



BOOK REVIEWS

Deep Control: Essays on Free Will and Value, by John Martin Fischer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 256 pages. \$31.95 (paperback).

SIMON KITTLE, University of Sheffield

John Martin Fischer is a proponent of what he calls an *actual-sequence* theory of moral responsibility. The central idea is that an agent's moral responsibility depends on what happens in the actual world as opposed to what could have happened—in other words, he rejects the traditional idea that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise. *Deep Control* is a collection of essays which motivate, defend and develop this actual-sequence approach. All of the essays have been published before in one form or other, with half having been revised or significantly extended. For the most part they are not introductory pieces, but pick up where Fischer's previous writings left off, clarifying various topics and engaging further with ongoing debates.

The book, which begins with a useful introduction that outlines Fischer's methodology and situates his account into a wider context, is divided into two parts. The first part defends the actual-sequence approach to freedom and moral responsibility. The second part deals primarily with Fischer's positive, actual-sequence theory of the freedom (or control) required for moral responsibility.

Fischer's motivation for an actual-sequence theory of moral responsibility comes, in part, from the idea that theories of responsibility should demonstrate a *resilience* to certain kinds of empirical discovery (3). In particular, they should not depend "on certain subtle ruminations of theoretical physicists" (4), by which Fischer means that they should not hinge on whether determinism obtains. As Fischer finds incompatibilism about the ability to do otherwise and causal determinism "extremely plausible" (16), he needs to show that an agent can be responsible without having the freedom to do otherwise. Fischer has long argued that Frankfurt-style cases support this contention and Part 1 defends this idea at length.

The first essay, "The Frankfurt Cases: The Moral of the Story," summarizes Fischer's latest thinking on these cases. To provide some background:



Frankfurt-style cases (FSCs) are thought-experiments that aim to show that the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), which states that someone is responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise, is false. Fischer presents the following example of such a case (8): Jones is deciding whether to vote for Obama or McCain. Black has implanted a chip in his brain which can monitor and control Jones's activities. Black wants Jones to vote for Obama, but he doesn't want to interfere unless it's absolutely necessary. If Jones shows any inclination of deciding to vote McCain, Black will intervene, causing Jones to decide to vote Obama; otherwise, he'll leave Jones alone. Jones, we are to suppose, deliberates and then votes for Obama. The (putative) point of such stories: Black's presence makes it the case that Jones *cannot* decide to vote (or vote) McCain, but because Jones decided to vote for Obama "on his own," it seems that he is morally responsible. Thus, PAP is false.

Little justice can be done here to the mountainous literature on such cases, but as so much in Fischer's account depends on these cases being successful, it is worth dwelling on how he sees them working. One of the most powerful objections to FSCs, Fischer says (36), is the Dilemma Defence. It works by asking the following: "how can Black's device help Black to *know* that Jones will choose to vote on his own for Obama?" (37). We are told that Black's device detects some *inclination* on Jones's part to decide to vote McCain. But here, the objector says, the Frankfurtian faces a dilemma: if that prior inclination is deterministically connected to Jones's decision then the incompatibilist will be under no obligation to agree that Jones is responsible. On the other hand, if the prior inclination is indeterministically connected to Jones's decision, then Black's device won't enable him to expunge *all* of Jones's alternatives.

Many proponents of FSCs have accepted the first point and thus tried to develop explicitly indeterministic cases. This route clearly avoids begging the question against the incompatibilist, and so, given the weight Fischer puts on these cases, it might be surprising to find that it is not the route he takes. The problem is that it's likely to remain contentious whether the alternatives which persist in these indeterministic cases are relevant to responsibility. As a result, Fischer focuses on the deterministic horn (40).

He puts forward the following "two-step argument" (40–41). First, we look at FSCs in a deterministic context and conclude that *if* Jones is not morally responsible (as the incompatibilist claims), this is *not* because he lacks alternatives (*contra* the incompatibilist). Second, we consider whether there are other features of causal determinism—aside from the fact it rules out alternatives—that might render it incompatible with moral responsibility. If the answer to the latter question is No, we conclude that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism.

