

Peer Review

Review of: "Beyond the Luck Problem: Addressing Discrimination in Event-Causal Libertarianism"

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The main point of the article seems to me to be both entirely correct and well argued. The paper shows that the classical event-libertarian accounts of free will have a hidden cost: the *radical* discrimination between psychologically indistinguishable agents. If this is so, libertarians need to justify the validity of such discrimination. They might try to argue that this challenge is nothing new for them since that is what they actually have been doing all along: namely that such arguments as the consequence argument are supposed to show that the systems that do not have libertarian free will cannot even count as agents and so cannot have moral responsibility. This response does not seem to be right, though. The consequence argument consists of highly general and abstract claims, and it might be the case that its initial attractiveness is exactly due to its abstractness. The argument of Sekatskaya's paper, on the other hand, deals with concrete, if imaginary, cases. It shows that people who accept the event-libertarian position (and the consequence argument in particular) are committed to agreeing that, when it comes to moral responsibility, the difference between the two agents with exactly the same psychology, and, so to speak, "moral record" is like the difference between a person and an inanimate object (a rock, say); moreover, these two kinds of agents can inhabit the same world. It is intuitively an absurd conclusion going against our deep pre-theoretical beliefs. The situation is much akin to the classical anti-consequentialist arguments, showing that the consequentialist principle, that is very attractive when stated as a general claim, has highly unattractive implications when applied to some concrete imaginary cases (like that of Philippa Foot's transplant case). Like consequentialists, event-libertarians can bite the bullet and say that even if this is the cost of their theory, it is still the cost one should be willing to pay, given how problematic the alternatives are. But in both cases, one cannot deny that a severe blow has been dealt to the theory: it turned out to be much more costly than we anticipated.

Alternatively, however, event-libertarians can follow the example of those consequentialists that modify their theories so that they no longer have those unwelcome consequences (by, say, moving from act consequentialism to rule consequentialism). It does seem to me that some kind of such response is open to event-libertarians. In particular, one can try to modify Kane's account so that the kind of case Sekatskaya is describing becomes impossible. The most obvious way to do that is to say that the situation of torn choice is in fact always resolved by an indeterministic process in the brain of an agent so that if Carol is exactly like Linda in her psychological history, she will necessarily be like her in the number of indeterministic choices that she made. To not lose the naturalistic vein of their theory, such event-libertarians can point out that this is not something that we can know for sure introspectively, but a prediction of our metaphysical theory that is necessary for it to be true; so that an additional advantage is that we built a reliable falsifier in our account (which bolsters its naturalistic pathos, not diminishes it): if we can show that any kind of torn choice situation is not resolved by an indeterministic process, our theory will be falsified.

Additionally, I should add that Sekatskaya's criticism certainly works against Kane's account: this is due to the fact that he explicitly accepts all of the standard compatibilist requirements for the possession of free will as necessary, but not sufficient conditions. That is one of the things that makes it possible to construct the thought experiment with Linda and Carol in the first place. But it is not as clear that Balager accepts all of the compatibilist requirements as well. And if he does not, it is not certain that he is committed to agreeing that the case of Carol is possible.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.