

A Brief Philosophical & Dialectical Inquiry on *Mere Molinism* | A Compatibilist Reply

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To my students,

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” ~Socrates

Know your security blanket. Keep thinking. Find the light out of the cave.

PREFACE

This project started out as literally a *brief* philosophical discussion detailing the many errors present in the overall theology and philosophy of ‘Mere Molinism’. Tim Stratton is considered the chief advocate of such a view, so it seemed fitting to construct a reply geared at examining whether or not *his* arguments for ‘Mere Molinism’ were indeed sound. However, the ‘brief’ project soon turned into a not-so-brief project totaling nearly 300 pages in Volume 1 alone. I had originally wanted to publish a 20 page article as a review of his book; that goal has long gone. I now keep the original title intact for hilariously sentimental reasons – perhaps as an ode to van Inwagen’s *An Essay on Free Will*. Afterwards I soon realized that this inquiry on Molinism became much more than a mere *review* of Stratton’s book; it became more of a *reply* to Stratton’s entire philosophy, theological and dialectical approach to determinism, free will, compatibilism, and their many relations with divine providence. And so, the subtitle ‘A Compatibilist *Reply*’ became part of the title.

I do not see this project (Volume 1 or 2) as a collective *review* of Stratton’s work, nor do I wish the reader to view it as such. Rather, I wish the reader to view these volumes as a *reply* to Stratton’s work, theology, and philosophy. There are several locations within this reply that the reader may wonder if I had lost track of the goal of arguing against Mere Molinism. I assure the reader that this concern is unwarranted. In the many pages of what’s to come, my primary goal is to tackle Stratton’s arguments against divine determinism and compatibilism. Though, I concede that I often do not do so with such philosophical professionalism, ease, or certainty; I am however confident that such counter responses *are* there, free of ambiguity, and thus clear.

This brings me to my last point. Unfortunately, I am not a professional philosopher, and I do not carry a PhD in philosophy or theology. This project is simply a passion project. I work full-time as a high school mathematics and philosophy teacher, and I am a newly bestowed father with a lovely wife. I do not have the precious time to polish this project into the best published version. So, the reader should not be alarmed to see grammatical quandaries within the paragraphs, nor should the reader be shocked to witness organizational mishaps. I see warrant in the fact that these unfortunate sins ought not plague a professional’s writing, but I fail to see warrant in critiquing the present reply due to a lack of obvious grammatical expertise. Given this, I have still spent well over the last year and a half editing this reply, mining the philosophical literature in oftentimes excruciating detail, while mulling over Stratton’s arguments and his many many (possible or actual) rejoinders to such responses.

Although this reply is not the work of a professional, I pray (and hope) that it functions as one, both with tactfulness, humility, rigor, and philosophical accuracy. *Sola Dei Gloria*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has proven to be most difficult. I owe a great deal to those who have encouraged me in my writing, thoughts, or arguments. These many men and women (in a variety of ways) have also nipped my overzealous confidence where it once stood, and therefore, ironically, made this project durable and I dare say fun. To the philosophers who have molded my views probably far more than I realize, I say thank you. Among these beautiful people (in no particular order) are Eleonore Stump, Kevin Timpe, Peter van Inwagen, Derk Pereboom, Alfred Mele (with David Robb) Carolina Sartorio, Kadri Vihvelin, Robert Kane, Jerry Walls, Michael Almeida, Michael McKenna, Manuel Vargas, and John Martin Fischer (with Mark Ravizza). Without the published works from these intellectual giants, I would inevitably be lost in the free will debate.

To my Calvinist philosophers and theologians, I am most grateful: Paul Manata, James N. Anderson, Greg Welty, Heath White, Michael Patrick Preciado, Scott Christensen, John Frame, John Feinberg, Paul Helm, John Frame, Vern Poythress, Tyler Vela, Chris Date, Steven Cowan, Oliver Crisp, and Matthew Hart. The precision to detail as well as a love for philosophically based theology is truly inspiring. Among them all, however, I am perhaps indebted most to Guillaume Bignon. Not only has he successfully shown that Calvinists can be nice in their dialectical exchanges with non-Calvinists, he has also shown that Calvinists can be and *ought* to be *philosophers*. His book *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God* has given me a renewal of intellectual rigor as well as theological humility. I quite simply could not have completed this project without his own pioneering work first paving the way. I thank God that He has strongly actualized a world in which Guillaume Bignon exists and is Calvinist.

I would also like to thank the central team of encouragement in completing this laborious feat: Jonathan Thompson, Zachary Reimer, Daniel Vargas, David Pallmann, and Shannon Byrd. Thank you for pushing me to not give up on this easily give-up-able reply! Thank you for your editing tips, structural ideas, and advice on tone. Your collective insights have proven most useful.

No lengthy work is perhaps finished without an awesome team of editors. This reply is not professionally edited; however, it is edited by my most advanced philosophy students at Mission Heights Preparatory High School. For their constant encouragement and constructive criticism, I am deeply grateful to these students. In time, I hope they learn the value of written scholarship, academic philosophy, and the personal struggle between the two. Thank you to Ivan Beard, Daniel Bice, Michele Cinque, Mason Feliciano, Kade Hall, Hayden Jennings, Xyden Kinnard, Alice Paolilli, Alizabeth Rodriguez, Esperanza Sanchez, Dylan Schmitz, Matthew Sherwood, Ava Slater, Rylan Stone, Renee Telting, Steven Westfall, Sherman Sheldon, and Christian Selby.

Specifically to Aisling Pitman, thank you for reading through the whole draft and critiquing not only grammar and syntax but also my defense. You are the only student to have taken Philosophy I and II, twice (for fun!). It is evident.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Diana – my love, my darling. This journey into philosophy would not be possible if it were not for your love, sacrifice, patience, and goodness. I do not understand how one could sacrifice the way you sacrifice; you are an image of Christ. Your heart for intellectual academia, thoughtfulness, and grammar have kept me going throughout this year. Though I often fail at loving you the way you wish to be loved, I still wish to thank you for your abundance of forgiveness and grace. You have changed my philosophical views perhaps more than I can acknowledge, of course, for the better.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Over the last year (or so), the online debate between Molinism and Calvinism, as well as incompatibilism and compatibilism, became increasingly interesting during a remarkable set of 13 plus hour YouTube video discussions between evangelical Molinist theologian Tim Stratton and prominent French Calvinist philosopher Guillaume Bignon.¹ After reading Bignon's book *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God*,² I was ecstatic to read Stratton's initial article to Bignon on his website.³ While Stratton was "unimpressed" with Bignon's work on the infamous Consequence Argument for incompatibilism, I found myself "unimpressed" with Stratton's article for not interacting with Bignon's arguments *at all*. I was then surprised that Bignon himself critiqued Stratton's article and his treasured Freethinking Argument (see videos below). So, after watching *all* the video content listed and after reading Stratton's long-awaited book, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism*,⁴ I thought it necessary to write a somewhat formal Calvinist compatibilist reply as I still remain unconvinced by Stratton's arguments.

I have interacted with Stratton personally, and of course his published works, on many occasions in private theological Facebook groups as well as in personal correspondence. It has been a pleasure to discuss potential defeaters for Calvinist determinism with him. In my early days in the free will debate, I remember learning much about Molinism and libertarian free will from the nearly innumerable amount of blog posts on his website Freethinking Ministries.⁵ His story and struggle over Calvinism and Molinism over the last decade has inspired me to dig deep into the debate. I do find myself oddly sympathetic to Stratton's story, since we are similar in our

¹ The following videos are listed in order of responses, Bignon starting the "dust-up" and Stratton ending with a rejoinder:

1. [French Calvinist Philosopher Responds to Critics](#) (hosted by Eli Ayala - Revealed Apologetics)
2. [Determinism Refuted Biblically](#) (hosted by Leighton Flowers - Soteriology 101)
3. [Determinism Refuted Theologically](#) (hosted by Braxton Hunter - Trinity Radio)
4. [Determinism Refuted Philosophically](#) (hosted by Tim Stratton - Freethinking Ministries)
5. [\(Part 2\): Guillaume Responds to Leighton Flowers, Tim Stratton, & Braxton Hunter](#) (hosted by Eli Ayala - Revealed Apologetics)
6. [A Rational Refutation of Divine Determinism](#) (hosted by Tim Stratton - Freethinking Ministries)

² Guillaume Bignon, *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God: A Calvinist Assessment of Determinism, Moral Responsibility, and Divine Involvement in Evil* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

³ "Excusing Sinners, Blaming God, Compatibilism, & the Consequence Argument", <https://freethinkingministries.com/excusing-sinners-blaming-god-compatibilism-the-consequence-argument/>.

⁴ Timothy A. Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020).

⁵ <https://freethinkingministries.com/>

approach to these topics.⁶ However, now that I have read a good deal of academic free will literature, I cannot hold the same conclusions.

The disagreement we have is regarding his abductive conclusion that “the inference to the best explanation of all the data is Molinism,” (*Mere Molinism*, 293). The reason I deny Stratton’s hopeful conclusion is two-fold: 1. I find libertarian freedom thus far unsupported by philosophical argumentation, and 2. I find middle knowledge thus far unsupported by theological argumentation. Over the course of this massive two-volume reply I hope to shed some light on these claims.

Stratton states that

“Mere Molinism” simply affirms two essential propositions, which might be called the “Two Pillars of Molinism.” They are the following: (i) Humans sometimes have limited libertarian freedom and (ii) God has middle knowledge.⁷

Symbolically,

$$(MM) =_{df} LFW \wedge MK$$

Mere Molinism (MM) is said to be the thesis that humans have libertarian free will (LFW) and God has counterfactual knowledge of those libertarian free will choices prior to His *free* knowledge, or creative decree, yet posterior to His *natural* knowledge (hence, *middle* knowledge (MK) – *media scientia*). Stratton argues this thesis historically, philosophically, and theologically throughout the book in a variety of different ways with a variety of cleverly named arguments. I will attempt to survey and critique his most potent arguments in the following sections. Stratton also tries to show the apologetic significance Molinism has presumably over its main competitors: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Open Theism (as if the book is not already ambitious enough!). While I think this is an obnoxious amount of ground to cover for any scholarly work, my primary focus is to attend to his arguments, potential (or actual) rejoinders, and *not* the structure, format, or length of the book.

1.2 Methodology & Aim

I will be using a philosophical and dialectical method in order to critique Stratton’s *Mere Molinism* (as per the title of this reply). The reason for this is that I take charitable theological forums and dialectics seriously. Therefore, the following reply will, at times, often give off a conversational vibe. This is to be expected. I have found these kinds of dialecticals helpful in

⁶ It is no wonder too because we are both from the great state of Nebraska! Ah, “the good life”!

⁷ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 239.

cultivating my own understanding of compatibilism in its relation to Calvinism, and of libertarianism in its relation to Molinism. In addition, I believe philosophy is the very foundation of systematic theology, so the reader should not be surprised that I take a more robust philosophical method or approach than a theological one. As one who also argues philosophically, I am sure that this position is one in which Stratton can appreciate.

In addition to my philosophical and dialectical approach, I will understand that Stratton has the initial burden of proof because it was *his* book that was published. He published a book with arguments; it is now up to the Calvinist compatibilist (whom he critiques extensively) to defend their thesis in light of these arguments. He prosecuted Calvinist (exhaustive) determinism, so we should see if compatibilism holds up to this charge and how it fares in comparison to libertarianism. I think this is fair. This line of defense, of course, means finding the premises in which Stratton may err and showing whether or not his argumentative conclusions are fallacious.

What is my aim then? Well, if my method is to philosophically critique Stratton's argument while assuming he has the burden of proof, then my intention will be to defend the thesis of compatibilism (and determinism) against Stratton's arguments. I plan to identify issues in his arguments (as there are several) and hope at the very least to show that these arguments are not (and *should not* be) convincing for compatibilists *and* incompatibilists alike (laymen or professional). As such, I will *not* present arguments *in favor* of compatibilism here, but rather I will defend compatibilism against libertarian freedom fighters or "free-thinklings" as Stratton calls them. Calvinism and its entailing theses of compatibilism and determinism will be assumed throughout the entire reply. In summation, my purpose, and my basic philosophical method, in the present reply is this: a *defense* of compatibilism, not an *argument*.⁸

I begin Volume 1 by examining Stratton's definition of libertarian freedom, compatibilism, and determinism. My aim in these sections is to show that Stratton has in mind essentially erroneous definitions (or, at best, unhelpful definitions). I show that he mischaracterizes his own view of libertarian freedom, and I utilize a wide array of incompatibilist libertarian philosophers to demonstrate this to be the case. Afterwards, I demonstrate that Stratton's definition of

⁸ In addition, by no means will this reply be an exhaustive defense of compatibilism, hence the "brief" in the title. I will attempt to answer as many arguments in *Mere Molinism* as possible, and perhaps a couple side-arguments as well, but it *will not* be a comprehensive defense by any stretch. If readers are looking for such arguments and/or comprehensive defenses of compatibilism, I would highly encourage them to read chapters 5 and 6 of Bignon's book *Excusing Sinners*, as well as introductory work on what is known as guidance control. See John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). If the reader is further interested in seeing how Fischer and Ravizza's theory may be applied to reformed Calvinist theology, see Michael Patrick Preciado, *A Reformed View of Freedom: The Compatibility of Guidance Control and Reformed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019). Last, for a more introductory work on Calvinist compatibilism, see Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will: Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2016). These works, among others, will be heavily utilized throughout this reply.

determinism and compatibilism are incomplete. Here, I expose the true definitions of these often philosophically loaded terms, and then compare them to Stratton's own definitions of these terms. We shall find that if one begins with a faulty definition of an opposing view, one will inevitably fail at accurately revealing the falsity of the view. Unfortunately for Stratton, this is found *ad nauseum* in his philosophical vocabulary.

Regarding some philosophical preliminaries, I detail a proper analysis of what is known as the 'categorical ability', responsibility, and the infamous libertarian condition: the ability to do otherwise. I show that Stratton misunderstands the ability to do otherwise in the current philosophical literature. Along the way I show how Stratton sees Frankfurt-style counterexamples in the free will debate. I argue that he misunderstands the sequences embedded in these examples, and that he honestly has not done his homework on this side of the dialectic. I end with looking at some applications regarding agency, determinism, and responsibility and their many implications involving Calvinism. Finally, I devote the entirety of Section 3 to the to the Pelagian controversy.

Last, as a side note before the rumbling, I have read both Bignon's review⁹ and Stratton's rejoinder¹⁰; by no means am I new to this debate. The reader should not be surprised when I quote both Bignon's review and Stratton's rejoinder extensively throughout the reply. It remains a fact that Stratton continues to make gross elementary philosophical mistakes in his defense of the Freethinking Argument. And I find Molinism, and thus libertarianism, false, not because I am somehow oddly committed to the metaphysics of *exhaustive* divine determinism (EDD),¹¹ but rather because Molinism and libertarianism are not well supported.

Like my opponent, I see these types of discussion as a chess game.¹² Stratton may think that his arguments in *Mere Molinism* provide heavy 'check-mate' defeaters for his compatibilist friends. I will consider it my job throughout the course of this reply to correct this mistake. Though compatibilists *may* be in 'check', it is *certainly not* 'check-mate'.

⁹ Guillaume Bignon, "A critical review and fairly comprehensive refutation of *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism* by Timothy A. Stratton", <http://theologi.blogspot.com/2020/12/response-to-tim-stratton.html>

¹⁰ Timothy A. Stratton, "Bignon's Review of *Mere Molinism*: A Rejoinder" <https://freethinkingministries.com/bignons-review-of-mere-molinism-a-rejoinder/>

¹¹ "In fact, EDD seems to be more of metaphysical commitment or a philosophical assumption about reality as opposed to a biblically supported theological view," (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 165). It is the subsidiary thesis of this reply to directly challenge this undefended hedging comment.

¹² Stratton mentions that he envisions theological discussions as a game of chess. See the following podcast: <https://freethinkingministries.com/ep-136-were-back-tim-discusses-the-response-to-his-book/>

2. ON DEFINITIONS & PHILOSOPHICAL PRELIMINARIES

2.1 Libertarianism

2.1.1 Mere Definitions

Stratton understands the thesis of libertarianism “as the conjunction of a rejection of compatibilism... along with the claim that humans (at least occasionally) possess free will,” (*Mere Molinism*, 4). In other words, “Libertarianism is often described as the view (1) that free will is incompatible with determinism... and (2) that some of our actions are free,” (Ibid., 160). This definition of libertarian freedom is standard in philosophical literature. Libertarian freedom is the conjunction of incompatibilism and that at least *some* human actions (or volitions) are, have been, or will be free. To put the definition logically, let LFW = libertarian free will, INC = incompatibilism, and FW = free will actions (some of the time). We may call this the “basic definition”:

$$(i) \quad \text{LFW} =_{\text{df}} \text{INC} \wedge \text{FW}^{13}$$

But now the essential question that lies in this definition is *what do we mean by free will action?*¹⁴ Stratton anticipates this question, so he clarifies and says that the “term ‘action’ in the phrase ‘free action,’... may refer to either a physical action, such as raising one’s hand to vote, and/or a mental action, such as willing or trying to raise one’s hand to vote,” (Ibid., 160). This now brings us into the divide between what we call *leeway* and *sourcehood* freedom.

¹³ Also articulated here: “... libertarianism (or libertarian free will) can be most simply defined as the conjunction of a rejection of compatibilism along with the claim that humans (at least occasionally) possess free will,” (Stratton, <https://freethinkingministries.com/what-is-libertarian-free-will/>). Christopher Evan Franklin, a prominent contemporary libertarian philosopher, equally agrees with this conjunct: “[Libertarianism is the view] that free will and moral responsibility are incompatible with determinism, and yet, nevertheless, many humans are free with respect to, and morally responsible for, many of their actions,” *A Minimal Libertarianism: Free Will and the Promise of Reduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1. In symbology, $\text{LFW} =_{\text{df}} \text{FW} \wedge \square (\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{IND})$, where ‘IND’ stands for ‘indeterminism’.

¹⁴ All libertarians agree that we have “free will”; however, they often disagree on *how* this “free will” comes about within the agent. There are three main branches of libertarianism: non-causal, agent causal, and event causation. For a brief, but modern, discussion on these three branches as well as a list of their current and past defenders, see Franklin, Ibid., 1-3, 20. For a critique on each of these three branches, and libertarianism in general, see Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapters 2-3. Because Stratton does not articulate his exact flavor of libertarianism according to the three branches above in his book, podcasts, or articles, I will refrain from critiquing the views specifically here; instead I will simply state my conviction that each of them have problems as argued in Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapters 2-3. Though, it is noteworthy that Stratton may lean towards agent-causal libertarianism based upon certain comments in his book (*Mere Molinism*, 5), with a subtle mix of event-causal libertarianism given his nod to *non-exhaustive* determinism (as we will see in later sections).

In the philosophical literature on freedom, the ability to do otherwise is seen as the *leeway* condition for freedom, while being the “source” of one’s action is considered the *sourcehood* condition for freedom.¹⁵ The former has to do with a certain sense of control or ability to do otherwise, whereas the latter rejects the former condition as what is most important in the free will debate and instead claims that being the ultimate source of one’s action is what is most important. Flipping back to the beginning of the book, Stratton states that “libertarian freedom *sometimes* refers to a categorical ability to act or think otherwise, and it *always* refers to source agency without any ultimate external deterministic cause. The former is sufficient for libertarian freedom, while the latter is necessary,” (Ibid., 4). With this slight qualifier in mind, Stratton finally finishes the definition in the following:

[T]he version of libertarianism adopted here affirms that an agent possesses libertarian freedom if and only if the agent performs, has performed, or can perform a free action. This implies that a person possesses libertarian freedom if he, at some time, is not causally determined to do what he chooses, and/or has the ability to genuinely choose among a range of alternative options, each of which is consistent and compatible with his nature.¹⁶

In short, as argued by Stratton, libertarian freedom is to be understood as the conjunction of incompatibilism and free will, where *free will* is to be taken as (a) being the ultimate or original source of our free actions (“not causally determined to do what he chooses”), and (b) the categorical (or leeway) ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with our natures.¹⁷ If Source = sourcehood, and AP = alternate categorical possibilities, then, in total, he claims the following two versions or principles of FW along with definition (i):

- (a) FW \Rightarrow Source
- (b) AP \Rightarrow FW

According to Stratton, we can plausibly state that this is what he means when he argues that an agent is *free*: (a) sourcehood is a necessary condition, whereas (b) alternate possibilities is a

¹⁵ For more discussion, see Pereboom, “Source Incompatibilism and Alternative Possibilities,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, edited by David Widerker and Michael McKenna, 185-86; Kevin Timpe, “Leeway vs. Sourcehood Conceptions of Free Will,” in *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*, edited by Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, and Neil Levy, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 213-24.

¹⁶ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 161. The difficult part about this definition is that Stratton says “and/or” and that makes it hard for the interlocutor to ascertain whether this definition of libertarian freedom is a logical conjunction or disjunction of two propositions. I will first assume the logical conjunction (as is understood in the philosophical literature on freedom), but later I will address Stratton’s defense for the disjunction.

¹⁷ In his rejoinder to Bignon, Stratton includes this final definition that suffices as well: “The ability to choose among a range of alternative options, each of which is compatible with the agent’s nature at the moment of choice, and the antecedent conditions are insufficient to causally determine the agent’s choice,” (“Rejoinder,” 2). This definition stresses the importance of indeterminism being necessary for libertarian freedom rather than incompatibilism.

sufficient condition. All together, we may formulate the following definition of libertarian freedom:

$$(ii) \quad \text{LFW} =_{\text{df}} \text{INC} \wedge ((\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{Source}) \wedge (\text{AP} \Rightarrow \text{FW}))$$

I agree that these are all standard definitions of libertarianism (except for possibly (b), but more on that later). I also agree that the *leeway* approach to freedom (b) is considered a stronger or bolder claim (as it is easier to refute), while the *sourcehood* approach to freedom (a) is considered a weaker or milder claim (as it is harder to refute).¹⁸ However, Stratton decides to add somewhat of an addendum onto these definitions: “Indeed, given the above definition[s] of libertarianism, both compatibilism and libertarianism might affirm that some form of libertarian freedom at least occasionally corresponds to reality,” (Ibid.). I agree with Bignon’s commentary on this awkward claim. He states in his review that

[l]ibertarianism entails incompatibilism, therefore compatibilists cannot affirm that anyone has or ever had or ever will have “libertarian” free will. That would require incompatibilism to be true, and hence compatibilism to be false.¹⁹

Given this, I am not exactly sure what Stratton was thinking here but this “add-on” is unacceptable for the same reasons Bignon has noted. As defined above by Stratton himself, (i) states that incompatibilism is a necessary condition for libertarian freedom because one cannot both be *libertarianly* free and at the same time determined; hence, free will (understood *libertarianly*) and determinism are incompatible. Perhaps Stratton tends to think that both compatibilism and libertarianism enjoy the “compatible with one’s nature” part of his final definition of libertarian freedom. If that’s the case, then I see no apparent quibbles (though, it seems, if interpreted that way, to do more harm than good).²⁰ Regardless, it is not stated

¹⁸ This seems to be what Stratton is in fact arguing: “The first is what is referred to as sourcehood libertarian freedom, according to which (as I say in my book), ‘libertarian freedom always refers to source agency without any ultimate external deterministic cause’ (p. 4). The second definition of libertarian freedom is ‘stronger’... As I noted on the fourth page of my book, one of the goals (at least whenever possible) was to argue for the stronger definition of libertarian freedom,” (“Rejoinder”, 2).

¹⁹ Bignon, “Review,” 8.

²⁰ Few philosophers have argued for a view called “libertarian-compatibilism”. See, for example, Kadri Vihvelin, “Libertarian Compatibilism”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 14 (2000): 139–166; Christian List, “What’s wrong with the consequence argument: A compatibilist libertarian response”, <https://personal.lse.ac.uk/list/PDF-files/ConsequenceArgumentAristotelianSociety.pdf>. Ultimately, however, I say that this type or brand of libertarianism (e.g., “libertarian-compatibilism”) does more harm than good precisely because it is an obvious fact that “libertarianism and compatibilism are mutually exclusive,” (Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, 4). Granted, Mele has argued elsewhere that *soft libertarianism* and compatibilism could tentatively be united in some respects (see Mele, “Soft Libertarianism and Flickers of Freedom,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, edited by David Widerker and Michael McKenna, 254–56). However, Mele’s brand of free will (if you can even call it that) is simply agnostic about the compatibilism and incompatibilism debate. So unless Stratton is willing to embrace agnosticism and give up his thoroughgoing incompatibilism, I suggest he looks elsewhere than “libertarian-compatibilism.” Minimally, if he is still adamant to keep the view, then he should call it “indeterministic compatibilism.” But,

explicitly and leaves the reader wondering if Stratton even knows his basic definitions (hence, the harm). So, while I suppose compatibilism can be minimally understood as the thesis that states we are essentially free to do as our nature allows, and I suppose libertarianism could possibly piggy-back off *that* part (given the fact that *soft* libertarianism has championed a similar definition throughout recent decades), it is not at all clear this is what Stratton intends. And even if we interpret Stratton in the best light as him simply describing soft libertarianism here, that fact alone still does not grant justification to the claim that compatibilism may affirm some sense of libertarian freedom at one time or another (cf. Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 166). In any case, Bignon has already settled the confusion in his book (thankfully): “[T]he incompatibility of determinism and *libertarian* free will is rather uncontroversial and requires little argumentation; it is definitional!” (*Excusing Sinners*, 63).

That small hiccup aside, I think Stratton’s commitment to *leeway* freedom (i.e., alternative possibilities) is the right one (especially for an indeterminist *who also claims libertarianism*). Many philosophers and theologians agree that in order to possess what we may call genuine free will or ultimate responsibility, one must first be indeterminated, and *by virtue* of this fact, also be able to do something other than what one actually does.²¹ This has been formulated as the “ability to do otherwise” mantra within free will literature, or often recognized as the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), and this of course also entails indeterminism (or more than *one* option being categorically accessible to the agent).²² Getting back to (i), we have seen that it is not enough to posit that libertarian freedom is the conjunction of incompatibilism and occasional free will action. Stratton has found it necessary (rightfully so) to tag on (a) and (b) in order to reformulate (i) into (ii). At this point we can see where the motivation for articulating (ii) emerges: *indeterminism*.

2.1.2 Libertarianism & Indeterminism

Circling back to the definition of libertarian freedom and its necessary conditions, I think it is safe to say that libertarians believe that indeterminism is also a necessary condition, not just

if he were to do that, then that would be inconsistent with him affirming that compatibilism entails determinism; he would be affirming the negation of the contrapositive. See § 2.3.2.

²¹ As a small sampling, for example, see Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 162; Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers” *Faith and Philosophy* 1.3 (1984), 265; Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2002), 80; Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 27; Roger E. Olson, “Responses to Bruce A. Ware,” *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views*, edited by Bruce A. Ware (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 134; and Leigh C. Vicens and Simon Kittle, *God and Human Freedom* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 4.

²² I will touch on Stratton’s specific flavor of “PAP” later in §2.4-5 along with, what he has strangely called, *Strattonian Leeway Ability*. However, I sincerely hope that terminology doesn’t catch on as the type of *leeway* he espouses is nothing new, and (at best) those alternative possibilities that Stratton is interested in defending seem to have already been given a name: *flickers of freedom*. See John M. Fischer, *Metaphysics of Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 65-85.

incompatibilism. How else could we receive that precious *leeway* that Stratton is looking for in deliberative or evaluative rationality? As I mentioned above, perhaps the reason *why* leeway is the kind of free will worth wanting for libertarians is because this kind of leeway is precisely indeterministic. That is to say, the kind of alternative possibilities that Stratton is concerned with is one in which the agent has the *categorical leeway* ability to *think* otherwise, especially regarding mental rationalistic processes known as *deliberation*.²³ With this in mind, perhaps we could formulate the following, if IND = indeterminism:

$$(iii) \text{ LFW} =_{df} \text{ INC} \wedge \text{ IND}$$

Now, of course, it is no surprise, nor is it remarkable, that libertarianism entails the conjunction of incompatibilism and indeterminism,²⁴ but the *reason* why it entails indeterminism is *because* of (a) and (b). An agent cannot be the originator or source of her action if she is determined to do said action, and the agent cannot be said to have access to alternative possibilities, and thus free will, if she cannot do otherwise. But right there is where I believe Stratton's formulation of (b) breaks down. He wants to say that alternative possibilities (possibilities that are either mental or physical actions yet categorically available to the agent at time *t*) remain a sufficient condition for libertarian freedom, and not a necessary one (at least not for physical actions). I find this deeply confused, especially if one claims indeterminism by virtue of (a) and (b). What does indeterminism entail if not for alternative possibilities? If determinism means, according to van Inwagen, as "the thesis that there is at any instant exactly one physically [or mentally] possible future,"²⁵ then what does the negation of determinism (i.e., indeterminism) entail if not *more than* one possible future? This would mean indeterminism, by definition, equals alternative possibilities, as indeterminism entails alternative possible futures. So if Stratton wants to claim (b) while, at the same time, arguing for indeterminism (at least in some actions, mental or physical), he must reformulate (b) or forsake it, or else surrender his indeterminism. In addition, if Stratton wants to claim (a) while not necessarily claiming (b), then indeterminism seems to be nothing more than a mere superfluous tag-on, for if one is the source then they are obviously indetermined. Bignon prods the same questions:

[W]hat does it mean for choices to be *undetermined* in that way? It means that they are not *determined*, or *necessitated* by prior conditions, inside or outside the agent; that is, the totality of prior facts about the world does not suffice to determine the agent's choice... this means that if the choice was undetermined, it entailed that the agent could have done otherwise. No matter how modestly one defines libertarianism [such as

²³ See §4.6.

²⁴ "The most distinctive claim that libertarians make is that indeterminism is necessary for a kind of freedom and responsibility central to our interpersonal practices," (Franklin, *Minimal*, 17). See also Kane, *Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32-33. Kane writes: "*Libertarianism* will thus be defined... as the view that (1) free will and determinism are incompatible (incompatibilism), (2) free will exists, and so (3) determinism is false."

²⁵ Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 3.

claiming alternative possibilities is in fact a sufficient condition instead of a necessary one]... the possession of libertarian free will entails the categorical ability to do otherwise than one does.²⁶

Interestingly, Stratton himself has gone on record to agree with Bignon's exact quote in his article "Freethinking Needs PAP!"²⁷ In response, Stratton states:

Although I do not agree with Bignon on many accounts, I think he might be on to something in this regard... a vital distinction needs to be made between the ability to physically act otherwise and the ability to mentally think otherwise. I contend that the former might not need the PAP, but the latter does (I refer to this as the principle of alternative possible thinking or "PAP-T").²⁸

But, according to contemporary philosophical literature, *there is no difference* between mental and overt actions when it comes to defining indeterminism.²⁹ If either a physical action or a mental action is available categorically to the agent at time *t*, then the agent can be said to possess indeterministic freedom as *both* provide alternative possibilities. Stratton continues to make these "distinctions" but they are neither relevant nor necessary. For instance, he quotes William Lane Craig as summarizing a Frankfurt story with a man deciding to vote for politician X or politician Y. Basically, Stratton concludes that

²⁶ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 126.

²⁷ See "Freethinking Needs the PAP!" (<https://freethinkingministries.com/freethinking-needs-the-pap/>). In the article, he says the following telling statements that bring me to a firm conclusion that libertarian freedom does entail some variety of indeterminism, and thus alternative possibilities, in order to claim the kind of free will worth wanting:

I am noticing more and more libertarians exclaiming that the PAP is not necessary for LFW. While this might be true of humanity in the physical/material substrate, it seems that this is almost a surrender of the view — and some seem like they are almost enthusiastically willing to give it up entirely. I, for one, think this is a big mistake for several reasons. First, I believe the ability for humans to do otherwise — at least in the immaterial substrate — is clearly taught (or heavily implied) in the Bible... Second, I believe that if the PAP is false, then life is absurd! I concede that, on a material level, there could be circumstances where P cannot 'do' otherwise (referring to a physical action); however, I believe for there to be moral and rational responsibility/accountability, the ability to 'think' or 'will' otherwise, is necessary. (I refer to this as the principle of alternative possible thinking or "PAP-T").

If these statements are still true for Stratton, then how does one maintain consistency by claiming libertarianism, and thus indeterminism, while holding to (b), especially when it seems that indeterminism requires alternative possibilities *definitionally*, regardless of the physical and mental distinction?

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ I understand that *freedom of action* is not synonymous with *freedom of will*. Many philosophers including Robert Kane (a libertarian) and Kadri Vihvelin (a compatibilist) agree that the two freedoms must remain distinct. However, the distinction itself is not the problem; rather, the problem lies in *defining indeterminism*. Whether the alternatives are overt or mental does not matter as they remain alternatives, and therefore indeterminism obtains. Further, it is not the case that just because one *could* indeterministically possess *freedom of will* while not possessing *freedom of action* does not mean that one's will *is* in fact free. That much has yet to be shown, even if we grant indeterminism. See §2.1.5.

[a]n agent, although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, is free to think otherwise and make his or her own decisions (at least some of the time) according to reason and without being completely controlled by deterministic laws of nature or some other external cause... If humans are free to make their own choices through reasoning and freely weighing alternatives, then they may be held responsible and accountable for their choices and free actions. This, then, is the essence of libertarian freedom.³⁰

First, I sincerely hope he doesn't conclude that Frankfurt-style examples are somehow defeated (or at least dealt with sufficiently) because he managed to push the alternative possibilities back into the realm of the "immaterial substrate" instead of the "material substrate". That is so far from the truth. Secondly, this maneuver is neither remarkable nor new. Derk Pereboom, among others, has long argued that the distinction between physical alternative possibilities and mental alternative possibilities is a non-starter, for it is asking the wrong questions.³¹ The question is not whether alternative possibilities are physical or mental (contrary to Stratton), but rather whether they are *robust* enough to properly ascribe moral (or rational) responsibility to the agent. I can only conclude that Stratton thinks and *assumes* that these "flickers" of rational deliberative thought found in Frankfurt-style counters are in fact robust enough, but because he doesn't demonstrate this, why should we believe his assumption? Just because the agent has them doesn't make him rationally and morally responsible.³² With all this in mind, I am not sure if Stratton simply doesn't want to deal with Frankfurt-style counterexamples, or if he sees them as virtually irrelevant. At any rate, I assure him and the reader that if that is what he is thinking, or even something remotely akin to it, then he is gravely mistaken.³³ He still concludes that the

³⁰ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 5.

³¹ See, for example, Derk Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life*, 9-29, or John M. Fischer, "Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities" in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, edited by David Widerker and Michael McKenna, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 27-52. To review, Stratton himself affirms that the distinction between mental and physical actions is irrelevant, as quoted above (*Mere Molinism*, 160). I will grant the long history of debate between the *freedom of action* (i.e., physical choices) and the *freedom of will* (i.e., mental or volitional choices), championed by libertarian philosopher Robert Kane. However, given significant counters such as Frankfurt-style cases, I fail to see why this distinction is even worth mentioning. See §2.5 for more details.

³² Kevin Timpe notes that some incompatibilists just like to have alternative possibilities. It's not necessarily the case whether or not these alternatives actually lead to proper ascriptions of responsibility via robustness; the sheer possession of these alternatives ascribe responsibility, and thus freedom. This does seem a lot like what Stratton is going after. However, Timpe calls this "particular strain of Leeway Incompatibilism" as "Naïve Leeway Incompatibilism". This strain "claims that it is *solely in virtue of* having such alternative possibilities, however miniscule or flimsy, that an agent satisfies the control condition for moral responsibility. In other words, on this view having any kind of alternative possibility would be sufficient for free will." So perhaps Stratton thinks that these rational flickers of his provide responsibility or freedom. I am inclined to suggest that this move would be a very *naïve* one to make, for it seems to be "plagued by the 'chance' or 'Luck' objection". See Kevin Timpe, *Free Will: Sourcehood and its Alternatives*, 2nd ed, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 120-121. See also §2.1.5 for more details on "luck".

³³ I will speak more of Stratton's egregious and unforgivable non-interaction of Frankfurt-style counterexamples, as well as discuss his distinctions between the physical and mental substrate in full in §2.5.

“essence of libertarian freedom” is the ability to think otherwise; this of course is *leeway* ability. But this ability, if Stratton wants to be consistent, *must* be considered as a necessary condition for indeterminism, and thus for free will action. This flopping back and forth between alternative possibilities as a sufficient and necessary condition is simply incoherent.

2.1.3 Libertarianism & Necessary Conditions

We have concluded thus far that (i) is an appropriate definition of libertarian freedom. Stratton’s worry is that in order to have free will, or the kind worth wanting, we need something more, such as the formulations of (a) and (b), which leads us to (ii). But, the reason why libertarians are motivated to go even further and tag on (iii) is *because* of (a) and (b). In other words, (a) and (b) are necessary conditions for (iii). Libertarians think that determinism rules out any meaningful or genuine sense of sourcehood and alternative possibilities, so they claim indeterminism. We can now move to the tentative libertarian thesis:

1. $LFW_{df} =_{df} INC \wedge IND$ (definition (iii))
2. $LFW_{df} \Rightarrow IND$ (from (1))
3. $IND \Rightarrow AP$ (premise, as argued by definition of indeterminism above)
4. $\therefore LFW_{df} \Rightarrow AP$. (from (1), (2), hypothetical syllogism)³⁴

The conclusion is that in order to claim libertarianism, one must be committed to the fact that the agent has categorical alternative possibilities available to her at least some of the time (if not *all* the time). Prominent theologian William Hasker agrees and says “that alternative possibilities are ‘crucial’ for the incompatibilists’ position and says that that the abandonment of *AP* ‘would force either a redefinition of libertarianism [and thus also incompatibilism more generally] or an outright capitulation to compatibilism.”³⁵ It seems like we now have a new condition on FW, or indeterminism more generally; one that is actually consistent within the affirmation of indeterminism:

$$(b^*) FW \Rightarrow AP$$

Taking this newly formulated (b*) (one that Stratton should affirm *at all times* if he wants to keep his indeterminism), we can then modify (ii) to the following:

³⁴ For a much better, and more detailed step-by-step argument and defense for the necessity of alternatives in the libertarian view, and not just a sufficiency, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 121-129. Scott Christensen summarizes Bignon’s argument nicely: “Bignon has persuasively demonstrated that it is incoherent for libertarianism to be indeterministic while denying the ability to choose otherwise (i.e. PAP). Determinism by its nature indicates that only one possible outcome can result from the antecedent factors that effectively generate the choices of moral agents; therefore, indeterminism necessarily entails the idea of contrary choice [alternative possibilities].” See *What About Evil?: A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2020), 87n7).

³⁵ Quoted in Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 146. (emphasis and bracketed quote original)

$$(ii^*) \quad LFW =_{df} INC \wedge ((FW \Rightarrow Source) \wedge (FW \Rightarrow AP))^{36}$$

What this means is that we can now formulate a standard definition of indeterminism, one that is actually consistent with its own thesis:

$$(iv) \quad IND =_{df} (FW \Rightarrow Source) \wedge (FW \Rightarrow AP)$$

That is to say, the definition of indeterminism, if properly understood, is the conjunction of (a) and (b*), *not* (a) and (b); therefore, (ii*) is more in line with the heart of libertarianism than (ii) because of its commitment to the thesis of indeterminism. If alternative possibilities are a necessary condition for free will action, and free will action is a necessary condition for *libertarian* freedom, we have another straightforward syllogism:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 5. $LFW =_{df} INC \wedge FW$ | <i>(from definition (i))</i> |
| 6. $LFW_{df} \Rightarrow FW$ | <i>(from (5))</i> |
| 7. $FW \Rightarrow AP$ | <i>(from (b*))</i> |
| 4. $\therefore LFW_{df} \Rightarrow AP.$ | <i>(from (6), (7), hypothetical syllogism)</i> |

This shows that alternative possibilities are quintessential to libertarianism, not just sourcehood. So, if Stratton wants to continue to deny that libertarian freedom does not entail alternative (physical) possibilities, and instead state (b) where alternatives are seen as a sufficient condition, not a necessary one like (b*) postulates, then he needs to show us why that formulation is relevant to libertarianism. Stratton continues to assert that alternative possibilities are not a necessary condition of libertarian freedom, but rather a sufficient one. He asserts this without argument or support; it is presumptuous at best and nonplussed at worst.

Now, I realize that Stratton is allowed to define his terms (though not arbitrarily, as he tends to demonstrate), but I also realize that his crowned (albeit simplified) definition of libertarianism is “the ability to do that which is according to or compatible with our nature,” which of course espouses or entails *leeway* freedom by definition. But then, if this is his “go-to” definition, why does he still say (b) at the beginning of the book? Perhaps he is attempting to state that (b) is true only for physical actions, but (b*) is true for mental actions. This would align with his definitions

³⁶ Stratton says something similar in his “Libertarian Freedom Fighters” article: “... in a nutshell libertarian free will (LFW) entails two essential ingredients: 1- agents possess the ability to think and/or act otherwise, and 2- there are no external deterministic causes of at least some thoughts and/or actions,” <https://freethinkingministries.com/libertarian-freedom-fighters/>. Again, “**Bottom line:** LFW provides you with an ability to think and/or act otherwise,” <https://freethinkingministries.com/what-is-libertarian-free-will/>. It is all the more quizzical if Stratton continues to fight against the fact that libertarian freedom entails alternative possibilities. He could push back and claim that he only argues that (b*) is true in the mental substrate (rational deliberations), not physical actions. But, again, this remains obtuse because in these articles he clearly states that “agents possess the ability to think *and/or act* [physically] otherwise.”

on page 4 of *Mere Molinsim* and parts of his article, “Freethinking Needs PAP!”. But then again, if rational responsibility or rational freedom is the kind of free will Stratton has in mind, then why even bother mentioning (b)? Alternative possibilities are alternative possibilities, regardless of their location, either physical or mental. As such, they are a necessary condition for indeterminism, which seems to be a primary reason why he is against determinism so vehemently: if determinism is true, we do not possess alternative possibilities within our rational cognitive faculties in order to deliberate, evaluate, or judge a better, best, worse, true, or false belief. But, if that is true, he must sacrifice (b) or indeterminism; he cannot seem to hold onto both while expecting all his definition(s) of libertarianism to remain cogent, because it seems they are logically inconsistent with one another.

With this in mind, we can finally conclude that, primarily, libertarian freedom does, and *should*, entail *leeway* ability (the kind of free will worth wanting) resulting from a proper establishment of indeterminism.³⁷

2.1.4 Objections

There are a few objections that come to mind. Perhaps Stratton retorts back by pressing the fact that leeway need not be present *at all times*; that is, alternative possibilities need not be categorically available to the agent *every time* the agent makes a choice or a deliberative decision. I concede this much. The derivative conclusions above are consistent with this objection. All I have argued is that libertarian freedom entails *indeterminism*, or *leeway* categorical alternative possibilities (whether that be in the form of overt action or willful mental choice). As such, condition (b*) is necessary for “free will” under libertarian freedom. The present objection presumably complains that *leeway* is indeed *unnecessary* at all times in the causal history of the agent. But notice, there is non-mutual exclusivity in my claim and Stratton’s potential objection. Although I can concede that the agent need not possess the ability to *actualize* categorical alternatives *at all times* in their causal history of choice and deliberation, this does *not* entail that the agent does not have the *capacity* to actualize categorical alternatives *at all times*. Since it is true that the agent under libertarianism possesses the *capacity* to actualize

³⁷ It is extremely noteworthy to add the fact that one of the leading libertarian philosophers of freedom alive today *agrees* that (libertarian) free will implies both (a) and (b*). Robert Kane says that (a) is the “**The Condition of Ultimate Responsibility (or UR)**” and (b*) is “**The Condition of Alternative Possibilities Condition (or AP)**.” He writes, as he is describing the AP-condition, that “Free agents *must* have ‘alternative possibilities’ or ‘open alternatives for choice or action, which implies that agents ‘could have chosen or acted otherwise’... It is not that alternative possibilities and the power to do otherwise are unimportant for free will—far from it.” See Robert Kane, “Free Will: A Libertarian Perspective”, in *Do We Have Free Will: A Debate* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 10-11. (emphasis added) And more bluntly, “Both conditions—Ultimate Responsibility or UR and Alternative Possibilities or AP—are needed for free will,” (Ibid., 15).

categorical alternatives (overt or mental) *at any time*, indeterminism (and thus leeway) remains a proper necessary condition for libertarianism.³⁸

Another objection could be raised concerning the above definitions. Stratton is free to push back on these conclusions if he would like (in fact, he already has!).³⁹ He would rather argue an even more modified (ii*):

$$(ii^{**}) \text{ LFW} =_{df} \text{INC} \wedge ((\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{Source}) \vee (\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{AP}))^{40}$$

Notice that (ii*) states the *conjunction* of (a) and (b*), not the *disjunction* which (ii**) attempts to affirm. Obviously Stratton would not want to agree with condition (b*): $\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{AP}$ (at least not all the time). So, instead of (ii**), his potential formulation would probably be more like,

$$(ii^{***}) \text{ LFW} =_{df} \text{INC} \wedge ((\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{Source}) \vee (\text{AP} \Rightarrow \text{FW}))$$

Libertarian freedom is the conjunction between incompatibilism and indeterminism (at least in some human actions or thoughts), which of course entails, in Stratton's view, the kind of free will worth having (i.e., *not* being causally determined). This indeterministic freedom, then, equals (a) *or* (b), *not* (a) *and* (b), nor does it equal, as he may argue, (a) *and* (b*).

Stratton writes,

The cart seems to be in front of the horse [i.e., the correct entailment should be (b) *not* (b*)]. If one possesses a categorical ability to choose or choose otherwise, then one possesses libertarian freedom. However, just because one possesses libertarian freedom,

³⁸ For more discussion on categorical deliberation, source, and leeway, see §2.5.11. There I essentially apply the above response to a view called 'virtue libertarianism.'

³⁹ Stratton, "Droids in Heaven?", <https://freethinkingministries.com/droids-in-heaven/>.

⁴⁰ He has recently formulated a definition of libertarian freedom remarkably similar to (ii**): "Libertarian Freedom: (1) Referring to an agent's choice, action, evaluation, or judgment that is not causally determined by something or someone else. (2) The opportunity to exercise an ability to choose among a range of options, each of which is compatible with one's nature in a circumstance where the antecedent conditions are insufficient to causally determine the agent's choice," (<https://youtu.be/WxqQFLHGxLA?t=2>, in the comments section). This definition has two conditions: (1) and (2). (1) is seen as synonymous with (a) and (2) is synonymous with (b*). He continues to say the following: "The point not to be missed is that if it can be demonstrated that (1) is true of an agent, then the agent has libertarian freedom even if one cannot prove (2). If one can demonstrate (2), then one has libertarian freedom and (1) comes along for the ride." According to Stratton, (1) and (2) are a logical *disjunction* because in order to prove libertarian freedom one must only show (1) *or* (2). If (1) is shown, then (2) need not be demonstrated. If (2) is shown, then (1) "comes along for the ride." So, Stratton thinks that (2) entails (1). I will try to show that this is perhaps in vain, while discussing sourcehood in later sections, by demonstrating that (1) actually entails (2). And later in this section, I will show that claiming (1) without the necessity of (2) is tantamount to the source incompatibilist view, *not* the libertarian view. Thus, in order to have libertarian freedom the *conjunction* of (1) and (2) must be upheld and defended, not merely the *disjunction*.

it does not necessarily follow that one possesses a categorical ability to do otherwise (or so it seems to me).⁴¹

He continues to maintain that the correct condition for freedom, or indeterminism, is (b) and not (b*). Moreover, he writes,

I have also made it clear that as long as one is not causally determined by something or someone else, then one possesses libertarian freedom (even if they do not possess the ability to do otherwise for some strange reason).⁴²

In other words, Stratton still wants to adamantly say that indeterminism (exemplified via source or leeway) entails libertarian freedom, regardless of (b*) or (b). What are we to make of these responses?

