claim, they do not show PAP to be false after all. John Martin Fischer has given the name 'Flicker of Freedom Strategy' to this third kind of response.⁶ According to the Flicker Strategy, closer inspection of FSEs shows there to be ineliminable differences between the actual and alternate scenario, as a result of which FSEs are not instances in which the agent truly lacks alternative possibilities. As Fischer puts it, 'although the counterfactual interveners eliminate most alternative possibilities, arguably they do not eliminate *all* such possibilities: even in the Frankfurt-type cases, there seems to be a "flicker of freedom."⁷

Elsewhere, I have argued that the first two of these strategies fail, and have endorsed a version of the third strategy.⁸ In the present paper, I want to compare two different ways of developing this third strategy, showing why my favored version of this approach is preferable to another proposal recently defended by Gordon Pettit.⁹ (However, in the course of my argument, a brief discussion of the second strategy will also surface.) In 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' Pettit sets out to defend PAP¹⁰ from FSEs via one form of the Flicker Strategy. In particular, Pettit assesses two facets of recent discussions

231-48; and David Hunt, 'Moral Responsibility and Unavoidable Action,' *Philosophical Studies* 97, 2 (2000) 195-227.

- 6 The *locus classicus* for discussions of the Flicker strategy is chapter 7 of John Martin Fischer's *The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Cambridge: Blackwell 1994).
- 7 Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 134
- 8 For my rejection of the first strategy, see my 'Trumping Frankfurt: Why the Kane-Widerker Objection is Irrelevant,' *Philosophia Christi* 5 (2003) 485-99. For my rejection of the second strategy, see 'A Critique of Frankfurt-Libertarianism,' *Philosophia* 34 (2006) 189-202. For my defense of the third strategy, see both 'A Critique of Frankfurt-Libertarianism' and 'The Dialectic Role of the Flickers of Freedom,' *Philosophical Studies* 131 (2006) 337-68.
- 9 Gordon Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (2005) 303-19.
- 10 Actually, Pettit's article is concerned not with a Principle of Alternative Possibilities, but with *Principles* of Alternative Possibilities. Nothing of significance hangs on the terminology here, though Pettit is certainly right that numerous such principles are advanced in the literature. In what follows, however, I will follow more traditional parlance and speak in the singular. Also note that Pettit is only concerned to those formulations of PAP that contain a historical or tracing clause (see 319, n. 34). I also think that whatever PAP is required by incompatibilism will include a tracing clause. However, for an excellent paper that raises serious challenges for tracing, see Manuel Vargas, 'The Trouble with Tracing,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29 (2005) 269-91. For a response, see John Martin Fischer and Neal Tognazzini, 'The Truth about Tracing,' *Nous* (forthcoming).

surrounding FSEs, PAP and moral responsibility: ‘The first facet involves the issue of whether FSEs successfully describe situations lacking alternatives, and the second involves the significance of alternatives within FSEs, if there are any.’¹¹ I agree with Pettit’s overall evaluation of the first facet of the debate in that I think that FSEs are *not* scenarios in which all alternative possibilities are lacking (though I think there is reason to reject a contentious metaphysical principle that Pettit’s argument for the existence of alternative possibilities relies on). The heart of the debate about the Flicker Strategy focuses on the second facet Pettit mentions — namely, the significance of the remaining alternatives for moral responsibility. While I also agree with Pettit on his final evaluation of the second facet of the debate, my point of disagreement with Pettit regarding the first facet leads me to think that his reasons for his evaluation of the second facet fail. In other words, while I agree with the general conclusion that Pettit reaches (i.e., that FSEs fail to refute PAP), I disagree with how he reaches that conclusion. The causal history of an event matters, not for individuation, but as an indicator of whether or not the agent satisfies the sourcehood requirement.

Stage I: Establishing Alternatives

Pettit notes that much of the recent debate surrounding FSEs and the Flicker Strategy has shifted from focusing primarily on the first facet to the second. The reason for this is that although FSEs were initially intended to be conclusive counterexamples to PAP, the general consensus is that they do, in fact, contain alternative possibilities. Even John Martin Fischer, whom Pettit describes as ‘the most prolific and influential proponent of FSEs,’¹² admits that FSEs which do not presuppose the truth of causal determinism will contain ‘ineliminable alternative possibilities.’¹³

It is true, as Pettit notes, that not all members of the debate are willing to concede that FSEs contain alternative possibilities. Included in this group are those incompatibilists who favor the second approach to FSEs mentioned above.¹⁴ Their reason for insisting that FSEs do not

11 Pettit, ‘Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,’ 304

12 *Ibid.*, 304

13 John Martin Fischer, ‘Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism,’ 6. Similar comments are made by Alfred Mele, another opponent of PAP, in ‘Soft Libertarianism and Flickers of Freedom,’ in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 253.