Fischer originally supported the first step with the following argument: Black and his device rule out Jones's alternatives. Black and his device are irrelevant to Jones's responsibility. Therefore, lacking alternatives is irrelevant to responsibility. Fischer now concedes that this argument is flawed

(42). The problem is that Black and his device only succeed in ruling out alternatives if determinism is also assumed. But in that case, we don't have something which both rules out Jones's alternatives and is also clearly irrelevant to his responsibility. Instead, Fischer asks us to assume determinism obtains but remain "officially agnostic" about whether determinism rules out alternatives. He then goes on to say:

Suppose that Black checks and sees the "prior sign" that is associated with a subsequent [Obama vote]. Given that Black knows that causal determinism obtains, he can now relax . . . [he] *knows* that Jones in fact will subsequently choose to vote Obama. . . . It is also true, given Black's device and dispositions, that *if* Jones were to show the sign associated with [voting McCain] . . . , Black's device would swing into action and stimulate Jones's brain so as to ensure that he chooses to vote Obama. This additional fact, when added to the assumption of causal determinism and the fact that Black can thus be sure that Jones's showing the prior sign will in fact be followed by his choosing accordingly, renders it true that Jones *cannot* . . . choose to vote for McCain. (42–43)

Fischer's idea is that Black and his device, the thesis of causal determinism, *and* the cited counterfactual, *together* rule out alternatives but *are also such that they are clearly irrelevant to moral responsibility*. That is what the conclusion requires: one thing (or collection of things) which rules out alternatives but which is irrelevant to responsibility.

However, this reasoning appears to succumb to the original objection. If we are being agnostic about whether determinism precludes alternatives, and if the disputed issue is whether alternatives are relevant to responsibility, shouldn't we remain agnostic about whether determinism precludes responsibility? Put another way: we are not (yet) assuming that Jones *cannot* involuntarily exhibit a different prior inclination (43). We're assuming determinism, but also adopting the agnostic stance, which precludes us drawing that conclusion. But if it precludes us drawing that conclusion, then it should also preclude us from concluding that Jones *will* vote for Obama, *once he's decided to*. That is, Fischer can't claim that because Black knows determinism is true he also "knows that Jones . . . *will* choose to vote Obama" (42). That doesn't follow if one has adopted the agnostic assumption, for just as Jones could (in a sense compatible with determinism) exhibit a different involuntary prior sign, so he could (in that same sense) change his mind after his initial decision. So Jones still has alternatives.

It is not clear, then, that Fischer has provided a workable Frankfurt-style case on the deterministic horn. Still, his writing on this subject is clear and penetrating and (once again) moves the debate forward by highlighting various issues—e.g., the interpretation of counterfactuals—that need to be taken into account when assessing these cases. These issues recur: chapter 3, a reply to a paper by Kadri Vihvelin, develops some important points about the interpretation of counterfactuals and when it is appropriate to use them in hypothetical syllogisms—points which are then used to

defend Frankfurt-style argumentation. Chapter 4 discusses whether FSCs only work if Jones is assumed to be *counterfactually stable*: that is, if it is assumed that Jones would have done the same thing even if he could have done otherwise. Daniel Speak argues that this is so, and that determinism rules out such counterfactual stability. Fischer suggests that FSCs need not rely on such an idea (70).