Well, first, we must contend that (ii**) is a better definition than (ii***). I fully understand that Stratton wants to argue for something like (ii***), but he would do so at his own detriment; it is simply logically incoherent for one to maintain (ii***), and yet be an indeterminist. Given the above technical definitions of libertarian freedom from van Inwagen and Hasker, (b) seems to still be wanting, whereas (b*) looks like a solid condition for libertarian freedom. Secondly, I sincerely wonder why Stratton continues to fight against (b*) when professional philosophers who *do* argue for libertarian freedom, and thus against determinism and compatibilism, maintain (b*). Stratton himself says he is a “mere theologian and not a professional philosopher,” so I am at a loss as to know why he is so against professional philosophers who disagree with him though they are nonetheless on his side of the camp philosophically (“Rejoinder”, 7). Stratton boldly writes that “[i]t is not true that one who possesses libertarian freedom *MUST* possess a categorical ability to do otherwise,” (Ibid.). Is it though? Where is his support for this audaciously sharp claim? It seems as though libertarian freedom *does* entail the categorical as true, given my actual support above: libertarian freedom *must* entail the possession of a categorical ability. In another way, if (b*) is true, then this means that the more consistent formulation of libertarian freedom is not (ii***), but (ii**).

But is (ii**) true? It may be consistent, but is it true? Is it more plausibly true than (ii*)? In other words, should indeterminism be seen as the conjunction of (a) and (b*) (i.e., (ii*)), or should it be seen as the disjunction between (a) and (b*) (i.e., (ii**))? For Stratton, he should see indeterminism as the conjunction of (a) and (b*), and not the disjunction. However, before stating the reason why I think this is the case, I want to appreciate the objection here, because it is a good one.

⁴¹ Ibid. I would like to additionally point out that he gives us *no reason* for thinking these claims.

⁴² Ibid.

Stratton seems to be saying that if indeterminism is considered the disjunction, instead of the conjunction, one must negate (a) *and* (b*) in order to negate indeterminism, and thus libertarian freedom (via DeMorgan's Law). If indeterminism was considered the conjunction, the compatibilist must only negate (a) *or* (b*) in order to negate indeterminism, and thus libertarian freedom (via DeMorgan's Law). So, if Stratton is right, it's a rather quick move to launch against his compatibilist or determinist friends. But does it work? Unfortunately for Stratton, no, as the conjunction, or (ii*), should remain upheld.

My first reason for why Stratton must accept the conjunction (ii*) and not the disjunction (ii**) is because if one accepts the disjunction, at best, you could only affirm source incompatibilism.⁴³ Source incompatibilism is more modest on the spectrum of free will views, and libertarianism is more bold. This is the reason why (b*) is placed as a condition for libertarian professional philosophers; they see this as necessary in order to distinguish between *source* incompatibilism and libertarian or *leeway* incompatibilism. Obviously, libertarianism is not to be taken as directly synonymous with leeway incompatibilism, but it sure entails it (as noted in plentiful support above)! Secondly, as also noted above, Stratton's crowned definition of libertarian freedom is the categorical ability to choose among a range of options each of which is compatible or consistent with one's nature. If that is the case, then this quite literally means that libertarian freedom equals the categorical ability, or leeway ability. Moreover, libertarian freedom, given this definition, equals the categorical ability to choose among a range of *alternative options*. It is extremely puzzling for me to read that Stratton argues this strong definition in *Mere Molinism*, confirm it in his "Rejoinder", yet still fights against (b*) in his article. From his rejoinder to Bignon:

As I noted on the fourth page of my book, one of the goals (at least whenever possible) was to argue for the stronger definition of libertarian freedom. I phrased it as follows: "The categorical ability to choose among a range of alternative options, each of which is consistent or compatible with one's nature."⁴⁴

Stratton is conceding that his prized definition of libertarian freedom *entails the categorical ability*.⁴⁵ I am not sure what else needs to be said in order to prove my point: the conjunction of (a) *and* (b*) is what grants indeterminism for the libertarian, or the kind of free will worth having (in Stratton's estimation for rational deliberation); not merely the disjunction, contrary to what Stratton may object, and not merely (a) (as the source incompatibilist would contend). Therefore, I conclude that libertarianism, in order to be properly understood, should be viewed as (ii*), not (ii**) and certainly not (ii***). In addition, this is seen when analyzing the literal definition of indeterminism, as formulated by (iv). Last, putting all the definitions together, along with textual

⁴³ See Timpe, *Free Will* (2e) for more information on why this is arguably the case.

⁴⁴ Stratton, "Rejoinder", 2.

⁴⁵ I realize that this "prized" definition is not his most "academic" or "philosophical" definition. More on this "academic" definition will be considered in later sections, specifically §2.4.3.

support from a few libertarian incompatibilists *and Stratton himself*, we can receive the following conclusion (4): libertarian freedom entails categorical alternative possibilities.

2.1.5 Luck & Sufficiency in Libertarian Freedom

Before closing this section on libertarianism, I would like to take a quick moment to mention sufficient conditions on libertarianism. So far, we have only been discussing what libertarian freedom entails, or what is necessary for libertarian freedom, but we have not discussed what is sufficient for libertarian freedom. Stratton has said that (b) is sufficient for libertarian freedom but then unfortunately he left it at that. Here's the problem: one of the classical issues associated with libertarian accounts of free will is the so-called *luck* objection. Obviously we see that Stratton's desired flavor of the freedom articulated in *Mere Molinism* is leeway, which means libertarianism (according to his view) must entail leeway (or (b*), as shown above). But this does not answer the more intriguing question of whether or not that leeway is indeed sufficient for libertarianism, or more broadly, for moral or rational responsibility. As far as I can tell, Stratton does not *once* answer the question on the sufficiency of libertarian freedom. He simply takes it for granted that his specific brand of leeway ought to be taken as sufficient for freedom. But, given just a brief glance at the philosophical literature, this is a highly controversial claim, and it remains to this day a claim that *must* be discussed especially if one argues for a strong view of leeway. The basic *luck objection* may be phrased as follows:

A prominent family of objections to libertarianism develops the idea that a non-deterministic history of an action precludes an agent's being morally responsible for it... more specifically, that if an action is not causally determined, it will not have sufficient connection with the agent for her to be morally responsible for it. Some objections that reflect [this] Humean concern are called *luck objections* (Clarke, 2005; Mele, 1999, 2006b), for the reason that they attempt to show that on the libertarian view at issue whether the action occurs is a matter of luck—good or bad—and thus it is not sufficiently in the control of the agent for her to be morally [and rationally] responsible for it.⁴⁶

The “luck” objection could be applied to something like event-causal libertarianism (which, I take to be adjacent to Stratton's own view given his views on *non-exhaustive* determinism). Here is what Pereboom and McKenna write on the matter:

Alfred Mele and Ishtiyaque Haji advocate and develop a version of the luck objection that targets the event causal view according to which free actions must be proximally and indeterministically caused by appropriate agent-involving events. Suppose that in an

⁴⁶ Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom, *Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 236-237.

event-causal libertarian world *W* an agent *A* makes decision *D* at *t*, that is, *A*-involving events *E* proximally cause decision *D* at *t*. Because the history of *D* is indeterministic, there is another world, *W**, which features exactly the same events antecedent to *t* as those that precede *E*'s causing *D* at *t* in *W*, but without *D* occurring at *t*. But then the fact that *D* did come about then would seem to be a matter of luck. The occurrence of agent-involving events—and only events are causally relevant—prior to *t* are compatible with *D*'s occurrence and with *D*'s non-occurrence. So it would seem that *D* is not sufficiently under the control of the agent for moral responsibility in particular.⁴⁷

The general idea here is that if there are no sufficient causal conditions for a given action, and if something like the (leeway) categorical ability is true, then it would seem to entail the fact that the agent does *not* possess the coveted sense of control necessary for responsibility. The agent would *not* be in control in that case, rather the agent's actions would be a victim of mere luck.⁴⁸ If libertarianism is true, the *contrastive explanation* for why an agent chooses *A* over *B* seems to be missing. In other words, positing (b) does nothing to *enhance* one's control over a given action. As Carolina Sartorio says, "... the existence of an alternative to the actual course of events is not something that can enhance our control over what we do unless the alternative is also without our control."⁴⁹ It is not at all obvious that mere indeterminism grants any *more* control of an action than determinism. What is obvious, however, is that this objection has been debated and discussed *ad nauseum*,⁵⁰ so I will not pretend to do justice to the objection against libertarianism (or indeterminism, more generally) here in this reply. My only aim in this small section was to simply point out that Stratton *has not touched* this objection in his rejoinder to Bignon, his book, nor podcast episodes to date. This is quite devastating. A scholar who supposedly dabbles in the philosophy of freedom should honestly consider the primary

⁴⁷ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁸ For a corollary discussion, see, for example, van Inwagen's rollback argument in Peter van Inwagen, "Free Will Remains a Mystery," ed. by Robert Kane in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 158-177; van Inwagen, "A Promising Argument" and Michael Almeida and Mark Bernstein, "Rollbacks, Endorsements, and Indeterminism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2e), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁹ Sartorio, "A Reply to Bob Kane's Reply," in *Do We Have Free Will?*, 189.

⁵⁰ For a great place to start studying the luck objection, its several responses, and rejoinders to it, see Alfred Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). In fact, Mele summarizes a huge concern for his libertarian colleagues, one in which Stratton has virtually written nothing about:

All libertarians who hold that *A*'s being a free action depends on its being the case that, at the time, the agent was able to do otherwise freely then should tell us what it could possibly be about an agent who freely *A*-ed at *t* in virtue of which it is true that, in another world with the same past and laws of nature, he freely does something else at *t*. Of course, they can say that the answer is "free will." But what they need to explain then is how free will, as they understand it, can be a feature of agents—or, more fully, how this can be so where free will, on their account of it, really does answer the question. To do this, of course, they must provide an account of free will—one that can be tested for adequacy in this connection. (Mele, *Free Will and Luck*, 9).

Yet, the problem is that Stratton fails to provide this *necessary* connection in his book. He simply takes it for granted that his supposed leeway condition is in fact sufficient for freedom all the while failing to actually secure that most coveted connection or sense of control between leeway and freedom. So why should we take his word for it?

objections to his view, and the luck objection is notoriously one of them. But where is Stratton's response to this major objection? Where is his defense? It is nowhere to be found. Though I wish him luck in cultivating such a response (pun intended).

In this next section, we will discuss Stratton's definition(s) of determinism, the problems that he supposedly has with *exhaustive* determinism, and why these "problems" are actually just embarrassing blunders.

2.2 Determinism

2.2.1 Comprehensiveness of Determinism

Determinism, of course, is the negation of indeterminism. Formally, we could say the following:

$$\sim(\text{iv}) \quad \neg \text{IND} =_{\text{df}} \neg (\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{Source}) \vee \neg (\text{FW} \Rightarrow \text{AP})$$

If determinism is true, we are not the source of our actions, nor do we have the ability to do otherwise. Since $\sim(\text{iv})$ is the logical *disjunction* between (a) (the source condition) and (b*) (the leeway condition), "[n]ecessarily, if determinism is true, then no one enjoys free will."⁵¹ Or,

$$\sim(\text{iv}) \quad \text{DET} =_{\text{df}} \Box ((P_0 \wedge L) \supset P)^{52}$$

This definition should make sense because if (iv) offers an *open* future entailing alternative possibilities available to the agent, then by definition $\sim(\text{iv})$ should offer a *closed* future entailing *one* possibility. This definition could describe virtually any type of determinism: psychological, biological, physical/natural, or theological. Of course, Stratton's interest (as well as mine) has to do with *theological determinism*.

Stratton defines "theological" determinism as *exhaustive divine determinism* (EDD).⁵³ Although I agree with Stratton that determinism *simpliciter* is not the same thing as predestination, and so,

⁵¹ Speak, "The Consequence Argument Revisited," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2e) ed. Robert Kane, 118. For Speak, the definition of determinism entails the incompatibilist thesis, which he calls (INC).

⁵² This definition of determinism has been famously formulated by none other than incompatibilist Peter van Inwagen. See van Inwagen, *Essay*, 94; cf. Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 64; cf. Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 29. "... van Inwagen supposes that P_0 is a proposition that expresses the state of the world at some time in the remote past, L is the conjunction of the laws of nature, and P is any true proposition," while \Box functions as a necessity operator (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 66). This is a widely held definition of determinism in philosophical literature. We will look a bit more closely at van Inwagen's definition of determinism (i.e., $\sim(\text{iv})$) and his use of it while formulating the Consequence Argument in §4.2.3.

⁵³ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 4. I will articulate more detailed definitions of determinism later in this section.

the two ought not be conflated if one is a mindful theologian,⁵⁴ I agree with Bignon, however, that this distinction between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive* determinism is useless and unnecessary. In response, Stratton, in his rejoinder to Bignon, writes the following:

According to Bignon (p. 7), my use of “exhaustive” in “exhaustive (divine) determinism” is superfluous because “determinism is the thesis that *all things* are determined by antecedent factors” (emphasis mine). However, such a definition of determinism requires clarification and, thus, I distinguish between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive* (divine) determinism. The former says that all things, apart from some ultimate ground, are causally determined by external factors, and the latter says that some, but not all, things (e.g., all non-conscious things) are causally determined by external factors while others (e.g., some conscious beings) are not.⁵⁵

One of Stratton’s primary aims in the book is to argue that *exhaustive* divine determinism is incompatible with free will,⁵⁶ and namely with alternative possibilities apparently produced via rationalistic deliberative processes. But determinism of any stripe, if properly understood, is incompatible with *libertarian* free will (as libertarian freedom entails that alternative possibilities are ruled out by determinism – see definition (b*) and conclusion (4) above); Stratton should know this. Yet, we see statements from Stratton where determinism does not necessarily have to entail *all things* being determined, but rather determinism could only entail *some things* being determined (hence, the needed distinction between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive* determinism). So what does it mean to say that “some, but not all, things... are causally determined by external factors”? Perhaps, he is thinking of soteriological things such as one’s salvation.⁵⁷ At any rate, determin-ism means *all things* are determined. So, if Stratton wants to make a distinction that’s

⁵⁴ For example, one could simply argue the following regarding God’s sovereignty {SOV = Sovereignty of God, P = Predestination, and D = Determinism}:

1. SOV = D \wedge P (premise)
2. \neg SOV = \neg (D \wedge P) (negation)
3. $\therefore \neg$ SOV = \neg D \vee \neg P (DeMorgan’s Law)

So then, if we take conclusion (3) along with the following syllogism:

4. D \Rightarrow P (premise)
5. \neg P (negation of consequent)
6. $\therefore \neg$ D. (Modus Tollens)

one could technically hold to P without the necessity of D and still believe in SOV because one can negate D without negating P. With this said, I can see why Stratton likes to make this distinction: P is compatible with human freedom and responsibility in the *exhaustive* sense, while D is not (equally in the *exhaustive* sense).

⁵⁵ Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 2.

⁵⁶ Stratton adds the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* definition of determinism as well: “The world is governed by... determinism if and only if, given a specific way things are at a time *t*, the way things go thereafter is fixed as a matter of natural law,” (*Mere Molinism*, 18). But right after he assumes, without argument, that, given determinism as defined, “human beings are not in control or responsible for anything they think or believe or how they act or behave. These things are not ‘up to the person,’” (*Ibid.*). How this is not blatant question-begging is beyond me.

⁵⁷ He alludes to that possibility often in his historical chapters. This will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

fine, but then it's not *determinism*, rather, it's just the case that something is *determined*. That's it. He can say that some things, such as salvation, are *determined*, and that could perhaps be compatible with the kind of leeway he treasures, yet, at the same time, do without the bewildering distinctions between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive*. *Determinism* already entails the *exhaustiveness* part, whereas something being *determined* entails the *non-exhaustive* part.⁵⁸

Contrary to what Stratton, and his friend,⁵⁹ may think, this is not “defining oneself to victory.”⁶⁰ If Stratton wants to disagree with a firmly held definition in the philosophical literature (with no such distinctions concerning the *comprehensiveness* of determinism ever alluded to), then *fine*;⁶¹ but then we should expect to see an additional detailed analysis on not only *why* Stratton wants to separate determinism into exhaustive and non-exhaustive but *how* this can be meaningfully and coherently done given his commitment to indeterminism for any “genuine” sense of rationality, not just *that* it can be done. Yet I am afraid we just don't see this type of desired analysis in his book nor rejoinder. He only asserts that the definition of determinism ought not to be conflated to all things. But, why? Is *Stratton* the one who is “defining himself to victory”? Maybe he thinks that Molinism does the trick and *that* is why determinism should not be conflated to exhaustiveness. But the only reason that I can think of why that move is necessary to be made, in context of arguing for Molinism, is if Molinism *itself* entails something akin to determinism. That would be a winner indeed!⁶² If it is the case that Molinism entails some variety of determinism, then the real conflict lies not in the *exhaustiveness* or *comprehensiveness*

⁵⁸ Robert Kane, a libertarian about free will, agrees: “... all doctrines of *determinism* imply that *every* event, or at least *every* human choice and action, is determined by some determining conditions in this sense,” (*Contemporary*, 6; emphasis added).

⁵⁹ See Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 2n4. Though, I must say Jonathan Thompson is a personal friend of mine as well, and it suffices to mention he is not too enthused with Stratton's book either.

⁶⁰ Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 2.

⁶¹ This could be seen as a slight appeal to authority: “Professional philosophers do not make a distinction between determinisms; therefore, there should be no such distinctions.” Maybe. But, first, that's not the defense I am trying to convey exactly, though it's similar. Second, Stratton has the burden of proof – it is not question-begging via appeal to authority if I state that professional philosophers do not argue for such a distinction, and so, we shouldn't make one. That's just my defense. Stratton needs to argue why we need one if he wants to make that claim. If he just says there is one without independent support for *why* we need one and *how* it could be useful, *that* is question-begging. Thirdly, going off of the second point, I would believe that charge *if* Stratton even attempted to argue that the conflation is misguided or presumptuous on the determinist's part rather than just stating that it is. Thus, I conclude, via Ockham's razor, that if there is no argument for such a distinction, then perhaps we should stick with the simpler explanation and say that *there is no such distinction*.

⁶² Interestingly, Stratton himself has previously stated that Molinism entails middle knowledge which can be seen as non-causal determinism: “*God knows Sally would freely choose X instead of not-X if He were to create her in non-causal deterministic circumstance C.*”

<https://freethinkingministries.com/the-freedom-to-trick-god/>. Even more interestingly, Stratton has, in personal correspondence, conceded that “almost everything about the universe and humanity is causally determined by something or someone else. I simply argue against EDD [exhaustive divine determinism] and for LLF [limited libertarian freedom].” Yet, in light of all this, how does *non-exhaustive* determinism, when “almost everything about the universe and humanity causally determined”, yet only a few moments in an agent's life remain undetermined, jive with the kind of indeterminism worth wanting? Is it too much to ask for a nicely knit theory to go along with these audacious claims?

of determinism, but rather the *method* of exhaustive divine determinism. If correct, this gives us yet another good reason to reject this silly distinction of exhaustiveness versus non-exhaustiveness. The controversy does not lie in the supposed conflation of determinism and exhaustiveness; it's in the actual *method* utilized in determinism that *makes* it exhaustive. For these reasons, I will see EDD as a determinism *simpliciter*.

Now, what if we go along with what Stratton is claiming, for argument's sake, that determinism *simpliciter* could be seen as either exhaustive or non-exhaustive? What does this mean if determinism is simply non-exhaustive? Does this mean we still could keep a residual amount of freedom or responsibility while being determined in an action (such as salvation; i.e., matters above versus matters below)? I presume that it means that if I am determined unto salvation (to believe in Christ), meaning my act of faith in Christ is determined, I still possess "freedom" necessary for responsibility of some kind in the midst of that determined action or deliberation. If that is the case, and if we are free or responsible in that act of believing (or the act of willing to believe), even though we are determined, hasn't the debate been surrendered? Stratton would have just conceded compatibilism; the agent is determined until salvation yet rationally responsible. It seems like Stratton would fit nicely in our compatibilist camp. But, perhaps Stratton would respond by once again stating that *non-exhaustive* determinism is different from *exhaustive* determinism, and in matters of salvation, this is an example of *non-exhaustive* determinism. For example, Stratton might object and say, "Yes! This is compatibilism! I simply argue that compatibilism cannot *exhaustively* explain reality!" I would press and ask why does it matter if it is one action that is determined or many actions determined, especially if that one action is determined, and yet *still free*? That is not what is relevant. The relevant question is not whether determinism is indeed *comprehensive*, but whether something *is* determined *and*, at the same time, we are responsible and free. In other words, the *compatibility* question is the relevant question. The fact that Stratton seems to be missing this core issue is unabashedly puzzling to me, I am afraid (especially given his decade of research on the very topic).

On the other hand, if Stratton responds by actually exclaiming *no*, we wouldn't be responsible nor "free" if we are determined unto salvation because the freedom necessary for responsibility is either (a) or (b*), and *that* sort of freedom is incompatible with determined actions, then *why does he mention it, or at the very least imply it, as a live option to TULIP Calvinists*? What is he expecting here? Why would the Calvinist agree that his salvation was determined yet not free in a relevant sense or at least the sense that Stratton is pressing? I would venture to submit that no Calvinist would accept his actions as "free" or responsible in matters below, but, concerning matters above, his act of faith as not "free" or responsible. Perhaps Stratton is meaning to say that determined salvation is not "free" (according to (a), and perhaps (b*)), but it remains responsible. But how is that possible if freedom is entailed by responsibility? That, in turn, would negate the Calvinist responsibility via *modus tollens*. That would be rich.

Stratton should really do away with this “non-exhaustive determinism in salvation argumentation, but not in matters below” stipulation, and instead stick with *exhaustive* determinism as that is what it means. Then he could say that determinism *simpliciter*, and the fact of being determined (even for one “matter above” action), is just plain false as it rules out responsibility, period. Or, at the very least, he should give us a full exposition on *how* these terms could be meaningfully understood; otherwise we are left guessing and then inadvertently open to Stratton’s accusations of straw-men. Thus, I pose the following hypothetical “Mere Molinism” dilemma:

Mere Molinist Dilemma: Either the agent while being determined unto salvation is A) not rationally responsible, or B) rationally responsible. If horn A), then his EDD definition is a useless redundancy and its distinction between exhaustive and non-exhaustive would be proven superfluous. Incompatibilism would obtain and his project of mending Mere Molinism with Reformed theology would be quizzical. If horn B), then the debate against compatibilism would be surrendered. We can be free in a most relevant sense necessary for rational responsibility though we are determined.

If he is okay with things being determined, yet still preserving freedom/responsibility, in one or a couple actions, then why not all actions? What distinguishes some deliberations being determined (arguably the most important deliberation: faith in Christ) and all deliberations being determined? And if indeterminism is a necessary condition for libertarian freedom ((iii) and premise (4)), then if determinism obtains, via *modus tollens*, so much for libertarian freedom.⁶³

Therefore, the *comprehensiveness* of determinism does not seem to pose a significant threat to freedom (understood in the relevant sense) and responsibility. All this tells me is that I do not think Stratton is personally against the “determined” part of “determinism”, but rather the “causal” part of determinism (or perhaps the *exhaustive* part of *causal*?). He seems to think that if something *causes* an agent to do as they do, *exhaustively* or all the time, then they do not have the ability to do otherwise, nor are they seriously considered the source of their actions, and thus, for Stratton, the agent is not free in the appropriate sense that is necessary for freedom (i.e., *libertarianly* or categorically). As a flaming libertarian, he is free to think that (pun intended). But does determinism necessitate causation? In other words, if one claims determinism (as I think consistent Calvinists ought to), does this wed him to the method of causation? Let’s adventure through an excursus on definitions of divine determinism and see whether the method of causation is necessary, or better yet, harmful to the Calvinist.

2.2.2 Causation, Calvinism, & Type of Determinism

⁶³ Recently, and in personal correspondence, Stratton has clarified his views on the comprehensiveness of determinism. I will try to accommodate these updated views in more detail in §2.5.11. Needless to say, the dilemma is still in force.

Daniel M. Johnson, co-editor of *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, defines Calvinist determinism in the following manner: “God is in control of everything, and has from eternity ordained all that has come to pass and will come to pass.”⁶⁴ This sounds very much like the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF):

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.⁶⁵

There is some mention of causation here through what we may call “second causes”, or causes that proceed from human agents. (Whether or not this is a helpful distinction need not detain us here as it will be discussed a bit further in the later sections of §2.5 during the discussion on sourcehood and how it may relate to Frankfurt-style counterexamples.) Some have speculated whether or not this article of faith could be compatible with libertarian free will.⁶⁶ Such scholars like Paul Helm⁶⁷ and Michael Patrick Preciado⁶⁸ have convincingly argued otherwise, stating that the WCF and the reformed tradition as a whole teaches theological determinism and are committed, by extension, to the compatibilist project. With these nuances in mind, one can formulate distinguishable types of Calvinists:

(RO) Hard Calvinist = _{df} Calvinists who adhere to the *reformed orthodox* and tradition, five-pillars of Calvinism (i.e., the *solas*), and the five-points of Calvinism (i.e., TULIP).

⁶⁴ Daniel M. Johnson, “Calvinism and the Problem of Evil: A Map of the Territory” in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, edited by David E. Alexander and Daniel M. Johnson (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 21.

⁶⁵ WCF 3.1

⁶⁶ Others such as Oliver Crisp, John Girardeau, or Richard Muller, for example. See Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014); Ibid. “John Girardeau: Libertarian Calvinist?” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8.3 (2014), 284-300; Richard A. Muller, *Divine and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). Some have additionally speculated that scholars such as Crisp actually believe that we possess libertarian freedom. Such scholars, like Stratton himself, seem to conclude that these reformers have endorsed libertarianism in light of its apparent compatibility with WCF (*Mere Molinism*, 172). Possibly. But it needs to be noted that Crisp is simply expanding the reformed tradition and doesn’t actually argue for libertarian freedom as a metaphysically live option. This is seen more prevalently and clearly in his second book *Saving Calvinism*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 67-86. See also Christ Date, “Theopolitics 038: ‘Freedom and Power to Will and to Do’: The Freedom of Adam and Eve in WCF/LBCF,” <https://youtu.be/K9YnQNEMUU8>. Here Date convincingly demonstrates how the authors of the Westminster and London Baptist divines emphatically did *not* teach libertarian freedom.

⁶⁷ Paul Helm, *Reforming Free Will: A Conversation on the History of Reformed Views on Compatibilism (1500-1800)*, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2020). Basically, Helm concludes that even the early reformed orthodox were committed to the compatibilist project and any evidence to suggest otherwise can be deemed as purely circumstantial. If this is the case, then the reformed tradition leaves no room for the likes of libertarian freedom.

⁶⁸ See Preciado, *Reformed View*, 61-139.

(NRO) Soft Calvinists =_{df} Calvinists who adhere *only* to the five-pillars of Calvinism (i.e., the *solae*) and the five-points of Calvinism (i.e., TULIP), *not* necessarily the reformed orthodox and tradition.

A word of explanation is certainly in order. First, these distinctions are not necessarily new in the literature. Johnson, who is mentioned above, has attempted a similar formulation with his distinctions known as *Calvinist soteriology* (i.e., (NRO) Soft Calvinism) and *Calvinist determinism* (i.e., (RO) Hard Calvinism).⁶⁹ There is a difference between Calvinists who adhere to the reformed tradition as a whole, and those who simply adhere to TULIP. The former look to reformed confessions such as WCF, or the Three Forms of Unity, whereas the latter are content with their TULIP systematic.⁷⁰ This helpful distinction will be used to signify those Calvinists who adhere to the reformed orthodox (RO), and those who, in contrast, only confess TULIP, not the entirety of the reformed orthodox (NRO).⁷¹ I take it that Calvinists ought to be (RO) Hard Calvinists if they would like to remain consistent within their systematic theology and tradition.⁷² Matthew J. Hart, quoted in Stratton's book,⁷³ states that "Calvinists, I shall assume, are theological determinists. They hold that God causes every contingent event, either directly (without the use of secondary causes) or indirectly (via secondary causes) [thus, in alignment with WCF 3.1]."⁷⁴ Hart seems to be assuming (RO) Hard Calvinism here via causation. We see

⁶⁹ Daniel M. Johnson, "A Map of the Territory", 20-24.

⁷⁰ The Three Forms of Unity comprise the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. The WCF, as well as the Catechisms, are part of the Continental and English traditions. See Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 61-64.

⁷¹ It must be said that (RO) has no correlation to high or hyper Calvinism and (NRO) has no correlation to soft determinism (compatibilism) or low Calvinism, in general. Similarly, I use the term "hard" not to allude to hard determinism, but rather to distinguish between those Calvinists who are rooted in the history of reformed theology (hard), and those who are not (soft). These terms are also not meant to be derogatory to my fellow Calvinists who would consider themselves more aligned with (NRO). Soft Calvinists are simply those who do not adhere to the reformed orthodox tradition and the compatibilists projects that they were formulating. That is all that is meant by these terms.

⁷² For more information on this "in-house" debate between Reformed theologians, see Wilhelm J. van Asselt, et al., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). I personally find this book wanting. James N. Anderson admits that this "volume purports to cast doubt on the notion that the early Reformed theologians held to divine determinism"; nonetheless, the volume seems to also tacitly imply the need for a compatibilist project ("Calvinism and the First Sin", 204). Helm convincingly shows in *Reforming Free Will* that this notion of determinism being denied in the early reformed theologians ought to be equally doubted. I encourage the reader to dive into this debate. Moreover, recently published, Scott Christensen has written an excellent magisterial landmark work on Calvinism and evil: *What About Evil?: A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory*, (Phillipsburg: NJ, 2020), and, in it, has an interesting summary of the debate and brief defense suggesting the early reformers were compatibilists (pg. 220n56). Lastly, Calvinist scholar Matthew J. Hart has written an excellent extensive, yet simplified, exposition on the free will debate within the reformed community. One can find it in his doctoral thesis, *Theological Determinism and the Goodness of God*, chapter 3: https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3090336/1/201049109_Sep2019.pdf.

⁷³ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 172.

⁷⁴ Hart, "Calvinism and the Problem of Hell" in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, 248. It is too bad that Stratton didn't go further and *actually interact* with Hart's essay, instead of merely quoting him (much like he does with Bignon, as we will see in §4.1). He missed a clear opportunity to foster scholarly interaction

something similar in Helm's chapter 6 "Causation in Doctrine" (*Reforming Free Will*).⁷⁵ But again, is causation really necessary for determinism? It seems like it may be, but what kind are we thinking here? Notable Calvinist author, Heath White, doesn't include causation in his definition of theological determinism:

Theological determinism... is a form of conditional necessity: given these facts or events over here, some other fact or event over there *must be the case* or *must occur*... [Therefore,] *Theological Determinism*: (i) the facts about God's will wholly determine every other contingent fact, and (ii) the facts about God's will explain every other contingent fact... The two clauses together say, roughly, that God's will determines, settles, or fixes every other fact about the world that could have been other than it is... there are no human actions which are undetermined by anything whatsoever.⁷⁶

This clearly seems to align well with (RO) Hard Calvinism. There is simply no room to posit (NRO) Soft Calvinism in this quote. What these quotes begin to tell us is that causation in the definition of determinism might be irrelevant. It may be useful to describe *a method* to the way God determines or brings about His decree, but I don't believe we should, and neither should Stratton, just jump to the conclusion that theological determinism *must* have the mechanism of causation present (although, it very well may be the case), or even consider causation as *the* method of determinism. Let's peer into the writings of a few more notable Calvinists philosophers and hopefully it will help clear the muddy waters.

James N. Anderson agrees with Hart in that "Calvinism is indeed committed to divine determinism: the view that everything is ultimately determined by God." He continues with the following definition for divine determinism:

(DD) For every event E, God decided that E should happen and that decision was the ultimate sufficient cause of E.⁷⁷

First, as Anderson anticipates, this definition is "not to say that God's will is the *efficient* or *immediate* cause of every event, a claim which most Calvinists have been careful to deny,"

by defending against Hart's thesis. He could have placed this interaction after offering his "Divine Desire & Divine Determinism Argument" (*Mere Molinism*, 194). What a shame.

⁷⁵ Hart also mentions the fact that the most prominent Calvinist philosopher and theologian, Paul Helm, is a (RO) Hard Calvinist.

⁷⁶ White, "Theological Determinism and the 'Authoring Sin' Objection" in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, 78-79.

⁷⁷ Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin", in *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, 204. In another way, "I think it's beyond reasonable dispute that **Calvinism is committed to divine determinism**, since historic Calvinism teaches that God actively foreordains all things; for every event E, God wills that E occurs, and God's willing that E occurs is a sufficient condition for E's occurrence," (Anderson, "Calvinism and Determinism," <https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/calvinism-and-determinism/>). This definition correlates fantastically with what (RO) Hard Calvinists wish to affirm.

(Ibid.). If this were the case, then God could be said to be the genuine author of evil.⁷⁸ God is said to be the efficient cause of the good, not evil; thus, He is not blameworthy for the evil in the world. How does this work exactly? Well, to put it shortly, so as to not be side-tracked,

[T]he reformed argue that God could not be the efficient cause of evil because evil cannot have an efficient cause since it is a privation of the good. Evil... is not something positive; it is a privation of the good. Evil can only exist as a deformity or lack of something good... [Therefore, as] a privation, evil is not a positive substance and thus does not need an efficient cause. Since it does not need an efficient cause, God could not possibly be the efficient cause.⁷⁹

The general idea is that it is impossible for God to be the efficient cause of something that is not a positive substance, such as evil.⁸⁰ So it is actually *not* the case that God determines *all* things (at least not in the *same sense*), but when the reformed say *all* things, they mean *all things that can be determined*, and evil is not one of them as it is not a “thing.”⁸¹

Second, Anderson, continuing his definition of determinism, states that we should be careful not to equate Calvinism with causal determinism. He writes, “Causal determinism... is the idea that events subsequent to *t* are necessitated by... the entire state of the world at *t* and those causal laws govern the world,” (Anderson, “Calvinism and the First Sin”, 205). But this view does not allow for secondary causation, only efficient causation. So, Calvinists respond to this worry by stating that “God can direct events both *through* second causes and *apart from* second causes,” (Ibid).⁸² Bignon chimes in and says that “God does not determine the actions of humans *against* their wills, but *through* their wills,” (*Excusing Sinners*, 23).

⁷⁸ The author of evil charge is a non-starter for most Calvinists as the argument is usually too unclear or too weak to stick. Unfortunately, I cannot address all the versions of the author of evil charge here, but rather only in passing. To remedy this, I point the reader to the already quoted book *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil* in order to see exactly how Calvinism can escape this trope of a charge raised against them. In addition, I point once more to Bignon’s defense in *Excusing Sinners*, 167-228. For more information, see Christensen, *What About Evil?*; the entire book is supremely dedicated to debunking charges such as “God is the author of evil given Calvinism” among other related assaults.

⁷⁹ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 103.

⁸⁰ I realize that this will not satisfy all readers (possibly not even Stratton). However, I also want to remind the reader, and Stratton, that my primary aim in this reply, as explained in §1.2, is to *defend* Calvinist compatibilism, not necessarily *argue* for it. This is one reason why I offer a variety of literature concerning the subject. I invite the reader to engage with the material there. In any case, it is not as if the theory of privation is not without its defenders, both from classical and contemporary sources, that of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, as well as Reformed scholars such as Bavinck, Preciado, and Christensen. See Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 60-61n64. Also, for a good summary of varying medieval thinkers on the first cause of evil, see Tobias Hoffmann, *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), chapters 6 and 7.

⁸¹ For more discussion on evil as privation and its relation to God’s decree, see §2.5.14 for what is known as “blockage cases” in Frankfurt-style counterexamples.

⁸² WCF 3.1 and 5.3.

Anderson's extended point is that causal determinism *simpliciter* seems not to allow for miraculous supernatural events such as raising Jesus from the dead. The reason being that the term "causal" denotes a heavy amount of nomologicality which would *presumably* exclude supernatural causation such as the resurrection; it would seem to only allow for natural causation. So, it seems as if we are in need of a slight modifier or some additional qualifier if Calvinists are to be "industrious" and attempt to formulate a definition of determinism that is compatible with "causal" notions. Calvinist scholar Greg Welty is inclined to agree, but in a different way: he rejects the need for "causal" notions altogether. He states that the WCF relies heavily on *negative* definitions of God's decree rather than *positive* ones. What this means is that the confession only states *that* God decrees (i.e., determines), but it does not shed too much light on exactly *how* He decrees or determines. He quotes Helm to prove his point: "it is crude and misleading to assimilate the working of the divine decree to intramundane models of causation, and particularly to general physical [causal] determinism."⁸³ Welty then, rightfully so, makes a nice distinction between "mysterian" and "industrious" Calvinists. The former "rest content with the apophatic formulations" of the WCF concerning divine determinism, whereas the latter choose to "supplement or 'fill out' the confession's teaching on the decree with the thesis of universal causal determinism," (Ibid.).⁸⁴ Welty claims the former (and it seems like Bignon does as well), whereas Calvinists like Anderson claim the latter. Let's treat Bignon's final remarks on determinism and its supposed relation with causation, and then we will finish the excursus with Anderson's apparently "industrious" model one last time.

In his opening chapter for *Excusing Sinners*, Bignon lays out a fairly comprehensive definition:

The main idea behind determinism is that everything that comes to pass is *determined*, or *necessitated* by prior conditions, natural or supernatural... Whether God determines all things through physical determinism or through directly supernatural means, both views can be described as "theological determinism": God providentially determines everything that comes to pass, including human choices.⁸⁵

Notice that there is no use of the word "cause". This was intentional. He writes that he has "carefully avoided any mention of the word 'cause'" because he finds it unhelpful only because the word *causation* is by itself not particularly helpful (Ibid., 5-6). He comes to the same conclusion as van Inwagen: causation is "a morass in which I for one refuse to set foot. Or not unless I am pushed," (van Inwagen, *Essay*, 65). Bignon further clarifies that *causal* in causal determinism may still be utilized by Calvinist determinists, but with caution, concluding that

⁸³ Quoted in "Molinist Gunslingers", *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 54.

⁸⁴ It must be noted that these so-called "industrious" Calvinists should not be equated to (RO) Hard Calvinists. According to the (RO) Hard Calvinist, one can claim either "mysterian" or "industrious" Calvinism, and vice versa for (NRO) Soft Calvinists. They are non-mutually exclusive in that regard.

⁸⁵ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 4-5.

perhaps it is better to view causal determinism as a distinction without a difference. In other words, determinism need not be wed to causation for there is no apparent relation nor does there need to be. If it is the case that determinism must not be wed to causation, then, as far as I can see, Stratton should be accused of the logical fallacy of “distinction without a difference” by painting all determinists with one stroke of a brush.⁸⁶

Reformed scholar Oliver Crisp, an advocate for libertarian-Calvinism, has also noted that causal determinism and theological determinism are not quite the same. He writes,

[Theological determinism] is not the same thesis as causal determinism because the idea is that God, an immaterial agent, determines a unique future for the created order. This includes the physical creation but does not comprise it. For presumably there are many things that are not physical in the created order, such as angels and demons. Yet on the theological determinist view, God is said to determine their actions as well. What is more, some theological determinists seem to think that God’s meticulous oversight of the creation, which involves his ordaining all that comes to pass, does not involve him physically or casually bringing things about in the world. His action is logically prior to physical causation and is sometimes said to be what informs or gives rise to such physical causation.

Be that as it may, the clear difference between theological determinism and causal determinism is that according to theological determinism, it is *God* that determines what comes to pass, whereas on causal determinism, physical events in the past plus the laws of nature determine a unique future physical state of affairs... [Thus,] the two theses are conceptually distinct.⁸⁷

This conclusion from Crisp is telling. For one, Crisp, though he does not necessarily hold to something like libertarian-Calvinism himself, he has indeed argued for it in order to expand the overall reformed tradition. This is sympathetic to Stratton’s project in *Mere Molinism*. More

⁸⁶ The “distinction without a difference” is indeed a logical fallacy. See <https://www.logicallyfallacious.com/logicalfallacies/Distinction-Without-a-Difference>. The fallacy is committed when a person makes “the assertion that a position is different from another position based on the language when, in fact, both positions are the same – at least in practice or practical terms.” Was this Stratton’s problem when he attempted to provide “distinctions” between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive* determinism? Mental and physical actions? I am not entirely sure, but it sure seems to fit the bill. One last time, at the risk of annoying repetition, determinism is determinism because of the “-ism”. By definition, this exhaustively describes reality. If Stratton wants to press for *non-exhaustive* determinism, then it seems he would be committing the logical fallacy of “distinction without a difference”. Instead he would be much better off dropping the “-ism”, and claim that if something is *non-exhaustively* determined, it is just that: *determined*. But it does not follow that it is *determinism*. To reiterate, there are exceptions because, of course, making a distinction is not bad; philosophers do it all the time. However, the difference is that when one makes a distinction, it must have support and it must be flushed out strategically. Stratton’s strategic support in making said distinction, as far as I can see, is nowhere to be found.

⁸⁷ Oliver Crisp, “Meticulous Providence,” in *Divine Action and Providence*, edited by Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 26.

importantly, we see that causation is *not* necessary for theological determinism; it is only what “gives rise to such physical causation.” But, *physical* determinism is not synonymous to *theological* determinism. That’s Crisp’s point. Thus, we can adequately deduce that the word “causal” is not necessarily entailed by the definition of determinism (at least not theological determinism), contrary to what Stratton has posited.⁸⁸

Now, as mentioned above, not all Calvinists are satisfied with the “mysterian” conclusion. That is, they are not satisfied or content in the fact *that* God determines; they insist that further demonstration must be necessary. They insist that we must find out *how* God determines. These “industrious” Calvinists, like Anderson, have a bit more to say on the issue. So, again, before wrapping up the excursus on causal determinism and its appropriate use in the theological arena, let’s once more reflect upon the writings of Anderson.

Anderson’s definition (DD) is a pretty tight definition (one which I am inclined to agree with myself), yet it affirms causation. We have already concluded that causation is not exactly necessarily baked into the definition of theological determinism.⁸⁹ The question now before us is whether or not the notion of causation is harmful to affirm, especially for the Calvinist determinist. Before we answer this question, let’s review Anderson’s basic conception of divine determinism, along with any qualifiers. Recall that Anderson is skeptical of the “causal” notion and how it would *not* account for divine acts such as the inspiration of the Scriptures, the resurrection of Christ, or the feeding of the five thousand. These supernatural miraculous acts do not seem to entail causal relations in the nomological sense of the word. He states the following in an article:

Calvinism doesn’t commit one to causal (nomological) determinism. Indeed, most Calvinists will deny causal determinism on the grounds that it would rule out divine supernatural intervention (e.g., miraculous events that violate or temporarily suspend the laws of nature, such that later events aren’t entailed by earlier events in conjunction with the laws of nature).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Once again, for reference: “This, then, is the view of theological determinism or what this author refers to as exhaustive divine determinism (EDD): all events are causally determined by God,” (*Mere Molinism*, 4).

⁸⁹ It could be the case that other varieties of determinism, such as physical or scientific determinism, must hold to some form of causation. Perhaps, this is what Stratton tends to think when he conflates scientific with theological determinism (*Mere Molinism*, 2-4). But I still don’t see how either scientific or theological determinism must be committed to some form of causation: “Note that causal determinism in this sense [physical determinism] is not equivalent to physical determinism, since it might be granted that not all events are physical events and not all natural laws are physical laws (e.g., there could be psychological laws that are distinct from physical laws),” (Anderson, “Calvinism and the First Sin”, 205).

⁹⁰ Anderson, “Calvinism and Determinism,”
<https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/calvinism-and-determinism/>

He argues further that it is equally clear that “[d]ivine **determinism doesn’t entail logical determinism, physical determinism, or causal determinism.** It is conceptually distinct from all the types previously discussed,” (Ibid.). He writes, “Divine determinism, broadly defined, is the doctrine that everything is determined *by God*. So defined, divine determinism isn’t committed to any particular account of *how* God determines everything, only that he *does* do so,” (Ibid.). This correlates nicely with what Crisp, Bignon, and Welty have articulated earlier. But does this mean that Anderson is not “industrious” after all? Not exactly. He argues for a *qualified* causal determinism mentioned earlier. This modified version of causal determinism, one in which allows for *some* kind of causation, is the one in which Anderson advocates for and argues. He calls this innovative version “causal divine determinism” (note the irony!). I believe this formulation gives credence to (DD) as it seems to function as its backbone.

Anderson begins his “industrious” exposition on Calvinist causation in determinism by recognizing the obvious right off the bat:

I should note that some Calvinists have shied away from the language of causation with regard to divine foreordination. It seems to me that this reticence to speak about divine causation, at least with respect to creaturely sins, owes more to semantic qualms than sober metaphysics: it is thought that the very term “causation” carries undesirable entailments. At any rate, I hope to show that even if one grants... that Calvinism is committed to divine *causal* determinism, this doesn’t introduce insuperable problems for Calvinists.⁹¹

These reserved Calvinists he speaks of are none other than those “mysterian” Calvinists (e.g., Bignon, Welty, etc.). In contrast, Anderson states his firm conviction that *causality* should be affirmed by Calvinists, at least if qualified in a divine sense.⁹² But the question remains: is divine causation in determination harmful to affirm for the Calvinist?

2.2.3 Causal Harm & Calvinistic Providence

Anderson begins by noting a number of distinctions:

1. Types of Causation: Intramundane versus Divine
2. Models of Providence: Domino versus Authorial

⁹¹ Anderson, “Calvinism and the First Sin,” 205-206. (footnote 15)

⁹² Anderson, “Calvinism and Determinism,”

<https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/calvinism-and-determinism/>: “I take the view that **mainstream Calvinism represents some version of causal divine determinism.** I would argue... that causal divine determinism is reflected in the writings of John Calvin, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and (most importantly) in many of the biblical texts to which Calvinists have appealed in defense of their doctrines.”

Afterwards, he attempts to provide sound defenses to three objections that could be raised against Calvinists:

1. God the author of sin
2. The challenges of compatibilism
3. No causal explanation for the first sin or origination of evil

For the sake of space, I would rather address potential challenges to compatibilism in §2.3. I will therefore invite the reader to that relevant section, but here I will briefly sketch out the responses from Anderson with objections 1 and 3.

1. Types of Causation: Intramundane versus Divine⁹³

These distinguishing types of causation should not throw the reader for a loop. In short, they can be summarized in a familiar fashion: primary versus secondary causation. Of course, Anderson doesn't leave us there. Intramundane causation can be defined as simply *human* causation or *formal* causation.⁹⁴ It is a stark contrast to *divine* causation or *sufficient/efficient* causation. Attributing divine efficient causation to evil, as noted above, is often a mistake that many non-Calvinists unfortunately commit. Just because WCF 3.1 describes the fact that God brings about all things and that by his decree or determination all things come to pass *does not* mean that He therefore *efficiently* causes or determines all things. As explained briefly above, the problem with this view is that it leaves Calvinism open to the author of evil charge before they can even finish describing God's decree! I agree that if God is seen as the *efficient* cause of *all things* including *sin*, then yes, God is the author of evil in a morally objectionable sense. Thus, Calvinism should be rejected (*if* that were the case). However, thankfully, the "industrious" Calvinist may choose to interpret WCF 3.1 to simply entail that God is the *sufficient* cause of *all things*, and since evil is *not* technically a thing, rather it is a negative substrate of reality instead of a positive one (i.e., the theory of privation), God may not be morally culpable in any objectionable sense. In fact, Preciado makes this exact point; he writes:

We see from this that God is the efficient cause of the good but not of the evil. There is an asymmetrical relationship that God's decree and providence bear to good and evil. God is not the efficient cause of evil and thus not the author of sin.

[Accepting determinism] does not make God the efficient cause of the formal aspect or lawlessness of the sinful act. We are not committed to causality from the decree or providence. Even if one were, we would not need to be committed to God efficiently causing the sinfulness of the sinful act.

⁹³ For more details on Reformed use of secondary and primary causation, see John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 155.

⁹⁴ This idea of formal causation will be the topic of our discussion in §2.5.13.