14 Elsewhere, I have used the term ‘Frankfurt-Incompatibilism’ to describe this posi-

involve alternative possibilities is illustrative of how they understand PAP and its role in the dialectic, and is of particular relevance to Pettit's argument. Consider, as a representative example, Eleonore Stump's position. According to Stump, 'what Frankfurt-style counterexamples show is only that the ability to do otherwise isn't essential to a free action or an action for which the agent is morally responsible.'¹⁵ Stump is willing to concede that it *seems* as if the agent in an FCE has remaining alternative possibilities, and thus she understands the intuitive pull of the Flicker Strategy. Indeed, she goes so far as to write that the Flicker Strategy is 'the best defense of PAP I know.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, she thinks the Flicker Strategy ultimately fails. In order for the Flicker Strategy to work, Stump thinks, the actual sequence would have to contain a numerically distinct action from the alternative sequence. To see why, consider an FSE in which the agent does some action *W* on his own in the actual sequence, and does action *W* in the alternate sequence only as a result of intervention. According to Stump,

If doing *W*-on-his-own weren't an *action* that the victim does, then there wouldn't be something the agent does in the actual sequence but omits to do in the alternative sequence, as the flicker of freedom proponents argue. And if doing *W*-on-his-own weren't different from doing *W*, then what the victim does in the actual and the alternative sequence would be identical, and the victim wouldn't have *alternative* possibilities available to him.¹⁷

In other words, Stump understands PAP to involve alternative possibilities for numerically distinct actions: *W*-on-his-own must be a numerically distinct action from *W*. As the quotation above makes clear, it is not the case that the FSE contains *no differences at all* between the actual sequence and the alternative sequence. Stump doesn't think that FSEs eliminate all alternative possibilities *simpliciter*; rather they merely eliminate all alternative possibilities regarding action. So we can understand the principle that Stump thinks FSEs undermine in the following way:

tion (see my 'A Critique of Frankfurt-Libertarianism'). John Fischer calls this view 'hyper-incompatibilism' (*The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 180), though more recently he prefers the term 'actual-sequence incompatibilism' ('Recent Work on Moral Responsibility,' *Ethics* 110 (1999), 93).

15 Eleonore Stump, 'Libertarian Freedom and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities,' in *Faith, Freedom and Rationality*, Daniel Howard-Snyder and Jeff Jordan, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 1996), 88.

16 Stump, 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,' 302

17 *Ibid.*, 314

PAP_a: an agent is morally responsible for doing an action *A* at time *t* only if she could have done an action numerically distinct from *A* at time *t*.¹⁸

It is reasonable to interpret PAP along the lines of PAP_a; Frankfurt himself implies that this is how he understands the principle in the original presentation of his counterexample:

In this example there are sufficient conditions for Jones' performing *the action* in question. What action he performs is not up to him. Of course it is in a way up to him whether he acts on his own or as a result of Black's intervention. But whether he finally acts on his own or as a result of Black's intervention, he performs *the same action*.¹⁹

Elsewhere, I have argued at greater length that even if Stump is right to reject PAP_a, she is in fact committed to some version of PAP, though one that does not involve numerically distinct actions or events.²⁰ But let us note here the connection between the principle that Stump rejects, namely PAP_a, and Pettit's own response to FSEs.

Following an earlier suggestion made by Peter van Inwagen,²¹ Pettit rejects the purported success of FSEs by focusing on causal origins. According to Pettit (and van Inwagen), events are individuated by their causal histories. If this were the case, then it quickly follows that FSEs fail to rebut PAP, even when interpreted as PAP_a above. Since the actual and the alternate sequences differ with respect to the causal histories of their events, there is a different event, and hence a different action, in each sequence.²² FSEs, then, only *appear* to contain an action that is

18 Stump says as much in a recent article, where she defines *PAP* as 'the principle that alternative possibilities for action are required for moral responsibility' ('Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities,' 139). Keep in mind that both Stump and Pettit understand the principle at issue to implicitly contain a historical or tracing clause.

19 Harry Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,' *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), 836 (emphasis added).

20 See my 'A Critique of Frankfurt-Libertarianism.'

21 See Peter van Inwagen 'Ability and Responsibility,' *Philosophical Review* 87 (1978) 201-24 and *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983), particularly 169.