Moving to Part 2, we find in chapters 8 and 9 that Fischer addresses, with a view to challenging, a distinction sometimes made between normative and metaphysical approaches to moral responsibility (24). Fischer discusses the normative approaches of Gary Watson, Susan Wolf, Angela Smith and R. Jay Wallace, among others. Although these theorists differ significantly in the accounts they offer, they appear to have two things in common. First, there is little focus on, if not an explicit rejection of, any kind of freedom or control condition on responsibility. Second, the conditions under which an agent is said to be morally responsible include criteria that are irreducibly normative. As Fischer puts it, “normative conditions play a certain kind of role in the *analysans*” (135). Thus, Watson appeals to normative competence (136), Wolf to the ability to act in accordance with the True and the Good (136), while Smith cites the importance of the agent’s evaluative judgements (137). Wallace invokes the idea of *fairness* (137, 140). Why is it unhelpful to group such views together as normative, and as in some way distinct from metaphysical views? Fischer first points out that his view, often “pigeon-holed” as metaphysical, includes a similar commitment to normative notions: according to Fischer, responsibility requires that an agent be capable of recognizing and responding to distinctively *moral* reasons (141). Next, Fischer asks whether those who see themselves as adopting a normative approach are in fact as free from the “metaphysical” issues surrounding control as they think. Fischer makes this question salient by pointing out that the conditionalist notion of freedom—the idea, employed by at least some who adopt the normative approach, that freedom consists in an agent’s actions being counterfactually dependent on his or her will—is decisively refuted by Frankfurt-style cases (126–132). This is a potent challenge for it both highlights the commitment these writers have to some kind of control condition—a commitment not often emphasized—whilst also suggesting that that kind of control is inadequate. This critique doesn’t imply that Fischer treats normative considerations as secondary. On Fischer’s own account the normative conditions feature heavily, being central to the relevant kind of control. Fischer’s idea, I take it, is that we can (and should) agree with Wallace’s claim that “resolving the debate about responsibility will require that we venture into normative moral theory” (*Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* [Harvard University Press, 2005], 108) but without thinking that this means the issue of control can therefore be neglected.

The two chapters that close out the collection both refine Fischer’s account of *guidance control*—the control he takes to be necessary for moral responsibility—in the face of recent objections. Chapter 11 addresses a number of putative counterexamples which target Fischer’s account of the

reasons-responsive mechanism that an agent needs in order to be responsible. Chapter 12 addresses a challenge from Manuel Vargas concerning the plausibility of employing *tracing* in a theory of moral responsibility—“tracing” being the idea that an agent will often be responsible for something at a time in virtue of having had control at an earlier time. Fischer’s responses here are clear and persuasive, although as he himself recognises, there are some substantial issues to do with how one should individuate reasons-responsive mechanisms which are left unresolved. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Fischer’s account of moral responsibility is one of the most sophisticated ever developed and as such demands attention from all who write on such issues. All in all, this is a strong collection of essays that deserves serious study.

Libertarian Free Will: Contemporary Debates, ed. David Palmer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 248 pages. \$90 (hardback).

ALLISON KRILE THORNTON, Baylor University/University of Notre Dame

Libertarian Free Will: Contemporary Debates is a collection of ten new essays on libertarianism about free will, specifically as it has been defended by Robert Kane, a prominent contemporary defender of the view. In addition to the essays, the collection includes a substantive introduction by the editor, David Palmer, and a clear and compelling final chapter in which Kane replies to his critics. Kane’s contribution to the volume is especially valuable. He both illuminates his critics’ arguments and uses the occasion to clarify, defend, and develop his view in important ways. Throughout, Kane models productive philosophical exchange. In what follows, I discuss a central thesis from each chapter and highlight Kane’s response to it.

In Part I, “Libertarian Theories of Free Will,” Carl Ginet and Timothy O’Connor discuss versions of libertarianism that differ according to what (if anything) causes free and responsible actions. According to Kane, events are the causes (though in his reply to O’Connor’s chapter 3 of this volume, he makes an important addendum). In chapters 2 and 3 respectively, Ginet and O’Connor defend alternatives: non-causalist and agent-causalist accounts respectively.

In “Can an Indeterministic Cause Leave a Choice Up to the Agent?,” Ginet argues for the view that an agent’s free and responsible actions are not caused because, on his view, if such actions were caused (even indeterministically), they would be produced by antecedent circumstances, and if they were produced by antecedent circumstances, they would “[have] to be viewed as