Secondly, [accepting determinism] is compatible with holding to the idea that evil is a privation. Thus, we could make the same arguments in favor of the idea that evil cannot have a cause, let alone God being that cause.⁹⁵

God is not the efficient cause of evil under Calvinism; instead He is the *sufficient* and even *deficient* cause of evil (in accordance to WCF 3.1 and the theory of privation, respectively). And though He is not the efficient cause of evil, He is the efficient cause of the good. The Calvinist compatibilist should not feel obligated to accept that God causes evil in a morally objectionable way simply because WCF 3.1 states that He unchangeably decrees all that comes to pass. Further, even if the Calvinists *were* obligated to accept the causal thesis in defining determinism, it still would not follow that the thesis would be harmful for the Calvinist to uphold. The theory of privation is completely consistent for the Calvinist compatibilist to argue in light of God's sufficient and efficient causation. I think this move is right and it falls in line with (DD).

Anderson further inquires that these types of causation provide us sound reason to adhere to the Creator-creature distinction. He writes that divine causation is "*sui generis* and is thus related only *analogically* to creaturely causation," (Ibid., 207). In summary, *intramundane* causation is similar to what Aristotle may call *formal* causation (i.e., secondary causation), whereas *divine* causation is similar to what Aristotle may call *efficient/sufficient* causation (i.e., primary causation). The *efficiency* of divine causation need not apply to *all things*, but only *some things*, whereas the *sufficiency* of divine causation must apply to *all things* in order to align to WCF 3.1.⁹⁶ In order to use these terms with ease, let α = divine causation, β = intramundane causation while turning to their application in the next section.

2. Models of Providence: Domino versus Authorial⁹⁷

There are at least two models that could be used to describe *how* God determines His providential plan through causation. The first one is probably the most well-known among Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike: The Domino Model of Providence. Anderson notes, and I think correctly, that the main problem with the Domino Model is that it pictures causation "horizontally", or linearly, and not "vertically", or orthogonally, and so picture α and β on the

⁹⁵ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 104. Again Preciado says, as quoted above, "In fact, the reformed argue that God could not be the efficient cause of evil because evil cannot have an efficient cause since it is a privation of the good. Evil or the lawlessness of sin is not something positive; it is a privation of the good. Evil can only exist as a deformity or lack of something good... As a privation, evil is not a positive substance and thus does not need an efficient cause. Since it does not need an efficient cause, God could not possibly be the efficient cause. Though God does not efficiently cause evil, he does permit it by a permissive decree and govern it by providence... However, it is impossible for God to be the efficient cause of the lawlessness," (Ibid., 103-104). The idea of "permission" being compatible with determinism will be dealt with at length in §2.2.8. On deficient causation, see Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 205-6.

⁹⁶ These distinctions between causes will be discussed at length and related to sourcehood freedom and Frankfurt-style counterexamples in §2.5.13.

⁹⁷ For more details on the Authorial Model of Providence, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 156-159.

“same ontological plane”, and so, as Anderson concludes, we should reject this model, even though it is tempting to sort of jump to this conclusion; it is after all, arguably, the easiest and most relatable form of causation that we may be able to picture. He writes, “Not only are Calvinists not committed to anything like such a model, they ought to firmly repudiate it in light of their high doctrine of God,” (Ibid., 208). The Domino Model is vastly different from the Authorial Model in that it allows for secondary causation such as β to occur.

The Authorial Model may be described as the following:

On this way of thinking God’s acts of creation and providence are analogized to the human authoring of a novel. At the ultimate level, the author *determines everything* that takes place in his novel. He creates a world and he populates it with characters. Indeed, he *creates* the characters—in a relative sense, he brings them into existence... The author sets up the circumstances... [in which some] of the characters may commit morally objectionable, even wicked actions—actions which the author himself disapproves, but which are necessary for the sake of the story and its outcome.⁹⁸

According to Anderson, we live in a *novel*, not a computer simulation. With this view of theological causation, α and β are distinct. Anderson continues to flesh out this necessary distinction:

For every creature C: (1) God α -causes C to exist in the first place; (2) God α -causes C to *continue* to exist... (3) God α -causes C to have the β -causal powers that it has... (4) God α -causes C to exercise its β -causal powers in precisely the way it does. Given that α -causation and β -causation operate on different [ontological and temporal] levels, we should avoid saying “God caused C to cause E”, which suggests a univocal, horizontal causal chain [i.e., the Domino Model]... Instead we do better to say “God causes C’s causing or E” – or more precisely, “God α -caused C’s β -causing of E.”⁹⁹

I believe this “industrious” model of Calvinist causation may in fact do the trick, that is, provide a plausible account of secondary and primary causation by demonstrating exactly *how* God determines through causation.¹⁰⁰ Of course, problems remain for the “instrustrious” Calvinist, and Anderson, realizing this, anticipated three objections. I will survey objections 1 and 3, as stated above. To these we now turn, albeit briefly.

1. God the author of sin¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 209

¹⁰⁰ In fact, this model may prove to be useful in some Molinist accounts of providence. Sharing is caring!

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Edwards has an interesting piece in his *Freedom of the Will* in which he states God is the author of evil in *some* sense, as in He *brings about* evil by virtue of the fact that He brought about the

I will not go into too much detail here because I have already mentioned a couple of Calvinists' responses above (see earlier footnote). But, I will try to outline Anderson's defense. Essentially, based upon WCF 3.1 and 5.4, it is not at all clear that God *creates* evil, or, more fundamentally, *authors* evil in a morally objectionable sense. In fact, it points to the opposite. Anderson states that "culpability depends not merely on whether there is a certain kind of causal connection but also on the *intentions* of the agents involved and whether the agents have *morally* justifying grounds for their actions. Causation alone is not sufficient to transfer culpability," (Ibid., 212). In other words, causation does not equal morality, or more precisely, causal responsibility does not necessarily entail moral responsibility. Even if that *were* the case, it still would not follow that *blameworthiness* would pop-out the other side. Why? Because, as Greg Welty notes,

... intentions are not closed under known entailment. If S intends that p, and S knows that p implies q, it does not follow that S thereby intends q. So if God intends the universe he creates because it will manifest some intrinsic value, or promote his glory, or reveal his attributes, and God also knows that the actualization of such a universe implies human sin, it does not follow that God thereby intends or 'desires' human sin.¹⁰²

I think part of this intuition, that moral and causal responsibility are somehow related, has to do with the fact that perhaps moral responsibility entails causal responsibility, but *not the other way around*. But, still, there may be some doubt whether or not causation is "strictly *necessary*" for culpability; it is safe to say at least that "causation [is] not *sufficient* for culpability" because of the fact that intentions are not closed under entailment (that part *must be assumed*) (Anderson, "Calvinism and the First Sin", 212). Thus, Anderson concludes, as I do, that

... divine causal determinism *as such* [interpreted via Authorial Model, therefore orthogonally not horizontally] doesn't obviously entail that God is the author of sin in any morally objectionable sense... The burden of proof thus lies with the critics of Calvinism to show that divine causation *must* transfer or generate moral culpability, at least in some instances, or that even with the best intentions God could not have morally justifying reasons for α -causing his creatures' β -causing of evil.¹⁰³

circumstances in which the evil thrived. He finds this sense unobjectionable. However, the other sense that could be pressed is the sense in which God *creates evil*. He does find that this sense is reprehensible and ought to be rejected. I agree as these different "senses" are what I have been alluding to all along. The first sense is where God is seen as the *sufficient* cause of all things, whereas the second sense, the sense of author that ought to be rejected by all Christians, not just Calvinists, is the sense in which God is seen as the *efficient* cause of all things, *including evil*. For I suppose there is no new objection under the sun. See *Freedom of the Will*, 4.9.

¹⁰² Welty, "Freethinking About Molinist Gunslingers – A Response to Stratton," <http://www.gregwelty.com/2017/04/freethinking-about-molinist-gunslingers-a-response-to-stratton/>. For a similar response, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 188. There he uncovers the equivocation, often made from non-Calvinists, between moral and causal responsibility.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 213.

To be morally culpable for a given action, it must be shown that some form of malign *intent* was present *along with causation*, not simply *that* causation was present. Thus, I don't believe non-Calvinists who press the "God as the author of sin" charge in this way have successfully met their burden. I will speak more on the topic of causal responsibility in relation to moral responsibility in later sections.¹⁰⁴ For now, let us move onto Anderson's third and final anticipated objection.

3. No causal explanation for the first sin or origination of evil

The basic contention is one that states, roughly, if compatibilist literature says that we do what we do based upon desires (or something similar), or more specifically, "S's choice at some time *t* must be sufficiently explained by the conjunction of S's internal state at *t* and S's external circumstances at *t*," then how is it the case that, if Adam was fully good, he could sin (Ibid., 216)? In other words, "how could [Adam] have sinned if he lacked even an inclination" of evil?¹⁰⁵ Is there no causal explanation for the first sin or origination of evil? If Adam did not choose to sin, because he was apparently fully good, indeed morally good, then does this mean God *efficiently* chose the sin for him? Does the evil that Adam chose originate *with God*? Wouldn't that bring us back to objection 1?

First, I, along with Anderson, agree that "Calvinists aren't *necessarily* committed" to this version of compatibilism (Ibid.). This rings more of an Edwardsian compatibilism, but nothing suggests that Calvinists *must* affirm something akin to this type of compatibilism.¹⁰⁶ In fact, contemporary compatibilism via guidance control would work just fine for Calvinists.¹⁰⁷ "Regardless," Anderson writes, "Calvinists *can* affirm that there is a sufficient *ultimate* explanation for Adam's sin: God decreed it. Indeed, there is a sufficient *causal* explanation: God -caused Adam's sinning [i.e. β -causing]," (Ibid.). This is what he has been saying all along, but perhaps this can be seen as a sly "dodge" (one in which Anderson was trying to avoid himself) (Ibid.). We can still conclude, however, that "Adam was created sinless but not impeccable, uncorrupted but not incorruptible," (Ibid., 218). So what does this mean for the compatibilist who wants to also affirm "industrious" divine determinism? Does she not have a causal explanation for the sin of Adam? Is she in trouble?

Alvin Plantinga in, arguably his most famous work, *God, Freedom, and Evil*,¹⁰⁸ suggested that God could not create a world in which there exists significantly free creatures and yet, at the

¹⁰⁴ For example, see the discussion concerning the ontological relationship between moral and causal responsibility, see §2.5.12 in the present work.

¹⁰⁵ Bignon, "Lord Willing and God Forbid" in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 232.

¹⁰⁶ See §5.2 for a discussion on Edwards and the archaic "greatest desire" mantra often raised against Calvinists.

¹⁰⁷ See Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 179-182.

¹⁰⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

same time, ensure the world contains no evil. This has been dubbed the Free Will Defense, and it has been championed among libertarians for decades as a sufficient and even necessary response to moral evil¹⁰⁹ (and natural evil?¹¹⁰). For Plantinga, the idea of “free creature,” though roughly sketched, resonates with (b*) in §2.1.¹¹¹ In order to be counted as significantly free, one must be able to do otherwise. Plantinga then suggested a hypothetical reality which we may call *transworld depravity*. This hypothetical supposedly solves the question as to why God cannot create significantly free creatures and also, at the same time, guarantee the world contains no moral evil. So, the key, and I dare say attractive, idea behind transworld depravity is that “if a person suffers from it, then it wasn’t within God’s power to actualize any world in which that person is significantly free but does no [sin],” (Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 47). So, despite His obvious omnipotence, “no matter who God created, humans always *would* act immorally if left free in the libertarian sense,” (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 146). They would say that “God is off the hook! He couldn’t have caused Adam’s sin! But also, God couldn’t have equally actualized a world in which Adam was free *and* no moral evil would not obtain; these worlds are just not feasible for God. The origin of sin is from humanity, not God.” So it seems that the problem shifts to Calvinists: *do they have a causal explanation for the first sin?* Libertarians can at least posit the Free Will Defense which consists of libertarian free will and transworld depravity. Can the Calvinist do something similar?

If the Calvinist is a (RO) Hard Calvinist, then no, they cannot appeal to the Free Will Defense as an actuality in order to explain away the first sin or the origination of evil (at least not in its entirety).¹¹² This, however, does not mean they do not have any tricks up their sleeves. Suppose that instead of thinking of modal worlds in terms of transworld depravity, we think of modal worlds in terms of *transworld deprivation*. These two modes of worlds may be summarized as follows:

(TWD) Transworld Depravity is the thesis that God cannot create a world full of creatures such that no sin obtains because of their *libertarian contingency*.

(TWD*) Transworld Deprivation is the thesis that God cannot create a world full of creatures such that no sin obtains because of their *ontological contingency*.

¹⁰⁹ For a formidable defense demonstrating that libertarian freedom is neither necessary nor sufficient in its response to the logical problem of evil, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 169-176.

¹¹⁰ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 262.

¹¹¹ Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 29-32.

¹¹² However, it is worth noting the following concession from notable Molinist scholar John D. Laing: “I have long maintained that Calvinists may legitimately make use of the free-will defense because it deals with logical possibility. So even if a Calvinist is uncomfortable with the suggestion that it may have been the case that God could have created a world where, for example, Adam is free and does not sin, he may nevertheless use the argument because it *could* have been the case. In other words, as long as he can say that it is *possible*, he can use the argument,” (“Middle Knowledge and the Assumption of Libertarian Freedom” in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 138n8). So, no, the (RO) Hard Calvinist cannot appeal to the Free Will Defense as an *actuality*, but *hypothetically*, yes, they can. I am inclined to agree.

The former is what Plantinga, and a variety of Molinists, would adhere to, and the latter is something that, I believe, Calvinists may adhere to (maybe even some non-Calvinists). In doing so, the Calvinist can save themselves from the objection that they have no causal explanation for the origination of evil except God Himself causing it, thus avoiding making Him to be the author of evil in the morally objectionable sense (and perhaps avoid an even worse sense than in objection 1). Transworld deprivation claims that it is *not* God who originated evil by determining Adam to sin, nor is it the case that evil originated because of Adam's *libertarian contingency* (freedom), but rather Adam's sheer *ontological contingency* rendered the origination or genesis of evil. How does this work exactly?

God is said to be ontologically perfect. Part of that ontological perfection entails the necessary attributes, such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, that make Him God. In other words, God is not God unless He has these fundamental attributes *necessarily*. He is also said to be perfectly righteous in all his ways (Psalm 145:17). Now, in defense of (TWD*), I posit that God is perfect *because* of His ontological necessity. He cannot help but be perfectly righteous in all His ways, *ontologically*. This means that if He created *ontologically contingent* moral creatures (i.e., humans), they are *necessarily* not God. They do not possess the necessary ontological attributes of God, and they do not possess these attributes necessarily, primarily because these attributes of God are said to be incommunicable. But, if these contingent moral creatures are necessarily not God, then they necessarily do not possess the same ontological attributes of God (i.e., perfect righteousness or perfect moral goodness). So, in short, humans are necessarily not God (a rather remarkable verdict indeed!).

This is obvious, but I believe fundamental as it is a crucial component in understanding (TWD*). If human agents are necessarily not God because of their created ontological contingency, they will never be able to be perfect right after creation. That is to say, when God created Adam, he was not morally perfect, *necessarily*. What this means is that in every possible (indeed feasible) world, God *could not create morally perfect human beings*, even given Calvinist determinism. He could not create morally perfect human beings *not* because of some libertarian contingency embedded into their ontology in which they would always choose evil (TWD), but rather *because of their sheer ontology* (TWD*). Creating morally righteous humans, at the moment of creation, is simply infeasible for God to do. It then follows that if God creates Adam, he would be morally *imperfect*, necessarily.¹¹³ Adam would have suffered from ontological moral

¹¹³ I suppose there would be a variety of rebuttals to (TWD*). Unfortunately, I do not have the space to defend every objection here in this section. However, for now, I suspect that a most common rebuttal, but perhaps not nearly the strongest, would be to point out that Adam could be created morally neutral rather than morally imperfect. The basic idea here is that Adam is supposedly said to be morally "innocent" in Eden, not morally corrupt. I think this objection is misguided for a number of reasons. Nevertheless, I must state at least one rejoinder to this anticipated rebuttal, and it is this: (TWD*) claims moral *deprivation*, not moral *depravity*. To rebut the thesis of (TWD*) by appealing to Adam's moral neutrality virtually does nothing to undermine it as (TWD*) can, and does, claim the same thing; it is not concerned

deprivation, not simply ontological moral *depravity* (although that may very well be the case). If (TWD*) proves true, then this means that it was not within God's power to even *strongly actualize* a world in which Adam did not already possess moral deprivation, or a moral imperfection. Adam's moral imperfection would naturally come about due to his transworld deprivation. As Bignon notes, Adam "would sin if left to his own device... To *sin*, a fallen [morally deprived] human will needs no 'moving' by God; it is what it *would* do naturally apart from a particular divine intervention with special grace [i.e., redemption]." ¹¹⁴ Again, in the words of Anderson, "Adam was created sinless but not impeccable, uncorrupted but not incorruptible," ("Calvinism and the First Sin", 218). God created Adam as sinless and uncorrupted, that is, but not morally *depraved*; however, Adam was not created impeccable or incorruptible as Adam was created morally *deprived*. Adam's contingent moral ontology results in his moral deprivation, and this is in stark contrast with God's necessary moral ontology which results in his moral perfection. ¹¹⁵ Adam was created with an *inclination* to sin; I call that (TWD*), and it seems to be perfectly compatible with determinism.

What this conclusion renders is a plausible account for the Calvinist to explain the origin of Adam's sin without that same explanation bleeding into objection 1 making God the author of sin. The reason why God cannot ensure a world with no moral evil along with significantly free creatures is not primarily due to (TWD), but rather because of (TWD*). In other words, it seems that (TWD) could entail (TWD*). This is why the Calvinist and non-Calvinist alike may enjoy the benefits of (TWD*) without too much philosophical meandering. If this is the case, logically,

- 8. (TWD) \Rightarrow (TWD*) (*premise*)
- 9. \neg (TWD*) (*negation of consequent*)
- 10. $\therefore \neg$ (TWD). (*from (8), (9), Modus Tollens*)

If the non-Calvinist, particularly the mere Molinist, wants to negate (TWD*), it seems they would unduly shoot themselves as they would then be negating (TWD) simultaneously. This does not seem like a healthy move; it would be much easier to assume the truth of (TWD*), so that non-Calvinists and Calvinists alike may reap the benefits in answering the metaphysical genesis of sin. But notice, the Calvinist need not assume the truth of (TWD). She may reject the antecedent without marring the truth of the consequent.

with Adam's accrual of personal guilt via his moral state, and thus resulting in his depravity, but rather (TWD*) is concerned with Adam being morally deprived.

¹¹⁴ Bignon, "Lord Willing and God Forbid" in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 232-233.

¹¹⁵ Preciado is helpful in enlightening these somewhat subtle distinctions: "[Adam] did not have a sinful nature, but a holy nature. Yet this holy nature was not confirmed in righteousness. It was mutable and capable of falling... [Adam] was created holy but capable of sinning," (*A Reformed View*, 89). Of course, this quote relies heavily upon the notion of holiness and righteousness. Holiness, in its traditional sense, simply means to be set apart. And so, Adam can be said to be holy, yet not righteous (or morally perfect).

Therefore, assuming the truth of (TWD*) should relatively be uncontroversial (key word being *relative!*). Under (TWD), God is not responsible for the origination of Adam's morally depraved state due to libertarian contingency. Under (TWD*), God is not responsible for the origination of Adam's morally deprived state due to ontological contingency. Both seem intuitively plausible. If the non-Calvinist can hold to (TWD) in *causally* explaining Adam's sin, then I do not see any good reason why the Calvinist cannot equally hold to something like (TWD*) in *ontologically* explaining Adam's sin. In the very least, if (TWD*) is true, God cannot be held responsible for Adam's *class action of sin*.¹¹⁶ Even if the non-Calvinist grants that God is not responsible for the *class action of sin* in Adam, of course, one could object by pointing out that God may still be responsible for causing Adam's *specific action of sin*. Fair enough. But if that is the case, then I would simply redirect that contention back to Anderson's "industrious" model of Authorial Providence. There, we have found that even if causality were to be utilized in explaining *how* God decrees, it still does not follow that God would be morally culpable as intentions are not known under closed entailment. Thus, we can aptly conclude that although (TWD*) doesn't necessarily grant Calvinists a precisely ideal or neatly presented causal explanation of the first sin, I believe it can grant Calvinists a more than ideal metaphysical or ontological explanation of the origination of sin (at least if sin is seen as a privation of good).¹¹⁷

We can now pose a potent, yet friendly, strategic *tu quoque* response to the non-Calvinist with God's divine involvement in evil, particularly regarding the origination of sin or first sin. If (TWD*) is correct, then this strips away the sting of the objection. Why? Because *all* providential systems must face the problem of the origination of sin. The atheist can, and does, ask why God created the world in the first place if He knew full well that humans *would* sin.¹¹⁸ Yet, we find a similar objection from theists raised against the Calvinist and then they expect a theodicy of some sort in response. (TWD*) has, I believe, the resources to handle these

¹¹⁶ For distinctions between levels of granularity regarding *class actions* and *specific actions*, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 110-119.

¹¹⁷ Perhaps the Calvinist can go further. Perhaps we can say that God knew humanity would suffer from (TWD*), and so, because of this necessary ontological malady, God did not want to *risk* evil; thus, providential determinism would obtain. For more information on this unique, and I think compelling and very plausible maneuver, see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 39-68; Bignon, "Does Compatibilism Entail Determinism? A Pragmatic Argument From Purpose in Evil", <http://theologui.blogspot.com/2014/11/does-compatibilism-entail-determinism.html>. If the non-Calvinist, specifically the mere Molinist, wishes to fight this plausible account by maintaining that their providential system requires no risk, I would have to press and ask for the relevant difference. If they say that God, under Molinism, *weakly actualizes*, whereas God, under Calvinism, *strongly actualizes*, I would respond saying that both cases provide *actualization* regardless of the form of actualization. In fact, Welty has taken similar cues in "Molinist Gunslingers." There he argues that Molinism is relevantly analogous to sufficient causation as Calvinist determinism. We also see Anderson claiming that Molinism still falls into the category of determinism, but it just so happens that it is "non-causal" determinism ("Calvinism and Determinism"). I am inclined to agree.

¹¹⁸ Note that the Open Theist could claim their dynamic omniscience here and say that God doesn't know that humanity *would* sin; thus, "the risk". Fair. But if (TWD*) is true, then the probability of God knowing that humanity would sin rises significantly (and I would dare say, the probability would rise to *near* certainty if not *actually* certain). (TWD*) has to do with God's necessary knowledge, and not his middle or free knowledge.

ecclesiologies.¹¹⁹ The (RO) Hard Calvinist can escape this specific *ecclesiology* often raised against its determinism. Given (TWD*), these Calvinists may logically maintain their commitment to determinism (of any type) in light of God creating the world knowing full well that humanity *would* sin, in every feasible world, while also maintaining God's non-culpable responsibility for Adam's *class action of sin*. They can receive the benefits of answering the origin of sin charge without all the drama of free will. So, if (RO) Hard Calvinism is said to be subject to the objection of the origination of sin, then so are *all* other providential systems due to the truth of (TWD*). Positing (TWD*) does wonders as it places all providential systems on a level-playing field as they all claim that God knows that the *class action of sin* would obtain, no matter what world God actualized, and yet *He still chose to actualize a world anyways*. All theists have to deal with the fact that God created a world in which He knew sin would, or will, reign. What is charged as an *ecclesiology* against the Calvinist ought to be seen as a traditional *theodicy* (or defense) for all Christians. Therefore, as Christians, we should stop with the unnecessary *ecclesiologies*, and answer the atheist objection already (whatever that answer may be).

(RO) Hard “industrious” Calvinists may not be able to fully explain the *causal* origin of the first sin in uncontroversial terms, but that does not mean that they cannot fully explain the *ontological* origin of the first sin in uncontroversial terms. They can and should appeal to something like (TWD*) in order to satisfy and quench the charges that objection 3 brings to them. Therefore, I conclude that the use of causation within theological determinism is not as harmful as one may suggest. The (RO) may be in their rights to claim “industrious” when explaining *how* God decrees.

2.2.4 Summary of Causation in Determinism

Moving past potential objections, and in summary, as well as at the risk of clarity, I will quote Anderson in full in order to conclude our final thoughts on the use of causality in divine determinism:

That still leaves open a lot of questions about the *kind* of causation by which God determines events. Note in particular that causal divine determinism does *not* assert or entail any of the following claims:

- that God is the *only* cause of events (i.e., there are no real second causes);
- that God is the *direct* or *immediate* cause of every event;
- that God always employs *positive* causation and never *negative* causation;
- that divine causation is on a par with *intramundane* causation (i.e., the kind of causation that operates within the created cosmos);

¹¹⁹ My lovely wife actually coined the term. It is meant to be used in a situation where theists ask for a theodicy from another theist: *ecclesia* + *theodicy* = *ecclesiology*.

- that God stands in the same causal relationship to *good* events (or good creaturely actions) as he does to *evil* events (or evil creaturely actions);
- that the language of ‘permission’ is inappropriate or incoherent when speaking of God’s relationship to evil.¹²⁰

In other words, a causal divine determinist can reject *all of the above* without falling into any obvious logical contradiction. It’s also important to see that causal divine determinism doesn’t entail causal determinism in the technical sense defined earlier (i.e., nomological determinism). The verbal similarity may tempt one to make that connection, but the two views are logically distinct.¹²¹

As we finally wrap up this particular excursus concerning the use of causality and its potential harm within theological determinism, a couple of words are in order. First, I want to grant the fact that Stratton does have *divine* embedded into his EDD definition. However, since I see no formal articulation of the word “divine” other than the implication that this type of determinism comes from God and thus theological, I don’t see his use of it as helpful nor instructively relevant. The primary concern is that Stratton neither articulates the varying distinctions nor addresses that there *are* in fact varying distinctions or types of theological determinism available. I find this to be sincerely lacking. When we have comprehensive definitions and types of theological determinism such as Anderson’s, it is hard to see why Stratton would restrict his types of determinism to either scientific determinism or EDD, both of which are elementary in their sophistication, articulation, and basicity when compared to the types of determinism discussed above. The Calvinist need not, and should not, merely be restricted to the redundant “EDD”.

Secondly, going back to Anderson’s formulation of (DD), it seems he is directing our attention to what *a* form of “industrious” Calvinism would look like, one which can affirm the notion of causation without being necessarily or overly harmful (as detailed above). Do Calvinists need to affirm the use of causality in determinism?¹²² No, and following after Welty, apophatic definitions are perfectly called for according to the WCF, so a “mysterian” approach can still get the job done by evading potentially harmful notions of causation. However, if pushed for an explanation on exactly *how* God determines, one could find great use by appealing to the mechanism of divine causality while equally evading potentially harmful consequences.¹²³ If

¹²⁰ For an awesome exposition on the use of divine permission language for the (RO) Hard Calvinist, see Bignon, “Lord Willing and God Forbid”. There he argues that in order to claim permission, one must have an *active* and *passive* pairing of counterfactuals, and if true, that is compatible with Calvinist determinism. See §2.2.8 for more discussion.

¹²¹ Anderson, “Calvinism and Determinism,” <https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/calvinism-and-determinism/>

¹²² As an aside, this conclusion is apparently contrary to Stratton, however. One must only peruse around the philosophy chapter of *Mere Molinism* and there he will find an obnoxious amount of conflation between “cause”, “determinism”, and “force” (all of which are just taken to be true and assumed).

¹²³ Again, contrary to Stratton: “... does this imply that God is forcing (causing) some/many people to believe false propositions?” (*Mere Molinism*, 172). Where is the argument for forcefulness being even

that's the case, I believe Anderson's approach works just fine. At any rate, it is safe to say that causal notions mixed with determinism are not necessary nor are they necessarily mutually exclusive; they could prove to be useful in answering some of the more dominant objections raised against the Calvinist.¹²⁴

Thus far in our dialectic concerning theological determinism, we have seen Stratton's ailing definition of "EDD" which unfortunately forsook a variety of important and arguably helpful distinctions. The first of these distinctions included the *comprehensiveness of determinism*. Is determinism defined as *exhaustive* or *non-exhaustive*, and can one maintain the latter while remaining cogent? We have seen that determinism should be seen, by definition, as *exhaustive* and that positing *non-exhaustive* determinism is an irrelevant distinction if one wants to maintain indeterminism; thus, it is not cogent as it is really a distinction without a difference, and a redundant one at that. Second, we have attempted to ask *what form of determinism* is necessary for determinism. If we place a seemingly overbearing causal mechanism in its definition, does this produce harmful effects? We have concluded that the Calvinist indeed does not, and need not, be committed to causal types of determinism; instead, they may rest content in their "mysterian" Calvinism and thus be committed to an apophatic definition instead of a more "industrious" type. In both the *comprehensiveness* and *type* of determinism, we have found no overly harmful effects for the Calvinist.

Now, before we officially conclude this section on determinism, a few more pressing questions are found to be lingering concerning the definition of determinism and its supposedly dirty implication: 1. *What is the location of determinism?* Are we determined *internally* to do as we do, or *externally*? Does it matter? Which one does theological determinism affirm? Is this harmful for Calvinist theology? 2. *What is the form of determinism?* In other words, should we view determinism as an *absolute* necessity or a *hypothetical* necessity? Lastly, 3. *What is the displacement of determinism?* If God determines, must that determination be understood strictly as *positive* or *negative*? *Passive* or *active*? What is the difference? We will treat each of these concerns in order.

2.2.5 Location of Determinism

The location of determinism may not seem to be a relevant factor, but according to Stratton, it most certainly is a relevant factor, if not *the* relevant factor. Rest assured, as we shall see, once again, Stratton's "EDD" definition bakes into a presumption: *all determinism must be external to the agent*. I can only assume that if Stratton thinks the location of determinism is primarily

remotely equivalent to causation? It is found nowhere in *Mere Molinism*. In fact, this has already been sufficiently dealt with in Calvinistic literature decades before Stratton even became interested in the debate behind freedom and responsibility. See John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 641-642.

¹²⁴ For more discussion on determinism, causation, and reformed theology, see Matthew J. Hart, *Theological Determinism*, 12-15 (section 1.3).

external, then this would produce a devastating attack on (RO) Hard Calvinism. If external determinism obtains, then the locus of our agency would somehow disappear.¹²⁵ Is Stratton correct in positing that the location is primarily external? No, and by a long shot. But, before we begin to pick away at the relevant differences between external and internal determination, let's show that Stratton is, unequivocally, committed to the claim that determinism *must* be external if it is to remain a proper definition of determinism (Stratton gives us no other reason to think otherwise).

On page 2, Stratton writes that “if everything about a human being is caused or determined [notice the conflation!] *by external factors*, then this would imply that human beings do not possess the freedom to think or act,” (*Mere Molinism*; emphasis added). Granted, this quote is in the midst of the section labeled “Scientific Determinism,” and as such, the view arguably knows *no other* location of determinism other than external, nor can it possibly account for another location. What would it mean for the scientific causal or otherwise physical (i.e., nomological) laws of nature to determine an agent *internally*?

Moving onto page 5 of *Mere Molinism*: “An agent, although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, is free to think otherwise and make his or her own decisions... according to reason and without being completely controlled by deterministic laws of nature *or some other external cause*,” (Ibid.; emphasis added). It is evident that, according to Stratton, being able to “make his or her own decisions” is synonymous with *not* being determined by external causes.

On page 18, Stratton affirms that “causal determinism” is the view that states

... all things are governed by forces of nature.... On this common view, human beings are not in control or responsible for anything they think or believe or how they act or behave. These things are not “up to the person.” On a deterministic paradigm these things are “up to” (so to speak) the laws and forces of nature. In the biblical context determinism means the *way things go* is up to God and fixed by God.¹²⁶

As aforementioned, this is clearly question-begging (why are we not in control or responsible?). But besides that, we see now that Stratton wants to tag on the fact that if determinism is true, nothing is “up to” the agent, and thus nothing that the agent does is within their voluntary

¹²⁵ “Bottom line: If it is assumed that things external to the thing you call “I” determines every single thought and belief of the thing you call “I” — then the “I” begins to vanish, if not completely disappear!” (Stratton, “The Vanishing ‘I’”, <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-vanishing-i/>. Interestingly, and also humorously, Fischer and Ravizza have already touched on this objection in *Responsibility and Control*. They openly admit that “If we are to be secure in our view of ourselves as persons, the challenges from causal determinism must be addressed,” (25). This is primarily the reason why they formulated *mechanism ownership* over Frankfurt’s mesh theory. Whether or not this move is successful (as I personally take it to be) is something we shall repeatedly discuss throughout the present reply.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

control. First, this equivocates control to mean regulative control, and not guidance control (discussed in §4.3). Secondly, we see another source requirement embedded in the definition: if determinism is true, then we are not the source of our actions. Why? Well, according to Stratton, presumably because the *external* laws and forces of nature (or God) would run the show, not us.

Fastforwarding through *Mere Molinism*, on page 163, regarding van Inwagen's Consequence Argument, Stratton concludes the following:

The CA [Consequence Argument] suggests, then, that if determinism is true, humanity is powerless or not responsible, in an "up to us" sense, for their thoughts or actions because (i) thoughts and actions were causally determined [again, causality has been shown to not be a necessary ingredient in the definition of determinism] by something *external to humanity*...¹²⁷

Again,

Although libertarian freedom seems to be the kind of freedom worth wanting or having, there are questions which remain: "Do humans actually have this kind of freedom? If so, how does one know? Are some of a person's thoughts, actions, beliefs, and behaviors ultimately decided by the person, *or are they always determined by external factors*?"¹²⁸

On the Freethinking Argument Against Naturalism, Stratton writes:

(A₃) communicates the fact that "if something *outside of human control* causally determines you to affirm a false belief, then it would be impossible for you to infer or affirm a better belief—let alone the truth!" If all things are *outside of human control*...¹²⁹

Though I obviously disagree with this absurd conclusion, which will be made clear later in the relevant section, we see once more this idea of *external* determinism or *outside-of-human-control* determinism prevalent in *Mere Molinism*.

My personal favorite:

Determinism implies that a human being's thoughts and beliefs are causally determined by *external factors*.¹³⁰

I think a few more quotes are in order:

¹²⁷ Ibid. (emphasis added)

¹²⁸ Ibid., 167 (emphasis added)

¹²⁹ Ibid., 167-168 (emphasis added)

¹³⁰ Ibid., 168 (emphasis added)

Rather, their [determinists'] very conclusion about determinism would simply be determined by *external factors* (perhaps chemistry and physics)...¹³¹

... the evaluative thoughts a person may *feel* are governing his deliberations are actually caused and determined by things (or persons) *external to him*. He is making no decision; it was made for him!¹³²

If any stripe of exhaustive determinism is true, then the evaluative thoughts a person may *feel* he is responsible for are actually caused and determined by factors *external to him*.¹³³

Premise D₁, however, seems true because, if everything about a person (the thing one refers to as "I") is exhaustively causally determined by *something other than oneself*...¹³⁴

... since they were causally determined to think and believe by *something other than themselves*.¹³⁵

... even if one asserts that libertarian freedom exists but the ability to think otherwise does not, then nothing ever really "makes a difference" because no one can really think other than the way he does think—even if he is not causally determined via an *external source*.¹³⁶

If exhaustive causal determinism of any flavor is true – if something other than or *external to the self* is causally determining all thoughts – then as Craig pointed out... "even this very thought itself, is outside your control..."¹³⁷

Lastly,

To summarize, if free thinking does not exist, then a person does not possess any epistemic ability to assess or evaluate his or her thoughts and beliefs. Further, if an agent is *not the source and originator of his own beliefs* (and something *external to the person* is causally determining the person's thoughts), then he is left merely assuming his or her determined thoughts are good...¹³⁸

¹³¹ Ibid., 169 (emphasis added)

¹³² Ibid., 170 (emphasis added on "*external to him*")

¹³³ Ibid., 172 (emphasis added on "*external to him*")

¹³⁴ Ibid., 174 (emphasis added)

¹³⁵ Ibid. (emphasis added)

¹³⁶ Ibid., 177 (emphasis added)

¹³⁷ Ibid., 179 (emphasis added on "*external to the self*")

¹³⁸ Ibid. (emphasis added)

Although this list of quotes is not exhaustive, it is certainly comprehensive. I am confident that there are more quotes I could pull from *Mere Molinism* indicating the same claims as above. That said, my point is to not be obnoxiously repetitive (at least not anymore than Stratton himself), but rather my point is to show just how overwhelmingly committed Stratton is to the *external location* of determinism. According to him, the location of determinism is external; anything short of that is unintelligible.¹³⁹ I truly see no other reason to think otherwise (again, pun intended). But we also see embedded within these quotes the dual commitment to defining determinism as *causal* determinism. Our excursus above showed that causality is not necessarily wed to the definition of determinism, so it is strange why Stratton continues to be committed to such a definition especially when van Inwagen himself doesn't even think this is the case, and clearly, he is no friend to the compatibilist nor determinist.¹⁴⁰ Concerning theological determinism, we have also seen that although we can industriously use causation in our definition, it is not necessary. In both situations, determinism *simpliciter* works wonders and does the job just fine. But, that aside, let's be charitable and grant Stratton the causal notion of determinism. Even though Anderson showed above that secondary causation may be preserved within the Authorial Model of Providence, and thus responsibility along with a sense of freedom necessary for said responsibility, while not being overly harmful to the determinist, let us kindly give causation to Stratton. If we are to focus solely on the *location* of determinism, and instead of simultaneously juggling the *type* of determinism, then the question may very well turn into whether causation entails external causes or internal causes. In both cases, I will address whether causation is harmful. In order to address whether causation is harmful to promote, we will see that, in both cases, either external or internal, causation does in fact depend upon the *method of causation*; whether the causation was produced in the right way. I will focus on internal causes first, then briefly merge external causes into the discussion.

¹³⁹ When I pressed him on this exact question in personal correspondence, he responded with this: "It can be internal, but if we are the source of these things, then we possess libertarian freedom. If God causally determines an individual's (internal) nature, which in turn causally determines how the agent chooses (the only way things could have been), then God ultimately causally determined the agent's so-called 'choice' (this seems to be metaphysical dominoes). Only if source-hood libertarian freedom is factored into the mix can the human determine anything that actually makes a difference," ("The Location of Determinism," <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-location-of-determinism/>).

Obviously he says much more to this response in the article, which I hope I will try to cover as much as possible when we reach the philosophical section. Needless to say, the quote here is clearly question-begging. Stratton does not understand how you can be a source of your actions while still being compatible with determinism. It's not simply that God determines our "internal nature." That's *what* God determines; I am speaking of *how* God determines, something which Stratton completely misrepresented. So this quote is already a heaping mess. He not only assumes the Domino Theory of Providence (which I, as well as other Calvinists, like Anderson, reject), but he also begged the question against source compatibilism (a view that will be discussed a bit later in relevant sections). Why is it the case that only if efficient causal sourcehood is present, *that* can "make a difference" with regards to responsibility? Because the agent would have access to efficient causal categorical evaluative judgment options? Why is that necessary? We are not told, and I am still patiently waiting.

¹⁴⁰ Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 65.

I said earlier that if something like secular scientific determinism were true, then there probably wouldn't be room to posit a coherent sense of internal causation, for what would it mean to say that the laws and forces of nature internally determine or work through an agent to do as they do? Usually, those who affirm scientific determinism affirm naturalism, and as Stratton would agree, if naturalism is true, then there doesn't seem to be any "self" or any locus of agency residing within the individual through which the method of causation could work. For theological determinism or compatibilism, this is a different story. We can have causal notions of *divine* determinism work internally to us and in tandem to our locus of agency *without* damaging or circumventing our agency.¹⁴¹ And, additionally, contrary to what Stratton has implied above with his quotes, we can be *a* source to our actions regardless of whether or not determinism is true.

Thaddeus J. Williams, theology professor at Biola University, argues it is often the case that libertarians lean towards assuming the fact that if something like determinism is true, then this must mean God's determining influence *circumvents* our agency. He writes that, in what he calls, "Heart Circumvention,"

God's role in [an agent's] "choice" to "love" Him is that of "Heart Circumvention" if God acts in some [external] way that *coercively bypasses her heart* such that any "love" for God is not an expression of her desires but of divine force.¹⁴²

Admittedly and in fairness, I will note that Williams actually uses the word *internal* instead of *external*. I personally disagree with Williams' word choice here, but the point he is making is equal to mine. I don't see the word change as deceptive to the reader, nor to the libertarian. To see this, think about the word *bypass* instead. Imagine you are driving from A to B. You take a road that you come to realize is blocked off. Instead of heading down that road, you are directed to an alternate route. You are said to *bypass* the road by taking the detour. However, the destination is the same after the detour: you arrive at B. Now, Williams' point is that if God determines an agent in such a way as to *bypass* or *circumvent* the agent's "internal, convergent, and prevailing" reasons, then this circumvention would be seen as forced and not free.¹⁴³ In this scenario, God is said to *bypass* the agent's "inner telos" or their "mechanism ownership."¹⁴⁴ For

¹⁴¹ For more information on specifically how strong providence (i.e., Calvinist determinism) can be reconciled with Christian accountability, see Helm, *Providence*, chapter 7. Helm discusses his take on "industrious" providence by offering four models: 1. Evil as privation, 2. Divine permission, 3. Divine compatibilism, and 4. Causal levels. Each model, he argues, sheds substantial light on how Calvinist deterministic providence may be reconciled with our accountability. Additionally John Feinberg has written extensively on God's decree, strong deterministic sovereignty, compatibilism and its many objections. See *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), chapter 14.

¹⁴² Thaddeus Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?*, (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi B.V., 2011), 120. (emphasis added)

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴⁴ This is a similar formulation from that of Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*: "... an agent exhibits guidance control of (for example) an action to the extent that the action issues from *his own, reasons-responsive mechanism*... the mechanism's being the *agent's own*, and its being appropriately responsive to reasons." (170; emphasis added on "*his own, reasons-responsive mechanism*").

this reason, I see no difference between positing *external* instead of *internal* in the above Williams quote. The detour is *external* to the initial road that would have been taken to travel from point A to point B. So while Williams might use the word *internal*, I think it is fair to replace the word with *external* as his point shows that by definition, *bypass* and *circumvention* entail *external* location.

That aside, Williams continues to exposit what he means by “Heart Circumvention”:

[God] bypasses the human will in such a way that morally relevant human agency is lost... There can be no “man” if God practices Heart Circumvention. With human desires, aversions, and reasons and intentions voided by an exercise of divine force, man reduces to the level of a machine.¹⁴⁵

This is why in Williams’ earlier quote, the word “choice” is in quotations. Under Heart Circumvention, there is no choice for the agent. Clearly, Stratton thinks this is exactly what Calvinist determinism entails.¹⁴⁶ This is nothing but a bare straw-man. Calvinist determinism is more akin to holding, and teaching, the following:

Heart Reformation: God’s role in [an agent’s] choice to love Him is that of “Heart Reformation” if God acts in some *internal* way that effectively [and sufficiently] changes the moral orientation of her heart so that she willingly chooses to love Him and cannot ultimately choose otherwise.¹⁴⁷

This kind of internal determination at play is one in which “God reforms a human heart” in such a way that is *through* the agent’s inner telos, and not absent of their agential mechanism (Ibid.). Williams continues and summarizes the two “models” of determinism:

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 127.

¹⁴⁶ See Stratton’s blog articles regarding love: <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-best-kind-of-love/>; <https://freethinkingministries.com/does-true-love-require-libertarian-free-will-a-response-to-greg-koukl/>. Additionally, he writes, “It is easy to see, then, why some determinists... claim that human choices are illusory. This illusion would include, of course, the choice [itself],” (*Mere Molinism*, 168-169). Moreover, he posted a Facebook status last year on the conclusion of the popular Disney+ show, *WandaVision*: “Free Will. Determinism. ‘Meat Puppets.’ True Love. Hell. ‘Identity Metaphysics.’ WandaVision.” I think it is safe to say *he thinks* determinism entails “meat puppets.” Clever. But, thankfully not the case (plus, Bignon already settled this charge in chapter 1, *Excusing Sinners*). The problem is that this is “Heart Circumvention”, and not what determinism claims nor needs to entail. Even more interestingly, *if* determinism is considered as external, then *perhaps* Stratton would be right as the characters on the show were *externally* controlled by Wanda. Perhaps. But I see no reason why determinism *must* be considered external. This is Williams’ point as well. For more discussion on how this “Puppet Threat” against determinism and compatibilist agency does not work despite the alleged pumping intuitions, see Heath White, *Fate and Free Will: A Defense of Theological Determinism*, (Notre Dame: IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), chapter 6. White’s defense is a bit different from Bignon’s in its structure, articulation, and overall quality, but virtually the same in its content.

¹⁴⁷ Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 120. (emphasis added)

... there is a qualitative distinction between Heart Reformation and Heart Circumvention (though the two are often conflated in the contemporary literature). When God reforms a heart, the human creature is left intact as a morally relevant agent with active power. Our center of choice-making power is not circumvented, but infused with new supernatural habits.¹⁴⁸

Heart Reformation is seen as internal determination, whereas Heart Circumvention is seen as external determination. The latter is often conflated to be what Calvinism teaches and/or entails, but in reality, it is actually the former; hence, the straw-man. In other words, under normal cases of Calvinist determinism, God does not work *against* our wills nor does He *bypass* or *circumvent* our agency, rather He works *through* our wills. That is a pristine relevant difference.

If the location of determinism is necessarily external, perhaps we are just “meat puppets”, or “robots”, or coerced into said action; but even so, we would still need an argument for *why* that must necessarily follow.¹⁴⁹ In relation to these colorful claims often made by incompatibilists, Bignon powerfully comments on these mistakes. He writes,

Is a determinist choice necessarily coerced [or circumvented]? It is hard to see why it would be. On the theistic compatibilist account, all human choices are determined by God’s providential decree, but on the pain of begging the question, incompatibilists cannot assume that the *only way* to operate such an efficacious decree is to use *force or threats* [i.e., external causation]... in usual cases of human free choices, God does not determine the actions of humans *against* their wills, but *through* their wills. God usually employs neither threats nor physical force, but rather, he providentially influences human hearts [via Heart Reformation] to willingly accomplish his purposes in all things.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 127.

¹⁴⁹ In fact, Reformed (RO) Hard Calvinist scholar John Frame claims that even if it were the case that humans are nothing more than robotic automaton functioning animatronically under God’s strong deterministic providence, it does not and *should not* negate the beauty and grandeur that is presently residing in the *imago dei* of humanity. He writes in his critically acclaimed piece of work, *The Doctrine of God*, 146-147:

What if it turns out that we are robots, after all... Should we complain to God about that?... would it not be a privilege to be born as an intelligent robot?

Indeed, what remarkable robots we would be—capable of love and intimacy with God, and assigned to rule over all the creatures. Is it not a wonderful blessing of grace that, when we sinned in Adam, God did not simply discard us, as a potter might very well do with his clay, and as a robot operator might well do with his malfunctioning machine, but sent his only Son to die for us?

The reader may take this quote as he wishes. Clearly, Frame is content in placing his chips in the Calvinist “mysterian” basket. I for one, identifying more as an “industrious” Calvinist, am not satisfied with the response. However, Bignon and White’s response to the robot analogy leveled critically against Calvinists by opposing philosophers and theologians alike shall suffice. Again, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, chapter 1 or White, *Fate and Free Will*, chapter 6.

¹⁵⁰ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 23. (emphasis added on “only way”) See also Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 528.