22 The discussion here assumes that actions are a sub-species of events. For contrary views, see Georg Henrik von Wright, *Norm and Action* (New York: Humanities Press 1963); Kent Bach, 'Actions are Not Events,' *Mind* 89 (1980) 114-20; and Paul Grice, 'Actions and Events,' *Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1986) 1-35. However, insofar as Pettit also assumes that actions are events, I will ignore these competing views here.

inevitable. While the actual and the counterfactual sequence of a Frankfurt-style counterexample appear to result in the same action, they actually contain numerically distinct actions.

But why should we accept that events should be individuated by their causal origins? Pettit gives two suggestions:

- (A) 'There is a difference between doing something 'on one's own' and being coerced into doing something by a mechanism external to one's normal decision making processes.'²³
- (B) 'There is positive motivation for individuating events by causal origin outside the context of FSEs and moral responsibility.'²⁴

I agree with (A), but will return to it in the next section. Consider then (B). A number of metaphysicians have argued that events should be individuated by their causal origins outside of issues pertaining to moral responsibility, most notably Donald Davidson.²⁵ Pettit gives a number of examples that are supposed to provide support for (B):

Some human endeavors require a concept of fragile events. In the process of investigating accidents of various sorts, in forensic investigations, and in many other circumstances, events must be distinguished by causal origin. For example, detailed precision about causal origins may be needed in order to determine if a plane crash was caused unintentionally by defective materials or by sabotage, in order to determine if a transaction involving a possible counterfeit \$100 bill is legitimate, and in order to determine if an emergency room patient was short of breath due to an allergic reaction, an asthma attack, or hyperventilation. If events cannot be identified by causal origin, important questions — questions that have answers in actuality — would be impossible to answer.²⁶

Note, however, that what these examples establish is only the weaker thesis that causal origin matters, and not the stronger conclusion that causal origin matters for individuation of events. Pettit himself recognizes this: 'These considerations do not demonstrate that a difference in causal origin implies a different event, but rather show that distinguishing events in a fine-grained manner that considers causal origin

23 Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' 309

24 Ibid.

25 Donald Davidson, 'The Individual of Events,' *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) 163-80. In the introduction to *Keith Lehrer, Radu Bogdan*, ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing 1981), Lehrer suggests that he advocated a similar view before Davidson's influential paper.

26 Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' 310

is plausible and sometimes necessary independently of the context of FSEs.²⁷ But it is one thing to say, rather uncontroversially it seems to me, that causal origin matters in these kinds of cases; it is quite another to embrace a metaphysical thesis that makes causal history a matter of the identity conditions for an action.

One should not slide too readily from the weaker claim to the stronger, not only because it isn't needed, but also because there are significant objections to individuating events on the basis of their causal origins that need to be addressed.²⁸ Christopher Hughes, for example, argues that the causal genesis account of events makes events too easy to prevent.²⁹ Similarly, Jonathan Bennett suggests that if omissions can be causes (as Pettit is willing to grant)³⁰ then everything that happens in the backward light cone³¹ of an event is essential to it. But this has some untoward consequences:

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- 27 Ibid. Van Inwagen also grants that he cannot conclusively argue that events should be individuated on the basis of their causal histories: 'I do not know how to justify my intuition that this criterion is correct, any more than I know how to justify my belief in the causal-genesis criterion [of material substances]. But, of course, arguments must come to an end somewhere. I can only suggest that since substances (such as human beings and tables) should be individuated by their causal origins, and since we are talking about events that, like substances, are particulars, the present proposal is plausible' (*An Essay on Free Will*, 169). For a criticism of this analogy, see Jonathan Bennett, *Events and Their Names* (Hackett: Indianapolis 1988), 59.
- 28 In personal correspondence, Pettit writes that his 'position on event individuation is not the result of a mere slide from a weaker claim to a stronger one as implied by at least one portion of your response. Rather, it was an explicit conclusion drawn from an argument to the best explanation (see 310).' Nevertheless, it still seems to me that Pettit's example only establish the thesis that causal origin matters, and not the stronger conclusion that causal origin matters for individuation. For example, the historical origins of a plane's crashing will be important for resolving who, if anyone, is causally responsible for that crashing, and similar comments hold for his other examples. I fail to see that Pettit has shown any 'important questions' that would be 'impossible to answer' (310) if his thesis regarding causal origins of events is false.
- 29 Christopher Hughes, 'The Essentiality of Origin and the Individuation of Events,' *Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994), 42
- 30 See, for example, his discussion of negligent omissions on 313f. For a more explicit endorsement that omissions can be causes, see Pettit's doctoral dissertation, *Conditions for Moral Responsibility* (University of Notre Dame 2000), 87, n. 43.
- 31 For a discussion of light cones and their relation to events, see Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books 1988), particularly 24f.