With Bignon's quote in mind, we see that if causal determinism must be utilized in our definition of determinism, and if the location of the cause is said to be external, then perhaps the indeterminist may have a warranted conclusion that God's determinative decree does indeed produce something akin to Heart Circumvention, and as a result, our agency, along with our responsibility, would indeed be forfeited. However, even if that could be the case, we need an argument for why that *must* be the case. In the meantime, the Calvinist can simply circle back and say that, in the normal cases of determinism, God determines *internally* to the agent without bypassing the locus of agency. Our self-consciousness, our sentient "God-given-ness"¹⁵¹ is still present within the determination, and thus, our responsibility, agency, and personhood; contrary to what Stratton may assume with his external determinism.¹⁵²

Williams concludes the following:

... a rejection of libertarian free will does not require the theologian to give up all meaningful human action. Rejecting libertarian free will does not logically force us to embrace a coercive deity who circumvents human hearts... [Heart Reformation] features a compatibilistic rather than libertarian account of human free will.¹⁵³

The method of causation used within determinism need not be external to the agent, but rather internal to the agent, thereby rescuing the most important aspect of the agent: *themselves*! The agent remains an agent, a person, even in the midst of causal determinism as long as their agency, or inner telos, is not bypassed, coerced, or circumvented. This seems right to me. In fact, to solidify the prevailing point a bit further, in an essay considering common sense views of freedom, or what we may also call "folk intuitions," philosopher Adam Feltz states,

... determinism should be distinguished from 'bypassing.' Bypassing occurs when one's mental states do not play a role in the production of an action. One can think free will and moral responsibility to be compatible with determinism while thinking that they are incompatible with bypassing. Determinism does not entail that an agent's mental states are bypassed or irrelevant to the production of the action. This distinction could explain why participants judge people not to be morally responsible for their actions in the abstract condition.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ This criterion of "God-given-ness" is the brainchild of Bignon while seeking to discover the relevant difference between determinism and manipulation in order to preserve the compatibility of freedom and determinism. This interesting little criterion will be discussed further in §2.3.4-5.

¹⁵² For more on agency, self-consciousness, coercion, and manipulation, and whether or not determinism entails harmful consequences for responsibility, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, chapters 1-4. In chapter 3, Bignon uses his criterion of an agent's "God-giveness" as the mechanism in which a cosmic manipulator must bypass in order to effectively manipulate an agent. If bypassed, the agent is not morally responsible.

¹⁵³ Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 129-130.

¹⁵⁴ Adam Feltz, "Folk Intuitions", *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*, 470. We will return to our consideration of "common sense views" in §4.8.

“Determinism,” Feltz says, need not “entail that an agent’s mental states are bypassed or irrelevant to the production of the action.” Agreed. Free will, according to *compatibilists*, is incompatible with determinism *if* that determining mechanism *bypasses* agency. But why should *all* kinds of determinations simply by virtue of being external to the agent necessarily be seen as bypassing agency? Compatibilist philosopher Lynne Rudder Baker adds to Feltz by defending the following:

Unlike the libertarian, the compatibilist does not think that external causes of decisions or actions *per se* threaten moral responsibility; moral responsibility is precluded only by certain kinds of external causes—those that by-pass the agent’s own psychological contribution involving his first-person perspective.¹⁵⁵

This is essentially Williams’ argument: there is a difference between external causes that *bypass* agency, and external causes that *reform* or *go through* agency. Simply because the determiner is external to the agent *does not* mean that the agent loses agency and moral responsibility. In order for that to happen, I contend, the determination would have to be classified as bypassing or circumventing agency and thus void of any “first-person perspective.” But, determinism simpliciter need not contain this type of determination. Determinism (although external to the agent) that ultimately reforms our agency has not been shown to prove fatal for compatibilism. Therefore, Calvinist causal determinism does not entail its location to be external, *necessarily*, but rather it could very well be understood as internal, contrary to what Stratton assumes. Stratton fails to realize this basic distinction deeply discussed in both the philosophical and theological literature; he either fails to realize the distinction or he is ignorant of it, both of which look poorly on his research.

As John M. Fischer summarizes,

... not all causal sequences are “created equal.” More specifically, the compatibilist wishes to insist that not all causally deterministic sequences undermine freedom; a straightforward and “upfront” commitment of the compatibilist is to the idea that we can distinguish among causally deterministic sequences, and more specifically, that we can distinguish those that involve “compulsion” [i.e., external bypass via heart circumvention] (or some freedom - and responsibility - undermining factor) from those that do not [i.e., internal heart reformation]... Yes, it is a basic commitment of the compatibilists... that not all causally deterministic sequences undermine freedom equally.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Moral Responsibility Without Libertarianism”, *Noûs* 42 (2006), 14, <https://people.umass.edu/lrb/files/bak06morM.pdf>.

¹⁵⁶ John M. Fischer, “Compatibilism” in *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 52-53.

This is exactly right. Even if the compatibilist grants causation, we can still maintain the fact that “not all causally deterministic sequences undermine freedom equally.” Incompatibilists must give an answer as to why determinism is supposed to be understood in a special way; that is to say, understood in a way that definitionally undermines freedom *without* begging the question against compatibilism.¹⁵⁷ In order for incompatibilists to be successful here, at the very least, they must give an answer that is “uncontroversially recognized to rule out freedom and responsibility,” (Fischer, “Compatibilism”, 53). That has not been done. Both compatibilists and incompatibilists can agree that if something like Heart Circumvention happens, then positing agential characteristics is futile. But, why must determinism be understood, necessarily, as Heart Circumvention by virtue of external causation? We are not told, at least not in an uncontroversial way that doesn’t first beg the question against compatibilism.

Perhaps this is where Stratton may object and spout something of the following: “Ah! But you see, God is *external to the agent*! Since He is external to the agent, how can *you* be considered an agent at all? God is the one who causally determines you to do what you do! ‘Bottom line, if an agent is *exhaustively* (thought, action, etc.) causally determined by something or someone else, then... agents are rendered to nothing but ‘passive cogs’ at the mercy of some external force.’”¹⁵⁸ Now, one thing needs to be clear: if determining sequences may differ, as Fischer suggests, as well as the determining location, as Bignon and Williams suggest, then we can additionally distinguish between the determiner of the action and the determining mechanism. In Stratton’s objection, the causal determiner is God, and the Calvinist compatibilist agrees (except, again, the causal notion may be left out; it is unnecessary as we have seen above). But, this is uncontroversial. Of course, God is external to the agent; however, it does not follow that the determining mechanism *must also* be external. There is a difference between the *determiner* of the mechanism and the *determining* mechanism. The determiner of the mechanism is indeed *external* to the agent, but the determining mechanism is *internal* to the agent (at least if theological compatibilism is upheld). Now Stratton wants to argue that if you are not the *determiner* or *source* of the action, then the *determining* mechanism seems to be irrelevant. The location of the determining agent is said to sort of “trump” the location of the determining mechanism. And since, in the case of God, He is the determining source, and so, *how* God

¹⁵⁷ It is extremely noteworthy to mention the fact that, arguably, the chief source incompatibilist Kevin Timpe actually *agrees* with his compatibilists friends concerning the fact that not all causal sequences are the same, and thus, cannot be utilized as a defeater for determinism. He writes, “Another typical initial confusion regarding compatibilism is to think that if determinism is true, then the causal processes which bring about our volitions are constrained or coerced in a way that undermines our freedom. But determinism does not imply that the causal processes which result in our volitions act contrary to our wills; instead it says that they are a necessary causal contributor to the volition in question,” (*Free Will* (2e), 20).

¹⁵⁸ Stratton agrees with this retort verbatim in personal correspondence via Facebook comment (accessed 3/8/21).

determines is irrelevant.¹⁵⁹ What is said to be relevant, according to Stratton, is the determiner (the “what”), not the determining mechanism (the “how”). *Au contraire*.

First, why should the dialectic be solely focused on the determiner of the agent? That answer has certainly not been given uncontroversially. Second, why should we also not look at whether or not the determined agent is determined in the relevant sense? Doesn’t Stratton believe in a kind of determinism non-exhaustively? Apparently that kind of determinism doesn’t rule out responsibility *simpliciter*. Why? Perhaps because the agent *is* determined in the relevant sense, or a sense in which his responsibility is not undermined.¹⁶⁰ Third, building off of the second point, why must the location of the *determiner* of the agent be what is considered as responsibility undermining and *not* the location of the *determining* mechanism? I would submit that the determiner of the agent may be external, but *that* is irrelevant. The determining mechanism is actually what is relevant, because if the determining mechanism is external, then *that* is what leads to circumvention (and thus responsibility undermining), even if the determiner is external. But if the determiner is external, and the determining mechanism is internal, this can be seen as a reformation in accordance with our will, and not an agential bypass. That is not the case if the determining mechanism were considered as *external* because that mechanism would presumably run *against* the agential mechanisms produced by the will of the individual. I fail to see how an external determiner can produce that level of consequence when it is really the *mechanism*, not the determiner, that ultimately runs through the agent. And so, it is the type of mechanism, rather than a mere external determiner, that matters most when considering agential or personal responsibility (and thus freedom). Given that compatibilists have long maintained that the determining mechanism *is* what is relevant, Stratton seems to beg the question against compatibilists by asserting that it is not. It seems that Stratton wants to implant the definition of determinism into his case and then expects compatibilists to agree that determinism is determinism (“EDD is EDD”). He states that the “problems persist no matter how one is exhaustively determined,” but I don’t see how he can come to that conclusion given Fischer’s quote above; “the problems” seem to persist *only if* one already thinks that determinism is the problem.¹⁶¹ That’s question-begging. While the determining mechanism may not be considered

¹⁵⁹ This is point-blank contrary to Stratton’s own words: “The *how* is irrelevant. EDD is EDD and the problems persist no matter how one is exhaustively determined,” (Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 27).

¹⁶⁰ I am not speaking of responsibility in the *desert* sense here, as Stratton argues it is incompatible with determinism of any stripe. Rather, I am simply pointing out that Stratton himself implicitly argues that there *are* relevant senses in which we are to take something to be determined.

¹⁶¹ In fact, this is *exactly* the response Carolina Sartorio gives to source incompatibilists. See *Causation & Free Will*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 151-152. She writes,

The challenge to our freedom, I claimed, is not posed by determinism on its own but by a combination of two main assumptions. The first of these assumptions is determinism, or something close to determinism, but the second is the assumption that we are *causally impotent* toward some of the (deterministic) causes of our acts... It seems, then, that the problem arises only if we assume that our acts are the inevitable consequence of events that are beyond our causal reach... But this suggests that the very formulation of the problem of determinism and free will guarantees that [source incompatibilism] won’t be satisfied. The ultimacy condition must be

relevant to the incompatibilist, it most certainly *is* relevant to the compatibilist as *that* is what grounds responsibility for the agent under their view. If Stratton wishes to gain yards against compatibilists, then he must not assume that the “how” is irrelevant, otherwise it is question-begging. Incompatibilists stress the determiner of the mechanism (the “source”). Compatibilists stress the determining mechanism (the “how”). Stratton needs to attack the “how” if he wants to remain in the debate, rather than reassert his argument and simply attack straws.¹⁶²

But, in the interest of charity, let’s continue to grant that the causal notion, or the causal mechanism, that is supposedly wed to determinism is in fact located external to the agent, not internal, in alignment with Stratton’s definition. Let’s additionally grant that God being the determining *causal source*, external to the agent, is what rules out responsibility, contrary to what compatibilists would contend, but what Stratton seems to argue. If this were the case, then this would certainly be a problem for the compatibilist as agents would be excused and God would be blamed; but is there an argument for this assumption? Earlier, I mentioned, and even conceded, that *perhaps* if determinism entailed an external causal mechanism, this *might* mean agency is completely lost in the same way Stratton thinks. But, I quickly added the caveat that if that is the case, if determinism entailed an external causal mechanism by virtue of an external determiner, we would still need an argument from the incompatibilist for why agency *is in fact* lost. To jump from a descriptive to a normative evaluation seems highly suspect to a blatant “is-ought” fallacy. To put it another way, Stratton argues (countless times) that if something external to the agent causally determined the agent to think, believe, will, etc., then the agent is excused and the determining agent (i.e., God) is to be blamed precisely because it was *not* “up to” the agent, but rather the action was “up to” the determining agent: God. In other words, blame is said to be placed upon the agent that possesses the *causal source* of the action. Since God is said to be the *causal source* of the action, or the determiner of the action, He is responsible, not the agent. This alludes to Stratton’s qualifier (a): being the source of an action is said to be a necessary condition in order for the agent to be considered as responsible in any fashion (moral or rational). Stratton claims that the agent must always be the *causal source* of the action in order to properly be held responsible; the agent must be the determiner of the action, *regardless* of the location of the mechanism. That is what seems to be most important to Stratton and his incompatibilist buddies. And so, the argument goes, if the agent is causally determined via an external source to do as they do, they cannot be the originator or causal source of the action, and if that is the case, they

violated in order for there to *be* a problem at all. And thus the ultimacy condition cannot be used in an *argument* for incompatibilism.

But, unfortunately for Stratton, we see just that: the ultimacy condition being used as an argument for incompatibilism, and thus responsibility undermining for the compatibilist, without a scintilla of evidential or metaphysical support. More on Sartorio’s quote will be discussed at greater length below.

¹⁶² I want to take a quick moment to remind the reader that it is *Stratton* who bears the current burden of proof in demonstrating his claim that not only should determinism be seen as “causal,” but also, “external” determination. Additionally, it is *his* claim, and thus his burden of proof, that what is responsibility undermining is the *determiner* of the mechanism, and not the *determining* mechanism. But, where is the argument? Where is the support for this atrociously incomplete *reductio*? This insouciant method of research from a supposed scholar is mind-boggling to say the least.

are neither responsible nor free, and so any agency would be lost. The *how*, as he would suggest, is thus irrelevant.

Keeping tabs with Aristotle,¹⁶³ one can even say that the kind of sourcehood Stratton has in mind is one that entails an *efficient cause*. In order to be held responsible for any action, the agent must be the efficient causal source of the action. In the philosophical literature, this is generally understood to be and is known as the “ultimacy condition.”

Derk Pereboom “understands the ultimacy requirement in the following way:

If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something *over which the agent has control*, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decision if it is produced by a source over which she has no control.”¹⁶⁴

Pereboom claims the title of a “hard source incompatibilist” because though he agrees that we must be the causal source (in the efficient sense), possessing the necessary kind of control, he disagrees, or rather he is skeptical, that we ever truly have that kind of necessary control.¹⁶⁵ Robert Kane, arguably one of the most influential libertarian philosophers around the turn of the century, states that,

For every X and Y, if an agent is responsible for X, and if Y is a sufficient cause of X, then the agent is also *responsible for Y*.¹⁶⁶

Baker, while quoting Kane, articulates the libertarian sourcehood condition fabulously:

But what is ultimate origination? Consider Kane again, as he speaks of ‘the power of agents to be the ultimate creators (or originators) and sustainers of their own ends or purposes:’

[W]hen we trace the causal or explanatory chains of action back to their sources in the purposes of free agents, these causal chains must come to an end or terminate in the willings (choices, decisions, or efforts) of the agents, which cause

¹⁶³ “What sort of things, then, should we say are forced? Perhaps we should say that something is forced unconditionally whenever its cause is external and the agent contributes nothing... What is forced, then, would seem to be what has its origin outside the person forced, who contributes nothing.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics: Book III*, quoted in Pereboom, *Free Will* (2e), (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), 2-3.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Carolina Sartorio, *Causation and Free Will*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ Derk Pereboom, *Free Will*, 4. He writes: “I call the resulting variety of skepticism about free will ‘hard incompatibilism’... But one might also be a source incompatibilist and seriously doubt that we have the sort of free will required for this sort of moral responsibility, and this is the position I advocate.”

¹⁶⁶ Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 35.

or bring about their purposes. If these willings were in turn caused by something else, so that the explanatory chains could be traced back further to heredity or environment, to God, or fate, then the ultimacy would not lie with the agents but with something else.

This suggests that an agent is the ultimate originator of a choice or action if and only if the sufficient condition for the choice or action includes something over which the agent has complete control. Ultimate originators have ultimate control.¹⁶⁷

Taking Kane's quotes together, it seems that it is not enough, under incompatibilism, to state that an agent is the efficient cause (i.e., has the original power necessary for responsibility) of an action, but one must also be the *sufficient* cause of an action. In other words, it seems to me that if one is the efficient cause of an action, one must also be the sufficient cause of that same action. So, Stratton's apparent beef with an external causal determiner seems to be hidden under the assumption that "we are *causally impotent* toward some of the (deterministic) causes of our actions"; thus, we are said to not be the proper sufficient *causal source* of these actions because we do not have causal access in the way Stratton would like (Sartorio, *Causation*, 151). The action does not originate with us;¹⁶⁸ we are not the sufficient causes of our actions. Notable compatibilist scholar Carolina Sartorio continues and says,

It seems, then, that the problem arises only if we assume that our acts are the inevitable consequence of events that are beyond our causal reach. Now, this means that our causal impotence toward the remote causes of our acts is one of the sources of the problem of determinism and free will. It is not something that follows from determinism itself, but an additional assumption without which the problem wouldn't even arise.¹⁶⁹

The "additional" (and hidden) assumption is of course that if we are not the efficient causal source of our actions, due to external determinism or, more fundamentally, an external determiner, then we cannot be said to possess responsibility or freedom. According to these incompatibilists, the agent needs to possess efficient causal access resulting in sufficient action in order to be seen as the "source" of the action, and also, in order to be recognized as responsible and therefore free. Again, according to incompatibilists, the location of the determiner is what is considered relevant to the debate, *not* the causal mechanism itself (regardless of its location).

Now, if Stratton wishes to maintain that *external causal* determinism (specifically regarding the location of the determiner) is the "thing" that rules out responsibility for the above reasons, let's attempt to "steel-man" his potential argument and see if it indeed works (in the interest of charity). Sartorio, once more, will be helpful in producing the "steel-man" and in revealing that

¹⁶⁷ Baker, "Moral Responsibility Without Libertarianism", 5.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 161.

¹⁶⁹ Sartorio, *Causation*, 151-152.

the hidden assumption should be unveiled. Once uncovered, the argument for the so-called “ultimacy condition” (the one Stratton arguably defends, as well as Kane) turns out to be question-begging. Sartorio gives the following “steel-man” argument:

(Premise 1) If our choices are determined by factors outside of our causal reach [via an external mechanism *or* external determiner], we don’t ever have causal access to all of the actual sufficient sources of our choices.

(Premise 2) We cannot be free unless we have causal access to all of the actual sufficient sources of our choices.

Therefore,

(Conclusion) If our choices are determined by factors outside of our causal reach, we cannot be free.¹⁷⁰

The Calvinist who claims determinism should accept premise (1): definitionally, if determinism is true, then obviously we do not have the efficient causal access to our choices, for “that’s precisely what ‘being outside of our causal reach’ means” (Ibid.).¹⁷¹ Premise (2), then, ought to be rejected as it assumes what it is trying to prove. The question at hand is whether efficient causal access is a necessary condition for something like rational (desert) agential responsibility, but in order to prove that it is, it must be assumed, but if it is assumed, it renders the argument unsound as it is question-begging. The source incompatibilist claim that is supposed to be proven is “the claim that being determined by factors beyond one’s causal reach is incompatible with being free,” (Ibid., 153). But that *is* premise (2); of course it is true that if we are “determined by factors beyond our causal reach” this means that we do not have the “causal access to all of the actual sufficient sources of our choices.” What we are not told is why that is responsibility undermining; it is merely presupposed. Therefore, premise (2) is question-begging, and thus the argument is unsound.

As it turns out, even when we grant Stratton the pleasure of demonstrating that efficient causal sourcehood is necessary for responsibility, it seems it is still question-begging. If it cannot be shown that the determiner of the mechanism is a problem by virtue of the fact that the determiner’s location is external, then we are back to whether the location of the determining mechanism is a problem. Compatibilists contend that the ingredients or factors, such as the location, of the determining mechanism is what is relevant to responsibility, *not* simply the location of the determiner of the mechanism. Compatibilists can, and do, hold to external determiners while maintaining either external or internal determining mechanisms. Granted, God *may* determine through an external mechanism; I concede this. However, I see no reason to posit that this *must* be the case, or even *is* the case. God, under normal cases of determinism, could

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 152 (original numbering is present)

¹⁷¹ Though, it must be pressed once more that the (RO) Hard Calvinist need not be committed to *external* mechanisms, but rather *only* to an external determiner (God).

very well determine through an internal mechanism. Therefore, as a theistic compatibilist, I submit that the determining mechanism ought to be seen primarily as *internal*.¹⁷²

I will wrap up the location of determinism with a block quote from Bignon on causal “source” incompatibilism, the location of determinism, and responsibility:

Indeed, it is now admitted that what excludes moral responsibility... is *not* that they are entirely determined. It is that they are determined *by the wrong kind of factors*. Kevin Timpe, arguing for this appropriately named “source incompatibilism,” puts it in those terms: “insofar as I’m an incompatibilist, I don’t think a choice can be free if it is causally determined by factors external to the agent, that is, if there exists an externally sufficient causal chain which brings about that action.” Exactly: the determinations that are said to exclude moral responsibility are those “external to the agent,” but insofar as some [if not all] determinations can arise internally (and in fact do so in the case of God), moral responsibility is compatible with determinism. So we now all agree on this: being determined isn’t the problem; it’s *how* one is determined that counts. The debate on compatibilism itself has been surrendered.¹⁷³

Clearly, and once again, we see that the “how” *is* relevant. If Stratton wants to maintain that determinism must be external through the causal mechanism, and *that’s the problem*, then he must *show* that to be the case rather than assuming it from the get-go in defining determinism. Additionally, if he wishes to argue that God being the determiner is the problem, because He is an external causal source to the agent, then Stratton must demonstrate that the causal source of the agent *must* be the efficient cause, while in connection to the sufficient causes of the agent’s choice, and *that condition* is necessary for an action to be free, or uncoerced, rationally or morally. Last, he must do that without first assuming that determinism already rules out that necessary condition (and as we have seen in Sartorio’s argument above, it doesn’t look like that can be done, at least not straight-forwardly). Surely, this is a hefty burden.

¹⁷² It is noteworthy to add that Sartorio is a secular compatibilist, and she thinks that most of the determining mechanisms are considered external to the agent. However, she argues that though the determining causal mechanism is external to the agent, the mechanism can be caused in the right way in order to be held responsible. Obviously the key phrase here is “in the right way”. As a *theistic* compatibilist, I can conveniently hold to the determining mechanism as internal to the agent, and that arguably could be what is considered as the “right way.” Perhaps naturalistic compatibilists should embrace theism for this very reason: we have better resources!

¹⁷³ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 132. Bignon continues to dialectically provide helpful tips: “But it is now clear that the debate has significantly shifted: compatibilism, the thesis that *determinism* is incompatible with moral responsibility, is no longer at stake; rather, we are back to raising the more specific question of whether being determined *by something or someone outside oneself* removes moral responsibility. In many respects, it is the problem of being ‘manipulated’ from the outside,” (Ibid.). Of course, Calvinist determinists need not, and ought not, concede external determinism (even though God is considered external). But I will attempt to cover one such manipulation argument, independent of Stratton’s, in the next section, so the reader may want to read Bignon’s treatment on manipulation cases as well in chapter 3 of his book.

Why must we accept that we have to be the efficient causal source of our actions in order for an agent to be free and responsible? Why must the compatibilist agree that, in order to be free or responsible, or to even be a “source” in some sense, we must have efficient causal access to an action? Why can’t there be a recognized distinction between external and internal causal mechanisms, the former possibly eliminating responsibility, whereas the latter not so much? These questions, as far as I can see, are not even remotely considered in *Mere Molinism*. All we read is that determinism rules out the fact that we are the efficient causal source via an external determiner; therefore, we are not free. But how does the mere definition of Calvinistic determinism (i.e., God, who is external, is the determiner) actually lead to the conclusion that we are not free or responsible in the relevant sense? How does Stratton get from the antecedent to the consequent? If we are determined, then by definition, we do not have efficient causal access. So what? Stratton needs to give us a reason why the mere definition of determinism apparently proves his case. More so, he needs to give us a reason why the freedom that is necessary for responsibility requires us to be the efficient causal source of an action without first assuming that it does. What is clearly missing is an argument for that hidden assumption, otherwise, if Stratton doesn’t lend it, he is begging the question against the compatibilist, and as he says, “Any argument based on a logical fallacy is no argument at all,” (*Mere Molinism*, 179). I will, ironically, take that under advisement; however, in the meantime, I highly suggest that Stratton do the same.

What can we conclude regarding the location of determinism? External? Internal? I think it is more than reasonable to conclude that under normal cases of Calvinist determinism, the determinations are *internal* to the agent. This does not seem to damage the agency of the agent (at least not in the way often implied by incompatibilists), nor the responsibility of the agent, *even though* God being the determiner is external to the agent. God does not circumvent our agency but reforms our agency by determining through our agency. If Stratton wants to say that it does in fact damage the agent’s view of “self”, then we await an argument. If Stratton wants to argue instead that determinism must be located external to the agent, then we await an argument. Until then, the location of determinism may be seen as internal to the agent (even if we grant a causal sequence in addition to granting God as the external determiner) without its location imposing upon the agent’s will in a harmful, coercive, or otherwise manipulative way. This is in direct contrast to what Stratton has repeatedly stated.¹⁷⁴

2.2.6 A Brief Interlude

¹⁷⁴ As a subtle after-thought, this idea of *not* being the efficient causal source of our actions seems to jive well with the following biblical passages: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20 ESV); “In him we live and move and have our being...” (Acts 17:28 ESV).

Before transitioning to the *form* of determinism, this upward hike through the definition of determinism has so far led to some insightful conclusions that ought to be quickly summarized:

1. The *comprehensiveness* of determinism should be understood as exhaustive without redundantly tagging on the actual world “exhaustive” (i.e. EDD). This is confusing. Additionally, even if we grant that a determinism *simpliciter* could be understood coherently as “non-exhaustive” determinism, it is still *determinism*. So, it seems Stratton’s issue is not necessarily with the *comprehensiveness* of determinism.
2. The *type* of determinism isn’t an issue either, as the *type* of determinism that Stratton seems to narrow-mindedly prosecute is one that entails causation, but as compatibilists have argued, determinism need not entail causation, though this doesn’t mean they are mutually exclusive either.
3. The *location* of determinism was found to be a question-begging enterprise. Neither the location of the determiner nor the location of the determining mechanism seems to be a problem, as long as the relevant factor as to what undermines responsibility or freedom is considered the determining mechanism. This is exactly what compatibilists have maintained: the determining mechanism is what constitutes praise or blame, *not* simply the determiner of the mechanism, regardless of the location. Theistic compatibilists may go further and maintain that the determining mechanism should primarily be taken as internal. Unfortunately, Stratton has only assumed that the determiner of the mechanism is what ascribes responsibility or freedom while not even considering commenting on the mechanism.

We will now turn to our last couple of remaining qualifications concerning the definition of determinism: the *form* and the *displacement*. Stratton hasn’t commented on either quality in detail. Scarce quotes may be found in *Mere Molinism* and in his recent “Rejoinder”, but neither shed significant light on either quality. This is fine; I have no quibbles on his decision to intentionally or unintentionally evade these qualities. The *comprehensiveness*, the *type*, and the *location* of determinism were heavily spoken of, alluded to, or commented on in *Mere Molinism* which is precisely why these first three qualities received the most discussion. The last two qualities will be discussed briefly, yet pointedly. While I openly admit that Stratton hasn’t taken a firm stance on either of these qualities, it is perhaps to the best interest of the reader that we discuss them nonetheless.

2.2.7 Form of Determinism

It is no secret that determinism entails necessity, but necessity need not entail *inevitability*; rather, necessity seems to entail more of an *immutability*. Further, we can distinguish between the two stating, albeit roughly: the former entails what we may call an *absolute necessity*, whereas the

latter entails what we may call a *hypothetical necessity*. These are the primary *forms* that determinism or necessity could take given certain propositions. Even further, these two forms of determinism may be called the “necessity of the consequent” and the “necessity of the consequence”. The former implies an absolute necessity, or renders an event inevitable, whereas the latter implies a hypothetical necessity, or renders an event immutable. The Reformed scholastics take the position of the latter regarding God’s decree. We mustn’t morph these two senses of necessity into one big melting-pot.¹⁷⁵

Reformed theologian and philosopher, Michael Preciado, sums up the two necessities nicely:

The [necessity of immutability] is the background of the [WCF 3.1]. This type of necessity... is not an absolute necessity, but a necessity of the consequence. [Early reformers] state this because an absolute necessity would take away man’s freedom and moral responsibility. They correctly argue that a necessity of the consequence preserves it.¹⁷⁶

Preciado continues to draw the distinctions between the two necessities in symbolic logic:

The necessity of the consequence:

[] ($p \rightarrow q$)

The necessity of the consequent:

($p \rightarrow$ [] q)

... On the necessity of the consequence, p and q are contingent in and of themselves... q will always obtain when p obtains... The necessity of the consequence does not imply the necessity of the consequent. On the necessity of the consequent, if p is true, then q is necessary *in itself*... On the necessity of the consequence, both p and q are contingent in themselves. However, on the necessity of the consequent, q is a necessary truth.

¹⁷⁵ Stratton has sketched these distinctions in *Mere Molinism* during his historical discussion on Luther; currently, however, it does not seem as if he has taken a position on either distinction. (*Mere Molinism*, 109). He does, however, make an interesting remark on page 50: “Necessity implies a fatalistic determinism.” Respectfully, this is laughable. This is the exact mistake by conflation explained above. Necessity only implies a fatalistic determinism *if* it is an *absolute necessity*. A hypothetical form of necessity could indeed preserve contingent realities of an event, not in an inevitable way, but an immutable way. In other words, hypothetical necessities, or the necessity of the consequence, are not fatalistic in nature.

¹⁷⁶ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 80.

The reformed understanding of God's decree and providence [i.e. determinism] as a necessity of immutability is not a necessity of the consequent, but a necessity of the consequence.¹⁷⁷

A way of applying WCF 3.1 in relation to these nuanced terms could be demonstrated as follows:

The fall of Adam is part of whatsoever comes to pass. Therefore God's decree that Adam fall has the necessity of immutability. The reformed would understand it as follows:

[] (if God decreed Adam to fall → then Adam will fall)

This does not teach that God necessarily had to decree Adam to fall. God was free to decree Adam to fall or Adam to not fall; the antecedent of this conditional [hypothetical] is free and contingent. But once God decreed Adam to fall, then the necessity of immutability applies. Once God decreed Adam to fall, Adam's fall was certain or immutable. Yet... not an absolute necessity.¹⁷⁸

What is important here is to stress the fact that the early reformers believed in a hypothetical necessity, or a necessity of the consequence. This type of necessity "is not the [form] of necessity that [conflicts] with freedom and moral responsibility" (Ibid., 82). Other forms of necessity that would conflict with freedom or moral responsibility would be physical necessity or natural necessity. In short, these forms of necessity were considered as absolutes, not hypotheticals, and so, not contingent. Physical necessity, for example, would be the form of coercion that is often conflated to be determinism *simpliciter*. But this is not the case.

How does this *form* of necessity of determinism relate to (TWD*)? This ontological malady, what I have described as (TWD*), bound on contingent moral human creatures would be necessarily known as it would be located in God's necessary or natural knowledge. This necessitates that we would be sinful from all eternity; that is, no matter what world God created with contingently moral human creatures, they would suffer from *moral ontological deprivation*. But what is necessary is the metaphysical ontological malady *not* that we would in fact sin. In other words, what is necessary is the metaphysical ontological death *not* the spiritual moral death. This is what is known as a necessity of the consequence. Recall that it has the following form:

[] (p→q)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 80-82. James N. Anderson puts it this way: "[Event] E isn't *absolutely* necessary, but it is *consequently* necessary given God's foreknowledge," (Anderson, "Calvinism & Determinism," <https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/calvinism-and-determinism/>).

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 83.

The "[]" obviously indicates the necessity here, just as it did above. This means that q (the malady of moral ontological deprivation) would hold their contingency unless and until p obtains (creation of humanity). The consequent (q) remains contingent in itself. So theists objecting to (TWD*) should not make the error that q (humans being necessarily sinful via a class action) somehow means that humanity is necessary or that their sin is an absolute necessity (even for God). No. Their deprivation is only a necessity *if* God creates them first.

It now seems that the form of necessity should not pose a threat to determinism, nor does it seem as if Stratton is against one form of the other. Nevertheless, if Stratton wishes to object at some point, either directly or indirectly, I sincerely hope he objects at the *right* form of determinism: necessity of the consequence.¹⁷⁹ One who dabbles, such as Stratton, in the modal metaphysics of Molinism should, at the very least, appreciate, if not down-right agree, that there are varying kinds of necessity and they ought not be conflated to one necessity *simpliciter*. Therefore, the *form* of determinism should not seriously be considered as a primary threat against the definition of determinism.

2.2.8 Displacement of Determinism

The question of displacement is admittedly a difficult question. It could be phrased as follows: *is God's determination understood positively or negatively?* What does this mean? It is often exclaimed by non-Calvinists that if determinism is true, then God must be the determiner. True enough! However, what this implies is that if He is the determiner, then there is no such room for the Calvinist to posit *divine permission language*. That is to say, if determinism obtains, God supposedly *actively* determines *all* events to come to pass. Under this charge, God cannot be said to "permit" anything under determinism, and thus, He cannot be said to *negatively* decree anything; He can only be said to *positively* or *actively* decree under determinism. Otherwise, it is argued, what does it mean for God to permit evil, specifically, under determinism? If God determines all events, surely this means He determines evil, and He must determine evil positively or actively, otherwise, He does not determine all events, and so determinism is left in scrambling pieces while trying to maintain coherency in the midst of permission. In the words of Bignon, the "steel-man" argument from the non-Calvinist could be formulated in the following way:

Premise 1—If determinism is true, then it cannot properly be said that God "permits" sin and evil.

¹⁷⁹ Libertarian Robert Kane agrees that the correct form of determinism should be seen as a necessity of the consequence, or a hypothetical necessity. He writes: "Determinism is thus a kind of necessity, but it is a conditional [or hypothetical] necessity. A determined event does not have to occur, no matter what else happens (it need not be *absolutely* necessary). But it must occur when the determining conditions have occurred," (*Contemporary*, 6).

Premise 2—It must properly be said that God “permits” sin and evil.

Therefore

Determinism is false.¹⁸⁰

So the question at hand is whether or not “determinists can maintain a difference in [the displacement] between God’s providence over the good and his providence over evil. Can it properly be said that God ‘intends’ the good... but ‘permits’ evil, *in distinction to* what he does in the case of the good?” (Ibid., 223). Moreover, “can determinists properly use ‘permission’ language for God’s control of human sin?” (Ibid.). That’s the question before us.

Bignon continues to argue that this type of permission language *can* be utilized in Calvinist theology and it more than likely *should* in fact be utilized in Calvinist theology. But, how does this work exactly? How can the determinist affirm divine permission language in such a way as to remain consistent in their determinism? Further, can the determinist coherently say that there is a sense in which God’s *active* or *positive* displacement is distinctive in determining *good* from God’s *passive* or *negative* displacement in determining *evil*? Bignon argues that such a displacement, or such an asymmetry, does exist and that Calvinists and Molinists alike may claim it.

Bignon, through the help of a few analogies, discovers that correct use of “permission” entails an *active/passive counterfactual pair*. He argues that “proper use of permission language... rests upon the truth of two important conditional, counterfactual statements... These two statements [are] as follows...

1-If God *were* to actively intervene, the sinner *would not* commit the sin.

And,

2-If God *were* to passively refrain from intervening, the sinner *would* commit the sin.¹⁸¹

In order to see clearly this active/passive counterfactual at play, Bignon quotes Jonathan Edwards at length in order to show the divine asymmetry in providence. Edwards “spoke of the relationship between the sun’s presence and the production of light and warmth or darkness and coldness [... he writes]:

There is a vast difference between the sun’s being the cause of the lightsomeness and warmth of the atmosphere, and brightness of gold and diamonds, by its presence and positive influence; and its being the occasion of darkness and frost in the night, by its

¹⁸⁰ Bignon, “Lord Willing and God Forbid”, 222. (original numbering present)

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 227, 229.

motion, whereby it descends below the horizon. The motion of the sun is the occasion of the latter kind of events; but it is not the proper cause efficient, or produce of them: though they are necessary consequent on that motion, under such circumstances: no more is any action of the Divine Being the cause of the evil of men's wills.

And then [Edwards continues to unpack] the asymmetry in [the following] terms... :

It would be strange arguing, indeed, because men never commit sin, but only when God leaves them to themselves, and necessarily sin when he does so, that therefore their sin is not from themselves, but from God; and so, that God must be a sinful being: as strange as it would be to argue, because it is always dark when the sun is gone, and never dark when the sun is present, that therefore all darkness is from the sun, and that his disc and beams must needs be black.

Edwards rests the asymmetry upon the facts that if the sun *were* to approach and actively shine upon the location, there *would* be light, and if it *were* to passively withdraw from the location, there *would* be darkness instead.”¹⁸² How is this applied theologically to the thesis of determinism? How does this language of active/passive pairs apply to Calvinist determinism?

If God were to refrain *from that active* [influential] *drawing on the moment of choice*, then the sinner *would* sin, because all that would be left within him to express itself in decision-making would be his nature and prior character, which of course Calvinists affirm are corrupted [ontologically, but also morally post-fall] by original sin. Apart from God actively extending his grace to them, fallen sinners sin. “Man without grace can will nothing but evil,” says Martin Luther... [Therefore,] If God were to refrain from divine intervention (namely an inner intervention in the form of a positive drawing of grace on the heart of the fallen sinner), the sinner *would* sin.¹⁸³

These conclusions on the use of divine permission language are, I find, extremely convincing. If God *were* to refrain His grace from the sinner, then the sinner *would* sin, necessarily via original sin or perhaps because of the truth of (TWD*). If God *were* to actively extend His grace from the sinner, then the sinner *would not* sin. The former counterfactual is *passive* or *negative*, whereas the latter counterfactual is *active* or *positive*. These two displacements in God's decree arguably demonstrate the use of permission language *even if* determinism obtains. Therefore, permission language, the use of God's *negative decree*, is said to be compatible with determinism. Additionally, these counterfactuals are easily paired with (TWD*) in demonstrating their truth.

¹⁸² Quoted in *ibid.*, 228.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 230.

As Bignon concludes, “In that sense, all evil is permitted, and all good is actively extended” (Ibid., 232).¹⁸⁴ Moreover, in agreement to Bignon, Calvinist Heath White writes,

Thus it is perfectly possible for the theological determinist to hold that God *intends* the good aspects of the world but merely *foresees* the evil aspects. There is no need to hold that God ever intends evil [in a morally culpable sense], although his will determines every detail of creation.¹⁸⁵

Put differently, “... God specifically permits his creatures to choose evil that he has ordained by not preventing it and by ensuring the circumstances in which the evil comes about. Nonetheless, this permissive will of God seeks to guard him from being the direct cause of evil,” (Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 221n59). The divine permission espoused by the reformed theologian is not “‘bare permission’ but a deliberate willing that sin not be prevented from occurring,” (Ibid. 221); “[i]t is not a disengaged permission, but an ‘efficacious permission.’”¹⁸⁶

I conclude that the Calvinist use of divine permission, or its defense of God’s *negative* decree in evil, and God’s *positive* decree in righteousness, is not just coherent but wholly sound. This also relates back to, and perhaps grants a solid foundation for, the above discussion on God being the efficient cause of the good, yet the deficient cause of evil, as evil is simply seen as a *negative* substance and not a *positive* substance; hence, God cannot decree nor determine evil in the *positive* or *efficient* sense as it is a privation of the good. This conclusion is the same as the conclusion reached when discussing causation and determinism.

While Stratton does not necessarily commit himself to defending divine permission language in light of Molinism (in as much as it is obviously implied), and consequently, doesn’t spend time critiquing Calvinism’s use of it in his book (that I am aware of), I think it may be safe to say that that doesn’t mean that he is *not against* the Calvinist using it. At any rate, with the help of Calvinist philosopher Bignon, all Molinists, including Stratton, should see the “present argument as having stolen from all libertarians the toy of divine permission language, only to return it to Molinists, as long as they can play nice and share it with their Calvinist friends,” (Ibid., 239). Cute and correct! The *displacement* of determinism should not be seen as a problem nor harmful to hold for Calvinists.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Of course, these counterfactual pairings concerning the displacement of God’s decree are not uncontroversial. In the meantime, I encourage the reader to find the anticipated objections that are discussed in Bignon’s essay, along with his compelling subsequent responses to them.

¹⁸⁵ Heath White, “Theological Determinism and the ‘Authoring Sin’ Objection”, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 178; cf. Turrentin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:516-17 (quoted in Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 221n59).

¹⁸⁷ “God’s *decree* is exercised monolithically and unilaterally, encompassing both good and evil... God’s providence as it stands behind good and evil as its primary causal agent is asymmetrical. He stands behind good in a direct way and behind evil indirectly. God is to be praised for all the good he causes, but moral culpability for evil is always attributed to secondary agents alone,” (Christensen, *What About Evil?*,

2.2.9 Conclusion

We are now at a place to finally close on §2.2. Admittedly, this was a far-reaching arduous journey, but I think it was a necessary one. I have attempted to defend the thesis of determinism in light of a few potentially fatal definitions of determinism; definitions which could prove to rear inevitable harmful effects for the (RO) Hard Calvinist. The various questions we asked in light of these “harmful” notions were the following: 1. *What is the comprehensiveness of determinism?* 2. *What is the type of determinism?* 3. *What is the location of determinism?* 4. *What is the form of determinism?* 5. *What is the displacement of determinism?* The first question shows that the distinction between exhaustiveness and non-exhaustiveness seems to be a distinction without a difference. Stratton affirms, awkwardly, that non-exhaustive determinism could be coherently affirmed, perhaps even by Molinists. Molinists apparently affirm exhaustive predestination, yet usually deny determinism (unless you are Stratton). But why? Maybe it is because the mechanism of determinism entails or poses a challenge to human libertarian freedom. But, if that is the case, the problem does not seem to lie with the *comprehensiveness* of determinism, but rather the *type* of determinism, whether it is *causal* or some other type. But, again, we have seen that causal notions are not necessarily wedded to determinism, and even if they were, it wouldn’t pose a significant threat to affirm. So, if the problem doesn’t lie within the *type* of determinism, perhaps Stratton thinks the problem lies, or should lie, in the *location* of determinism. Again, this comes out short. First, the location of the determiner does not equal the location of the determining mechanism. Even if the location of the determiner is external, we are in need of an argument for why this negates our agency. Second, if the location of the determining mechanism is the problem, namely because it is just assumed that Calvinism entails an external determining mechanism, then we can switch the location to internal and be perfectly fine. If the problem of determinism lies not in its *comprehensiveness*, *type*, nor its *location*, what about the *form*? No such problem. The reformers argue a necessity of the consequence keeping intact the contingency of an event, and thus, arguably, moral responsibility and the agency of humanity as a whole. Lastly, what about the *displacement* of determinism? This kind of determinism is not seen as a problem as Calvinist can, and perhaps should, argue for divine permission language in their providential system. God can be said to negatively decree sin via deficient determinations or via a passive counterfactual decree. Both *displacements* are secured under determinism and the Calvinist systematic with consistency, so what is the problem here? Where is the threat?

We have found that the answers to these questions pose no such *intrinsic* threat to the thesis of determinism.¹⁸⁸ So why does Stratton consider “exhaustive” determinism to be a “dirty” word? If

194). See *ibid.*, 194n41, 221n59 for modern renditions of the displacement of determinism in reformed theology.

¹⁸⁸ For more discussion on common threats to (or confusions with) determinism, see Kane, *Contemporary*, 17-21.

he continues to argue against determinism it cannot be because of the following questions posed above. If Stratton continues to have residual beef with determinism, it must be that it is simply *not* compatible with freedom. That is to say, as we will see in the philosophical section, Stratton is vehemently against the thesis of determinism primarily because it rules out categorical alternatives to the agent as well as the efficient sourcehood of the agent. But why should this matter to moral or rational responsibility? Are we ever told this or shown this? Unfortunately not, at least not in a convincingly straight-forward way (as we shall see). Stratton writes,

Both [determinism and human freedom] appear to be taught in holy writ, yet they might seem to be logically incompatible... Must readers shrug their shoulders and retreat to mystery, or can Christians provide a logically coherent answer to this vital question? One matter is certain: A solution cannot occur by denying free will (by some flavor of divine determinism), nor by denying God's sovereignty.¹⁸⁹

As Bignon noted, "Just like that, before any argument is offered, the matter is already 'certain' that determinism cannot be affirmed, as it would be 'denying free will,'" ("Review", 7). Is this seriously the best Stratton can do? Beg the question against determinism? In the next section, we will look at Stratton's definition of compatibilism and his basic "arguments" for why the thesis supposedly, as argued, does not provide an escape route for Calvinist determinism. We will see that it fails.

2.3 Compatibilism

2.3.1 Definition of Compatibilism

The standard definition of compatibilism is the thesis that freedom and determinism are compatible.¹⁹⁰ Other writers have modified the thesis to tailor their specific needs along with their specific arguments. For instance, Bignon defines compatibilism as "the thesis that determinism is compatible with moral responsibility," (*Excusing Sinners*, 7). Reformed scholar, Michael Preciado, who I mentioned several times above, defines compatibilism in the following way:

Compatibilism is the thesis that it is metaphysically possible that determinism is true and some person has free will and moral responsibility.¹⁹¹

Preciado actually constructs his definition using the definitions of Michael McKenna, Derk Pereboom, and Ishitayaque Haji. These are all basic definitions, and I am pleased to

¹⁸⁹ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 40.

¹⁹⁰ Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 13.

¹⁹¹ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 142.

acknowledge the fact that Stratton does well in defining compatibilism. He plays it safe as he leans on the definition given by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Compatibilism is the thesis that free will is compatible with determinism. Because free will is typically taken to be a necessary condition of moral responsibility, compatibilism is sometimes expressed as a thesis about the compatibility between moral responsibility and determinism.¹⁹²

So far, so good. Moral responsibility is usually said to be a sufficient condition to free will, and as such, free will is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. That is to say, if we do not have the freedom necessary for moral responsibility (in whatever sense that may be), then we cannot possibly be said to be appropriate candidates of moral responsibility. This is uncontroversial. I take it that using moral responsibility in a compatibilist definition is more direct, whereas free will is more indirect.¹⁹³ With this in mind, we can concoct the following:

$$(v) \text{ COMP} =_{\text{df}} \diamond(MR \wedge \neg \text{IND})$$

But, as we will see in the next section, the problem in how Stratton lays out his definition of compatibilism does not lie in his *construction* of the definition, but by its supposed *entailment*.

2.3.2 Does Compatibilism Entail Determinism?

Stratton claims that compatibilism, even given (v), still *entails* determinism:

$$(v^*) \text{ COMP} \Rightarrow_{\text{df}} \neg \text{IND}$$

He attempts to argue this in other places,¹⁹⁴ but in *Mere Molinism* he writes:

The aim, then, is not merely to argue against the thesis of compatibilism, but to demonstrate that this thesis does not actually correspond to reality, and thus, compatibilism does not always explain the way things are. For the purposes of this [philosophical] chapter, compatibilism will entail the thesis that exhaustive determinism describes reality, at least everything about humanity. That is to say, compatibilism will

¹⁹² Quoted in Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 161-162. Elsewhere Stratton has defined the thesis: “**Compatibilism**: the *thesis* that free will and/or moral (and rational) responsibility is compatible with determinism,” (“An Argument Supporting the Incompatibility Thesis”, <https://freethinkingministries.com/an-argument-supporting-the-incompatibility-thesis/>).

¹⁹³ See van Inwagen’s *Essay* for arguments against compatibilism. He formulates these arguments in an indirect and direct fashion, against free will in the former and moral responsibility in the latter.

¹⁹⁴ For example: “According to compatibilism, those thoughts, desires, and wants can never be *up to us*. Compatibilism is nothing more than ugly determinism ‘covered with frosting!’” (“Compatibilistic Free Will”, <https://freethinkingministries.com/compatibilistic-free-will-can-you-have-your-cake-eat-it-too-2/>)

not simply be referred to as the thesis that freedom and/or responsibility is compatible with determinism; it will be referred to as the thesis that exhaustive determinism is, in fact, true.¹⁹⁵

There are two parts to this quote. I will deal with the first part about compatibilism and its supposed description of some things in reality, and then I will deal with the second part where he assumes compatibilism entails determinism.

The first part is clumsy. Bignon writes in response, “To say that a thesis ‘does not actually correspond to reality’ is simply to say that it’s *false*. And if the thesis of compatibilism is *false*, then *it* never explains the way things are,” (“Review”, 7). Right. As I explained earlier in §2.2.1, distinguishing between *exhaustive* and *non-exhaustive* reality according to a thesis is, to put bluntly, asinine. It makes no sense as my dilemma in that section attempted to demonstrate. Moreover, because compatibilism is a *principled* position, if *one* event is determined and yet we retain moral (or rational) responsibility in that same event, then it *is* true that, definitionally, compatibilism obtains; that is, the thesis exhaustively describes reality. My being morally responsible in some event *x* is indeed compatible with the determination of that same event *x*. This means that incompatibilism does not hold true for event *x*. And so, *in principle*, if *one* event may be determined and we retain moral (and rational) responsibility in that same event, then *all* events may be determined and this means we *can* be held morally (and rationally) responsible for those events. This is, I think, Bignon’s overall point. In defense to Bignon’s remarks, Stratton states:

I am simply accommodating the view that some free actions might be compatible with determinism while other free actions are not, and I propose that both the labels “compatibilism” and “libertarian” might be used, in a rather loose sense, to apply to those who hold this view.¹⁹⁶

According to Stratton, we can be morally responsible, and thus “free” in a relevant sense, if we are determined in *some* actions, but not *all*. But, in order to be *rational* responsible (in the desert sense), and thus “free” in *that* relevant sense, if we are rationally determined *at all*, we are not free. Further, a charitable interpretation would claim that Stratton finds *physical* (overt) *actions* distinct from *mental* actions; but, in either case, for Stratton, responsibility in the *desert*

¹⁹⁵ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 162-163.

¹⁹⁶ Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 4. Stratton says elsewhere something similar: “In *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge and Mere Molinism*, I do not simply argue against the mere thesis of compatibilism. Rather, I aim to show that even if the thesis happens to be coherent, the idea expressed in this thesis does not actually describe reality,” (“An Argument Supporting the Incompatibility Thesis,” linked above). This is the problem. Stratton does not understand that if the *mere thesis* of compatibilism is true (and thus coherent), then *in principle* it *always describes reality*! I would give the same philosophical accommodation for the thesis of incompatibilism as well. More will be discussed in §2.5.11.

sense is incompatible with EDD.¹⁹⁷ How shall we, then, proceed under the purview of compatibilism?

In a podcast,¹⁹⁸ Stratton is willing to grant that compatibilist freedom could be true in an instance where he is at a line at a fast-food restaurant and he orders in alignment to his greatest desire. He states that this is where compatibilism could obtain, and that he is “determined” by his nature to choose according to his greatest desire at that given moment. However, when it comes to rationality, or maybe even morality, compatibilism cannot possibly be said to describe reality (or at least in that instance) as desert responsibility is incompatible (according to Stratton) with determinism. If compatibilism entails determinism (v^*) (as he claims that it does), then this would be problematic for compatibilism (or the EDD advocate) because compatibilism, as argued by Stratton, is incompatible with the kinds of rationality worth wanting (rational inference and affirmation, deliberation, desert rational responsibility, etc.). So, is this specific thought-process of Stratton’s redeemable or coherent enough to salvage the “non-exhaustive” or “does not always describe reality” language?

No, and for a couple of reasons. For one, compatibilism is *not* simply the thesis that we are free *if* we follow our greatest desires. That posits a sufficient condition for freedom: *if we follow our greatest desires*, then we are free. Our greatest desires could be a *necessary* condition for freedom (and Bignon alludes to this in his discussion of the conditional analysis), but how could it function as a sufficient condition? Contemporary compatibilists themselves hardly ever affirm this, primarily because of manipulation cases. Secondly, if Stratton is said to be compatibilistically free while ordering his food, then this means he does not have libertarian freedom at that moment on the count that libertarian freedom entails incompatibilism. That is not the problem, however; the problem is that the situation Stratton has proposed in order to justify his use of non-exhaustive compatibilism is incoherent. If Stratton has the libertarian freedom, then *he possesses the ability to choose whether or not to follow after his greatest desires* even at the moment of choosing his food. That’s still thinking; that’s still *rational responsibility* that has

¹⁹⁷ Stratton emphatically makes this claim in “Freedom, Responsibility, and Tacos: Why Compatibilism Is [NOT] True,”

https://freethinkingministries.com/freedom-responsibility-and-tacos-why-compatibilism-is-not-true/?fbclid=IwAR2yG8xwx6jQVwLK21sKieNQPqG5V_mytib41kKwBh7Mfnil9F6rXTtEXew (brackets original). He writes, “Be that as it may, I have made it clear that I do NOT think that *moral* and *rational* responsibility (in a desert sense) are compatible with EDD,” (emphasis added).

¹⁹⁸ Ep. 143 Answering Guillaume Bignon: Philosophical Objections (Part 1), <https://freethinkingministries.com/ep-143-answering-guillaume-bignon-philosophical-objections-part-1/>, and in “What exactly is meant by Exhaustive Determinism? | Reviewing The Free Will Show (pt2),” <https://youtu.be/H6H8kJEaVy4?t=123>. Here, Stratton concedes that if agent P can be accurately described as “compatibilistically free” then agent P is causally determined (note the entailment). However, Stratton fully admits that agent P cannot be held rationally responsible (in the desert sense) for his action even if we grant P is compatibilistically free. So, P’s deliberative actions are said to be incompatible with determinism, but compatible with libertarian freedom; the latter is said to be necessary for responsibility whereas the former is not. Also see the article titled, “Freedom, Responsibility, and Tacos: Why Compatibilism Is [NOT] True,” (linked above).

obtained due to his libertarian freedom. He could choose at the instant of ordering his food to follow or *not follow* after his greatest desire. As a libertarianly free creature, he can choose what his greatest desire is at that moment. If that is the case, and he *can* choose or *not* choose to *choose* according to his greatest desires, then compatibilism does not obtain, but *libertarian freedom* obtains (because of (b*)), which is still incompatibilism. Moreover, he would be the efficient causal source of his desires at that moment. Even better, *nothing is determining him to choose* his greatest desire except for his own internal disposition at that time (or (a)). Stratton's proposed situation here is patently absurd, especially if he thinks that it somehow grants "non-exhaustive" compatibilism.¹⁹⁹ We have the above reasons to reject this silly notion. If compatibilism is true, it always describes reality (that is, it is *exhaustive*) in the exact same way as if determinism is true, it always describes reality.²⁰⁰

Going back to Stratton's above block quote, after he defends the awkward phrase that his aim is to argue that compatibilism does not always describe reality, he states that, for his purposes, compatibilism will entail determinism. In the philosophical chapter of *Mere Molinism*, he ends up referring to (v*) to make his case. In other words, if he can prove determinism false (or in his view, that determinism does not always exhaustively describe reality) then via *modus tollens*, compatibilism falls as well. How convenient. Obviously as a compatibilist, I reject that conclusion. So, does Stratton have a good basis to simply posit (v*)? I think not.

Several philosophers state that the thesis of compatibilism is simply that moral responsibility and determinism *are possible*, *not* that moral responsibility and determinism are in fact true.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ironically, Stratton agrees with this objection: "Sure, perhaps when I survey the menu I might only and always choose my greatest desire at that moment. But the use of reason entails the opportunity to exercise an ability (libertarian freedom) to think and ultimately believe things which are opposed to one's greatest desires at a specific moment. This is exactly what separates humanity from the animal kingdom," (Ibid.) The sad part is Stratton does not understand that this agreement actually shows his advocacy of compatibilism as virtually useless.

²⁰⁰ More discussion on this "Mere Molinist" dilemma will be presented in advanced detail in §2.5.11. However, I will note that Stratton has gone on record to scathingly criticize compatibilistic free will: "The reason why we have to use the word 'libertarian' when describing free will is because the term 'free will' has been hijacked by determinists who want to have their cake and eat it too. They affirm an incoherent idea called 'compatibilistic free will' (the idea that humans are free even though something external to humanity causally determines everything about humanity). As I have pointed out... there is nothing free about compatibilistic 'freedom.'" ("What is Libertarian Free Will?", <https://freethinkingministries.com/what-is-libertarian-free-will/>).

This quote is filled with more pop-culture rhetorical theology than actual academic philosophical rigor. We see in recent podcasts that Stratton apparently wants to hold to *some* things being described as "compatibilist freedom," yet apparently in the same breath, we see him asserting that "there is nothing free about compatibilist 'freedom.'" In philosophy, we call these beliefs inconsistent at best, or a walking contradiction at worst.

²⁰¹ Two such philosophers are Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom in *Free Will*, 30. They write: "... the definition of compatibilism does not commit to the truth of determinism. It tells us that *if* determinism were true, its truth would not entail that no person ever acts freely." We will see below that this definition follows what is said to be "simple" compatibilism, not "substantive" compatibilism. Reformed Calvinists are not necessarily committed to the latter, but rather the former only. Additionally, compatibilist scholar Carolina Sartorio says this about the thesis of compatibilism:

Bignon cautions this all too easy mistake: “Note that compatibilism itself says nothing about the *truth* of either determinism or moral responsibility. It only says that both *could* be true together; that they are compossible,” (*Excusing Sinners*, 7). Perhaps this mistake allured Stratton. It is tempting to hop to determinism as a necessary condition of compatibilism, but this is simply not the case. One can show compatibilism to be true without being stuck to the necessary entailment of determinism. Bignon’s remarks toward the entailment is noted, as it is not a unique position in the literature; his note should nonetheless be heeded and the entailment ought to be avoided unless an argument is given.

But, with that said, Bignon accepts Stratton’s entailment:

Stratton then says that compatibilism entails determinism—that’s all too quick without at least offering an argument, but I’m sympathetic to that move myself, so I don’t need to object here—and he argues against determinism to refute compatibilism.²⁰²

What’s more, Bignon himself *does not argue* for determinism; an exciting new twist in the mix! In closing part one of his book, Bignon is intellectually honest while reflecting upon his own arguments:

With the above arguments in hand, which purport to establish the victory of compatibilism in the former debate, it would thus be easy to jump to conclusions and claim victory for determinism in the latter debate as well, *but it would be invalid*. The above argument establishes that determinism is *compatible with moral responsibility*, not that it is *true*. It established compatibilism, not determinism...²⁰³

Compatibilism doesn't say that Determinism *is* true but, only that it wouldn't undermine our free will if it *were* true. Thus, according to Compatibilism, even if we may not know whether or not Determinism holds, we needn't worry about it being true because it is not a threat to our free will. As a result, Compatibilism represents a more optimistic stance on free will, compared to incompatibilism, in that it understands free will as compatible with a way of conceiving the causal structure of the world that may be (for all we know) an accurate description of the way things actually are... To be clear: the [compatibilist] view doesn't *require* deterministic causal histories. For all the view says, there could be some connections in the causal histories of our acts that are not deterministic but indeterministic. But the view also doesn't *rule out* the possibility of deterministic causal histories. Therefore, according to the [compatibilist view] view, acting freely is compatible with the truth of Determinism. (Sartorio, “Free Will and Determinism: A Compatibilism,” in *Do We Have Free Will? A Debate*, 87, 88)

Notice that Sartorio actually agrees that compatibilism *describes reality* if it is indeed true, while at the same time *denying* that determinism is a necessary entailment to that fact. This is in direct contradiction to what Stratton claims. So one can hold to *exhaustive* compatibilism (exactly in the way Stratton defines the thesis as being an actual description of reality) while denying *exhaustive* determinism.

²⁰² Bignon, “Review,” 33.

²⁰³ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 165. (emphasis added on “*but it would be invalid*”)

Bignon's position here is not a novel one. Though he classifies himself as a theological determinist, he does not argue for *determinism* but rather he argues for *compatibilism*.²⁰⁴ To Bignon, though the concession to Stratton is noted, the two views are ultimately separate. In fact, in a recent podcast, Bignon has noted at least “*four* logical possible views” on how one answers the compatibility question.²⁰⁵ In that episode, he also explains that the determinism question is *different* from the compatibility question. These views can be briefly formulated as follows:

- (C₁): (i) Free will and determinism are compatible, (ii) free will is true, and determinism is true.
- (I₁): (i) Free will and determinism are incompatible, (ii) free will is not true, but determinism is true.
- (I₂): (i) Free will and determinism are incompatible, (ii) free will is true, but determinism is not true.
- (C₂): (i) Free will and determinism are compatible, (ii) free will is not true, and determinism is not true.

Bignon himself affirms (C₁) because obviously if free will and determinism are true, then they are compatible. (I₁) describes the hard incompatibilist position as advocated by free will skeptics such as Pereboom or Baruch Spinoza, while (I₂) describes the libertarian position. The odd position, as Bignon notes, is (C₂). The position is odd because one usually would deny the compatibility question in order to uphold free will (i.e., indeterministic freedom), instead of merely holding onto the compatibility question in light of denying this freedom. Nonetheless, it is a position one could logically take, and, as it stands, it serves as a *bona fide* entailment of compatibilism, and thus a *bona fide* counterexample to Stratton's (v*). (C₂) takes more of an agnostic position on the second proposition (actually, upon further inspection, the view

²⁰⁴ In fact, *if* it were the case that compatibilism does indeed entail determinism, necessarily, then why didn't Bignon just tag on that conclusion in his argument? That would have been easy and valid via *modus ponens*. See his definitional argument, *Excusing Sinners*, 122-123.

²⁰⁵ See “Compatibilism & Christian Theology (Dr. Guillaume Bignon)”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDrPCy8aet4>, timestamp 2:00-5:10.

resembles closely to that of Alfred Mele's).²⁰⁶ But, perhaps there could be a further position, say (C)':

(C)': Free will and determinism are compatible, that is, they are *compossible*.²⁰⁷

This definition closely aligns with (v) above; the two propositions of freedom (or moral responsibility) and determinism are *simply compatible*, nothing more.

To be fair, some Reformed Calvinist philosophers have opted for (v*). For example, John C. Wingard affirms the entailment and calls himself a *substantive compatibilist*. This type of compatibilism affirms (C_I). These compatibilists are in contrast to *simple compatibilists*. This type of compatibilism affirms (C)'. Those who claim this type of compatibilism only affirm that moral responsibility and determinism *could* be true together, whereas the *substantive compatibilists* affirm that compatibilism is true, *and also* moral responsibility and determinism are true.²⁰⁸ (C)' deals with potentiality, or compossibility, whereas (C_I) deals with actuality. So we should see here that while Bignon himself only argues philosophically for *simple compatibilism* (C)' in his book, theologically, he claims *substantive compatibilism* (C_I). He

²⁰⁶ Even more reflection suggests that (C₂) appears to be in line with Augustine's own view of compatibilism. Augustine wants to say that while praiseworthiness is compatible with determinism, perhaps *blameworthiness* is not (hence, the indeterminism). This reminds me of Nelkin's asymmetrical view of compatibilism. See Nelkin, *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Augustine's own view of freedom is often messy and controversial. Jesse Couenhoven writes:

I conclude, then, that Augustine rejects some of the most common forms of determinism: psychological determinism, causal determinism, and divine determinism. This does not, however, undermine the idea that he is a kind of compatibilist, since compatibilists need not be committed to the truth of determinism, but only to the compatibility of responsibility with some significant kind of determination. In addition, Augustine does seem committed to some sort of post-lapsarian determinism since he suggests that after the fall, sinners are unable to save themselves without divine intervention... Augustine defends a variation of compatibilism, objecting to some thoroughgoing forms of determinism yet embracing the compatibility or responsibility and a number of kinds of determinism... [Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 104, 105]

It may very well be the case that Augustine held to something akin to Nelkin's Rational Abilities View. Perhaps, though it is not absolutely clear. In either case, Augustine is still secured as a compatibilist, while also being a direct counterexample to Stratton's (v*). And in the present section, that is what matters.

²⁰⁷ Obviously the negation would be true as well, namely a position such as, say, (I)': Free will and determinism are incompatible, that is, they are impossible.

²⁰⁸ See Wingard, "Confession of a Reformed Philosopher: Why I Am a Compatibilist about Determinism and Moral Responsibility",

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/confession-of-a-reformed-philosopher/>. In fact, libertarians Moreland and Craig make a similar point in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (1e), (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 269. Their term "hard compatibilism" maps closely to something like *substantive compatibilism*, whereas their term "soft compatibilism" maps to Wingard's *simple compatibilism*.

apparently knows his argumentative limits given the quote above.²⁰⁹ Another example would be Michael Preciado. He argues that the WCF unashamedly teaches theological determinism. However, *in addition* to affirming determinism, he argues that “reformed theology affirms that man has free will and is morally responsible for his actions. This means that reformed theology clearly falls within the category of compatibilism...” (*A Reformed View*, 142).

So, while reformed Calvinists ought to hold to determinism as true based upon the WCF (3.1, specifically), they must, as Preciado argues, equally hold to compatibilism as moral responsibility is also true and therefore must also be upheld, even in light of determinism. Preciado, Bignon, and Wingard would all be considered, for all intents and purposes, as *substantive compatibilists* because they affirm (C_1), *regardless* of whether or not they actually *argue* for it. However, the truth of compatibilism, at least technically, by definition, while even granting theism, does not entail determinism. That is to say, the thesis of compatibilism only entails *simple compatibilism*, not *substantive compatibilism*. These must not be conflated, no matter how tempting.

Lastly, James Anderson joins the club by unfortunately throwing a wrench in the gears:

Given this basic understanding of compatibilism, we can define ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ determinism as follows: **soft determinism is compatibilist determinism** and **hard determinism is incompatibilist determinism**. In other words, soft and hard determinists agree that determinism is *true*, but they disagree about whether free choices are possible *given* that determinism is true. The ‘softies’ say they are; the ‘hardies’ say they aren’t.²¹⁰

Given this quote from Anderson, one may object and say that compatibilism *is* indeed a kind of determinism, namely *soft determinism*.²¹¹ The theist who affirms compatibilism must therefore be committed to determinism (or so it may be argued). If one affirms compatibilism, and compatibilism is usually considered *soft determinism*, then one receives determinism by entailment.²¹² Does this mean that if one affirms compatibilism they must also hold to *soft*

²⁰⁹ Bignon has gone on record to argue for something like (v^*). See “Does Compatibilism Entail Determinism? A Pragmatic Argument From Purpose in Evil,” <http://theologui.blogspot.com/2014/11/does-compatibilism-entail-determinism.html>. I personally find this argument extremely convincing, however, as I will explain below, this only means that, if true, compatibilism entails determinism via *application*, not *definition*. It seems that Stratton claims the latter in order to understand (v^*), while Bignon, apparently, claims the former. My issue is with the latter.

²¹⁰ Anderson, “Determinism: Soft or Hard?”, <https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/determinism-soft-or-hard/>.

²¹¹ “The terms ‘soft determinism’ and ‘hard determinism’ originate in William James’ essay ‘The Dilemma of Determinism,’ in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (New York: Longman, 1909)” (quoted in Pereboom, *Free Will* (2e)).

²¹² In fact, Stratton has previously stated that this is exactly what compatibilism entails or means: “A popular shade of a view amongst determinists is called compatibilism. Because compatibilists (aka, ‘soft determinists’) realize the many philosophical problems that come along with denying free will — specifically a loss of moral responsibility — they assert that freedom is compatible with determinism. This

determinism after all? Is Stratton right in claiming (v*)? Not quite. As libertarian philosopher Robert Kane says,

In many writings on free will, compatibilists are often referred to as *soft determinists*. Soft determinists are compatibilists who *also* believe that determinism is true [i.e., *substantive compatibilists*].²¹³

Only those compatibilists who wish to claim further than the actual definitional thesis of compatibilism would be considered as *soft determinists* or *substantive compatibilists*. These compatibilists would be going above and beyond what the actual thesis of compatibilism entails.²¹⁴ For the record, if one is a (RO) Hard Calvinist, it is probably in their best interest to affirm *substantive compatibilism* or soft determinism, as to remain consistent with the WCF. However, given this, it still does not follow that (v*) is true, or *must* be true *definitionally*. The (RO) Hard Calvinist may affirm compatibilism *because* of his determinism, not the other way around. That is to say, given the strong reformed orthodox teaching of determinist providence, compatibilism must be upheld *in light of* that doctrine. So it may very well be that it is not the case that theistic compatibilism entails determinism, but rather theistic *determinism* entails compatibilism (at least given a reformed Calvinist background and theology). Even given this additional caveat, I still agree with Bignon that if one wants to claim substantive compatibilism, or (v*), then one must be able to grant an argument for it. Otherwise they should be intellectually honest and stick to their simple compatibilism (v), or (C)', and as we have seen, Bignon does just that in his book.

Following Bignon's caution, Anderson eventually concedes,

It's worth noting in passing that holding to a compatibilist view of free will doesn't commit one to a position on whether or not determinism is actually true. The same goes

assertion has been refuted by Peter van Inwagen's **Consequence Argument** (CA)."

<https://freethinkingministries.com/libertarian-freedom-fighters/>. First, we will discuss the Consequence Argument in detail in the relevant section below. Second, compatibilists do not merely *assert* the compatibility of free will and determinism. I highly doubt that Fischer and Ravizza's magisterial work could be considered as a mere *assertion*, but I digress. Third, and quite ironically, it suffices to say Stratton *asserts* that freedom (unqualified) seems to *not* be compatible with determinism. Now, let's grant some charity: Stratton has updated his arguments since this article has been published on his website. He now argues that compatibilism may describe some kinds of freedom (perhaps, like ordering at a fast food restaurant; see example above), but other kinds of freedom (or at least the kind of freedom worth wanting, such as rational deliberation) is *not* compatible with determinism. That's fair. But, if true, then why doesn't he remove these kinds of outdated articles from his website? Or better yet, why doesn't he simply revise them? Unfortunately, I am not sure we will ever receive an answer. But here is to hoping!

²¹³ Kane, *Contemporary*, 22. (emphasis on "also")

²¹⁴ In the literature, it is often implied that *strong compatibilism* is equivalent to *soft determinism* (i.e., *substantive compatibilism*, or (C_s)), while *weak compatibilism* is equivalent to *simple compatibilism* (i.e., compatibilism without determinism, or (C')). I reject the usage of strong and weak compatibilism only because the same terms are used elsewhere in the literature with no correlation (see next sub-section).

for holding [an] incompatibilist view. *Compatibilism* as such *doesn't entail determinism*; incompatibilism *as such* doesn't entail indeterminism. In principle, one could be a compatibilist who denies determinism or an incompatibilist who affirms determinism (the latter would be a hard determinist). Likewise, one could be a compatibilist or an incompatibilist while being 'agnostic' about determinism. Compatibilism and incompatibilism are simply theses about whether two claims are *logically compatible*; neither involves a commitment to the *truth* of either of those two claims.²¹⁵

It is important to pause here and highlight the fact that in principle even if compatibilism is true, according to Anderson, that itself does not guarantee that determinism is true (this is the odd position noted above, (C_2)). This is completely contrary to what Stratton asserts. One could coherently hold to compatibilism without the entailment of determinism lurking; one could simply be "agnostic" on the thesis of determinism. In fact, this is partly why John Martin Fischer constructed the doctrine of *semi-compatibilism* in recent decades (see below). Lastly, following this train from Stratton's own incompatibilist camp, notable philosopher Kevin Timpe states that it is

... important to keep in mind that compatibilism makes no claim about whether or not determinism is true... [And] most contemporary compatibilists want their view of free will to be compatible not only with the truth of determinism, but also its falsity. That is, they want their view to be one according to which the truth or falsity of determinism is irrelevant to whether or not we are free.²¹⁶

Timpe is describing semi-compatibilism here, but also the compatibilist project as a whole. This is, again, in striking contrast to what Stratton posits. Is Stratton attacking a straw-man? Granted, he did state before arguing against compatibilism that (v^*) was going to be assumed, and so I find myself thankful for the clarity. Stratton's main arguments seem to be against Calvinist (theistic) exhaustive determinism. It appears that *they* are indeed his only interlocutor in mind; those compatibilists who *also* affirm determinism ((v^*) , i.e., *substantive* compatibilists). I agree that it is helpful to the reader for Stratton to address a narrow focus, but I only agree insofar as it is helpful in the sense that his intentions were clearly stated; I disagree that the item of his intention (i.e., the unnecessary entailment) should even be made. Compatibilism may be easier to refute if that is the case, but then it would be nothing more than a soft straw-man as the technical definition of compatibilism is best understood as (v) not (v^*) . There are countless definitions floating around from theological determinists, and its relation to compatibilism, from which Stratton could have interacted with and he instead quoted *none* of them (not even Bignon's though Stratton mentioned him on the very same page!). Once again, we see Stratton merely

²¹⁵ Anderson, "Determinism: Soft or Hard?", <https://www.proginosko.com/2014/07/determinism-soft-or-hard/> (emphasis added).

²¹⁶ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 18. Contemporary compatibilist John M. Fischer takes exactly this line of thought. See his article "Compatibilism" in *Four Views of Free Will*.

pushing his definitions into the text without argument or, at the very least, without documented support (and I thought Bignon was the one accused of defining himself to victory?).

Of course, Stratton could come back and argue that *compatibilistic* freedom entails determinism, whereas the general thesis of *compatibilism* does not entail determinism. This objection states that if one is described as being “compatibilistically” free, then this must entail that determinism obtains in the agent at that time; for what does it mean, the objection could go, for one to be compatibilistically free and *not* be determined? The problem with this objection is two-fold. First, it still assumes *substantive* compatibilism without any sort of homage to simple compatibilism; therefore, it is tantamount to a classic equivocation. Secondly, and most importantly, the objection is actually a non-sequitur. It simply does not follow that if P is “compatibilistically” free to do A at t_1 , then P is by entailment determined to do A at t_1 . If P is compatibilistically free to do A at t_1 , then *all* this means is that determinism *could* be true at t_1 and, if it *were* true, P’s being morally (or rationally) responsible for A-ing at t_1 would *not* be undermined. Thus P could indeed be free in the relevant sense. This is still in alignment with (v), not (v*), contrary to Stratton once again.

Therefore, we can adequately conclude that compatibilism does not *necessarily* entail determinism. Full disclosure: I think that (v*) may be the case, and I would myself affirm theological determinism as a (RO) Hard Calvinist; but I am personally weary to commit to that premise *in an argument*. I would much rather stick to defending *simple* compatibilism. I find that (v*) denotes a proper *application* of compatibilism; I fully concede this. However, (v*) does not denote a proper *definition* of compatibilism; (v) does. The application of compatibilism must be held distinctive to the definition of compatibilism. I have often said that I am a determinist for *theological* reasons, and a compatibilist for *philosophical* reasons. I want a robust or strong actualization of providence while maintaining responsibility for the creatures within that providence. So, if anything, I am a compatibilist because of determinism; I am not a determinist *because of compatibilism*, contrary to Stratton’s suggestion. So it is not at all clear that these two questions (the compatibility of free will and the determinacy of free will) are in fact related, at least not in the way Stratton assumes. The former is more of an explanation of possibilities, whereas the latter is more of a theory on freedom (and an empirical one at that). We should keep these distinctions as they are, not whimsically play around with them, unless we are willing to support it. We should reject (v*) and uphold (v) instead. A proper application of compatibilism need not be equated with the proper definition of compatibilism.

2.3.3 Types of Compatibilism

Given that (v) is a more suitable definition of compatibilism, we can now turn to types of compatibilism. However, before we articulate some of the types, it must be said that, unfortunately, Stratton offers no such type of compatibilism, and given his commentary on

Edwards throughout his historical, philosophical, and theological sections, I believe he equates compatibilist freedom as “one’s greatest desires,” or something akin to it. While this isn’t necessarily far off, it isn’t close either. There are many types of compatibilism in the current philosophical literature today from (as a small sampling) Frankfurt, Fischer, McKenna, Huoranszki, Strawson, Sartorio, Kapitan, Berofsky, Dennett, Haji, Nelkin, Vihvelin, and of course our friendly neighborhood Bignon. *None* of these types of compatibilism were once mentioned in *Mere Molinism*, and only a *few* were mentioned in the rejoinder. Not once did we see Stratton mention Fischer’s great work with semicompatibilism,²¹⁷ nor do we see Stratton interact with Bignon’s arguments.²¹⁸ Moreover, the bibliography doesn’t even reference the above compatibilists (except for McKenna for the definition of compatibilism, and obviously Bignon, but only regarding introductory remarks, not his actual arguments nor defense against the Consequence Argument). I cannot even begin to comprehend what Stratton was thinking here. He is attempting to argue against compatibilism and doesn’t *once* attempt to interact with the leading compatibilist arguments. How is Stratton supposed to argue against compatibilism when his book doesn’t even mention the strongest versions of compatibilism? All one must do is select the relevant chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*,²¹⁹ or the relevant essay in the anthology *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*.^{220 221} In these works one could find fantastic expositions and defenses of contemporary compatibilism. This failure on Stratton’s part to not interact with compatibilism at its finest is hard for me to understand, especially when he passionately claims that, as interlocutors, we have an obligation to “attack an iron-man!”²²² Great! So why doesn’t he do this in *Mere Molinism* with compatibilism? Why doesn’t Stratton “keep up to date” with compatibilism and “attack the strongest version” of it? This seems to be a double-standard. Once again, to not do so in a *philosophical* chapter *against* compatibilism is pure asinine.

As aforementioned, there are several types of compatibilism floating in contemporary literature. Preciado summarizes the most common types:

²¹⁷ This is most upsetting as Stratton commented to me, before his book went on sale, in personal correspondence, that Fischer and Ravizza’s work would be mildly referenced in the book.

²¹⁸ Stratton does, however, have some articles concerning semicompatibilism. See “Yoda & K-2: Semi-Compatibilism & Responsibility”, <https://freethinkingministries.com/yoda-k-2-semi-compatibilism-responsibility/>. He mentions this exact article with some modified edits in “Rejoinder”, 22. Regarding Stratton’s “interaction” with Bignon’s arguments, see §4.1.

²¹⁹ Robert Kane, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, (2e), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²²⁰ David Widerker and Michael McKenna, ed., *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities: Essays on the Importance of Alternative Possibilities*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

²²¹ Or, for that matter, the compatibilist article by McKenna, Michael and D. Justin Coates, “Compatibilism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/compatibilism/>>.

²²² See [A Rational Refutation of Divine Determinism](#) (hosted by Tim Stratton - Freethinking Ministries), timestamp 17:35. Stratton mentions this while accusing Bignon of initially attacking an old formulation of Stratton’s Freethinking Argument. So, Stratton says, we should attack an “iron-man” not an “old-man.”

In surveying the different compatibilist views we can identify five basic categories: (1) classical compatibilism, (2) mesh theories, (3) Strawsonian reactive attitude theories, (4) leeway theories, and (5) reasons-responsive theories. These are all compatibilist views in contemporary philosophy. However, they have different conceptions of freedom.²²³

That they do. In the interest of space, and relevance, I will only focus on (1) classical compatibilism and (5) reasons-responsiveness, albeit briefly.²²⁴ I will summarize the main defense of classical compatibilism first, and then move to reasons-responsiveness after.

Kevin Timpe helpfully distinguishes between (1) and (5) in the following way:

- (1) Classical Compatibilism = Strong Compatibilism
- (5) Reasons-Responsiveness = Weak Compatibilism²²⁵

By “strong compatibilism”, Timpe is referring to the fact that (1) is necessarily committed to some form of leeway compatibilism (I will defend the claim that compatibilist type (4) entails (1) in §2.4.3). Earlier, in §2.1 when defining libertarianism, we concluded that Stratton’s definition of libertarianism must accept (b*) *if* he wants to remain indeterministic regarding free will. There we also concluded, with the help of Stratton’s clarity in his “Rejoinder” that he is unashamedly committed to leeway ability. This means he is considered, according to the philosophical literature, a leeway incompatibilist (i.e., libertarian). Just as there exists leeway incompatibilism, there also exists leeway compatibilism. Interestingly, Stratton affirms the former, whereas Bignon would affirm the latter. The reason why leeway theories are considered “strong” views is because they are “bold” views; it is rather easy to object to these theories. That is, of course, not to say that these theories are false *per se*, rather it is only to say that they are highly pretentious, and thus more objectionable. In contrast, (5) is considered “weak” because the premises argued in reasons-responsive theories are more modest compared to their counterpart leeway theories, and so, they are harder to refute. (1), as stated, are generally considered as *leeway* theories, whereas (5) are considered as *source* theories. This means that reasons-responsiveness theory is considered *source compatibilism* as it posits an emphasis on the agent’s reasons-responsiveness for any given action, not simply whether the agent has alternative possibilities (leeway). Bignon primarily holds to (1) while Fischer and Preciado hold to (5).

I do find (1) and (5) very appealing as a compatibilist and I would personally hold them both in high regard. I will not necessarily argue for them here, as stated in §1.2, but I will *defend* them as

²²³ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 153.

²²⁴ For suggested literature on the applications, arguments, defenses, and objections to the other types of compatibilism not discussed in this present reply, see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapters 8 and 9.

²²⁵ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 69-80. He takes these “strong” and “weak” distinctions from Joseph Campbell.

I believe they are the strongest compatibilist theories alive today. With these “strong” and “weak” distinctions in mind, I often grant the following defense:

$$(\gamma) \text{ COMP} = (1) \vee (5)$$

What this means is that in order to negate the combined thesis of compatibilism (γ), one must first show *both* (via *DeMorgan's Law*) (1) and (5) are false, and therefore not suitable foundations for compatibilism. In other words, negating (1) or (5) *alone* will not do the job of negating compatibilism. Calvinist compatibilists ought to adopt something like (γ); this simply makes their defense harder to refute. The benefits of adopting (γ) in the debate are advantageous indeed. Now, let's move onto the summaries.

Classical compatibilism (1) (or “strong” compatibilism) may be defined in the following way:

According to the classical compatibilist, the free will at issue in the debate is an agent's ability to act and to refrain from acting unencumbered, that is, free from impediments that would stand in her way. The core idea is that free will consists in the absence of impediments both to making a choice and to refraining from doing so.²²⁶

This conception of freedom was most notably held by Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and the well-known Calvinist and American theologian, Jonathan Edwards. In contemporary literature, philosophers such as Ferenc Huoranszki²²⁷ and Bernard Berofsky²²⁸ defend robust accounts of (1) (or entailments of (1)) as well as its usual consequent known as the conditional analysis. Unfortunately, the conditional analysis has received a bad rap in recent years,²²⁹ yet Bignon assures us that not only should it be associated with (1), but that it is alive and well and ought to be defended (*Excusing Sinners*, 91-98).²³⁰ Preciado states that (1) is “certainly part of what reformed theology wants to affirm... [as] the notion of rational spontaneity includes within it a lack of coercion,” (*A Reformed View*, 153). In the next section, we will discuss the conditional analysis in a bit more detail, and its strengths, but for now it is sufficient to say that classical compatibilism can be integrated with reformed theology, along with (5).

Reasons-responsiveness (5) (or “weak” compatibilism) has been articulated into a robust theory in recent years. Essentially (5) teaches that “free will and moral responsibility are accounted for by the ability to respond to reasons in a certain way... Guidance control is a type of

²²⁶ McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 50. Similar statements may be found in Kane, *Contemporary*, 13.

²²⁷ Ferenc Huoranszki, *Freedom of the Will: A Conditional Analysis*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

²²⁸ See Bernard Berofsky, “Compatibilism without Frankfurt: Dispositional Analyses of Free Will” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*; “Classic Compatibilism: Not Dead Yet” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*.

²²⁹ See Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 71-76; Fischer, “Compatibilism”, 48-53.

²³⁰ See also Bignon's article, “The Distasteful Conditional Analysis of Ability”, <http://theologui.blogspot.com/2014/11/the-distasteful-conditional-analysis.html>.

reasons-responsive theory,” (Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 156). Guidance control is said to be differentiated between regulative control. Libertarians hold regulative control in high esteem as it entails the categorical ability to do otherwise. Guidance control, as argued by Fischer, is said to be compatible with determinism, and that this type of control is all that is necessary (and sufficient) for moral responsibility.

Without getting too deep into the multifaceted aspects of guidance control, as it will be the primary topic of discussion in §4.3, it consists of two parts: 1. Reasons-Responsiveness, and 2. Mechanism Ownership. These two parts or conditions make up what is known as guidance control. These conditions are hard terms to delineate and it takes great care to teach them adequately, so I will not go through them in detail here. However, the main idea is that this type of control (guidance control) is necessary as the freedom-relevant condition for moral responsibility, whereas regulative control is argued to not be necessary. I believe Stratton knows this well given his above blog-post on semi-compatibilism as well as his discussion on guidance control in his “Rejoinder”. Nevertheless, for the benefit of the reader, guidance control is said to be under what is called “semi-compatibilism”. McKenna defines it:

Semi-compatibilism holds that determinism is incompatible with the freedom to do otherwise but compatible with moral responsibility.²³¹

The lure here is that even if it is shown that freedom is canceled or shown moot if determinism is found to be true, that *does not mean* that moral responsibility is shown to be incompatible with determinism. This attraction has drawn much attention in the philosophy of freedom debates. Preciado even goes so far as to say that “reformed theology is semi-compatibilist” (Ibid.).²³² For the purpose of the present reply, the difference between semi-compatibilism and compatibilism *simpliciter* will be non-existent. My defense of compatibilism (γ) will remain as the disjunction between classical and semi-compatibilism. This is not to say that I don’t think (1) and (5) could have *some* overlap, and thus are non-mutually exclusive; rather, it is only to say that for all intents and purposes here, I will consider them virtually disjoint and therefore mutually exclusive.

2.3.4 Manipulation Arguments

The previous paragraphs simply show that there are varying types of compatibilism that Stratton has failed to interact with in *Mere Molinism*. Each will be defended differently in the relevant sections below. With those basic definitions in place, at this time I would like to move onto a

²³¹ Quoted in Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 156. For more information on semi-compatibilism, see John Martin Fischer, “Semicompatibilism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*, 5-14.

²³² Greg Welty agrees and thinks that the theory of semi-compatibilism is also robust enough to account for (RO) Hard Calvinist determinism, even though the view itself does not take a hard stance on the truth of determinism. See “Molinist Gun Control: A Flawed Proposal?” in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 84.

potential problem for compatibilism. We have seen above that one potential problem is the fact that compatibilism entails, necessarily, determinism, or (v*), and we concluded that this may be the case for (RO) Hard Calvinists, however, it does not necessarily need to be the case. As long as compatibilism is upheld in reformed theology, and it is defended, one does not need to argue for determinism *per se*. This is not to say that an argument for determinism cannot be done, or even should not be done,²³³ but it is to say that it isn't all that necessary. The application of compatibilism must be maintained as distinguishable from the mere definition of compatibilism. With that said, a more formidable problem arises against compatibilism, and that is manipulation arguments.²³⁴ I will attend to a weaker type argument first, and then address a more famous one.

There are essentially two ways to press a manipulation argument: 1. Entailment and 2. Analogy. The first way, that of entailment, is argued in such a way as to claim manipulation is entailed by or amounts to determinism. Bignon gives one such argument as a steel-man before articulating his assessment:

20. If determinism is true, then all human choices are “manipulated.”

21. If a person's choice is “manipulated,” then that person cannot be morally responsible for it.

Therefore,

14. If determinism is true, then no person can be morally responsible for any of his choices.

Which is to say

6. Determinism is incompatible with moral responsibility.²³⁵

Here, Bignon encourages theistic compatibilists to reject premise (20) as it is too ambiguous on what “manipulation” truly entails. Bignon gives two ways that this “manipulation” could come about: 1. Influencing and 2. Overriding. Incompatibilists who press a type of manipulation argument as the one given usually mean to press the fact that if one is determined, then this must mean *overriding* determination, and in which case, they conclude that determinism therefore entails manipulation “proper.” In other words, it is not surprising to see incompatibilists automatically conclude that if determinism is true, the determining mechanism must be understood as a *circumvention* or *bypass* of one's agency (i.e., overriding manipulation). But why think this? Why think that determinism equals or entails *overriding* manipulation? The conflation

²³³ For instance, see §2.5.14 for a logically possible defense of deterministic agency.

²³⁴ Obviously Stratton is fond of his particular take on manipulation arguments, often using Star Wars or Marvel (or DC) comic book characters to make it fun. I will address Stratton's specific manipulation concerns later in the relevant section. With that said, manipulation arguments have received a plethora of push-back from compatibilists in recent decades, both from secular and religious compatibilists, so much so that virtually *any* work seeking to defend compatibilism about moral responsibility *must* address manipulation cases. For a small sampling, see Sartorio, *Causation & Free Will*, 157-70; Nelkin, *Freedom & Responsibility*, 51-60; Vihvelin, *Causes, Laws, and Free Will*, 148-55; White, *Fate and Free Will*, 133, 181-88, 195-97; Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, chapter 3.

²³⁵ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 29. (original numbering)

between determinism and *overriding* manipulation is unacceptable. Bignon defends against this all too common presumption:

On the theistic compatibilist account, all human choices are determined by God's providential decree, but on the pain of begging the question, incompatibilists cannot assume that the only way to operate such an efficacious decree is to use "manipulation" *proper*, whether it be influencing or overriding.²³⁶

To assume that determinism entails manipulation is to beg the question against compatibilism, especially if no independent argument has been given. In normal cases of divine determinism, God does not *circumvent* our agency, but *reforms* our agency as explained in the last section on determinism. God can and does determine through an internal mechanism; arguably this does nothing to negate our agency and thus our moral responsibility would be preserved. To assume that determinism must equal or entail heart circumvention is to misread the deterministic view severely. According to Bignon, influencing manipulation can preserve, and often does preserve, moral responsibility.²³⁷ Why should we accept premise (20) and agree with the incompatibilist interlocutor that determinism necessarily entails *overriding* manipulation (as that is usually the type of manipulation that is pressed in the arguments)? Additionally, does this mean determinism entails (at the very least) influencing manipulation if not overriding manipulation? No, for Bignon is helpful once again:

On theistic compatibilism, God providentially works in human hearts thereby ensuring that his purposes are willingly accomplished in all things, but in usual cases of normal free choices [often called in philosophical literature as *the actual sequence* of events], God uses none of the [influential] manipulating mechanisms described above to do so: he does not harass, blackmail, misinform, hypnotize, drug, or brain-short-circuit us. The normal mechanism used by God on Calvinism to bring about human free choices lacks the features that are necessary for "influencing manipulation," so it follows that determinism does not entail "influencing manipulation." Premise (20) is thus false on the "influencing" reading of manipulation... the compatibilist account of a free choice need not involve any of the mechanisms that have been admitted or shown to entail "overriding manipulation."²³⁸

We see that under compatibilism, the determining mechanism *does* matter; that is to say, *how* we are determined matters in assessing whether or not we are morally responsible. The mechanism *is* relevant. To assert, without argument, that determinism entails manipulation, and then to

²³⁶ Ibid., 32.

²³⁷ This is not to say that he agrees that under Calvinistic determinism God *does* in fact manipulate us by way of influential circumstances. It is only to say that the burden of proof has not been adequately met by incompatibilists asserting that determinism must entail manipulation proper.

²³⁸ Ibid.

smuggle in a hidden unsupported premise that all determinism must be necessarily understood with, or synonymous as, overriding (or even influencing by whatever degree of) manipulation is to beg the question against the compatibilist. The determining mechanism of the agent can be, and often is, in normal cases of compatibilist providence, seen as *internal* to the agent thereby *reforming* the heart of the agent, yet still ensuring that the agent does what she does according to the decree of God.²³⁹ Therefore, the argument that determinism necessarily entails manipulation is false, first by an equivocation on what it means to be manipulated, and second by a smuggled question-begging assumption that all determinism must entail overriding heart circumvention manipulation.

The second way to press the manipulation argument is to do so by analogy. In this family of arguments, the “incompatibilist claim at hand is that determinism and manipulation are *analogous*; they are relevantly similar, so that if one exclude moral responsibility... then allegedly the other one should too,” (Ibid., 35). Here “manipulation *proper* is no longer the issue,” (Ibid.). Rather, the claim pressed by the incompatibilist is actually an invitation to the compatibilist objector. The compatibilist is asked to identify the relevant difference between normal cases of determinism and the analogous case of manipulation. If there is no such relevant difference that the compatibilist could identify, then the argument by analogy stands, which is to say determinism is analogous to manipulation. These types of manipulation arguments tend to produce three steps: 1. Identify the compatibilist “freedom-relevant” control condition that is argued as primarily sufficient for moral responsibility, 2. Elicit a story which incorporates this sufficient condition, and 3. Abductively conclude that the consequence of being morally responsible, even given the compatibilist control condition, does not follow intuitively.²⁴⁰ If manipulation arguments by analogy are to be successful in demonstrating incompatibilism, these basic three steps (or something very similar) must be articulated clearly within the argument so as to not beg any question against the compatibilist (much like the manipulation arguments by entailment tend to produce, as we have seen). There are a couple of arguments floating in contemporary literature that press the argument by analogy, and they end by asking the compatibilist to give a relevant difference.²⁴¹ Probably the most famous manipulation argument is the “Four Case” argument by Derk Pereboom.²⁴²

In Pereboom’s “Four Case” argument, he attempts to give the compatibilist four cases of professor Plum who unfortunately kills Ms. White. In these four successive cases, each one

²³⁹ For a more detailed account on Bignon’s response to manipulation cases, see the rest of his chapter 3 in *Excusing Sinners*. Also, see “God Determined You to Listen to This & You Ought To | w/ Dr. Guillaume Bignon - PPP ep. 27”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30pcmn8i7Os>.

²⁴⁰ I am thankful to Zach Reimer for pointing this out to me and clarifying the steps.

²⁴¹ Alfred Mele’s “zygote” argument is one as well as Kane’s “Walden Two” argument. Both of which Bignon attempts to rebut in chapter 3 of *Excusing Sinners*.

²⁴² See Derk Pereboom, *Free Will*, 71-103; Pereboom, “Free-Will Skepticism and Meaning of Life” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2e); and Pereboom, “Source Incompatibilism and Alternative Possibilities” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*.

differs ever so slightly, yet each of the cases grants sufficient conditions (under compatibilist philosophy) for Plum. For instance, compatibilist-type (5), or guidance control, is said to be held by Plum in each of the cases. Pereboom hopes to argue that Plum is still not morally responsible at the end of the argument even though he possesses all the necessary and sufficient conditions for moral responsibility from typical compatibilist philosophy. That is, the “conclusion to reach is that the agent in Case 4 (the causally determined agent) is not morally responsible even though the compatibilist conditions on freedom and moral responsibility (including guidance control) have been met,” (Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 263). What does this argument look like?

In Case 1, we start out with Plum being locally or directly manipulated by a team of neurosurgeons. Here we can easily agree that Plum is not morally responsible for killing White. In Case 2, we see the length of manipulation has changed. Instead of being locally manipulated, Plum is now said to be *globally* manipulated to kill White, that is to say at the start of Plum’s life, or that the “programming [directly instilled by the nefarious neurosurgeons] is now supposed to have taken place once for all in the distant past, rather than at the moment of Plum’s choice,” (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 43). In both Case 1 and Case 2, theistic compatibilists can agree that Plum is not morally responsible *because* the mechanism of manipulation has *circumvented* or *overridden* Plum’s agency in a coercive manner. But what about Case 3 and 4?

In Case 3, the situation becomes a bit more difficult. The mechanism of determination of Plum is said to now be through elite “training practices of his community [that] causally [determine] the nature of his deliberative reasoning processes,” (Pereboom, *Free Will*, 78). In other words, “the neuroscientists are removed and replaced with more social and environmental causes,” (Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 266). So the question is whether Plum is morally responsible in Case 3. It appears he meets common contemporary compatibilist conditions of freedom, yet Pereboom argues that Plum being controlled by factors *external* to his control “plausibly explains the absence of moral responsibility in Case 2, and it’s reasonable to conclude that he is not morally responsible in Case 3 on the same ground,” (Pereboom, *Free Will*, 78). But is this reasonable? I agree with Bignon: “It depends,” (*Excusing Sinners*, 43). The first two cases were seen as clear cases of *overriding* or *circumventing* manipulation. When we get to Case 3, it is not as clear whether Plum is a victim of such circumvention. It could very well be the case that Plum is an agent in the midst of *influencing* manipulation. And since determinism does not necessarily rule out *influential* means, it is thus compatible. If compatible, then given Case 3, Plum can be said to be morally responsible. If this is correct, then Case 4 is irrelevant as the ambiguity was found in Case 3.