Think of all the causal chains leading to the death of Socrates, spreading outwards and backward in time for centuries. Consider a world that is extremely like ours, but which differs from it in respect of the identity of some one event, in one of those causal chains, about a century before Socrates died. According to van Inwagen, that is a world where Socrates' death — the actual one that did occur — does not occur. This is offered as so implausible as to discredit van Inwagen's position [that events should be individuated by their causal histories].³²

Even if one doesn't agree with Bennett that this view is 'so implausible' as to be discredited, his example does provide reason not to embrace the essentiality of causal origins too quickly. Furthermore, a quick survey of metaphysicians who work on the individuation of events shows that the essentiality of causal origin is often rejected for similar reasons.³³

Besides these general worries, others have raised objections to Pettit and van Inwagen's causal origin thesis that are more closely connected with the debate surrounding moral responsibility. For instance, Laura Waddell Ekstrom rejects the causal origin reply to FSEs:

I am aware that one might use the type-token distinction, along with a certain theory of the individuation of events, to argue that the action Jones commits in the alternate scenario (in which Black intervenes) would not be the same action particular, only an action of the same type, since event particulars are individuated (wholly or in part) by their causal histories.... But this line of response to Frankfurt I do not find particularly compelling, both because it relies for its success in defeating Frankfurt-type counterexamples to PAP on their proponents' accepting

32 Bennett, *Events and Their Names*, 59. In personal correspondence, Pettit writes that 'your objection related to Bennett's views about omissions is a concern for me. But you should note that my account of omissions for which someone is responsible always trace back to an action of the agent (see 313). Omissions are only relevant for moral responsibility when they can be traced to an action that involved alternatives for the agent, so are limited temporally in a way that Bennett's example is not.' While I concede that Pettit limits moral responsibility for omissions to only those that can be traced back to a free action or decision on the part of the agent in question, Bennett's point remains untouched. In order to avoid the force of Bennett's objection, Pettit would need to develop an account that would place a historical-temporal boundary on the essentiality of causal origin.

33 Instead, most metaphysicians who have written on the subject embrace a property-exemplification view of events. See, among others, Jaegwon Kim, 'Causes and Events: Mackie on Causation,' *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971) 426-41; Kim, 'Events as Property Exemplifications,' in *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, Richard Hales, ed. (Belmont, CA: Wordsworth 1998) 336-47; Kim, 'Events: Their Metaphysics and Semantics,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 641-6; Jonathan Bennett, *Events and Their Names*; Lawrence Brian Lombard, *Events: A Metaphysical Study* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul 1986); and Carol Cleland, 'On the Individuation of Events' *Synthese* (1991) 229-54.

a certain theory of event individuation and, more importantly, because the sort of alternative possibilities granted to the agent do not seem to be the right sort to be crucial in accounting for moral responsibility.³⁴

Similarly, Fischer writes, 'I do not know how exactly to resolve the dispute about event individuation, but I also do not think that one's view about the Frankfurt type cases should depend on this sort of issue.'³⁵

I'll grant that nothing in the previous two paragraphs conclusively proves that Pettit is wrong to claim that the causal origins of actions are essential. Nevertheless, I do think that this discussion shows that Pettit's response to FSEs relies on a very contentious claim and that the support Pettit gives for (B) is inconclusive. Here, I find myself agreeing with Fischer in that I am not willing for the debate surrounding the success or failure of FSEs to depend on such a controversial metaphysical thesis. Fortunately, I think that the incompatibilist has another response that she can give.

Before moving to this other available response, however, let me briefly summarize the argument in the present section. I agree with Pettit that contrary to what is often claimed, FSEs do *not* show that alternative possibilities are not required for moral responsibility because by their very nature FSEs contain alternative possibilities. Furthermore, the actual and alternative sequences of an FSE differ in terms of their causal origin. Pettit is right that an essential feature of FSEs is their 'having two possible causal paths leading to an end result.'³⁶ However, for the reasons given above, I am not prepared to agree with Pettit that FSEs must contain numerically distinct events simply in virtue of having different causal histories.

34 Laura Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study* (Boulder, CO: Westview 2000), 215f., n. 14. I return to the second of Ekstrom's points in the next section. For another incompatibilist rejection of van Inwagen and Pettit's approach, see Carl Ginet, *On Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 70.

35 Fischer, 'Frankfurt-Type Examples and Semi-Compatibilism,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, Robert Kane, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), 287. Fischer also responds to individuating events in virtue of their causal origins in *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 131-59 and Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 95-103.

36 Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' 307

Stage II: Establishing Robustness via Sourcehood

The second stage of Pettit's argument is to show that, contrary to the claims of Fischer and others, the remaining alternative possibilities are 'robust enough to ground moral responsibility.'³⁷ Pettit considers multiple versions of the objection according to which the agent must have 'a high level of direct control'³⁸ over the remaining alternatives in both the actual and the alternate sequences. These versions of the objection fail, Pettit thinks, because they implicitly 'rely on the assumption that we are never responsible for events or actions that are not intentionally willed.'³⁹ Pettit then gives two detailed counterexamples to this assumption. Both of these counterexamples, however, presuppose that the defender of PAP must show that the actual and alternative sequences contain numerically distinct actions (or an action that is numerically distinct from an omission). In other words, his reply to the robustness objection in the second stage of his argument dovetails with and depends upon his treatment of the first stage in appealing to numeric distinctness between sequences. As I argued in the previous section, resting a response to FSEs on this issue is undesirable. Fortunately, it is also avoidable.

How, then, should the incompatibilist respond to the robustness objection? The answer to this depends on what the proponent of the Flicker Strategy is attempting to do. The proponent of the Flicker Strategy may simply dig in her incompatibilist heels and say that the remaining alternatives are relevant to moral responsibility in virtue of showing the falsity of causal determinism. If the incompatibilist is correct that the truth or falsity of determinism is relevant to moral responsibility, then all alternative possibilities are relevant to moral responsibility in that they are a necessary precondition for moral responsibility. Even if it turns out that the remaining alternative possibilities are not relevant to moral responsibility in any further way, or tell us nothing further about the nature of moral responsibility, their absence is sufficient for the incompatibilist to claim that an agent is not morally responsible. For instance, Alfred Mele notes that the incompatibilist opponent of FSEs 'can get significant mileage out of some flickers of freedom, given

37 *Ibid.*, 304. As Pettit notes, the second stage of the argument presupposes success in the first stage: 'there has to be an alternative possibility if there is a robust alternative' (304).

38 *Ibid.*, 313

39 *Ibid.*

the indeterminism that those flickers require.⁴⁰ Such an account of robustness will not get far in debates with compatibilists, for whom the appeal to the incompatibility of causal determinism and moral responsibility will be question-begging. Fortunately, more can be said than that the alternative possibilities are relevant in showing the presence of indeterminism.

Let us again take our cue from Pettit. Pettit is right that 'the [causal] history of an agent is important for moral responsibility.'⁴¹ Where he is wrong is in thinking that the causal history matters because it is essential to securing numerically distinct events. Rather, the causal history of the action points to what Linda Zagzebski calls 'the deeper libertarian intuition,'⁴² namely sourcehood or origination.⁴³ According to Robert Kane, who perhaps more than anyone has stressed the importance of sourcehood for moral responsibility, agents must 'have the power to be the *ultimate* producers of their own ends.... They have the *power to make choices which can only and finally be explained in terms for their own wills* (i.e., character, motives, and efforts of will). No one can have this power in a determined world.'⁴⁴ The idea here is that an agent is morally responsible for an action only if there is no deterministic causal chain that begins outside of the agent which is itself sufficient for the agent's doing the action in question. Instead, the agent herself will be the ultimate source of her action.⁴⁵

One way to be the source would be for the agent to be able to bring about two numerically distinct actions. But this is not the only way to secure sourcehood. Even if one thinks, *pace* Pettit, that the numeri-

40 Alfred Mele, 'Flickers of Freedom,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* 29 (1998), 154. Michael Della Rocca makes a similar point in his 'Frankfurt, Fischer and Flickers,' *Nous* 32 (1998), 102. This response is what I refer to as the Weak Strategy in my 'The Dialectic Role of the Flickers of Freedom.'

41 Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' 315

42 Linda Zagzebski, 'Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternative Possibilities?' *Philosophical Perspectives* 14 (2000), 243f.