The relevant difference that Pereboom asked for and that the theistic compatibilist should give is that under normal cases of determinism, God works *through* our agency, not against it. Case 1

and 2 arguably depict Plum being manipulated²⁴³ via causal determination in a way that works against his agency (i.e., through a harmful mechanism that overrides Plum's central locus of agency). Case 3 is too ambiguous to completely ascertain exactly what type of manipulation is upon Plum (either influencing or overriding), but arguably, it remains that Plum's agency *is still* not lost nor is it circumvented under Case 3. Therefore, he would be morally responsible.

Bignon summarizes:

In conclusion, the four case argument is successfully refuted by continuing to discriminate between determinism and covert manipulation on the basis of covert manipulation... is "improperly meddling with an agent's God-given character and desires," [i.e. heart circumvention] a responsibility-undermining practice, which is obviously absent in normal cases of determinist, compatibilist free choices made by agents who freely act out of their God-given characters and desires. The four case argument thus fails to establish that determinism and manipulation are analogous.²⁴⁴

This is what I have been defending all along: there is a difference between a suppression of agency and a reformation of agency, or interveners that counterfactually process against agency or that process through agency, and the determining mechanism reveals that to us. It seems that we can substantially conclude Pereboom's "Four Case" argument against compatibilism in the following way:

The point here is that there is, arguably, a relevant difference between, as Demetriou puts it, 'the effects of being causally determined by suppressive manipulation and the effects of being an inhabitant of a causally deterministic world' ... Determinism, just by itself, does not suppress our agency - whereas having neuroscientists [like in Pereboom's "Four Case" Argument] induce your mental states (by inducing your neural states) from moment to moment clearly *does* suppress agency. Hence, [Pereboom's argument] fails.²⁴⁵

2.3.5 Agency, Determinism, & Compatibilism

Before closing on this section of compatibilism, it may be helpful to tie up some loose ends from Bignon's response to the "Four Case" argument. In Bignon's general critique of manipulation

²⁴³ Not all compatibilists agree that the relevant difference is found between Case 2 and 3, however. Some compatibilists, such as Fischer and Helen Beebe, argue that the relevant difference is in fact found between Case 1 and 2. Of course, this is simply a matter of professional opinion; either way, the argument fails, and obviously that's the fundamental agreement.

²⁴⁴ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 45. It is helpful to note that Bignon takes what is called a "soft-line" approach to the manipulation cases. Michael McKenna has advocated for a much stronger approach, called the "hard-line" approach. The details of which can be found in Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapter 4, and Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 267-273. Personally, I think both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages.

²⁴⁵ Helen Beebe, *Free Will: An Introduction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 92.

cases, he uses an agential criterion of what he calls “God-given-ness.” This is similar to Williams’ “Heart Reformation” and “Heart Circumvention” distinction. However, Bignon’s criterion seems a bit stronger and perhaps, because of this, a bit more ambiguous. For what does it mean to say that something is or is not “God-given” if all things are determined by God? How does this rescue moral responsibility under compatibilism? If all things are determined by God, then doesn’t this mean all things are *already* “God-given”?²⁴⁶ Where is the agency in this? There are a couple of responses that I think I could grant on Bignon’s behalf.

First, the complaint that, if determinism is true, then the claim that says “everything is already given by God,” is a bit ambiguous. This same complaint is additionally seen when incompatibilists ridicule Calvinist compatibilism when they bicker along the lines of, “Isn’t that determined?” or “God determined for me to not believe in Calvinism!”, etc. All this complaint means to show is that if determinism is true, *all* things are determined, including the belief in determinism, as well as our “God-given” agency. And to this I say, yes, of course; this is what determinism means. But more to the point, compatibilists must press that just because everything is determined *doesn’t mean* that everything is determined in the same sense (this is verbatim how Bignon begins to respond to this criticism; see previous footnote). This is to say, just because our agency is in fact “God-given” does not mean it is determined or “God-given” in the same *sense* or *way* as, say, something like sin. In the last section, I took great pains to show the differences between determinism and the assumed imputed notions of causality. I also went to great lengths to show that compatibilists find moral responsibility in the determining mechanism, or the *right kind of determinations*, rather than the determiner of the said mechanism. There is, and can be,

²⁴⁶ In fact, Kevin Timpe complains to Bignon’s “God-giveness” criteria in the same way in his review of Bignon. Timpe writes:

However, notice that if theological determinism is true, all cases of manipulation are ultimately God-given. What one would want, and what one doesn’t find, is an account of why responsibility despite God-giveness is compatible with God’s directly causing an agent to choose, but incompatible with the God-giveness that goes through any human agent (that is, a manipulator). (quoted in Bignon, “Response to Kevin Timpe,” 7)

Bignon responds by stating the following:

Here again, his objection hinges on his different interpretation of my phrase “God-given.” He uses it with a meaning such that everything is God-given on determinism, which makes it unable to differentiate between cases that are responsible and cases that aren’t. But I didn’t mean the phrase like that. Is everything God-given on determinism? Well, yes, in *some* sense of God-given-ness. But obviously not the sense I was suggesting. Mine doesn’t have to do with merely tracing the action causally back to God; that of course is the case for all actions on Calvinist determinism. Rather, it had to do with how the determined action comes to pass. I suggested that God as our creator has a proper channel to work directly in our hearts to appropriately determine us to act responsibly, whereas responsibility is excluded if our (equally determined) choice is brought about indirectly, going through a human overriding of our “God-given” character and desires, by a human manipulator. (“Response,” 8)

My response to this objection will be quite similar to Bignon’s. He continues as says, “My book stops short of a philosophical analysis of that ‘God-given-ness’ in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (Calvinist philosophers can pick up where I left off), but that sort of God-given-ness is what I suggest as a relevant difference,” (Ibid.). I propose to take up that challenge of demonstrating a necessary and sufficient condition for Bignon’s “God-given-ness” criterion in my response.

an indirect or *negative* determination by God in the cases of, say, evil, and a direct or *positive* determination by God in the cases of righteousness or goodness. With this in mind, we compatibilists would agree that our agency is in fact “God-given,” but this does not mean that *every part* of our agency, which include our evil intentions, desires, etc., are in fact determined by God or given by God *in the same way* as, say, our good intentions, desires, etc. The good parts of our character are arguably efficiently determined by God whereas the evil parts of our character are deficiently determined by God. Both are determined, but they are determined through a different mechanism or divine approach; one through divine action and the other through divine omission.

Our agency is in fact God-given, or determined by God, and Bignon himself assures us that this criterion can be assumed by compatibilists and incompatibilists alike (*Excusing Sinners*, 37). Surely even libertarians agree that God has granted them the libertarian freedom *and because of this* their character influences their agency. In any case, our agency is equally flawed due to the fall. Everything is God-given in the sense that everything exists because of Him, but that does *not* mean that everything that exists is *from* Him, such as evil (at least not directly or *positively*). My theory of (TWD*) plausibly shows that this could be the case that while we owe our existence to God Himself, we do not blame Him for our ontological deprivation (that was “out of God’s hands” so to speak). Whether or not He is morally culpable for creating us with such a known malady is a different question (one of which most if not all theological providential systems must equally face, albeit their answers may slightly differ). But it remains that our ontological deprivation is only from Him in the sense that He brought it about, *not* that He originated the deprivation or evil within us.

So what does this mean? How does this help? The bulk of our agency is *not* necessarily determined directly or positively. Rather, due to something like (TWD*), arguably, most of our agency is determined by our ontological malady, and so, since God does not want to risk evil, He would rather control it and be sovereign over it to ensure the best possible set of redeemable circumstances in the midst of it. This calls for *determinism* or a *strong actualization*. He can be said to negatively determine our agency through our own ontological deprivation in the way that we would naturally choose or in the way our sinfulness would naturally flow. As quoted above, Bignon adds,

God on Calvinism who as a result of the fall ordained that humans would have corrupted natures [i.e., (TWD*) would come about], but regulates their evil, particularly on the moment of choice, by a justifiably asymmetrical control [i.e., negative and positive decree]. He actively [positively] extends grace to prevent sin, or passively [negatively] refrains to do so, allowing naturally sinful people to sin when his good purposes require

it... To *sin*, a fallen human will needs no “moving” by God; it is what it *would* do naturally apart from a particular divine intervention with special grace.²⁴⁷

This is exactly right, and it just so happens, as I concluded the discussion on divine displacement in the last section, this formulation or proposal concerning God’s determinations actually rescues divine permission language for the Calvinist, and also fits nicely with (TWD*). Although the evil aspects that are formed in our characters arise, which then go on to negatively affect our agency and decision-making, they can still be said to be traced back to God’s divine *permission* or negative decree (i.e., God is still strongly sovereign, yet not culpable). God’s “permission of evil is less active, but no less decisive” as He is said to “actively [bring] about the good, and more passively ‘permits’ evil, both of which still occur under his meticulous control” or strong determinative actualization (Ibid., 235). Regarding my agency then, I am more prone to certain sins than others because of God’s negative decree, *but also* due to the malady of ontological deprivation (i.e., (TWD*)). He uses those sins that I have a tendency to commit in order to bring about His good purposes, regardless of whether or not I possess epistemic access to those good purposes. The negative or sinful aspects of our characters which arguably influence our agency deeply are still decided and determined by God via negative decree or divine omission. These sinful aspects of my character-formed agency is *not* directly determined, but rather the reasons, circumstances, desires, and influences (i.e., the means) all culminate to flow *through* my personhood in such a way as to do what God has decreed or determined for me to do (albeit negatively) for His good purposes. This is how our agency is formed and this is how it can be said to be “God-given,” or determined by God, yet not in a morally inappropriate sense. In addition, our agency is neither lost nor diminished in this providential process. In short, is God responsible for my agency? Yes. It is “God-given”, of course. Is he morally culpable for the evil aspects that my agency produces? No, as He negatively decrees such evil aspects via privation and passivity.²⁴⁸

There is about one more complaint from the incompatibilist rejecting Bignon’s “God-giveness” criteria in responding to manipulation cases. It is similar to the first objection, but it goes something like this: If God is said to determine all things, even if it is through negative determination, and this of course entails our agency is in fact “God-given”, then does it not follow that even if God negatively determines person X to sin against person Y, then God is, in some sort, still “meddling” with person Y’s agency? If humans are not supposed to “meddle” with each other’s agency (as in the cases of overt overriding manipulation), then why can God “meddle” by determination via negatively or positively? Why are we to be blamed for our

²⁴⁷ Bignon, “Lord Willing and God Forbid” in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge*, 231, 233.

²⁴⁸ As an aside, this idea of God being “hands-off” is of course biblical. Romans 1 teaches that we are left to our sinful desires as a sort of judicial hardening. Arguably, this is consistent with Calvinism *if* the Calvinist compatibilists proclaim something like God’s active/passive counterfactual decrees. That much, I believe, Bignon and I have done.

“meddling” of another person’s agency, yet God is not? These questions are legitimate and deserve a suitable answer.

The central objection in this rebuttal is basically that God doesn’t have the right to meddle with our agencies; if we are not allowed, then God is not allowed. I think this is wrong. God being God has the right to “meddle” or change, or better yet, *reform* our agencies (via irresistible grace?), and this is justified by the very fact *that they are God-given*. Perhaps this objection confuses “meddle” with *reform*. God reforms our agencies for His good purposes. Here I don’t think this complaint is against God’s positive determination upon our spiritual lives in sanctification. Why wouldn’t we want God to directly determine or reform our characters in such a way as to influence our agency in a righteous way? But if the complaint is directed more towards the “meddling” of our agency in the negative decree, then first, I would point the interlocutor back to the first complaint. My response there plausibly shows that God is not morally culpable for that negative decree. Second, I would point out that even if God is said to “meddle” with our agencies (which again, I would rather use “reform” than “meddle”), why would this be morally inappropriate for God to do? God doesn’t meddle with our agency like agents meddle with one another. Once again, we see the compatibilist emphasis on the mechanism at play. God would “meddle” in an internal way, and this is a way that would lead to some sort of reformation if through a positive determination, but if through a negative determination, it would lead to a “letting go” as Romans 1 suggests. With regards to humans, all we can do is overtly meddle with one another’s agencies in a way that is either overriding or circumventing. If we do “meddle” in a way that is influential, then why would this equally be poised against God as a negative complaint as God’s spiritual influences don’t usually negate responsibility. God, as our Creator, gives us our agencies, and as Job has famously stated, He can take away what He gives. Also, it is interesting to note that even if God is said to be residually blamed for supposedly afflicting our agencies in a harmful way through a negative decree, I would simply like to point out that God being God is vastly different from humans being humans. In other words, there is a creature-Creator distinction. God can command the killing of human civilizations (in fact, He did just that in the Old Testament; many times if I might add), and yet we say He is righteous for doing so. Perhaps the rebuttal is that those human civilizations, like the Canaanites, were not so innocent. So, here killing is different than *murder*. I would then post the rejoinder and say, yes, but God still commanded the *murder* of Christ His Son. It was morally wrong for the Pharisees to put Christ to death, and we looked upon Pilate with a shameful face, yet it was predetermined by God to do so. All this is to say that “God’s almighty position is radically different from that of his creatures. When it is forbidden for us to go and kill our neighbors, it is perfectly within God’s prerogative, as the author of life, to give and to take it away,” (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 39). Therefore, I think these two complaints against Bignon’s soft-line approach to manipulation cases (specifically to Pereboom’s “Four Case” argument) while utilizing the criterion of “God-giveness” are thus not persuasive.

2.3.6 Conclusion

Theistic compatibilism, when defending the thesis, should claim something like (γ) as it tends to strengthen their case especially in response to manipulation arguments. We have seen that the compatibilist can respond to sophisticated manipulation cases and still seem to hold to the fact that human agents can be morally responsible and that this is perfectly compatible with determinism, as definition (ν) stated. Moreover, theistic compatibilists should be cautious in claiming something like (ν*) without an independent argument for the thesis of determinism. Although Stratton's definition and exposition of compatibilism fares much better than that of libertarianism and determinism (namely because his basic definition of compatibilism provides a much more coherent and non-confusing definition, though (ν*) is still questionable), he still fails to account for contemporary definitions of compatibilism. That is to say, Stratton fails to attack "steel-man" positions of compatibilism. I find this miserable failure deeply unforgivable for a scholar of his stature and notoriety.

2.4 Responsibility, Ability, & Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP)

2.4.1 Introduction

When considering the question of whether or not an agent is responsible, it is often argued that "free will" is a necessary condition. That is to say, if an agent is morally responsible, then she is "free" in the necessary sense. Philosophers have thus named "free will" as the control condition necessary for moral responsibility.²⁴⁹ If I am said to be responsible for some action, this implies that I must have had a certain sense of control or freedom in that same said action. In other words, if I do not possess this "control" condition, or this "freedom-relevant" condition in some action or volition, I cannot be said to possess responsibility for that same action. The question remains, however: *what is the "freedom-relevant" condition?* What sense of "control", or more precisely, what sense of *ability* is necessary for responsibility? Clearly, responsibility entails ability; but what kind of ability? Moreover, if I am said to be responsible in the basic desert sense, I am said to be a prime candidate for *praiseworthiness* or *blameworthiness* of some sort, whether that be to God or to my immediate community. So, what is the necessary condition for

²⁴⁹ Cf. Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 8; Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility & Control*, 13; Vicens and Kittle, *God and Human Freedom*, 1. In the literature, it is relatively uncontroversial that "free will" is often defined as just that: the freedom-relevant condition necessary for responsibility. See Kevin Timpe, *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 7: "*Free will* = _{df} the control condition on moral responsibility; that is, the capacity or set of capacities governing an agent's choices or volitions, the exercise of which are necessary for the agent to be morally responsible for those choices or volitions."

this type of (basic) desert responsibility?²⁵⁰ These are questions that must be dealt with in any academic work concerning the philosophy of freedom.

2.4.2 Moral & Rational Responsibility

In *Mere Molinism*, Stratton attempts to argue that this “freedom-relevant” condition necessary for responsibility is known as the *categorical ability* (*Mere Molinism*, 4-5). But, the type of responsibility Stratton is interested in is not *moral* responsibility, but rather *rational* responsibility. Rational responsibility, as argued by Stratton, entails a categorical ability to *think* otherwise. This is alarmingly evident in his philosophical chapter. Any person following Stratton’s defense of *Mere Molinism* in his videos, articles on responsibility, and podcast episodes or rejoinder to Bignon will additionally come to understand that this is a point Stratton aims to make absolutely clear. In fact, Stratton alludes to this on page 5 of *Mere Molinism* by citing the unnamed Frankfurt-style example: “This thought-experiment suggests that... An agent, although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, is free to think otherwise and make his or her own choices.”²⁵¹ Here we see the distinction between mental and physical (overt) actions once again. Putting it in terms of responsibility, we see the distinction between moral and rational responsibility *as well as* mention of the categorical ability. Stratton seems to concede that while it *may* be the case that the agent does not have the ability to physically do otherwise, yet is said to be intuitively *morally* responsible, it is certainly *not* the case that he is not *rationally* responsible (regarding his mental actions, or deliberative processes). In other words, the agent may not have the ability to *do* otherwise, but the agent certainly has the ability to *think* otherwise, and that is justification enough to label the agent libertarianly free in Stratton’s eyes. I must admit, this distinction is quite clever (though it is not new). Stratton seems to be making the age-old trick of placing various distinguishable senses of a proposition in terms of a logical disjunction. His proposal could be described as the following:

Let RESP = Responsibility (unqualified), MR = Moral Responsibility, and RR = Rational Responsibility.

11. $\text{RESP} =_{\text{df}} \text{MR} \vee \text{RR}$ (*Stratton’s definition of responsibility*)
12. $\neg \text{RESP} = \neg(\text{MR} \vee \text{RR})$ (*negation of (11)*)
13. $\therefore \neg \text{RESP} = \neg \text{MR} \wedge \neg \text{RR}$. (*from (11), (12), DeMorgan’s Law*)

²⁵⁰ It is often said in the literature that there are essentially two main necessary conditions involved with moral responsibility in the basic desert sense: the “freedom-relevant” condition, and the “epistemic” condition. That is, responsibility *proper* entails the conjunction of control and epistemic conditions. We will focus solely on the former condition as it pertains to *Mere Molinism* the most.

²⁵¹ For a more thorough discussion on Stratton’s exposition of this unnamed Frankfurt example, see §2.5.2.

What this demonstrates is that in order to negate responsibility *proper*, one must negate moral responsibility *and* rational responsibility. In other words, one can maintain the truth of rational responsibility *even though* moral responsibility is negated. Stratton can claim the agent in the above Frankfurt thought-experiment as rationally responsible though he does not have the ability to *do* otherwise, the agent can still *think* otherwise. This move works given the above syllogism. Again, this is a clever maneuver on Stratton's part. The compatibilist usually presses that moral responsibility is primarily at stake in the given thought-experiment, not necessarily rational responsibility. So, if this demonstration works, then perhaps compatibilists have something to worry about. I will argue two reasons why I do not think the disjunction works.

First, if Stratton likes to press against (RO) Hard Calvinists that he is in "good company" with some confessing Calvinists in maintaining libertarian freedom in "matters below" but not "matters above," then I am in "good company" with some confessing incompatibilists (such as Pereboom and Timpe) in maintaining that mental actions are no different than overt actions, at least when the question of the compatibility of free will and determinism is being debated (as it is here). This means that the distinction between moral and rational responsibility, although it is an interesting one to make, does not swim too far before it sinks (again, for more details, see §2.5). If other professional incompatibilists do not see the importance of such a maneuver, then Stratton should doubt his own use of such a distinction. Of course, this isn't a rebutting defeater, rather it is only an undercutting defeater.

For the second critique, I wish to provide such a rebutting defeater. For the sake of argument, let's grant Stratton the distinction and play around with it in order to see whether or not it can maintain some residual amount of philosophical nuance. In personal correspondence to Stratton, he has argued that rational responsibility should be seen as a necessary condition for moral responsibility. To not do so would, in Stratton's words, "put the cart before the horse." One cannot, according to Stratton, even begin to attribute moral responsibility to an agent unless one first can attribute rational responsibility to the same agent. In other words, Stratton would argue that moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, and this is supported by the simple fact that the rational cognitive processes of one's deliberation must *precede* one's moral physical (or otherwise bodily) overt action.²⁵² In another way, one's mental attribution or allocation to rational responsibility must precede one's physical attribution or allocation to moral responsibility.

²⁵² Stratton also goes on record to defend this very premise in a recent article. He states it like this: "1- If x is not rationally responsible, then x is not morally responsible," ("An Argument Supporting the Incompatibility Thesis," linked above). In defense of this premise, he actually (surprisingly) quotes compatibilist Carolina Sartorio: "The first premise is intuitively obvious. Indeed, even Carolina Sartorio — one of the leading compatibilists in the world today — affirms this much: '*some minimal degree of rationality is arguably required for moral responsibility . . .*'" Sadly, although Stratton cites the quote from *Do We Have Free Will? A Debate*, he does not give a page number in order for interlocutors to double-check his research conveniently.

Stratton wants to argue that rational responsibility may be able to be distinguished from moral responsibility, and how he aims to do this is presumably by denoting that the two provide a logical *disjunction* from responsibility *proper*. However, I don't think the *disjunction* works in Stratton's favor. Consider the following *conjunction* instead:

- 14. $\text{RESP} =_{\text{df}} \text{MR} \wedge \text{RR}$ (*incompatibilist definition of responsibility*)
- 15. $\neg \text{RESP} = \neg(\text{MR} \wedge \text{RR})$ (*negation of (14)*)
- 16. $\therefore \neg \text{RESP} = \neg \text{MR} \vee \neg \text{RR}$. (*from (14), (15), DeMorgan's Law*)

The problem I have with Stratton's disjunction lies in the fact that what is necessary for moral responsibility *and* rational responsibility is *libertarian freedom*. If Stratton wishes to argue that former entails the latter, then it is evident that what is necessary for the consequent *must also* be necessary for the antecedent. Responsibility *simpliciter*, for the *incompatibilist*, should be considered as the *conjunction* of moral responsibility and rational responsibility, not simply the disjunction. This is why overt actions do not necessarily differ from mental actions (or "willings"). Though, one could argue that, traditionally, *freedom of action* is distinct from *freedom of will*,²⁵³ and though moral responsibility could be tied to the former, whereas rational responsibility could be tied to the latter, both moral *and* rational responsibility are still considered incompatible with determinism in the desert sense for the incompatibilist. Whatever control condition is necessary for mere "willings" of an agent must also be necessary for overt actions of the same agent.²⁵⁴

2.4.3 Dispositional Abilities: Broad & Narrow

The next critique I have in my agenda is concerning Stratton's exposition of *ability*. Earlier, I mentioned that Stratton presumably holds to the *categorical* ability as the freedom-relevant condition for rational responsibility. When asked to defend this condition, he says, "A brief comment regarding the word 'ability'" is necessary ("Rejoinder", 2). He is correct; he writes,

There are several manners in which one can use the word. For example, we may distinguish between narrow ability (which focuses solely on one's nature) and broad ability (which focuses on both one's nature and one's circumstances related to a certain narrow ability). Accordingly, for some person *p* and action *a*, to say that "*p* has the narrow ability to perform *a*" is to say that *p*'s nature implies that *p* can perform *a* given that *p* is in the right circumstances (i.e., circumstances that are conducive to *p*'s performing *a*). And to say that "*p* has the broad ability to perform *a*" is to say that (i) *p* has the narrow ability to perform *a* and (ii) *p*'s circumstances allow, or are conducive to, *p*'s performing *a* (or, in simple terms, *p* has the opportunity to perform *a*). So, for

²⁵³ Cf. Kane, "Free Will: A Libertarian Perspective," in *Do We Have Free Will?*, 13-15.

²⁵⁴ I will argue this claim more directly in §2.4.6.

example, I have the narrow ability to play the bass guitar; however, since I have no bass guitar in my current vicinity, I do not have the broad ability to actually slap a funky bass line at the current moment. With this in mind, although I possess the narrow ability to play the bass guitar, if God supernaturally causally determined (hereafter simply “determined”) all bass guitars to vanish from the face of the earth, then, although I could still play the bass (if things were determined to be different), I would lack the broad ability (or opportunity) to play the bass.²⁵⁵

We see that Stratton lists only two senses in which one could interpret “ability”, both of which have nothing to do with the categorical ability which he affirms in his book (and that is odd). These two senses of abilities seen in the above quote are the following: *broad* and *narrow ability*. These distinctions are not new; they are found in the writings of Vihvelin (compatibilist)²⁵⁶ and Franklin (libertarian-incompatibilist).²⁵⁷ These distinctions between the “broad” abilities (oftentimes called “wide”) and “narrow” abilities are known as the dispositional analysis of ability. This analysis of ability is considered a *leeway* view regarding the freedom-relevant condition for responsibility. Now, while I appreciate, and ultimately applaud, Stratton’s engagement with the relevant free will literature, I am afraid the mere positing of dispositional abilities in order to potentially ground rational responsibility fails to do proper justice. As we shall see later, Stratton misunderstands the term “opportunity” in the compatibilist context.

Kadri Vihvelin is often known as the leading philosopher on dispositional (leeway) compatibilism. She espouses compatibilist-type (4) (see §2.3.3). Though there are differences between Stratton’s dispositional analysis and Vihvelin’s analysis—for instance, she uses the term “wide” instead of “broad”—I have a hunch she would essentially agree with Stratton’s quick exposition of broad and narrow ability. For background, Vihvelin describes the narrow abilities as “those abilities that you have in virtue of facts about your *intrinsic properties*,” (Vihvelin, *Causes*, 11). Another term useful for defining narrow ability is *capacity*, or *disposition*. Later, Vihvelin argues that narrow abilities just are *intrinsic dispositions*. Basically, according to

²⁵⁵ Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 2-3.

²⁵⁶ Kadri Vihvelin, *Causes Laws, and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn’t Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵⁷ Christopher Evan Franklin, *Minimal*, chapter 3 (cf. Stratton, “Rejoinder”, 3n8). In chapter 3 of Franklin’s book, he specifically attacks Vihvelin’s dispositional leeway compatibilism. Vihvelin argues for something similar: “narrow and wide abilities.” Vihvelin is seen as a dispositional (or leeway) compatibilist, and as far as I know, she originated the terms “narrow” and “wide” ability. Unfortunately, the details of Vihvelin’s complex case for dispositional compatibilism will not be discussed. However, to see where Stratton may potentially be coming from, see Franklin, *Minimal*, 80-84; there, Franklin displays Vihvelin’s dispositional compatibilism and then argues that it fails to capture true responsibility and freedom, at least in the compatibilist sense, and is instead better applied to libertarianism. For my purposes in the present reply, I will remain neutral on whether the dispositional compatibilist account succeeds in *grounding* our metaphysical freedom in the way Vihvelin claims. Though I will say that if something like dispositional compatibilism is true, it is plausible that it could entail classical compatibilism along with its infamous conditional analysis, as the dispositions of an agent by definition are counterfactual in nature. See next subsection for more details.

Vihvelin, “abilities to do otherwise are to be characterized in terms of intrinsic dispositions, that is, dispositions of agents that consist in intrinsic properties—by contrast with extrinsic or relational properties—that agents have,” (McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 226).

McKenna and Pereboom detail Vihvelin’s dispositional analysis:

In her analysis, Vihvelin distinguishes between narrow and wide abilities. A narrow ability to A, where A-ing is some type of action, is, as Vihvelin puts it, a matter of “what it takes” to A [Vihvelin, *Causes*, 11]. What it takes to A, she holds, includes whatever skills, competence, or know-how are required to A—and to do it without too much luck. A narrow ability also involves “the psychological and physical capacity to use” the required skills or exercise the competence of know-how. Usain Bolt can run 100 meters in ten seconds, but lacks a narrow ability to do so if he is asleep. Having a wide ability to A is having a narrow ability to A and being in circumstances amenable to the exercise of that ability. One must have the means and the opportunity to A, and there must be nothing external that stands in one’s way. Despite being able to run 100 meters in ten seconds when in propitious circumstances, Bolt lacks a wide ability to do so now if he’s asleep on swampy ground.²⁵⁸

McKenna and Pereboom’s characterization of Vihvelin’s analysis is almost identical to Stratton’s analysis quoted above. If *p* possesses the narrow ability to do otherwise, then “*p*’s [intrinsic dispositional] nature implies that *p* can perform *a* given that *p* is in the right circumstances (i.e., circumstances that are conducive to *p*’s performing *a*),” (Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 3). And if *p* has the wide (or broad) ability to perform *a*, then “(i) *p* has the narrow ability to perform *a* and (ii) *p*’s circumstances allow, or are conducive to, *p*’s performing *a* (or, in simple terms, *p* has the opportunity to perform *a*),” (Ibid.). In short, to have a narrow ability is to have the *means* to do A (i.e., *disposition* or *capacity*), while the wide (broad) ability entails the narrow ability *plus* being in *amenable circumstances* in order to do A (i.e., the *opportunity*). Logically,

(N) Narrow = (Intrinsic) Disposition

(W) Wide = (N) \wedge OPP²⁵⁹

Stratton then illustrates these abilities while utilizing a scenario of him playing his bass guitar (similar to McKenna and Pereboom’s example of Usain Bolt). Stratton possesses (N) to play the bass guitar even if he is not in a suitable environment, that is, there is no bass guitar currently

²⁵⁸ McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 226.

²⁵⁹ Even more formally, Vihvelin proposes the following ability necessary for free will:

LCA-PROP-Ability: S has the narrow ability at time *t* to do R as the result of trying iff, for *some* intrinsic property B that S has at *t*, and for some time *t'* after *t*, if S had the opportunity at *t* to do R and S tried to do R while retaining property B until time *t'*, then in a *suitable proportion of these cases*, S’s trying to do R and S’s having of B would be an S-complete cause of S’s doing R. (Vihvelin, *Causes*, 187)

within the immediate vicinity. Of course, Stratton *can* still play the bass guitar though there are no bass guitars around him. This sense of *can* is seen as (N): Stratton has the narrow ability, or *intrinsic disposition* or *power* to play the bass even though he does not possess the *opportunity* to play the bass; he still has the *means* or the *capacity* to play the bass. Not being in a suitable circumstance or opportunity to play the bass does not vanquish Stratton of his bass playing *disposition* or *capacity* (or, as Vihvelin would argue, his bass playing *ability*). However, if Stratton *is* in a suitable circumstance in which he *can* play the bass, we say that he has (W). In this scenario, Stratton has the conjunction of (N) *and* the opportunity to actually play the bass (e.g., there is a bass guitar in the room with him). For a proper dispositional analysis, then, we see the following:

$$\text{PAP}_{\text{Disp}} =_{\text{df}} (W) \Rightarrow (N)$$

In order to have the wide (or broad) opportunity to do *a*, one must first possess the *narrow* opportunity to do *a*; that is to say, one must first possess the *intrinsic power* or *disposition* to *a* in order to actually do *a*, if suitable circumstances are said to obtain. Therefore, the *wide ability* entails the *narrow ability*.

As a quick aside, it is worth noting just how malleable the dispositional analysis is to other compatibilists who do *not* hold to compatibilist type (4) (leeway dispositionalism). For example, consider John Martin Fischer. Though he holds to type (5) (reasons-responsiveness, or guidance control), he too may reap the benefits of a modified dispositional analysis of ability. It is thought that Fischer, the leading compatibilist philosopher on semi-compatibilism, believes that *no* alternative possibility is necessary for responsibility. This is false. Fischer does believe that *some* alternatives are necessary for moral responsibility; it is just the case about *which kind* of alternatives. Instead of using “broad” and “narrow” abilities, he uses the terms “specific” and “general”, respectively. In response to Franklin’s criticism that semi-compatibilism allows for no such alternatives, Fischer writes,

I completely agree with Franklin that I do indeed believe that *various* kinds of alternative possibilities are required for moral responsibility (although not for the “grounding” or explanation of moral responsibility), and thus my repeated contention that alternative possibilities are not required for moral responsibility might well have caused confusion. Of course, in the Frankfurt-Style Cases Jones does not lose his *general ability* to vote Republican (i.e., to do otherwise in the context), just as we do not lose various general abilities when we are asleep. One might say that we keep our general abilities in these contexts, although we do not have the *opportunity* to exercise them (immediately). Again:

I do not lose my *general ability* to play the piano when there is no piano in my vicinity; I simply do not have the *opportunity* to exercise it.²⁶⁰

Fischer speaks of “general” and “specific” abilities, whereas Stratton speaks of “broad” and “narrow” abilities. The definitions of the said abilities appear to be equivalent, but they have different names. Stratton speaks of the “broad” ability to stand for Fischer’s implied “specific” ability. Using the example of Stratton’s bass guitar, if he is *actually* in the room with a bass guitar, then Stratton is said to possess the “broad” ability as he has the *specific* opportunity to play or slap some funky tunes. However, if Stratton is not in the room, and let’s say at a speaking engagement with no bass guitar within the immediate vicinity, then he does *not* possess the “broad” ability because he does not have the *specific* opportunity to play some funky tunes. Instead, in this latter scenario, he would only possess the “narrow” ability, or the *general* ability, because “although [he] could still play the bass [generally],” he does not have the specific opportunity to play the bass; “[he] would lack the broad ability (or [specific] opportunity) to play the bass,” (“Rejoinder”, 3).

Thus far, the dispositional analysis that has been explained and posited by Stratton is standard across the dispositional literature. So, what is the problem with Stratton’s use of the dispositional? First, as I have alluded to previously, the dispositional analysis of ability virtually has *nothing* to do with the categorical analysis. It is bewildering why Stratton feels as if he has to exposit the dispositional analysis in order to defend an indeterministic sense of ability. The categorical analysis of ability is, at bottom, *categorically* different from the dispositional analysis of ability. Given this, Stratton’s switch to the dispositional analysis as his chosen freedom-relevant condition necessary for rational responsibility seems to be uncomfortable at best, or grossly misinformed at worst.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 152. (emphasis added on “general ability” and “opportunity”) For more discussion on ability and opportunity to do otherwise, see Franklin, *Minimal*, 42. Here he classifies the necessary condition or what is known as the “freedom relevant condition” for responsibility as the Principle of Reasonable Opportunity (PRO). In the same book, Franklin details the notion of “opportunity” in relation to moral responsibility, ability, and determinism (see chapter 3). Though Franklin’s minimal event-causal libertarianism is significantly robust, and perhaps the best account of libertarian philosophy other than Kane’s or Timpe’s, I find PRO unconvincing.

Now, of course, not all philosophers agree with Fischer’s concession to Franklin. Taylor Cyr and Philip Swenson have recently published an excellent essay on these dispositional abilities of *general*, *narrow*, *broad*, etc. As their title claims, they argue for moral responsibility *without* general ability to do otherwise. While I will not get into those woods here, I find this subset of the freedom debate fascinating. See Swenson and Cyr, “Moral Responsibility without General Ability” *Philosophical Quarterly* (2019). For an unpublished PDF copy, see <https://philpapers.org/archive/CYRMRW.pdf> (accessed 12/1/21, from Swenson’s website: <https://sites.google.com/site/philipjswenson/home>). See also “Semicompatibilism: no ability to do otherwise required,” *Philosophical Explorations* 20 (3):308-321 (2017), <https://philpapers.org/archive/CYRSNA.pdf>. Here, Cyr responds to Franklin’s criticism of semi-compatibilism and its apparent inconsistent use of alternative possibilities (albeit dispositional abilities). Last, see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 120, as well as Robb, David, “Moral Responsibility and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/alternative-possibilities/>, section 4.2.1.

Even if I were to grant that libertarianism is compatible with the dispositional analysis, that fact alone doesn't grant its coherency, especially if positioned as the freedom-relevant condition for responsibility. After all, libertarianism is compatible with virtually *all* compatibilist-types (e.g., classical compatibilism, reasons-responsiveness, etc.). That's not the issue; the issue is when the libertarian places the compatibilist freedom-relevant condition for responsibility *as its own* freedom-relevant condition for responsibility. I understand that Franklin has utilized the dispositional analysis in order to argue that determinism allows for "no opportunity" to do otherwise (Franklin, *Minimal*, 72). And though Franklin does not seem to pay homage to the categorical analysis, nor does Stratton utilize the categorical analysis in his extended rejoinder to Bignon, those facts alone do not grant their usage of the dispositional as coherent; it is virtually irrelevant. Given the fact that indeterminism (a necessary condition for libertarianism) *by definition* entails categorical alternatives (see §2.1.2-3), the mere utilization of dispositional abilities seems inconsistent and disorganized. If (b*) (i.e., *categorical* alternative possibilities) is a necessary condition for free will under libertarianism, I do not see how positing dispositions rescue the libertarian in their analysis of leeway control. In fact, Franklin himself responds to the luck objection in his book (Franklin, *Minimal*, chapter 5). But, it is no secret that the luck objection is an objection *against* the categorical analysis of free will and control. What's more is that Franklin responds to the luck objection in such a way that *presupposes* the categorical analysis. As Bignon has already argued, "[n]o matter how modestly one defines libertarianism [such as claiming dispositional abilities as the freedom-relevant condition]... the possession of libertarian free will entails the categorical ability to do otherwise than one does," (*Excusing Sinners*, 126).

Moreover, it is long held that the dispositional analysis *is* compatible with determinism, whereas the categorical analysis is *not* compatible with determinism. In fact, Vihvelin believes that

We are, at least sometimes and perhaps quite often, in situations in which we have not only the narrow but also the *wide* ability to choose and to act otherwise. We believe that some of the choices that we make are [deliberative choices]. That is, we believe that we are sometimes in situations in which we deliberate, decide, and act on the basis of our decision *and* in which it is also true that we have the *wide ability* to decide and act otherwise.²⁶¹

Obviously Stratton would dispute this claim. In particular, he would argue that the *wide* ability is incompatible with determinism. In his rejoinder, he writes,

Similarly, if God determines Sally to affirm a false belief, then she does not have the broad ability (opportunity) to infer a better or true belief, even if she has the narrow

²⁶¹ Vihvelin, *Causes*, 192.

ability to do this. If Sally has had all opportunities to infer true beliefs blocked off or locked away from her access, it seems that she should not be blamed for her affirmation of a false belief (including affirmations of false theological beliefs which lead to eternal punishment). Bottom line: when I use the word “ability,” I am referring to an agent’s broad ability, and not to their narrow ability, to perform some action. If this opportunity (broad ability) is determined to be unavailable to an agent, then the agent cannot be held rationally or morally responsible for not seizing the opportunity.²⁶²

Stratton argues that if God determines Sally to do *a*, though she may have the narrow ability (N), she does *not* possess the wide (or broad) ability (W) to do *a*. This must be the case, he says, because Sally does not possess the opportunity to do *a* (i.e., fails to possess (W)), then Sally “cannot be held rationally or morally responsible for not seizing the opportunity.” Although Stratton concedes that Sally could possess (N) given the truth of determinism, she cannot possess (W) because determinism supposedly “blocks” off the alternative possibilities for Sally to be rationally responsible.²⁶³ In short, Stratton argues that while (N) is perhaps compatible with determinism, (W) is *not*.

So, what reason does Stratton give for this bold claim, especially given that the dispositional analysis started out as a *compatibilist analysis*? Stratton still doesn’t tell us why this sense of “opportunity” (i.e., broad ability) is relevant to free will and rational responsibility, nor does he tell us why broad ability grounds rational responsibility. So what if we do not have this broad ability or opportunity? What’s the problem with *not* possessing it? Stratton attempts to answer these concerns:

With this clarification in place, the problem that Bignon and other (divine) determinists face, I believe, is the following. Some things or broad abilities, such as a certain sense of the property of *being rational* (or the broad ability to be rational), require the broad

²⁶² Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 3.

²⁶³ In §2.4.14, I argue a defense of determinism that utilizes what is known as a “blockage-style” Frankfurt case. Basically, the case presents a logical scenario in which the agent Bob is still said to be intuitively rationally responsible in spite of a determining mechanism “blocking” off alternative neuro-pathways for him to categorically access. Although I deal with the case in more detail below in the said section, I will say here that the mere *risk* of blockage does not entail the *actual* blockage of an alternative. The alternatives exist for Bob epistemically, and the determining mechanism does in fact block alternatives for Bob, but the way the determining mechanism blocks the alternatives for Bob is through *occurrent preemption*, or *simultaneous preemption*. This means that Bob’s deliberative alternatives are blocked off *only* when he blocks them off by choosing A instead of ~A; he blocks them off in the actual sequence of events by accessing his indeterministic rational deliberative cognitive faculties. The deterministic mechanism has no role in the actual blocking of alternatives. It is true the presence of the determining mechanism puts Bob at *risk* for his rational deliberative pathways to be blocked off; however, that fact does not guarantee nor is it sufficient for Bob to still choose, deliberate, and decide; therefore, *actual blocking* of Bob’s alternatives are not seen in the actual sequence, contrary to what Stratton (and others) perhaps assume. Suppose, however, that I am wrong; this does not mean Stratton is right. He must show that the mere addition to indeterministic categorical alternatives provides Bob with control. But, unfortunately, he has not shown this to be the case. See §2.1.5.

ability or opportunity to do otherwise than what one does. For example, in one sense (or in some cases), *making a rational decision* seems, at least to me, to require (or entail) that one, simultaneously, has (i) the broad ability to choose an option, *O*, that is good in light of certain evidence *and* (ii) the broad ability to choose an option, not-*O*, that is bad and goes against the evidence. However, exhaustive determinism/compatibilism prevents the simultaneously possessing of such broad abilities, since such a situation involves the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP). But this, in turn, implies that we cannot have the broad ability to make a rational decision (as understood above) *even if* we have the narrow ability to make a rational decision.²⁶⁴

But, I have to goad: *why* does rational responsibility require this wide/broad ability? He does not say anything other than imply that if one does not possess this opportunity, because of determinism, we would not be free, and thus we wouldn't be rationally responsible. This simply kicks the can down the road; more than that actually: it's question-begging. In fact, this answer seems to resemble premise 3 of his Freethinking argument which basically claims that unless one has libertarian freedom, one cannot rationally infer or affirm claims of knowledge (i.e., unless one has a broad opportunity to perform action *a*, one cannot be rationally responsible). But *why* is this the case? *Why* is this premise true? *What* is the independent reason for the truth of this premise? In personal correspondence, he interacts with this valid question of mine. His answer is the following:

Because if something or someone else (like a deity of deception) causally determines your reasoning process and your eventual belief determined by this determined process, then Colton Carlson has no opportunity to INFER a better or true belief. Since you cannot INFER a better or true belief, you are left hoping, assuming, and presupposing that the deity of deception is causally determining you to affirm true beliefs. If one cannot INFER better or true beliefs on a particular matter (like this one), one cannot rationally AFFIRM that the deity of deception has, in fact, causally determined one to reason correctly to reach truth.²⁶⁵

If my reasoning processes lead to a belief that X is determined by God, I apparently have no wide or broad opportunity to infer whether or not X is actually true or false. And, he says, because of this, I am simply "left hoping, assuming, and presupposing that [God] is causally determining [me] to affirm true beliefs." In essence, he argues that if one is rationally responsible, then we possess the opportunity or broad ability to evaluate, judge, or consider X over not X. We are rationally responsible, according to Stratton, *because* we would have an opportunity present or accessible given the broad ability. But, notice, he does not say *why* this

²⁶⁴ Stratton, "Rejoinder", 3.

²⁶⁵ Personal correspondence (6/16/21) in Facebook thread. This kind of obnoxious rhetoric is unfortunately typical of Stratton and I plan to respond to his more specific claims in this quote later in my philosophical sections.

broad ability is *necessary* for rational responsibility other than simply *asserting* that it is. Why is this ability necessary (or sufficient) for responsibility of any kind? Compatibilists deserve an answer, and preferably one that does not argue in circles, nor one that does not end in fancifully vain intuition. He alludes to the conceptual necessity of these broad alternatives available to the agent in order to properly ascribe responsibility to the agent by grounding them in the following:

It seems intuitive that in this situation, I could not be blamed (in a desert sense) for not playing the bass guitar in the church band this Sunday morning as there would be no opportunity for me to do otherwise.²⁶⁶

And there you have it, just like that (and unfortunately against my misplaced high hopes), the necessity of the broad ability is simply based upon *intuition*. In other words, it cannot necessarily be proven (even though Stratton “tries” to prove it with his arguments), but rather it is a mere fact of intuition.²⁶⁷ According to Stratton, if one does not possess the broad ability to do otherwise in a given context, he or she cannot be held rationally responsible (or morally responsible, especially if moral responsibility is a sufficient condition for rational responsibility). It is grounded in mere *intuition*. But why think this? Stratton says that if there is no bass around him, and he is asked to play the bass, then he cannot be held responsible *because* he does not have the wide or broad ability to play the bass. If we do not have a specific or broad opportunity to perform an action, then we cannot possibly be held responsible for it. He calls this “intuitive” (as most libertarians often punt to). Is he right? I don’t believe so.

To end this subsection, I have one *undercutting defeater* for Stratton’s posited use of the dispositional analysis: Stratton’s use of “opportunity” mischaracterizes the compatibilist use of “opportunity.” In doing so, he fails at a proper internal critique, which then consequently places Stratton into circular reasoning. According to Vihvelin, the word ‘opportunity’ does not presuppose indeterministic circumstances. The word ‘opportunity’ simply is the conjunction of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* enablers as well as the absence of (what Vihvelin calls) *extrinsic masks*. Or,

$$\text{OPP} =_{\text{df}} (\text{N}) \wedge \text{Extrinsic Enablers} \wedge \neg \text{Extrinsic Masks}^{268}$$

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ This reminds me of Jerry Walls’ quote found in Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 60, and in Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164. Walls writes: “We believe that libertarian free will is intrinsic to the very notion of moral responsibility. That is, a person cannot be held morally responsible for an act unless he or she was free to perform that act and free to refrain from it. This is a *basic moral intuition*, and we do not believe there are any relevant moral convictions more basic than this one that could serve as premises to prove it.” Stratton also states that libertarian freedom “seems properly basic... if some action *x* is not ultimately ‘up to us,’ then, a person cannot genuinely be responsible (morally responsible or [rationally responsible]).” (Ibid). I will take up this discussion about whether or not we should see libertarian freedom as properly basic or “intuitive” in §4.8.

²⁶⁸ Vihvelin, *Causes*, 187.

So, when an agent possesses the *broad* or *wide* ability to do *a*, or to rationally decide *a*, it means that the agent possesses the *narrow* ability (N), suitable circumstances (i.e., extrinsic enablers), and the absence of extrinsic masks. This definition of opportunity is pretty straight-forward, except for “extrinsic masks.” For Vihvelin, this means “the absence of impediments, obstacles, or constraints to the exercise of this power or narrow ability,” (*Causes*, 193). Stratton has already conceded that determinism and (N) are compatible, and it is not at all obvious that determinism rules out suitable circumstances in order to perform *a*. If we come to find out that we live in an empirically determined universe, it would be almost inconceivable to say that actions performed within the confines of this universe lacked suitable circumstances. In other words, even if determinism is true, it doesn’t seem to negate the fact that circumstances are suitable for action. Just as determinism doesn’t rule out *intrinsic* dispositions, it cannot rule out *extrinsic* dispositions. Therefore, the (N) and Extrinsic Enabler conditions are safely compatible with determinism.

Now, of course, Stratton will attack the last condition necessary for OPP, and that is the lack of extrinsic masks. Stratton made clear that determinism is not compatible with broad ability, but the only reason I can think of as to *why* Stratton argues this claim (aside from mere intuition) is that determinism *itself* is an extrinsic mask to our rational deliberations. If determinism is true, Stratton could argue, *all* alternative rational options are “blocked off” or “locked away” precisely because *determinism is true*. Thus, it is *determinism* that is *itself* the extrinsic mask, and so, if true, we have no OPP (i.e., broad ability) to rationally infer or affirm knowledge claims; rational alternatives would be “masked” or “blocked” or “locked away.” For Stratton, determinism *is* the “impediment”, or “obstacle”, or “constraint” against the exercise of (N); thus, (W) is incompatible with determinism.