43 This isn't to suggest that sourcehood is independent of matters of alternative possibilities. In my *Free Will: Sourcehood and its Alternatives* (London: Continuum Press 2008), I argue that an agent who satisfies the sourcehood condition for moral responsibility will also satisfy an alternative possibilities condition.

44 Robert Kane, 'Two Kinds of Incompatibilism,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (1989), 254

45 See, for instance, Eleonore Stump, 'Augustine and Free Will,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), 125-8.

cally same action occurs in both sequences of an FSE, Pettit is correct that the two sequences contain distinct causal histories. In the actual sequence, the action originates within the agent (thereby preserving the sourcehood requirement for moral responsibility), while in the alternate sequence the action (perhaps the numerically same action as in the actual sequence) is brought about by a causal chain that ultimately begins outside of the agent and in the counterfactual intervener. Since whether or not the intervener intervenes depends on the agent, which of these two possibilities is actualized depends on a causal chain that has its source in the agent. And since the agent is morally responsible in the actual sequence but not the alternative sequence, it is also up to the agent whether or not she is morally responsible. The causal history of the action is therefore important because whether or not the agent is morally responsible depends on whether she is the source of the action.

The proposal that I'm making bears a certain similarity to one made previously by Michael Otsuka. Responding to the challenge posed by FSEs, Otsuka argues that PAP should be replaced by what he calls the Principle of Avoidable Blame (PAB):

PAB: an agent is blameworthy for performing an act of a given type only if one could instead have behaved in a manner for which one would have been entirely blameless.⁴⁶

By formulating PAB in terms of event-types rather than event-tokens, Otsuka need not be committed to different event particulars in the actual and alternative sequences of an FSE, as is Pettit. In elaborating on PAB, Otsuka also takes care to note that 'when I say that one could have instead behaved in a manner for which one would have been entirely blameless, I mean that it was within one's voluntary control whether or not one ended up behaving that way.'⁴⁷ The most natural way for an incompatibilist to spell out this 'voluntary control' is along the lines of a sourcehood requirement.⁴⁸ Thus, I see Otsuka's proposal for responding to FSEs as in the same general vein as the response developed here by pointing to the importance of sourcehood. And while these comments do not suggest the exact formulation that the sourcehood requirement

46 Michael Otsuka, 'Incompatibilism and the Avoidability of Blame,' *Ethics* 108 (1998), 686

47 *Ibid.*, 688

48 For further arguments for this claim, see chapters 6 and 7 of my *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives*.

for moral responsibility should take, I think that they do show how this condition will account for the importance of the causal origin of an action. The causal origin of an event is important for ascriptions of moral responsibility, not because it is essential to that event's identity, but because it tells us whether or not the agent is the source of her action in the way required for moral responsibility.

Conclusion

Earlier, I noted Pettit's claim (A) that 'there is a difference between doing something 'on one's own' and being coerced into doing something by a mechanism external to one's normal decision making processes.'⁴⁹ We now see why this is true, even if it doesn't help establish the essentiality of causal origin. The morally significant feature of causal origin is that only a certain kind of causal history is able to secure the kind of sourcehood required for moral responsibility. The causal history of an event in a FSE is thus relevant to the agent's moral responsibility even if it doesn't establish numerically distinct events.⁵⁰ The moral relevance of causal history is found in its connection with sourcehood, and not action individuation. The incompatibilist will understand the sourcehood requirement for moral responsibility in such a way that it precludes the agent being causally determined by a causal chain that originates outside of her, such that an agent who meets the sourcehood condition will also have some alternative possibilities available to her. Compatibilists, obviously, are going to favor a different understanding of sourcehood that doesn't preclude a determined agent from being the ultimate source of her action.⁵¹ I agree that further work needs to be done on caching out the exact nature of the sourcehood condition for moral responsibility. But what the present discussion shows is that the debates about sourcehood and the alternative possibilities that source-

49 Pettit, 'Moral Responsibility and the Ability to do Otherwise,' 309

50 Cf. Stump, 'Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities,' 151: 'it is up to [the agent] whether or not he does what is blameworthy. But it need not be up to Jones in virtue of the fact that alternative possibilities for action [i.e., numerically distinct actions] are open to him.'

51 John Fischer argues against the incompatibilist understanding of sourcehood in 'Problems with Actual-Sequence Incompatibilism,' *The Journal of Ethics* 4 (2000), 326 and 'Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism,' 9-18. However, he embraces a compatibilist version of the sourcehood condition on moral responsibility. See also the discussion in chapter 5 of my *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives*.

hood secures do not require commitment to contentious metaphysical principles of event individuation.⁵²

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