This response from Stratton, though predictable, is wholly implausible. In fact, Vihvelin has specifically argued that the wide (or broad) ability *is* compatible with determinism. She defends for what she has called “The Wide Ability to Do Otherwise Argument”:

In particular, we can respond to the charge that determinism robs us of the free will we think we have, including the wide ability to decide and act otherwise, by arguing something like this:

- (1) We have the freedom of will and action we think we have, including the freedom we take for granted in [deliberative choice] situations, only if we have and exercise certain *narrow abilities* to choose and to act and it is at least sometimes true that we also have the *wide ability* to choose and to act otherwise; that is, there are *no impediments* to the exercise of our narrow abilities to choose and to act and our surroundings provide us with what we need (the opportunity, means, etc.) to exercise these abilities.

- (2) To have these narrow abilities is to have some intrinsic disposition or bundle of dispositions.
- (3) The existence and manifestation of intrinsic dispositions is compatible with determinism.
- (4) Therefore, the existence and exercise of narrow abilities is compatible with determinism.
- (5) Determinism is compatible with the persistence of intrinsic dispositions during times when they are not manifested, and determinism is compatible with the existence and persistence of dispositions that are neither *finked* nor *masked* nor lacking an *extrinsic enabler* [OPP_{df} above].
- (6) Therefore, determinism is compatible with the persistence of narrow abilities during times when they are not exercised, and determinism is compatible with the existence and persistence of narrow abilities that are neither finked nor masked nor lacking an extrinsic enabler.
- (7) If a person has an unexercised narrow ability that is neither finked nor masked nor missing an extrinsic enabler, then it is true that there are *no impediments* to the exercise of that narrow ability and that the person's surroundings provide her with what she needs to exercise that ability, and when all this is true the person has the *wide ability to do that thing*.
- (8) Therefore, determinism is compatible with the wide ability to choose and to do otherwise.²⁶⁹

Vihvelin's conclusion is in direct contradiction to what Stratton has claimed. The wide (or broad) ability is in fact *compatible* with determinism. If Stratton wants to escape this conclusion, he must deny premise (1) or perhaps premise (5). But seeing as "no one in the contemporary literature on dispositions denies Premise (5)," premise (1) seems to be the only option (Vihvelin, *Causes*, 195). Premise (2) is true by definition regardless of whether determinism is true, or whether the dispositional analysis is utilized by a compatibilist or incompatibilism. Premise (3) has already been conceded by Stratton: (N) is in fact compatible with determinism. Stratton cannot deny (4) because the "conjunction of Premises (2) and (3) entails (4)," nor can he deny (6) because "the conjunction of premises (2) and (5) entails (6)," (Ibid.). Premise (7) cannot be denied because it is the definition of PAP_{Disp}, the strict logical entailment of (W) and (N)—a definition Stratton implicitly agrees with by using the dispositional analysis in his own incompatibilist defense of leeway. Therefore, premise (1) seems to be the *only* premise Stratton could deny. However, the denial of (1) leads Stratton into a question-begging enterprise. In order to deny (1), the incompatibilist *must* affirm that determinism is *by definition* the impediment to freedom. But, that is the *very question* for debate!

²⁶⁹ Vihvelin, *Causes*, 193.

To deny premise (1) also seems highly implausible seeing as chief leeway incompatibilists such as Peter van Inwagen *agree* that determinism by itself does not present a metaphysical constraint, obstacle, nor impediment upon the agent's rational ability to think otherwise. Van Inwagen writes,

And it is evident that determinism places me under no constraints... it is certainly not inevitable that my will encounter an obstacle on any given occasion in a deterministic world, and even in an indeterministic world, my will must encounter obstacles on many occasions...

... there is *a* concept of freedom that is not a merely negative concept, and this concept is a very important one.... If we consider carefully the meaning of "I can do X" ("I am able to do X", "It is within my power to do X") do we find that idea expressed by this form of words is a merely negative one, the idea of the absence of some constraint or barrier or obstacle to action? It would seem not. It is true that the presence of an obstacle to the performance of an action can be sufficient for one's being unable to perform it. But it does not follow that the absence of all obstacles to the performance of an action is sufficient for one's being able to perform that action.²⁷⁰

Vihvelin suggests that van Inwagen appears to be "committed to the claim that the threat that determinism poses to our freedom is *not* the threat of constraint, impediment, or obstacle... [Therefore,] [i]t seems implausible, then, to deny Premise (1)," (Vihvelin, *Causes*, 195). On the pain of begging the question against compatibilism, Stratton must accept premise (1); therefore, the dispositional analysis (or PAP_{Disp}) is compatible with determinism after all.

Stratton had wanted to argue that "exhaustive determinism/compatibilism prevents the simultaneously possessing of such broad abilities, since such a situation involves the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP)," (Stratton, "Rejoinder," 3). Clearly, this is false. As Vihvelin argued, an agent may be determined while possessing the narrow *and* wide ability to do otherwise, contrary to Stratton's assertion. Categorical PAP is not necessarily needed to "ground" rational responsibility, despite Stratton's (apparently misplaced) intuition.

2.4.4 Conditional vs Categorical Ability

Is Stratton correct in claiming that this ability (the wide or broad ability) is *necessary for responsibility*? No, I don't think so, and I believe I have demonstrated this with Vihvelin's argument above. If PAP_{Disp} is compatible with determinism (specifically, the wide ability to do otherwise), then it does not follow that compatibilists do not have access to this type of ability. At best, incompatibilists and compatibilists could share this leeway condition (though, as I

²⁷⁰ Peter van Inwagen, quoted in Vihvelin, *Causes*, 194-95. (ellipsis and emphasis as quoted in Vihvelin)

argued above, at the very least, the incompatibilist *must* affirm the categorical in conjunction with the dispositional ability in order to properly ground responsibility). But, let's say Stratton still is not satisfied with this conclusion, or better yet, let's say he concedes it! Is his intuition correct, then, in that the categorical analysis grounds rational responsibility in the way he thinks the broad ability grounds rational responsibility? In order to show this intuition false, all a compatibilist must do is replace the broad ability (or opportunity) with some *other* sense of ability that challenges the necessity of the former. Think about the case before us.

It is not simply the case that I wouldn't be held morally responsible because I lack the broad opportunity to play the guitar (like Stratton wants to "intuitively" assert), but rather I wouldn't be held morally responsible for playing the guitar because I couldn't play the guitar *even if I had wanted to*. This is the conditional ability. The mere lack of broad access or an opportunity to do an action isn't exactly what negates moral responsibility. It is rather the case that if I couldn't do an action, and if I wouldn't be held responsible for that action, it is not because I couldn't have done otherwise *simpliciter*, or because of the lack of broad ability or opportunity, but rather it is because I could not have done otherwise, *even if I had wanted to*. But, if I have an opportunity (i.e., wide ability) to do something, I *can* decide whether or not to fulfill that opportunity because OPP is satisfied. And so, given an opportunity, I have the wide ability. This is what Vihvelin's argument demonstrated. What is *not* shown by Stratton, but what is needed in his exposition, is *the sense of "can"* that is necessary for responsibility. Is it categorical or conditional? The debate is still about *abilities* not mere opportunities, especially for the *libertarian*.

I have mentioned the categorical and conditional ability more than a few times above, so proper definitions are in order. These are metaphysical abilities whereas the wide/broad and narrow abilities are purely circumstantial or dispositional. Yes, PAP_{Disp} proves to be necessary for responsibility, but I don't think it proves as a *grounding* condition to responsibility (at least not as much as Stratton may think they do).²⁷¹ So what are these "metaphysical" abilities? Bignon defines them quite nicely:

PAP_{All} =_{df} "A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if, *all things inside and outside the person being just as they are at the moment of choice*, he could have done otherwise. Let us name this sort of ability a *categorical ability*."

²⁷¹ Perhaps the dispositional abilities are necessary conditions for responsibility. Again, I could concede this much. However, I fail to see how they provide *grounds* for responsibility, let alone mere sufficient conditions. If they cannot ground responsibility for the compatibilist, certainly, they cannot possibly ground responsibility for the incompatibilist.

$PAP_{If} =_{df}$ “A person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise, *had his inner desires inclined him to do so at the moment of choice.*”²⁷²
Let us name this sort of ability a *conditional ability*.

Of course, “PAP” stands for the “Principle of Alternate Possibilities” made famous by Harry Frankfurt in his landmark essay “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibilities”. It states that “a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise.”²⁷³ The PAP plays a vital role in identifying the motivation for incompatibilism. In fact, (b*) is specifically tailored to this kind of ability: PAP_{All} or the categorical ability. One way we could describe the categorical is by appealing to possible worlds. An agent possesses PAP_{All} (the categorical ability) if and only if a number of possible worlds share an identical past leading up to the moment of the agent’s choice. The agent’s choice, then, may be seen as a “garden of forking paths” (as it is commonly put in the philosophical literature); the agent has a variety of accessible alternatives available to him at the moment of choice.²⁷⁴ The conditional ability (PAP_{If}), on the other hand, may equally be described by appealing to possible worlds, not through modal categorical access, but through modal counterfactual access: *if* the agent were to choose X in world W, *then* world W would obtain.

To the libertarian, one must be able to choose among a *range of options* (PAP_{All}) each of which is according to his nature in order to be considered appropriately or genuinely free *in the actual world*. Further, it is argued that if one has this freedom, it is sufficient to say one has *libertarian freedom*.²⁷⁵ But, it also seems PAP_{All} is a necessary condition to libertarian freedom. This is confirmed (to my estimation, and quite heavily if I may add) throughout *Mere Molinism*, especially on page 5 when Stratton quotes J.P. Moreland’s exposition on libertarian freedom, and by extension, the categorical ability. Therefore, denying the necessity of PAP_{All} , Bignon writes,

²⁷² Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 72. Moreland and Craig define the categorical ability in the following way: Freedom requires that we have the **categorical ability** to act, or at least, to will to act. This means that if Smith freely does (or wills to do) A, he could have refrained from doing (or willing to do) A or he could have done (or willed to have done) B without any conditions whatever being different. No description of Smith’s desires, beliefs, character or other things in his make-up and no description of the universe prior to and at the moment of his choice to do A is sufficient to entail that he did A. It was not necessary that anything be different for Smith to refrain from doing A or to do B instead. His ability is not conditioned on any hypothetical difference in his desires (or beliefs, etc.) at the moment of choice; it is categorical. (*Philosophical Foundations* (1e), 271)

This definition, *from two flaming libertarians*, literally states that the leeway condition is necessary for freedom (i.e., PAP_{All} is necessary in order to be free). Given that Stratton quotes from *Philosophical Foundations* in *Mere Molinism*, specifically from this chapter (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 4), I take it that PAP_{All} is therefore necessary for moral (i.e., “to act”) and *rational* responsibility (i.e., “to will to act”).

²⁷³ Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities”, 1.

²⁷⁴ In another way, “If one accepts PAP_{All} , then one thinks that free will requires a certain sort of leeway. Free will, on this leeway conception, is like a garden of forking paths: at various points on one’s walk through the garden there are two (or more) available options, and one must select which of the available options to pursue,” Taylor Cyr, “Libertarian Free Will: How to Avoid Some Confusions,”

https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/libertarian-free-will-how-to-avoid-some-confusions/#_ftn6. See also Kane, *Contemporary*, 6-7.

²⁷⁵ Recall §2.1.5.

“would jettison the agent’s moral [and according to Stratton, the agent’s *rational*] responsibility for his decision and action,” (Ibid., 70). But, how?

Stratton says, “I could not be blamed (in a desert sense) for not playing the bass guitar in the church band this Sunday morning as there would be no opportunity for me to do otherwise.” Indeed he couldn’t be blamed, but *not* because he lacked broad opportunity (i.e., a lack of helpful or available circumstances), or even the lack of PAP_{All}, but rather his lack of moral responsibility is due to his lack of the PAP_{If}: *he couldn’t play bass guitar even if he had wanted to play bass guitar*. The lack of opportunity Stratton is pressing here necessitates or requires the PAP_{If}.²⁷⁶ To see another example, consider McKenna and Pereboom’s previous exposition of PAP_{Disp} with Usain Bolt. Recall, they write, “Despite being able to run 100 meters in ten seconds when in propitious circumstances, Bolt lacks a wide ability to do so now if he’s asleep on swampy ground,” (*Free Will*, 226). Bolt would lack (W) *because* he would also lack (N); though he possesses the skills necessary to run 100 meters in ten seconds, he does *not* possess the skills necessary to run 100 meters *on swampy ground*. And because he lacks (N), he lacks (W); this is true definitionally—see definition PAP_{Disp}, and premise (7) of Vihvelin’s argument above. However, I contend that the lack of (W) is *not* what excuses Bolt from running 100 meters on swampy ground. Instead, what excuses Bolt is that *he couldn’t have run 100 meters on swampy ground, even if he had wanted to*. Again, this is PAP_{If}.

Does this mean PAP_{Disp} entails PAP_{If}? I think so, primarily because dispositions depend upon counterfactuals. To see this, once again, consider the example of Usain Bolt. *If* Bolt was in a suitable environment, that is, *not* sleeping on swampy ground, then he *could* run 100 meters in ten seconds, thus preserving (N), or his intrinsic disposition. However, *if* Bolt was *not* in a suitable environment, that is, sleeping on swampy ground, then he *could not* run 100 meters in ten seconds *even if he had wanted to*. What seems to undergird the dispositional analysis is the conditional analysis. It seems then that dispositions are *by definition* counterfactual in nature.

Other philosophers tend to utilize the dispositional in defense of the conditional as well. For instance, McKenna and Pereboom makes use of a simple dispositional analysis in order to defend classical compatibilism (*Free Will*, 58-59). Randolph Clarke has argued that Vihvelin’s PAP_{Disp} account entails PAP_{If} after all (see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 227). Last, Vihvelin herself seems open to the idea that her ‘bundle of dispositions’ account entails conditional analyses. In fact, she argues that Roderick Chisholm (a formidable opponent against the classical compatibilism) ultimately fails in his several critiques *against* the conditional analysis (Vihvelin, *Causes*, 196-208). Vihvelin essentially *defends* her PAP_{Disp} account against attacks aimed at traditional (or rather historical) PAP_{If} accounts. So, it is not at all a stretch to conclude that Vihvelin seems to think dispositions entail counterfactuals by nature, especially

²⁷⁶ Bignon argues that this idea of PAP_{All} entailing PAP_{If} is the case. See *Excusing Sinners*, 94-95 (along with the corresponding footnote), 99-100.

seeing her primary response to the Consequence Argument is *counterfactual* (see Volume 2, §4.1.3). It is safe to say, then, that what really is necessary for responsibility is *not* PAP_{All}, nor is it PAP_{Disp} (though, I concede PAP_{Disp} is still compatible with determinism), but rather PAP_{If}.

The lack of responsibility, then, is not due to a mere missed or absent categorical opportunity or circumstance, but rather it is due to the absence of the conditional opportunity or circumstance. Again, it is not simply because I lack opportunity (via the lack of broad ability) that ascribes to me the lack of responsibility, but rather it is because I am lacking PAP_{If}. I am not morally responsible not simply because I couldn't have done otherwise (due to a lack of categorical opportunity), but rather I am not held morally responsible because I could not have done otherwise, *even if I had wanted to* (due to a lack of conditional opportunity).

Stratton continues to assert that this broad or wide ability is necessary for responsibility without actually demonstrating that it is indeed necessary beyond mere intuition. Of course, as a compatibilist who espouses compatibilist-type (1), I see nothing wrong with arguing that compatibilist-type (4) (leeway dispositionalism, or PAP_{Disp}) entails compatibilist-type (1) (classical compatibilism, or PAP_{If}). However, I cannot understand how Stratton, *as a libertarian*, can make the same claims. I don't see Stratton's attempt at introducing "the lack of opportunity" here as fruitful, nor does it get him anywhere in actually establishing what *he needs* to establish because opportunities, or circumstances, may both be utilized by libertarians and compatibilists alike.

Unfortunately for Stratton, he seems to think that he doesn't need to defend PAP_{All}. Instead, he seems to think PAP_{Disp} does the job of securing the freedom-relevant condition necessary for rational responsibility. This is false. Since compatibilists can, and often do, use PAP_{Disp} (or a variation thereof) in order to defend their compatibilism, Stratton has virtually produced nothing of substance by appealing to PAP_{Disp}. He *must* defend PAP_{All} as the freedom-relevant condition. But, Stratton has yet to provide a scintilla of substantial evidence for the claim that this said metaphysical ability is necessary for responsibility save abductive intuition.²⁷⁷ If intuition is seriously his only defense or support here, then I am inclined to defend the fact that what is truly intuitive is not the categorical opportunity being necessary for responsibility, but the *counterfactual opportunity*, as defended above. If that is the case, then this sense of metaphysical ability is indeed compatible with determinism, and thus, there is no need to zealously tag on the less modest categorical ability. PAP_{If} fares much better in the face of intuition and real-life cases.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ In the words of Bignon: "The problem is that we still haven't moved beyond the equivocation between 'categorical' and 'conditional' senses of the ability to do otherwise... What Stratton would need to do is to support the claim that a *categorical* ability to think otherwise is necessary; that the ability in question must be interpreted *modally* as the existence of a possible world which shares a strictly identical past up until the moment of choice, and contains a different choice. Stratton doesn't do any of that," ("Review", 26).

²⁷⁸ See Bignon's application of PAP_{If} to other counterexamples including Peter van Inwagen's Consequence Argument in chapter 5, *Excusing Sinners*.

2.4.5 Objection: Conditional Ability & Determinism?

At this point an all too common objection from Stratton may arise. This objection usually traces the following line of thought: “If EDD is true this means that the conditional is *itself* determined! After all, *all* things mean *all* things if *exhaustive* determinism is true.” In his rejoinder to Bignon, Stratton generally has this to say about the conditional ability:

Appealing to a “conditional ability,” it seems to me, is merely appealing to a narrow ability, or appealing to another possible world (what God *could* have causally determined to be otherwise), and thus, it would be a different “moment” in which God causally determined something to be different. On this view, it seems that I have the conditional ability to walk on water (just as Peter did) if God causally determined me to walk on water. But in the real and actual world, I do not possess the ability to walk on water. I do however, possess the opportunity to exercise an ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with my nature. For example, I can jump feet first into the water, dive head first into the water, or stay in the boat (or so it seems to me) without conditions being different. If so, then I possess *limited* libertarian freedom.²⁷⁹

In addition, and more specifically, Stratton critiqued Bignon’s use of the conditional ability in responding to his argument on 1 Corinthians 10:13. Stratton writes: “Ultimately, the conditional Bignon appeals to is simply that God could freely choose to causally determine otherwise (big deal),” (“Rejoinder,” 34). My response is two-fold.

First, the narrow ability is not exactly synonymous to the conditional ability (though, dispositions entail counterfactuals, as defended above). Second, I am not entirely sure but it seems that Stratton is mistakenly applying the conditional analysis. I have this hunch especially when I read Stratton’s (potential) caricature of the conditional ability by walking on water. If that is the case, then Bignon has already answered these rebuttals (that of Timpe and Kane) in his own book (*Excusing Sinners*, 96). Third, I think Stratton is right: “what God *could* have causally determined to be otherwise” is to describe a “different ‘moment’ in which God causally determined something to be different.” What doesn’t follow from this description of a conditional analysis is Stratton’s conclusion of *limited* libertarian freedom.²⁸⁰ That is a

²⁷⁹ Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 20.

²⁸⁰ In fact, what I hope to show in §5.7 is that Stratton’s use of the “actual world” in order to provide a critique against the conditional ability here actually backfires *if* he accepts the truth of Molinism. But put briefly here, if one accepts Molinism, one could just as easily posit that the agent could do otherwise in the *hypothetical* world (*before* God’s creative decree), but could *not* do otherwise in the *actual* world, that is, the *actual* sequence of events (*after* God’s creative decree). This world is “published” as it were, and so the agent cannot do otherwise. To illustrate, Stratton says this above: “But in the real and actual world, I do not possess the ability to walk on water. I do however, possess the opportunity to exercise an ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with my nature.” Well, if Molinism is true, I guess

non-sequitur, as I will hopefully make clear in the proceeding sections. All that follows from Stratton's description is the *conditional analysis*, not the *categorical analysis*, which his limited libertarian freedom still *depends* on. Last, Stratton says that it is no "big deal" that "God could freely choose to causally determine otherwise." But, this is in fact a big deal! Stratton additionally remarked to me in personal correspondence that

[c]onditional access doesn't work if combined with EDD for similar reasons as to why externalism doesn't work when combined with EDD (as you already admitted). Bignon takes an externalist approach (he's admitted that much). This approach fails and I demonstrate this in my Rejoinder.

The "big deal" is that if conditionalism fails when "combined with EDD for similar reasons as to why externalism doesn't work when combined with EDD", then the original objection stated above is the exact objection I had planned to counter. Putting aside externalism for the moment (as it will be discussed in later sections), the objection I had anticipated is that *if* EDD is true, then the conditional is *itself* determined. In other words, Stratton wants to argue that even the *conditional* is not compatible with determinism because God Himself *is* the condition. Now, the reason why this is a "big deal" (contrary to Stratton) is because even professional philosophers who disagree with the conditional analysis disagree with *why* Stratton disagrees with it. Or, to put it a bit more clear, Stratton's reason for rejecting the conditional analysis should *not* be the reason for why he rejects it. Consider the words of McKenna and Pereboom on how they frame the incompatibilist objection:

Notice that against this formulation [of the conditional analysis] the incompatibilist can press essentially the same objection mentioned above. Given that a determined agent is determined at the time of action to have the wants that she does have, how is it helpful to state what she would have done had she had different wants than the wants that she did have? For one thing, given the truth of determinism, at the time at which she acted, she could have had no other wants than the wants that her causal history determined her to have. How is this counterfactual ability more than a hollow freedom? How is this analysis supposed to answer the incompatibilist's objection?²⁸¹

This objection is almost identical to that of Stratton's main objection to the conditional analysis (or at least that is how I understand it). It seems, given the truth of determinism, it would be no "big deal" if the conditional analysis is true as it virtually does nothing to mitigate the initial incompatibilist intuition at hand. Perhaps this is Stratton's contention. Given determinism, the conditional is itself determined and thus provides nothing more than "hollow freedom."

Stratton does not possess the ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with his nature *in the real and actual world*.

²⁸¹ McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 58.

McKenna and Pereboom respond, however, in a rather sympathetic way in order to show why this supposed contention from Stratton is severely misguided:

... it is worth pointing out that, *if* the relevant “could have done otherwise” statements are rightly interpreted as counterfactual conditionals, then it is clear that they *do not* conflict with the truth of determinism. This is so for two reasons. First, determinism is a thesis about what future will unfold *given a specific past*, for example given specific past wants. Determinism does not deny that, with a different past, a different future would unfold. Hence, it does not deny that, along with other conditions of the state of the world at a time, different wants would causally determine an agent to act other than the way she acted in the actual world.

Second, causal determinism is a thesis that invokes natural laws, laws that specify general causal patterns, regularities, or structures confirmed by the history of the natural world. These patterns include more in their scope than merely truths about what does happen. They also include truths about what is causally possible, which involve truths about what would happen under varying conditions. Consider a simple causal law specifying that salt dissolves in water under certain conditions. Note that a natural law that specifies a regularity in the interaction of salt and water is just as applicable to salt that is not currently placed in water as it is to salt that is so placed. The salt in one’s salt shaker, for instance, is such that *if it were placed in water, then it would dissolve*. That truth is in turn indicative of the salt’s *disposition* to respond in certain ways to certain causal factors. Similarly, to the extent that a statement of an agent’s ability to do otherwise can be analyzed as a counterfactual conditional about what an agent would have done under different conditions, it is indicative of the disposition of agents. Our having such dispositions does not clearly conflict with the truth of determinism, since it’s open that the laws that govern them are deterministic.²⁸²

This is the exact point that Stratton fails to understand or at the very least appreciate. Given determinism, it literally does not matter whether or not the conditional was in fact determined (or if God is indeed the conditional) as it remains *compatible* with determinism. There is indeed *no* such contended conflict between the conditional analysis and determinism, *even if* the conditional was determined. What follows from determinism are certain truths that state or describe particular dispositions of the agent at a time. If God were to determine *S* to do *A*, then *S* would do *A*. The agent would have done differently given antecedent causal conditions and that is indicative of their disposition. Applied to theistic compatibilism, this truth is indicative of the agent’s disposition to respond to God’s all-encompassing decree. Thus, the conditional *is* in fact compatible with determinism and there is no such conflict. What actually follows, then, from

²⁸² Ibid., 58-59. Note here that the dispositional analysis is used in defense of the conditional analysis.

Stratton's above exposition of Bignon's use of the conditional is *not* the non-sequitur of limited libertarian freedom, but rather *compatibilism*.²⁸³

2.4.6 Stratton's Argument: Turning the Tables

Going back to Stratton's exposition on opportunity and ability, we could attempt to illustrate his argument. But first, recall that Stratton is primarily interested in *rational* responsibility. As I mentioned above, it was in personal correspondence that Stratton told me that he would rather see moral responsibility requiring rational responsibility.

Let OPP_{Broad} = Broad Opportunity:

- 17. $MR \Rightarrow RR$ *(personal correspondence)*
- 18. $RR \Rightarrow OPP_{\text{Broad}}$ *(premise)*
- 19. $\therefore MR \Rightarrow OPP_{\text{Broad}}$ *(from (17), (18), hypothetical syllogism)*
- 20. $OPP_{\text{Broad}} \Rightarrow PAP_{\text{All}}$ *(premise)*
- 21. $\therefore RR \Rightarrow PAP_{\text{All}}$ *(from (18), (20), hypothetical syllogism)*
- 22. $\therefore MR \Rightarrow PAP_{\text{All}}$ *(from (17), (21), hypothetical syllogism)²⁸⁴*

This could be seen as Stratton's rough or basic "steel-man" argument. Here, we see the necessity of the specific/broad ability attached to the opportunity. But, if moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, then it follows that moral responsibility entails the specific/broad opportunity to be categorically accessible to the agent. If the agent does not have the accessibility to the opportunity (i.e., to play the bass guitar), then Stratton argues that he cannot be morally responsible. The problem is that Stratton *also* affirms, implicitly, premise (20).²⁸⁵ He explicitly

²⁸³ Robert Kane has a similar response as Stratton against the conditional ability. It involves something like "the conditional refers to counterfactual worlds, and what the agent would do, but given determinism *in the actual world*, the conditional ability is false." See Kane, "A Reply to Carolina Sartorio", in *Do We Have Free Will?*, 125-28. Perhaps this objection may have some teeth. Though space does not allow for the defense of my conviction here, when paired with the dispositional analysis, I think the objection loses a considerable amount of force.

²⁸⁴ Stratton claims something similar on a Facebook post made by Stratton himself on 7/16/21: "Libertarian freedom is required for rational responsibility and rational responsibility is required for moral responsibility." (accessed 7/26/21) This means that if moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, and rational responsibility entails libertarian freedom, then, by hypothetical syllogism, moral responsibility entails libertarian freedom. Now, of course, conclusion (21) is not that moral responsibility entails libertarian freedom; however, if (b*) is true, then it actually does follow that moral responsibility entails categorical alternative possibilities (i.e., PAP_{All}). Thus, conclusion (21) seems true, especially if categorical deliberative alternatives are what Stratton has in mind when defending libertarian freedom.

²⁸⁵ "However, exhaustive determinism/compatibilism prevents the simultaneously possessing of such broad abilities, *since such a situation involves the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP)*," (Stratton, "Rejoinder," 3. (emphasis added))

affirms PAP_{All}²⁸⁶ in addition to smuggling this categorical sense of ability into his “bass-playing” scenario as a necessary condition for his broad opportunity. If Stratton does not have the broad opportunity to play the bass, arguably, *it is because* he does not have PAP_{All} at the same time. If premise (20) is secure, then conclusions (21) and (22) follow. The tables have now turned.

The conclusion is highly significant in a couple of ways. First, Stratton himself stresses over and over in his podcasts and video responses to Bignon that he is concerned with *rational* responsibility, not *moral* responsibility. If this “steel-man” argument offered above works, then *it does not matter* if rational responsibility is pressed rather than moral responsibility. What is of primary importance is the *moral* responsibility of an agent, as that would function as the sufficient condition for rationality according to Stratton. Second, if this entailment is correct, and if Stratton *must* be committed to PAP_{All} as any good libertarian should, then Bignon’s definitional argument for compatibilism goes through full force.²⁸⁷ When Bignon says “MR”, one could just replace it with “RR” or include premise (17) in his argument in order to accommodate Stratton’s concerns. This is a huge win for compatibilists especially when Stratton does not interact with Bignon’s argument for compatibilism *whatsoever* (but more on that later).

To recap, I cannot negate the specific/broad ability by positing the general/narrow ability; Stratton is right. But I don’t see how positing the specific/broad ability somehow rescues responsibility. *Both* the broad and narrow abilities are too circumstantial to ground responsibility forthright. They are not metaphysical abilities, but circumstantial ones. Stratton *needs* to argue for the metaphysical ability here (PAP_{All}) in order for his case to be taken seriously; otherwise, I find that he is question-begging. Why assume that the categorical ability is necessary for responsibility (rational or moral), especially when the conditional accommodates and explains powerfully why someone wouldn’t be considered morally responsible in a given context, and *that* ability is indeed compatible with determinism? If I am in a room where there is no guitar, and yet I am asked to play the guitar, I wouldn’t be held responsible for not playing the guitar. I wouldn’t be held responsible *not* because I lack a specific/broad ability or *categorical* opportunity to play the guitar, but because I lack the *conditional* opportunity to play the guitar: *I couldn’t play the guitar even if I had wanted to; that is why* I wouldn’t be held responsible. I can undercut that strict categorical by positing the much milder and more modest metaphysical ability, the conditional ability (PAP_{If}).

So, both incompatibilists and compatibilists *can* agree (although some don’t) that in order to be held morally responsible, there needs to be some sort of circumstantial opportunity granted to the agent. But as defended above, this “circumstantial opportunity” is and can be seen to simply be the *conditional* counterfactual ability, or PAP_{If}. It is not the case that I, in order to be responsible,

²⁸⁶ In order to prove this beyond a reasonable doubt, see Bignon’s “Review”, 25-26. Here, Bignon explicitly quotes Stratton from *Mere Molinism* in all the ways where he claims categorical alternative possibilities are in fact necessary for rationality.

²⁸⁷ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 121-123.

need some opportunity to do action A. *That* is not what is in dispute. What is in dispute is the *kind of opportunity* I would need in order to be appropriately treated as responsible. Compatibilists argue that this circumstance should be seen as a *conditional* opportunity, and not as a *categorical* opportunity. But, a corollary objection seems to prop up at this point.

2.4.7 Existence vs Accessibility

It is often argued by incompatibilists that these opportunities provide intuitive alternatives, and if determinism is true, then these alternative opportunities do not exist. But this is false. There are no *categorical* alternatives, sure, but *there are conditional alternatives*. This is partly one of the reasons why Bignon formulates "PAP_{If}" with the basic form of "PAP". Compatibilists do not deny that alternatives exist; they do, however, deny *access* to those said alternatives exist, especially categorical access; specifically that the said access to those alternatives are what is necessary for moral (or rational) responsibility. That is to say, we may not have the ability to do A, but this does not mean we do not possess the capacity to do A. Preciado sums this contention well while summarizing Fischer and Ravizza's stance on the use of alternative possibilities in their theory of moral responsibility.

Fischer and Ravizza deny that alternative possibilities are necessary for moral responsibility [as does Bignon; again, this is why he defends PAP_{If}]. For them, moral responsibility consists of guidance control. This does not require alternative possibilities in the actual sequence. However, this does not mean that all alternative possibilities have no role. Instead, Fischer and Ravizza uphold alternative possibilities in other possible worlds [i.e., counterfactual worlds; again, Bignon affirms this as well given the conditional analysis which relies upon counterfactuals]...²⁸⁸

Fischer and Ravizza themselves argue the following:

Thus, we have associated moral responsibility with a dispositional or modal property [PAP_{If}?]. It is important to see that, whereas other possible worlds are relevant to ascertaining whether there is some actually operative dispositional feature... such worlds are *not* relevant in virtue of bearing on the question of whether some alternative sequence is *genuinely accessible* to the agent.

On our approach to moral responsibility, then, other possible scenarios are relevant to the issue of whether the *actual sequence* has certain features... But it does *not* follow that our approach is committed to the claim that agents can have it in their power to *actualize* such scenarios—that is a quite different matter.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 68.

²⁸⁹ Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, 53.

This quote from Fischer and Ravizza is interesting for several reasons, but primarily, it is interesting because we see an important distinction between the *existence* of alternative possibilities and the agent's *accessibility* to those same said alternative possibilities.²⁹⁰ Compatibilists do not deny the *existence* of alternatives; they merely deny that we have causal categorical *access* to alternatives (i.e., PAP_{All}). With that in mind, why should we accept the incompatibilist contention that *categorical access* to alternatives is what is necessary for an agent to be morally responsible? We are not told, specifically not by Stratton. He assumes this highly disputed intuition all the way through his rejoinder, and in his not-so-good support of his deductive syllogisms in *Mere Molinism*. We are in need of an *independent* premise that supports PAP_{All}, and not one that is smuggled into his premises; without that independent premise, and support for said premise, Stratton's arguments can only be seen as question-begging. He *needs* PAP_{All} to be true as it is necessary for libertarian freedom (again, see (b*) and conclusion (4)).

The distinction between the existence of options and the accessibility of those same options can be put differently. Notable compatibilist scholar Kadri Vihvelin explains this distinction in the context of Frankfurt-type counterexamples:

There is a difference between the *existence* of a power and the *exercise* of a power. It is a modal fallacy to reason from "Black has the power to bring it about that Jones lacks the ability to do otherwise" to "Jones lacks the ability to do otherwise". The truth about Jones is not that Black robs him of the ability to do otherwise; it is the more complicated truth that Black puts him at constant *risk* of losing the ability to do otherwise.²⁹¹

Notice the distinction between the *existence* of a power and the *exercise* of a power. To jump from the former to the latter is to commit a modal fallacy; the latter just does not follow from the former. And so, compatibilists are well within their metaphysical rights to only claim the more modest *existence* of powers (or options) while refusing to hold to the more controversial claim of having the *exercise* or *accessibility* of those same said powers (or options).²⁹²

²⁹⁰ This helpful distinction may be found implicit in other metaphysical areas such as God's existence. Atheists often argue that *even if* God exists this does not mean we have metaphysical access to Him. In fact, Immanuel Kant argued something similar, and Alvin Plantinga himself has defended against the claim that just because God is a *thing in itself* does not mean that He doesn't exist. Moreover, Plantinga argues that we *do* have access to God, but that's not the point, at least not the one I intend to make. The point is that existence does not automatically mean or entail accessibility. Plantinga confirms this when he goes on to argue for God's *existence* and then our rational *accessibility* to that very same God. See Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 1-6.

²⁹¹ Vihvelin, Kadri, "Arguments for Incompatibilism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/>. More will be said on Frankfurt-type examples in §2.5.

²⁹² In fact, compatibilist Taylor Cyr has argued something similar. See "Semicompatibilism: no ability to do otherwise required," *Philosophical Explorations* 20 (3):308-321 (2017), <https://philpapers.org/archive/CYRSNA.pdf>. He claims that "having an alternative possibility is not the same as having an ability to do otherwise" (9). That is, "having an alternative possibility" (i.e., the

Often it is exclaimed that alternative possibilities are intuitive, and alternatives must exist in order for the agent to be free. This is correct, and the compatibilist has no fish to fry with that statement. But the libertarian, while breathing in the *existence* of alternatives via intuition, attempts to smuggle in the *accessibility* to those same alternatives with the same breath. Compatibilists demand an answer for why *efficient causal access* to alternatives is necessary for responsibility. To reiterate, there is nothing inconsistent with compatibilists (and determinists for that matter) claiming the existence of alternatives while denying the accessibility, especially if the accessibility of a thing entails the existence of the same thing (instead of its converse being true). When Stratton attempts to give that reason by positing “opportunity” instead of ability, it does not make the cut; it just kicks the can down the road. What kind of opportunity? Categorical? Conditional? Stratton just assumes that the categorical must be present within that opportunity: if I don’t have a *categorical* opportunity to do (or think) otherwise, I cannot be held responsible. This, I contend, is not as intuitive as the conditional: if I don’t have a *conditional* opportunity to do otherwise, I cannot be held responsible, *because* I could not do otherwise *even if I had wanted to do otherwise*. The compatibilists can reap the benefit of claiming the existence of options (in a conditional or perhaps even dispositional sense) while denying (categorical) accessibility to those same said options. Therefore, the conflation between existence and accessibility ought to be rejected in this dialectical context and analysis of responsibility, opportunity, and ability.²⁹³

2.4.8 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Theological Preliminaries

That distinction aside, I would now like to begin a detailed analysis on what the categorical ability (i.e., PAP_{All}) actually entails and what a libertarian *must* commit to when they posit the categorical. Before diving into the philosophical details, I would like to take a few moments to clarify and exposit the following: 1. What is the theological difference between mental and physical actions? 2. What is the composition of actions given this theological framework? And 3. Given the groundwork of theological action theory, how should we merge the metaphysical topic of free will and ability into it? More specifically, what are the varying levels of granularity for actions, and what are the types of liberties afforded to the devoted libertarian? Let’s begin with 1.

existence of options) is not synonymous with “having an ability to do otherwise” (i.e., the accessibility of options).

²⁹³ Another helpful way to see the above distinction between existence and accessibility is perhaps through illustration. Imagine a door that is closed but *not* locked. The door with respect to the agent is in fact closed, but it is not locked; that is to say, *if* the agent *were* to open the door, then the door would open because it is simply closed, not locked. The mere existence of the door is true whether or not the agent possesses the categorical or conditional ability to open the door. And so, the compatibilist can rightfully say that the door is indeed *existent* for him, while not necessarily categorically *accessible* to him. It remains coherent to say that the door is *conditionally* open to him, that is, *if* he *were* to open it.

What is the theological difference between mental and physical actions? Earlier, in previous sections, we have noted that there is no difference between mental and physical actions, at least philosophically, precisely because they are weighted the same. Now, I would like to discuss the theological side. Given Christianity, it is hard to see how there is a difference. Calvinist scholar John Frame writes,

[W]e are answerable to God for our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. Everything we think and do—indeed, everything we are—brings God’s commendation or condemnation. Even actions like eating and drinking, which we might consider to be ethically neutral or “adiaphora,” must be done to God’s glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Whatever we do should be done thankfully, in Jesus’ name (Col. 3:17), with all our hearts (v. 23). Everything that does not come from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Practically every page of Scripture displays God’s sovereign evaluations of human attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds... Furthermore, we are responsible to see salvation. We must make a decision to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15-24). We must receive Christ... we must believe in him... we must repent, believe, and be baptized... So we are responsible for everything we are and do.²⁹⁴

It is equally hard for me to understand exactly how something like mental thoughts or mental activity can be construed as morally neutral or amoral (especially given explicit biblical texts such as Phillipians 4:8 or 1 Corinthians 10:31). The comprehensiveness of our responsibility in the most minute matters (such as eating and drinking) ought to be seen as giving glory or praise to God. Why should our mental deliberative activities be understood any differently than a physical activity? Is it not true that if we deliberate about hating someone, under Christian orthodox doctrine, it is equivalent, in the eyes of God, to deliberating or plotting the murder of that same someone? Both are sinful according to Jesus (Matthew 5:21-22). After all, even if we grant that moral responsibility is different from rational responsibility, as Stratton is so privy to suggest, does it still not follow that we are *responsible* for our rationality? In other words, isn't it still the case that I can be *praiseworthy* or *blameworthy* for how I come to reason with the evidence? So it seems clear that even our deliberations, or our thoughts, can and should be considered part of the moral realm, and *not* simply within the rational realm. Moreover, if our rational faculties are seen as an epistemic duty or epistemic obligation (like W.K. Clifford suggests), then it seems perfectly reasonable to suggest that our deliberations, if considered a *duty*, do in fact entail morality in some sense inasmuch as it is imperative to reason a certain way.²⁹⁵ Just because there exists a physical realm that is apart from a mental realm does not mean

²⁹⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 120-121.

²⁹⁵ In fact, Stratton quotes Moreland and Craig on this “epistemic” duty or imperative: “Regarding this view, Moreland and Craig write: ‘If one is to have justified beliefs... then one must be free to obey or disobey epistemic rules. Otherwise, one could not be held responsible for his intellectual behavior.’ The phrase ‘to obey and disobey’ implies the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP)...” (*Mere Molinism*, 177). The problem is that we *still* have not gotten past the equivocation between PAP_{All} and PAP_{If}. Of course, one must be free to “obey or disobey” epistemic rules. That is not what is in question. The

they do not intersect each other in the *moral* realm. We may struggle mentally over some sin, rather than physically, yet what remains is that that mental struggle is within the spiritual (or moral) realm.²⁹⁶

What does this mean for the Calvinist perspective, and for the unregenerate? Can the unregenerate believe in Christ? Romans 8:6-8 is very clear: “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.” Frame urges the reader to “[n]ote the words ‘can’ and ‘cannot.’ We not only sin, but cannot [categorically] do otherwise... Apart from grace, we are all afflicted with moral inability. And apart from grace, we will all die in our sins,” (*The Doctrine of God*, 131). Though the unregenerate are “physically and mentally able [to believe], [they are] morally [categorically] unable” to believe (*Ibid.*, 134). Here, the unregenerate do not have the PAP_{All} to believe Christ, yet they do possess the PAP_{If} to believe Christ: *if* Christ extends grace, then they will believe and be saved. But it remains the fact that they cannot categorically love God or come to God, as their sinful flesh cannot please God. Consequently, the unregenerate cannot categorically have faith in Christ. So, though the mental and physical actions may be ontologically independent to each other, that is not to say that they are not morally or spiritually interdependent upon each other, and because of this, I take it that they are not just philosophically interchangeable, but theologically as well (*Ibid.*).²⁹⁷

question is *what kind of freedom* is necessary in order to obey or disobey epistemic rules. Stratton has not yet given us a clear unequivocal answer for not only *how* we have efficient causal access to categorical alternatives, but also *why* those alternatives are necessary for rational responsibility in the first place. What is clear, however, is that we have an epistemic imperative to reason in a certain way that glorifies God. Therefore, we can acutely be held morally accountable for how we obey or disobey these epistemic imperatives, yet how this demonstrates *libertarian* freedom is simply dubious.

²⁹⁶ Stratton has noted to me in personal correspondence that perhaps young Jesus was deliberating through a certain mathematics problem (or, better yet, a carpentry measurement problem). Let’s say he miscalculated. Does this mean that Jesus was not “moral” and missed the mark? Stratton uses this line of rhetoric to show that rationality can be wholly distinguished from morality. Yet, we still can say that although Jesus may have had several miscalculations on His time on Earth, that does not mean that those rational mistakes are still not part of a moral realm. Of course it is possible, Jesus misses the mark, at times, especially growing up, rationally, but He never misses the mark morally. That is to say, that even in the midst of that hypothetical miscalculation on Jesus’ part, I am sure, nay confident, He still *glorified* God His Father. So that hypothetical deliberation from Jesus, though incorrect, is still said to be either glorifying to God or not. And that is the point: *that* the moral realm cannot be separated. Although Christ could have been hypothetically wrong in his rational calculations, even in the midst of his errant calculations, His glory to God is *inerrant*.

²⁹⁷ For an interesting discussion on Christ’s ability to sin, while it pertains to mental and physical actions, see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 134. He writes, “Could Jesus sin? ... yes, he was physically and mentally capable of sinning, but no, he was morally incapable [categorically] of it, since he was perfectly holy. Could he struggle with temptation? He could struggle against physical obstacles, so why not against mental and spiritual ones as well? As a man, and therefore as a divine-human person, he could struggle mentally with Satan’s proposals... He understood, surely, how evil tempts a man—what pleasures, however fleeting, are to be found in sin. Yet he saw all of these in their true perspective and rejected them.”

Moving onto 2., if all this is true, the question, then, becomes how these moral actions can be categorized. If there is no true neutral position or action, and no true distinction between mental or physical actions, and if we are accountable to God, then it follows, arguably, that we have only two categories of action available to us at any given time: righteous actions or sinful actions. As the old saying goes, “There are two choices on the shelf: pleasing God or pleasing self!” It is easy, now, to see the connection between the categories of action and the senses of abilities discussed earlier (PAP_{All} and PAP_{If}). Given this theological action framework, we will now discuss question number 3: *how should we merge the metaphysical topic of free will and ability into theological action theory?* But alas, before moving onto what is so often called the liberties of action, let us consider the varying granularities or levels of action.

2.4.9 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Levels of Action

There are at least two identified levels of action: *specific actions* or *class actions*.²⁹⁸ To put it in a philosophically unorthodox fashion, yet in a pedagogically helpful manner, imagine the action “to love.” I am commanded by God to love my wife, and so when I go to exemplify or demonstrate this love I have for her, I do so in a variety of different ways, each of which I am said to be responsible for. Assuming libertarianism, I could love my wife by, let’s say, rubbing her feet, or using words of affirmation, or buying her gifts such as her favorite flower, or by listening (intently) to her when she speaks, or even by spending quality time with her on a Sunday afternoon. These are what we can call *specific* actions of love. If libertarianism is true, I could do all of these things as PAP_{All} would be correct (that would be the natural reading of these actions, under libertarianism), and of course, by virtue of those alternatives or having those alternatives, I would be held responsible. If I didn’t love my wife by listening to her intently, though she had asked me to or made it clear that I ought to (let’s just say, as per our vows), then I would be held responsible for not loving her in that specific instance.

But, could it be true that I am also equally held responsible for a *higher* level of action? Is it not true that I am also held responsible for *loving her* or *not loving her* in that same instance? For example, I am held responsible for not loving her by not listening to her intently, even though she had asked and expected me to, but, in addition to this specific action, I am also held responsible for a higher action: *not loving*. Call this last action, or this higher action, *class action*. This analysis is significant because if I am responsible for my specific actions of loving my wife, then I am *equally responsible* for the class action of loving my wife. Or, philosophically, specific actions would entail class actions by induction.²⁹⁹ To see this,

²⁹⁸ These distinctions have been developed and formulated in arduous philosophical detail in Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 110-116. These distinctions, however, are not new in the philosophical literature as they have been around at least since van Inwagen, *Essay*, 171, or possibly earlier.

²⁹⁹ Interestingly, Baggett and Walls attempted to argue that because an agent ought to be able to avoid a *specific* sin, this does not entail that the agent can avoid *all* sin. They write:

Again, P implies Q, where “P” is “we ought to avoid all sin,” and “Q” is “we can avoid all sin.” The problem seems to be that on most versions of Christian theology it looks as if after the fall of man,

Let us imagine a fully specific situation for person P at time t, where a choice must and will be made by P. Presupposing a libertarian account of P's free will so as not to beg any question, it would follow that P has a collection of possible free will choices that is finite, but featuring more than one option. Some of them will be morally righteous, and some will be sinful; let us name them respectively R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n , and S_1, S_2, \dots, S_m . (Nothing hangs on there possibly existing morally neutral options as well.)³⁰⁰

This is what has been argued from Frame above: there are no morally neutral actions according to Scripture. And if moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, it does not seem that there are truly any *rational* neutral options either. We are held responsible (in a desert sense) for *how we think* just as much as we are held responsible for *how we act*. In other words, we are held responsible or accountable to God for whether or not we give glory to Him regardless of what it is we are currently deliberating about or doing. All this jives nicely with what has been explained above, and as such, pairs nicely with Bignon's quote. And so, there are two kinds of actions (as shown theologically above), righteous actions (R_n) and sinful actions (S_m), and if there is no real difference between mental and physical actions, then it is safe to say there are righteous ways to

P can be true while Q is false; therefore, the famous principle is false. But let's look more closely by translating the quantifications:

(P_i) For any x, if x is a sin, then we ought to avoid doing x.

(Q_i) For any x, if x is a sin, then we can avoid x. (*Good God*, 70)

They further go on to clarify that one must equivocate "Q" on the word "all" in order for (Q) to entail (Q_i). Besides the fact that I disagree with the *ought implies can* maxim (see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 75-77), their rebuttal is misguided: (Q_i) *does* entail (Q). This can be demonstrated through recurrence. Unfortunately, the full recurrence cannot possibly be demonstrated here; however, a full treatment can be found in Bignon's book *Excusing Sinners*, 134-135. Here is a brief summary of the recurrence to show that this not just plausible, but using induction, demonstrably proven:

By recurrence: the claim that (Q) "we can avoid all sin" follows from (Q_i) "for any action x, if x is a sin, then we can avoid x." So the specific actions of (Q_i) logically entail the class action of (Q); thus, if one seeks to affirm (Q_i) yet reject (Q), the maneuver would remain incoherent because specific actions entail class of actions at each level of granularity; that is to say, PAP_{All} if true, must be true for high levels of granularity (class of actions) as well as low levels of granularity (specific actions).

Thus,

1. $Q_i \Rightarrow Q$

2. Q_i

Therefore,

3. Q.

(*Modus Ponens*)

So, in order to maintain the truth of Q_i, you must also accept the validity of Q, namely that "[Humans] can avoid all sin". That is, if you can avoid any *specific* sin, then it logically follows that you can avoid *all* sin by the sheer use of your categorical ability. Bignon, responding to Baggett and Walls on this very point writes, "Their response to Calvinists who argue against PAP on the basis that fallen humans cannot avoid all sin is then to accuse them of equivocation on the word 'all,' allegedly confusing between (Q) and (Q_i)," (*Excusing Sinners*, 144). But Bignon reaches the same conclusion as articulated here: "This critique fails to apply to [the Pelagian argument]. I have not equivocated between (Q) and (Q_i), I have *demonstrated* by recurrence that (Q) follows from (Q_i), thereby establishing that their attempt to affirm (Q_i) and reject (Q) is incoherent," (Ibid.).

³⁰⁰ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 112.

think and sinful ways to think. So, going back to my example above, I can love my wife *specifically* in a multitude of varying ways (R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n) through tapping into her preferred love language, let's say, or I can categorically (assuming libertarianism is true) not love her in other specific ways (S_1, S_2, \dots, S_m).

Bignon continues further,

Let's suppose that P chooses and performs the sinful option S_1 . If P is morally responsible for doing S_1 , the $PAP_{[All]}$ asserts that P was able to do otherwise than S_1 . P could have done $\neg S_1$, which given the list of all options available to him [each of which are consistent or compatible to his nature, as Stratton would suggest], means that P could have done $(S_2 \vee S_3 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n)$.

In defining the S's and R's, it was understood that they covered absolutely all the different, unique options that P could possibly choose [again, options that are each compatible or consistent to P's nature], each becoming fully specified so that any minute difference between two possible courses of actions—albeit similar ones—resulted in two different symbols (R_x and R_y with $x \neq y$). This means that the S's and R's each describe P's individual possible choices *at the most fully specified, lowest level of granularity* [or action].³⁰¹

What Bignon is describing are the specific actions or the lowest level of granularity in actions. I could love my wife by rubbing her feet, or giving her flowers, or I could not love her by not rubbing her feet, or not giving her flowers, or worse yet (and God forbid), by committing adultery, etc.³⁰² Each action is “fully specified”, as it were, in order to be fully distinct from one another; even if each action has the smallest minute difference, it is said that there is still a difference. Moreover, if there are no other morally neutral actions, and if the contradiction of sinful actions are righteous actions, and vice versa, then these actions may be formulated into a set. Thus, another way to write these specified sinful or righteous actions are as follows:

$$R_n = \{n \mid n \in R, R \neq S\}$$

$$S_m = \{m \mid m \in S, R \neq S\}$$

If this is how specific actions could be described, then what about class actions?

³⁰¹ Ibid., 112-113.

³⁰² Obviously it is not a sin if I do not rub my wife's feet in and of itself. It is a sin, however, if I know that rubbing her feet is the right thing to do in that instance, yet I fail to do it (James 4:17). I would still be responsible, in that instance, for not just the specific action of not rubbing her feet, but also the class action by not loving her at all (again, in that instant of time).

If we now wanted to describe what P chose and did at a higher level of granularity, considering not a single action but a class of actions, then we would simply regroup the S's and the R's according to common features that they share amongst each other. For example, if S_1 through S_4 consisted of all the “adulterous” decisions that P could have made at t , all the possible courses of action in which P's decision involves his committing adultery in one way or another, then “P decided to commit adultery” could be phrased “P decided to do $(S_1 \vee S_2 \vee S_3 \vee S_4)$.” And accordingly, if we assert that “P is morally responsible for *committing adultery*,” the $PAP_{[All]}$ will entail that P was able to do otherwise than committing adultery, which means P was able to do $\neg(S_1 \vee S_2 \vee S_3 \vee S_4)$, hence he was able to do $(\neg S_1 \wedge \neg S_2 \wedge \neg S_3 \wedge \neg S_4)$, which here is the ability to do $(S_5 \vee S_6 \vee S_7 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n)$.³⁰³

Listing these class of actions in set-builder notation, rather than mere roster form, it may become a bit clearer, and so, we get the following:

$$R = \{n \mid R_n \in R, R \neq S\}$$

$$S = \{m \mid S_m \in S, R \neq S\}$$

Bignon notes that “[a]ll of this seems to be coherent, natural, and most plausible method of application of the PAP to the various levels of granularity of free choices and actions,” (Ibid.). I agree, except for the fact that Bignon seems to unintentionally equate negation of actions with exclusions of actions. In other words, if I negate a sinful action, say S_1 , I don't see how this becomes, say, S_5 , or a mere exclusion of S_1 . Bignon seems to think that a negation of action entails any action that is merely excluded from the negated action.³⁰⁴ I disagree. If I negate S_1 , then by definition I get, instead, R_1 , as righteous actions are the contradiction to sinful actions. Yet, if this relationship between sinful and righteous actions are true in specific lower levels of granularity, then it is true of higher levels of granularity as specific low levels entail a class high level, by induction. So, to uncover or reveal this unfortunate mistake by Bignon, once again, the set-builder notation will be used instead of mere roster form. Consider the following:

$$\neg S_m = \{m \mid m \in \neg S \wedge m \in R, R \neq S\}$$

³⁰³ Ibid., 113.

³⁰⁴ Perhaps Bignon's view is closer to my own than I may realize. $\sim S_1$ equals R_1 , and $\sim S_2$ equals R_2 , and this seems to be in accordance with the theological data argued above. But, if LFW is true, and PAP is true, then the agent could also do other actions like S_5 , S_6 , S_m . It seems that Bignon puts this set together with R_1 , R_2 , etc. If true, then these elements would comprise the fully specified set Bignon has given: $(S_5 \vee S_6 \vee S_7 \dots S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \dots R_n)$. At any rate, even if that is the case, it is not exactly clear that we *should* put them together in Bignon's view. While I will proceed to interpret him in a disagreeable fashion, it may well be the case that our views are very much alike (as we shall see closely in the next section), if not identical.

This set says that the negation of *m* is an element in the set of $\neg S$ (non-sinful actions) as well as in the set of *R*; there is an overlap. In other words, if I negate the action of “being adulterous to my wife” ($\neg S_1$) in a specified way, this also means that “being faithful to my wife” (R_1) obtains in a similarly specified way, as faithfulness is generally considered to be the opposite of adultery. I find that, by definition, if I am not being adulterous to my wife, I am, in some sense, faithful to her (no matter what class action that is entailed by that specific action). But, because of this, there is an intersection between the class rosters of *S* and *R*. Given Bignon’s roster form of specific and class actions above, this seems to be the best interpretation. Of course, Bignon did posit the logical disjunction (the “or”) within his roster of actions, but it seems to me that my being not adulterous to my wife necessarily entails the fact that I am being faithful to my wife. That is to say, if I am not sinning, I am being “righteous” in a certain sense, at least to God.³⁰⁵

2.4.10 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Liberties of Action

It now seems necessary to parse through the notation and go a bit further in identifying not only the levels of actions but the *liberties of action* as well. After all, the said “liberties” that are attached to the said actions are what libertarians truly care about. Although I am not certain, Bignon seems to conflate the levels of action with liberties of action, and so, I hope to remedy this potential mistake and provide a much more robust and clear version of his granularities in action while at the same time provide perhaps an uncomfortable conclusion to the libertarian.

There are at least two distinct liberties of action, and they are the *liberty of contrariety* and the *liberty of contradiction*. They are found in the writings of Reformed scholar Richard Muller, and interacted with by Michael Preciado.³⁰⁶ The two liberties of action could be defined in the following way:

[The two liberties of action mean] that the will of the agent has the power to do *A* or not-*A* (the liberty of contradiction) as well as the power to do *A* or *B* or *C*, etc. (the liberty of contrariety). In this way, the agent has the power or ability to do otherwise.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ As my wife noted to me, one could object and say that the intentions must be considered as well, not just the actions of loving her or not loving her. Put differently, “not sinning” is said to be less active than actively pursuing righteousness. Actually, Kevin Timpe has noted this objection as well, albeit in an orthogonal manner to my own case here (*Philosophical Theology*, 56-66). And because this objection is not exactly parallel to the present discussion, though applicable nonetheless, I will elect to respond to this charge when it is more convenient and pertinent to the discussion at hand. Therefore, more will be said in the historical sections on determining and non-determining grace and limited libertarian freedom, as that tracks the original context. See §3.4-5.

³⁰⁶ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 143-145. The terms “contrariety” and “contradiction,” however, are not original to Muller nor Preciado. These terms date back as far as Aristotle and are prominently discussed in medieval philosophy, specifically regarding logic (see below).

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 144. Here, Preciado convincingly shows that Muller’s objections to compatibilism fall (to put bluntly) flat across the board. Muller’s conceptions of “potencies” are virtually indistinguishable from Fischer and Ravizza’s guidance control conditions. Preciado writes, “This is the precise sense in which

Using these definitions, let us build a roster for both liberties. Let CTR = Liberty of Contrariety, and CON = Liberty of Contradiction:

$$\begin{aligned} CTR &= \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n\} \\ CON &= \{S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\} \end{aligned}$$

CTR signifies “any fully specified action *contrary* to another fully specified action,” whereas CON signifies “any action *contradictory* to another action.” Bignon is right to note that there are varying levels of granularity of actions, namely specific actions versus class actions. This is true, and it is seen as true when we are precise in defining liberties of action as well. CTR’s roster fully exemplifies Bignon’s roster for specific actions available to the libertarianly free agent. However, when it comes to the class action, his roster seems a bit muddled, as noted above. I believe positioning the liberty of contradiction (or CON) as the class actions available to P at t might do the trick, and in doing so it will avoid the potential confusion of delineating between negations and exclusions. But, what does this mean? It means that CON may be interpreted as P’s *class* actions, and CTR can be interpreted as P’s *specific* actions. CTR entails all the fully specified actions (each of which is according to P’s nature) available to P at t . CON entails the class of *sin* {S} and the class of *righteousness* {R} available to P at t . If that is the case, and if specific actions entail class actions, then it follows, logically, that CTR entails CON. In other words, if I have the liberty of contrariety available to me at time t , and I am considered morally responsible for action A at t , then this necessarily entails that I have the liberty of contradiction for A at t as well, and I am also said to be equally responsible for that action. To be more clear, recall earlier that Bignon argued that if PAP is true, this logically entails, for example, that the agent could do S_1 or $\neg S_1$. And according to Bignon, this means that the agent had the following set of specified actions at their disposal: $\{S_2 \vee S_3 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n\}$. Now, it seems to me that this roster is *exactly*, element for element, the set of CTR. Interestingly, this roster of Bignon’s shows CTR *and* CON. The contradiction of S_2 , for instance, is present as it is the action of R_2 . This is true for all other *specific* actions. And because of this, the contradiction of S_m is *equally* present as it is the action of R_n . Therefore, we see here that even given *contrary* actions in one single set (CTR), we *also* have *contradictory* actions present as well.

To put it syllogistically:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 23. CTR \Rightarrow CON | (premise) |
| 24. CTR | (affirmation of antecedent) |
| 25. \therefore CON. | (Modus Ponens) |

Fischer and Ravizza say that an agent cannot do otherwise. An agent cannot do otherwise in the actual sequence, or, as Muller puts it, “in the very moment that it is doing A,” (Ibid.).

If this is correct, then I believe this gives the compatibilist a strong case against the libertarian. “As philosophers like to say, one person’s *modus ponens* is another’s *modus tollens*—and that’s literally the case here.”³⁰⁸ And so,

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 23. CTR \Rightarrow CON | (premise) |
| 26. \neg CON | (negation of consequent) |
| 27. $\therefore \neg$ CTR. | (<i>Modus Tollens</i>) ³⁰⁹ |

This is significant because if libertarianism is true, then PAP_{All} is true as it is a necessary condition for libertarian freedom. If that is true, and if CTR is interpreted categorically, then the CON must also be interpreted categorically by entailment, and if that is true then one cannot rationally affirm CTR while negating CON. Yet, we see Stratton do this all the time with his “limited libertarian freedom.” Stratton writes,

For example, perhaps one may contend that an unregenerate sinner does not possess the ability (left to his or her own devices) [i.e., categorical ability or PAP_{All}] to do anything that is “spiritually good.” However, that does not rule out the unregenerate sinner’s ability to choose among a range of bad options that are each consistent with his sinful nature. He is free to rob the bank or to rob the liquor store and free to simply choose to sit on the couch and merely think about robbing the bank, robbing the liquor store, or watching some television instead.³¹⁰

Without getting into too much detail, as this idea of “limited libertarian freedom” will be dealt with in more depth in §3, I will simply note that if CTR entails CON, this above paragraph from Stratton is deeply incoherent. If P has the PAP_{All} concerning CTR, then P has the PAP_{All} concerning CON. In other words, if P “robs a bank” at t_1 , then P, if CTR entails CON, must be able to also *not* rob a bank at t_1 , and *not* robbing banks is generally considered a righteous action (or so I assume). Stratton says that P is free (categorically) “to rob a bank” (S_1) or “to rob the liquor store” (S_2) and “free to simply choose to sit on the couch and merely think about robbing the bank” (arguably, S_3 , especially if we are still morally responsible for what we think; see Philippians 4:8 and Jesus’ lecture on lust and adultery for an example). It is safe to say that what

³⁰⁸ Gregg Caruso, “On the Compatibility of Rational Deliberation: Why Deterministic Manipulation is Not a Counterexample” (*The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 0, No. 0 2020), 4.

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/c27e4ce1ee662cbdbc87507013c6ef460?AccessKeyId=57C0F200619988621A8D&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

³⁰⁹ Bignon has a similar formulation of the argument. Instead of utilizing CON and CTR, or the liberties of action, he uses the *levels of action*, specific and class of actions. Our conclusions are roughly the same. However, although I wish to remain modest, I think my formulations of the liberties of action ought to be used instead of Bignon’s levels of action (though, I have no quibble with levels of action). Arguably, the liberties of action entail the levels of action, so my formulations would be more directly against the libertarian here, whereas Bignon’s formulations would be more indirect. See *Excusing Sinners*, 104-120.

³¹⁰ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164.

Stratton has in mind is that the unregenerate sinner can only do sinful actions; that is to say, the unregenerate P only possesses CTR, categorically, within available sinful actions each of which is compatible or consistent with P's nature (i.e., unregenerate nature). This line of reasoning will be considered when I defend against some objections later on.

But, first, why assume the liberty of contrariety entails the liberty of contradiction, however? Couldn't Stratton just say that this is an ad hoc derivation, or worse, that we compatibilists have no proof and so it just reveals a desperate attempt to square the libertarian into a corner? Moreover, couldn't Stratton say that libertarian freedom entails CTR, but not CON? That is, couldn't Stratton retort back and say that CTR is necessary for libertarian freedom, but not CON? What about the levels of actions? Why are these necessary? What makes them not ad hoc? No doubt these are all good objections and concerns, and so I shall address them specifically. The verdict (not surprisingly) will be that these objections do not get far in helping Stratton defend his precious limited libertarianism, nor do these objections allow Stratton the privilege of reformulating his libertarianism into a more specific version. If the definitions of libertarian freedom in *Mere Molinism* and Stratton's many podcasts and articles are correct, then there is nowhere to run. I hope to deliver these promises well.

2.4.11 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Objection 1 - Ad Hoc?

Let's begin by starting with the objection concerning the levels of action and whether or not they are indeed an ad hoc derivation. To clarify, this objection tends to press the fact that the higher levels of action, or the class action, is not the consequent of having specified actions, or the lower level of action. Responding to this objection, Bignon says,

[This escape route for PAP advocates] is [itself] an ad-hoc, arbitrary qualification. Why would the PAP, if true, be thus restricted in the levels of granularity at which it applies? Why would it be true of the lowest level, and false of any (every) other? The alleged intuitive warrant of the PAP that is claimed by incompatibilists would seem to equally support each level of granularity indiscriminately.³¹¹

Bignon defends the higher level of action by appealing to the incompatibilists' own ad hoc formulation of their objection: to reject the higher levels of action, yet keep the lower levels, is *itself* ad hoc. He asks, "if [PAP] were true at one [level], why would it not be true at (all) others?" (Ibid.). Valid question, and it demands an answer. Seeing as one of the chief incompatibilists themselves, Peter van Inwagen, *affirm* a variant of the low and high levels of action, perhaps other libertarian incompatibilists ought to follow suit. He writes,

³¹¹ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 115.

Just as there are many different ways the concrete particulars that make up our surroundings could be arranged that would be sufficient for the *truth* of a given proposition, so there are many different ways that would be sufficient for the *obtaining* of a given state of affairs.³¹²

Van Inwagen calls these *event-particulars* and *event-universals*. As Bignon puts it, “the PAP is applied to particulars and universals, to low and high levels of granularity,” respectively, even among incompatibilist scholars (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 116).³¹³ To object and say that these levels of action, namely that the specific does not entail the class, is itself an ad hoc assertion. I personally see no real reason why specific actions do not entail a higher granularity of action, such as the class action. If I am responsible for loving my wife by, say, being faithful to her while doing X, specifically, then does it not follow that I am equally responsible, by entailment, for simply *loving her*, generally? I think I would be, and I would be naturally held responsible for both granularities. I am responsible for specifically loving my wife in any given specific circumstance, and because of that, I am responsible for loving my wife, *period*. One needn’t entertain the objection any further. Positing a higher level of action is not an ad hoc derivation.

2.4.12 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Objection 2 - CTR entails CON?

The next objection targets not the levels of actions but the liberties of action. This objection argues that the liberty of contrariety does not entail the liberty of contradiction. Arguably, the contradiction is what is necessary for libertarian freedom, especially if PAP_{All} is necessary for libertarian freedom and to be considered as a morally significant action (for what would it mean, then, to choose to refrain or *not* to refrain from an action if not true?). Negating the entailment between contrary and contradictory actions would prove to be a profound blow to the thesis and defense of compatibilism at hand. If the objection works, the libertarian, such as Stratton, would be able to keep his contrary actions, or libertarian freedom in “matters below,” while denying that one has the ability or freedom to do contradictory actions, such as love God, or have faith in God, etc., or in what MacGregor and Stratton call “matters above.” This “limited libertarian freedom” would be defended indeed, and the compatibilist war against the PAP_{All} would seem dim if not extremely dull; mute even. Does it work? I do not think it does.

Recall the basic, unanalyzed roster formulations for CTR and CON:

$$CTR = \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n\}$$

³¹² Van Inwagen, *Essay*, 171.

³¹³ Compatibilists Fischer and Ravizza interact with van Inwagen’s event-particulars and even-universals as well by applying them to moral responsibility for the consequences and omissions of actions. See the relevant chapters in *Responsibility & Control*. Needless to say, this “ad hoc” objection is perhaps a sly ploy by the desperate incompatibilist to distract the issue at hand as it is clear that the granularities of action are heavily and commonly utilized, albeit in various forms, within the philosophical literature.

$$CON = \{S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\}$$

Earlier, I mentioned that CTR stands for “any fully specified action *contrary* to another fully specified action,” and in contrast, CON stands for “any action *contradictory* to another action.” Let’s analyze CTR a bit by showing its true entailments. To say that an action is *contrary* to another action, surely this means that I could *not* do that action. In other words, if I do A, and I possess the liberty of contrariety (categorically), this would mean that I could do B, C, D, etc., but it would also mean that I could do $\neg A$ as well, or $\neg B$, or $\neg C$, or $\neg D$, etc. That is what it means to be “contrary” to another action. Surely $\neg A$ is in fact *contrary* to A, but if that is true, it is *also contradictory* to A. This is why $R_n \in CTR$ because R_n is considered a contrary action to other actions (S_1, R_2 , etc.).

In order to show that CTR entails CON, I would need to demonstrate that CON is a subset of CTR. Using the roster formulas above, this becomes a rather straightforward task. In set theory, A is a subset of set B if the following two conditions hold:

1. A is first and foremost a *set* (A cannot be a subset if it is not a set).
2. If $x \in A$, then $x \in B$.

So, set A is an improper subset of B if all elements of A are also elements of B. Obviously CON and CTR are sets. But are they non-mutually exclusive? That is, is there a common element, x, in both sets? More so, are all the elements in A also in B? Is there an intersection of sets? To prove that A is a subset of B it must be shown that A intersects B, and the intersection between A and B also equals A. Put symbolically,

$$A \subseteq B \text{ iff } A \cap B = A$$

The intersection of sets A and B, denoted by $A \cap B$, is:

$$I = \{x \mid x \in A \cap x \in B\}$$

So, is there an intersection of CON and CTR? Is there a common element between the sets? There is, indeed, and it is the set $\{S_m \vee R_n\}$. The intersection is all that the two sets, CON and CTR, have in common. If this is true, we have,

$$CON \cap CTR = \{S_m \vee R_n\}$$

But, does this intersection equal CON? It does indeed. As argued above, the contradiction of S_m is $\neg S_m$ which is the same as R_n , of that *same* action. But more technically, $\neg S_m$ equals R_m . If I

commit the sin of not loving my wife, the contradiction of not loving my wife is *loving* my wife, which is a righteous action. And surely, R_m would be considered an element of CTR as R_m (i.e., loving my wife) is in fact a contrary action to any other action. Put a different way, and if there remains some doubt, let's say $m = 1$, and $n = 1$. If we modify CON, we receive the following:

$$* CON = \{S_1 \vee \neg S_1 \vee R_1 \vee \neg R_1\}$$

Simplifying *CON more,

$$** CON = \{S_1 \vee R_1\}$$

It seems that m and n are arbitrary variables and need not disturb the sequence of sets in any real significant manner. Because the actions S_1 and R_1 are also listed as elements in CTR, and they are indeed contradictory to each other (as $\neg S_1$ equals R_1), the sets CON and CTR are said to have a clear intersection. After all, the negation of S_m is equally residing within the class set of R as R_m . Recall the following we defined earlier:

$$\neg S_m = \{m \mid m \in \neg S \wedge m \in R, R \neq S\}$$

$\neg S_m$ is said to be in the set of $\neg S$ and R as the element of R_n . Therefore, it follows, and remains,

$$CON \cap CTR$$

The intersection is valid as both S_1 and R_1 are elements in the set CON *and* CTR, and since that intersection is *also* the whole set of CON, it is proved that CON is in fact an improper subset of CTR. The intersection of CON and CTR does equal the set of CON. Therefore, via set theory,

$$CON \subseteq CTR \text{ iff } CON \cap CTR = CON \blacksquare$$

If it is true that there is an intersection of CON and CTR, and that intersection equals the entire set of elements from CON, then there exists an improper subset relation: CON is the subset of CTR. Since it is true that CON is a subset of CTR, it then follows that CTR is a superset of CON,

$$CTR \supseteq CON$$

Because every element of CON exists within CTR, CON is said to be an improper subset of CTR. If that is the case that CON is said to be an improper subset of CTR, CTR is said to be a superset of CON, thus proving CTR entails CON. If this is true, then CTR entails CON. Therefore, the objection touted by incompatibilists that the liberty of contrary actions need not

entail the liberty of contradictory actions is thus proven false; CTR entails CON as CON is a proven subset of CTR.

Now, at the risk of repetition, and of probable philosophical overkill, I thought it necessary to provide additional proof of the fact that CTR entails CON by utilizing Venn Diagrams, instead of mere roster formulations.

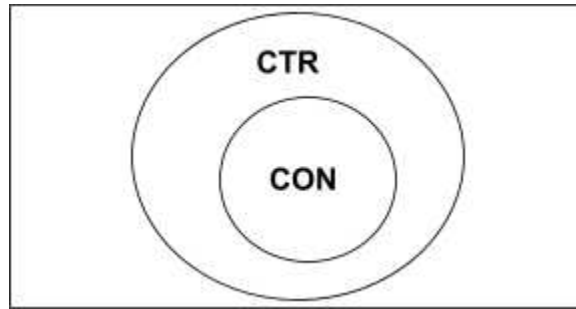
Recall that in order to prove the entailment of sets, one must show,

$$CON \cap CTR = CON$$

If the intersection of two sets equal one of the sets, there there exists an improper subset relation, which then leads to an equivalent entailment:

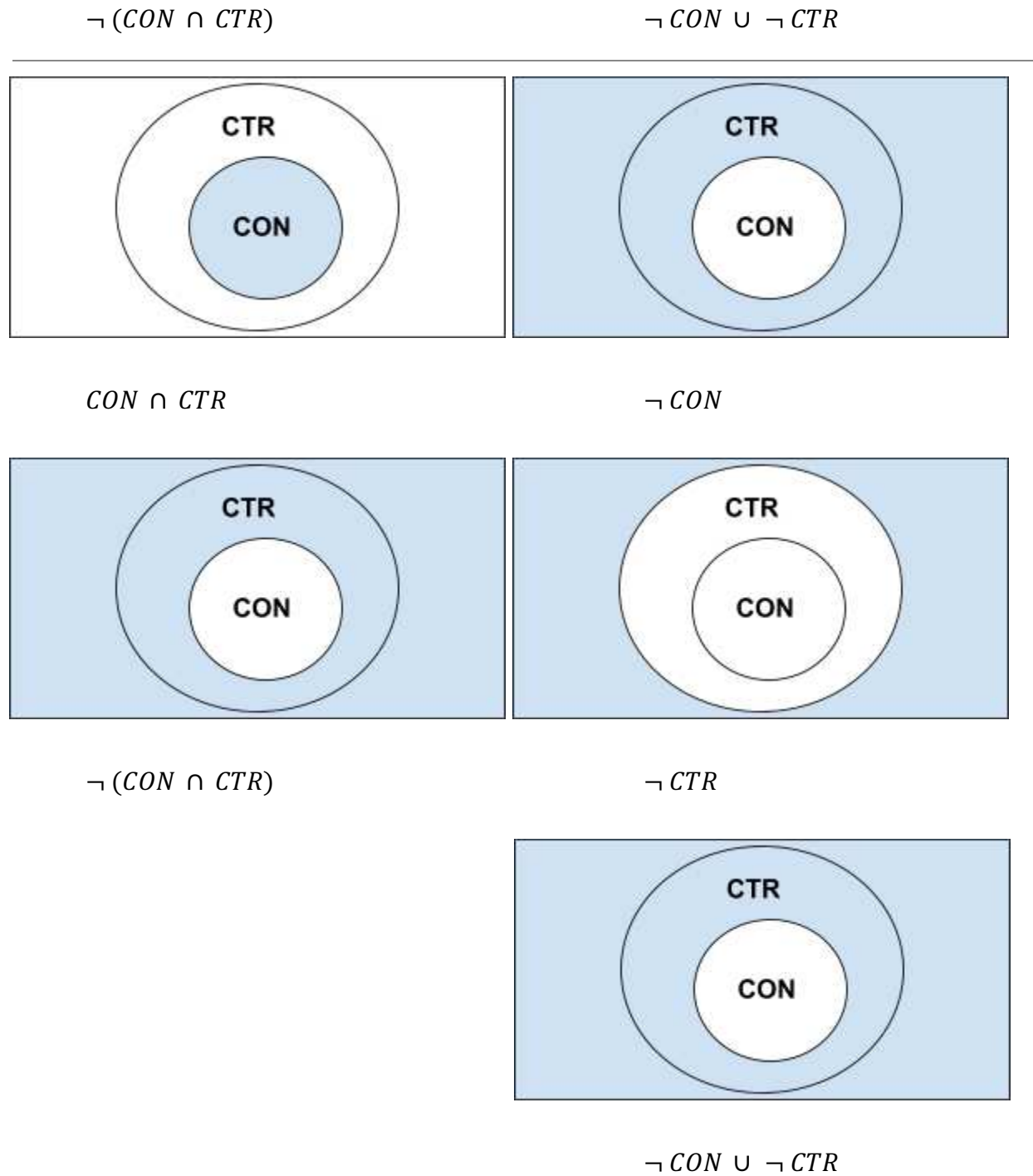
$$CON \subseteq CTR \Leftrightarrow CTR \supseteq CON \Leftrightarrow CTR \Rightarrow CON$$

Using Venn Diagrams, what I aim to show is the following:



It is clear that in this Venn Diagram, CTR entails CON for the mere fact that CTR is a superset of CON. I have adequately and sufficiently shown above that this is the case by utilizing the roster formulations of the two sets. Any action that is considered *contrary* to another action is also said to include a *contradictory* action (after all, libertarian freedom along with its entailing PAP_{All} is often dubbed “the power of *contrary* choice”). This is the case because, arguably, a contradictory action *is in fact* contrary to the action at hand. Thus, any element that is in CON is also located, by definition, in CTR. In addition to this controversial conclusion, I now aim to show (or better yet, solidify) the fact that the intersection of CON and CTR equals CON, though in a different way than above. One can prove this relationship via the negation of sets by utilizing DeMorgan’s Law. So, the Venn Diagram proof for $CON \cap CTR = CON$ utilizing DeMorgan’s Law is shown below.

I must first show that $\neg (CON \cap CTR) = \neg CON \cup \neg CTR$ if DeMorgan’s Law is to be demonstrated and proved.



$\therefore \neg (CON \cap CTR) = \neg CON \cup \neg CTR$ because the Venn Diagrams are the same. DeMorgan's Law holds. Interestingly, however, $\neg CON$ is the same as two conclusions. So, we actually have,

$$\therefore \neg (CON \cap CTR) = \neg CON \cup \neg CTR = \neg CON$$

We may go further and demonstrate the following that, if the above conclusion is true, then the liberty of contradiction and the liberty of contrariety do have an intersection (via roster formulations). In addition, the intersection equals the liberty of contradiction.

$$\begin{aligned}\neg (CON \cap CTR) &= \neg CON \\ \neg \neg (CON \cap CTR) &= \neg \neg CON \\ \therefore CON \cap CTR &= CON \blacksquare^{314}\end{aligned}$$

This discovery yields a powerful conclusion. Remember, CTR entails CON *if and only if* the intersection of both sets equal CON. We now have an argument:

- 28. $CON \cap CTR = CON$ (premise)
- 29. $CON \subseteq CTR$ (from (28), set theory, DeMorgan's Law negation)
- 30. $CTR \supseteq CON$ (from (29), set theory)
- 31. $\therefore CTR \Rightarrow CON$. (from (30), propositional logic)

Each premise has been sufficiently defended above utilizing set theory and Venn Diagrams, as well as the negation of DeMorgan's Law. Given these defenses, and the strong mathematical set theory demonstrated above, the argument holds: the liberty of contrariety entails the liberty of contradiction.

The reason why this conclusion matters is because it no longer allows the libertarian incompatibilist the metaphysical escape to "limited libertarian freedom". The entailing liberty of contradiction is what the libertarian must be committed to when one posits PAP_{All}, which of course Stratton does. What this means is that if a libertarian, such as Stratton himself, comes and throws around the idea that P can choose between a range of options each of which is compatible with P's nature, and P's nature, being unregenerate, cannot simply choose a contradictory action such as R_m, then this conclusion is false. Because CON {S, R} is entailed by CTR {S₁, S₂, ... , S_m, \neg S_m}, P *does* have metaphysical access to R_m (assuming libertarianism), by virtue of R_m is the same as \neg S_m. As demonstrated above, contradictory actions {S_m, R_m} are *by definition* considered as contrary actions to the whole list of specific actions at P's disposal, even granting the fact that P may only do actions which are compatible with its nature. This is the case primarily because of the type of *ability* that Stratton, among other libertarians, wishes to attach to *liberty*: PAP_{All}. This sense of ability is so strong that it entails the liberty of contradiction; indeed, *it must*, in order for it to count as a robust alternative that is considered morally significant.

³¹⁴ I think it is of equal value to note that this conclusion could be demonstrated without utilizing DeMorgan's Law. The intersection of CON and CTR is by definition CON, and Venn Diagrams allow this to be clearly illustrated. If we shade the overlap of CON and CTR the only shaded region that satisfies that condition is CON. So, while I suppose the use of DeMorgan could be subject to superfluity, I believe the conclusion to be the same, and obviously that is what matters.

2.4.13 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Objection 3 - Union or Intersection?

This opens the door to yet another objection anticipated from Stratton. What if CON is only sufficient for PAP_{All}, while CTR is sufficient and *necessary*? In other words, Stratton could just as easily dismiss the above proof by maintaining the fact that in order to have libertarian freedom, and therefore PAP, one must only possess CTR and *not* CON, although if one did possess CON it would be sufficient for libertarian freedom. Let's attempt to steel-man Stratton's anticipated objection:

- 32. LFW \Rightarrow PAP_{All} (from (4), definition as shown in §2.1.3)
- 33. PAP_{All} = CON \cup CTR (libertarian premise)
- 34. $\neg(\text{PAP}_{\text{All}}) = \neg(\text{CON} \cup \text{CTR})$ (from (33), negation)
- 35. $\neg\text{PAP}_{\text{All}} = \neg(\text{CTR})$ (from (34), set theory)³¹⁵
- 36. $\neg(\neg\text{PAP}_{\text{All}}) = \neg(\neg\text{CTR})$ (from (35), negation)
- 37. $\therefore \text{PAP}_{\text{All}} = \text{CTR}$. (from (36))
- 38. $\therefore \text{LFW} \Rightarrow \text{CTR}$. (from (32), (37))

This conclusion means that in order to negate PAP_{All}, and therefore LFW, one must negate CTR, *not* merely CON. Using DeMorgan's Law on premise (34), we receive the following:

$$\neg\text{PAP}_{\text{All}} = \neg\text{CON} \cap \neg\text{CTR}$$

If CON and CTR are considered a *union* of sets, and not an *intersection* of sets, this means that PAP_{All}, and LFW by extension, only equal CTR, *not* CON. In order to negate LFW one must negate PAP_{All}, but in order to negate PAP_{All} one must negate CON *and* CTR, not merely CON *or* CTR. This is a difficult burden for the compatibilist here, if true. My original argument (or defense) attempted to show that PAP_{All} equals the intersection of CON and CTR. And if DeMorgan's Law is applied, then in order to negate PAP_{All}, and thus LFW, one must *only* negate CON *or* CTR (as that is the definition of the intersection of sets). This is a much easier burden for the compatibilist. And of course, given the fact that there is no CON regarding the unregenerate sinner, or arguably God,³¹⁶ it follows that PAP_{All} is false or at least highly dubious.³¹⁷ That's the technical game-plan for the compatibilist. However, if Stratton's objection works, and PAP_{All} only entails CON *or* CTR, and not CON *and* CTR (as compatibilists would

³¹⁵ The union of CON and CTR does in fact equal CTR. Although I will not take the time nor space to demonstrate that here, it can be proved in a parallel fashion as the above reasoning utilizing set theory, Venn Diagrams, and DeMorgan's negation. That is, it can be proven that the union of CON and CTR equals CTR just like it was proven that the intersection of CON and CTR equals CON.

³¹⁶ See Bignon's formulation of Edwards' argument in defense of divine impeccability, *Excusing Sinners*, 104-120.

³¹⁷ I understand that I am making some minor assumptions here. Obviously if I let these stand as they are they would be unjustified. However, I believe this conclusion has been adequately defended by Bignon, Helm, Fischer, Anderson, Christensen, Frame, etc. as it has not been shown necessary for responsibility.

like), then this objection has some potent bite in it, and thus deserves a valid response by the compatibilist. In order to defeat PAP_{All} with a successful refutation, given Stratton's anticipated response here, the compatibilist would need to rebut CON *and* CTR, not merely CON *or* CTR.

Before responding, it would be helpful for the reader to see the essential gist of what the compatibilist originally aimed to do, in contrast to Stratton's potential objection to it. The basic compatibilist argument would be rendered as something of the following:

- 32. $LFW \Rightarrow PAP_{All}$ (from (4), definition as shown in §2.1.3)
- 39. $PAP_{All} = CON \cap CTR$ (compatibilist premise)
- 40. $\neg(PAP_{All}) = \neg(CON \cap CTR)$ (from (39), negation)
- 41. $\neg PAP_{All} = \neg(CON)$ (from (40), set theory, Venn Diagrams as shown above)
- 42. $\neg(\neg PAP_{All}) = \neg(\neg CON)$ (from (41), negation)
- 43. $\therefore PAP_{All} = CON.$ (from (42))
- 44. $\therefore LFW \Rightarrow CON.$ (from (32), (43))

Now, at this point, the compatibilist would whole-heartedly jump on conclusion (44) by listing off a number of arguments in order to show that CON is false, and if CON is false, LFW is false. These arguments would include Bignon's reformulation of Edwards' divine impeccability argument (as previously mentioned), Bignon's reformulation of Luther's Pelagian/Universalism argument/dilemma, Frankfurt-style counterexamples, or the biblical data that the unregenerate *cannot* please God (i.e., do righteous actions, or simply "have faith"; Romans 3:10; Hebrews 11:6; cf. Romans 8:6-8, as mentioned by Frame). However, as stated above, this potentially powerful defeater for libertarianism is completely undermined with one minute change in the premises: PAP_{All} does not equal the *intersection of sets*, as compatibilists would like, but rather the *union of sets*. If this is the case, then it is not CON that is deadly to the libertarian view, but rather it is the CTR that is deadly to the compatibilist view. What a change of events!

And so, I must admit that this response, if it works, is a rather brilliant one, and it's one in which I have personally wrestled thoroughly within my own view of compatibilism. If true, libertarianism could have something like "limited libertarian freedom" by forsaking controversial theses like CON. In addition, if true, the Calvinist himself could affirm something like "limited libertarian freedom" as it only entails CTR and *not* CON, thus making him, perhaps, a mere Molinist (much to Stratton's credit). It is just harder to refute the disjunction of two sets as a necessary condition for PAP, rather than the conjunction.

So, does libertarian freedom only entail CTR and not CON? Does PAP_{All} only entail CTR as well? After much reflection, I don't see how it does. The crucial libertarian premise in defense of something like Stratton's "limited libertarian freedom" is (33) along with conclusion (37) and (38). Together, they argue for the following:

$$CON \cup CTR = CTR$$

As we have seen, the compatibilist does not (and should not) accept this premise. Instead, to my estimation, they should accept the intersection, as explained above:

$$CON \cap CTR = CON$$

While the Venn Diagrams could be made in order to prove the union, just like they were used to prove the intersection, it seems to me that this would be a rather futile attempt; it literally does nothing for the libertarian. The libertarian must not simply show that the union of the two sets equal CTR, but rather that there *must be a union*. In other words, the libertarian must show that the *intersection* of sets is false, but also that the *union* of sets is true; that is, the libertarian defender for “limited libertarian freedom” must show that there are no common elements between sets. Similarly, the compatibilist must equally demonstrate, to a reasonable degree, that the PAP entails the *intersection*, not the union. In order to show this, one must recognize that the proof via Venn Diagrams seem to be lacking in this particular area (to both the compatibilist and incompatibilist alike). Though Venn Diagrams are helpful to show *what* the entailing liberty is, they are not helpful in demonstrating *how* the common or uncommon elements relate to each other within the sets. That is, Venn Diagrams do not show *how* elements relate to each other within the set, either through an intersection or union; roster formulations on the other hand, do exactly that. With this in mind, in order to respond to the libertarian charge at hand, I will redirect back to the original roster formulations of both sets.

Recall the sets of CON and CTR once again:

$$\begin{aligned} CTR &= \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n\} \\ CON &= \{S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\} \end{aligned}$$

These are currently left unanalyzed, and previously, I have attempted to analyze them both by “filling them in” as it were. The set of CTR could be reformulated:

$$* CTR = \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\}$$

This reformulation or union of sets was alluded to above, but now it should be clearly seen: *there still remains an intersection of sets!* Given the roster formulations of the sets, it is *still true* that CTR entails CON because CON is a (improper) subset of CTR. The common elements in CTR are $\{S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\}$. These elements are the unsimplified set of CON. Even if one takes the union of sets, it does not negate the fact that the intersection is still CON. Now, once

again, the reason why this works is because certainly a *contradictory* action is *also* a *contrary* action. This is the case by the very nature of contrary actions; contradictory actions are entailed by contrary actions, definitionally. If I could do (via the categorical ability) S_1 , and I also possess the liberty of contrariety, it is not just the case that I have the “limited libertarian freedom” to do S_2, S_3, \dots, S_m . Because I possess the liberty of contrariety, *and* the ability attached to that liberty (the categorical ability, or PAP_{All}), by definition, I can also do $\neg S_1, \neg S_2, \neg S_3, \dots, \neg S_m$. Therefore, the contradiction obtains, namely $R_1, R_2, R_3, \dots, R_m$.

What if Stratton still objects and modifies CTR even further? Let’s say he modifies it to the following:

$$** CTR = \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee \neg S_m\}$$

This newly formulated set does not have righteous actions entailed as its elements, so does the contradiction not obtain? No, it still obtains because what does the element $\neg S_m$ equal? It equals R_m , which is the contradictory action. If one doubts this, I would encourage them to think of a sin, and then negate that sin, and then think about whether or not a righteous action does ensue. To keep with my original example regarding the class action or higher level of granularity, if I negate not loving my wife at time t , then at t , I am not *not* loving my wife, which means, at t , I *am* loving my wife. Last time I checked, this action seems to be righteous before God.

In conclusion to this rather interesting objection, I do not see the libertarian appeal to the union of sets as an attractive one for the primary reason that it seems to be unsupportable, definitionally. In §3.5.2, I will attempt to dive deeper into the idea of this “limited libertarian freedom” as it relates to historical theology, Pelagius and PAP; however, for now, it suffices to say that “limited libertarian freedom” does not appear to lay on sturdy grounds. The union of CON and CTR has not been shown, via roster formulations, to prove the fact that PAP_{All} only entails CTR. In fact, as noted above, in order for an action to be morally significant it is usually argued that one must be able (PAP_{All}) to refrain or *not* refrain. That is CON. In addition, the negation of the intersection between CON and CTR has equally not been demonstrated. It is actually the opposite, and because of this, if LFW entails PAP_{All} , and PAP_{All} entails CON, then this completely refutes Stratton’s conception of “limited libertarian freedom”. Libertarian freedom *does not* entail simple contrary actions; rather, it entails, definitionally, especially if PAP_{All} is necessary for libertarian freedom, the liberty of contradiction.

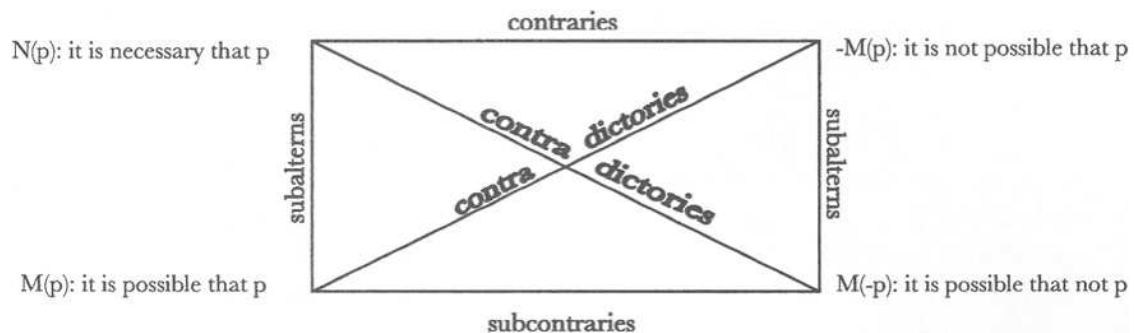
2.4.14 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Objection 4 - CON entails CTR?

Another objection is anticipated: couldn’t it be true that CON entails CTR? This would allow the libertarian to hold fast to CTR while rejecting CON. I have two responses.

First, if it is true that CON entails CTR, in addition to what has been already proven in the previous section that CTR entails CON, then this would mean that $CON = CTR$. Clearly, this is simply not the case. The two sets do not share *all* the same elements. This would additionally go against common logic as there is a basic logical difference between contrarieties and contradictions.³¹⁸ Therefore, in order to prove this objection to be valid, the previous demonstration for CTR entailing CON needs to be shown false first. More formally, however, given the modal square of opposition, the contradiction doesn't entail contrariety since the two propositions cannot both be false. Reformed scholastics argue the following:

An often used didactical device to explain the relations between necessity, contingency, possibility and impossibility is the so-called Square of Opposition, which arose in medieval philosophy and theology to explain modal problems...

An example of such a modal square is given below:



Each of the corners of this square has one modal term, and the lines between the corners indicate the possible relations between these options. It is important to note that for the sake of convenience we treat possibility and contingency as equivalents here. The relations between them are not as exclusive and simple as might seem at first sight. Logically, distinctions have to be made between contradictory, contrary, ... :

- (3) Two propositions are contradictory if they cannot both be true and they cannot both be false.
- (4) Two propositions are contraries if they cannot both be true but can both be false.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 49.

³¹⁹ Willem J. van Asselt et al. eds, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 34

We see that (3) cannot entail (4), but (4) does entail (3).³²⁰ Contrariety is broader than the contradiction as it includes the contradiction, since on the former $\neg A$ means B, C, or D, while the latter only presents two options $\neg A$ and B. CON cannot possibly be said to entail CTR because under CON only one proposition can be false, whereas under CTR multiple propositions can be false. Condition (4) states that while I must choose one (and only one) option, I can reject multiple options at the same time. For instance:

If I can choose between mutually exclusive options {A, B, or C}, only one must be true and the other two false. For example, Socrates can sit, run, stand, jump, etc. He must do one to the exclusion of all others, but he can refrain from multiple others. But this entails condition (4), or CON, because one must be true to the necessary exclusion of all the others. On contradiction, you have A or $\neg A$ as specific options, whereas on contrariety, you still have A or $\neg A$, but $\neg A$ serves as a category (rather than a specific option) under which the specific (mutually exclusive) options are {B, C, D, etc.}.³²¹

CON is said to possess the set $\{A \vee \neg A\}$. Earlier, I argued that this set relates to class actions or event-universals (to use van Inwagen's terminology). The elements residing in the set are specific options, but are also considered class options as specific actions entail class actions. CTR is said to possess the set $\{A_x \vee \neg A_x\}$ as well, *but* $\neg A_x$ is featured as a categorical option which entails specific options {B, C, D, ...} (or event-particulars). Now, from a Christian perspective, there are only two class actions available: sinful (S) or righteous (R). So, instead of {B, C, D}, we could presumably have $\{B_a, B_b, B_c, \dots\}$. We see here that the categorical option of $\neg A_x$ entails specific categorical options $\{B_a, B_b, B_c, \dots\}$. For example, let's suppose CTR is the set $\{S_1 \vee \neg S_1\}$. Let's further assume S_1 is "the act of gluttony." At any time, if $\neg S_1$ is chosen by an agent, this entails the category of specific options $\{R_1, R_2, R_3, \dots\}$ because *not* being gluttonous is by definition a righteous act.³²² $\neg S_1$ equals R_1 , which is CON. The agent in our example, by not being gluttonous could mean that he's eating healthy (R_1), being content about his weight (R_2), promoting a positive body image (R_3), and so on. But this set $\{R_1, R_2, R_3, \dots\}$ still entails $\{R\}$. And this is what has been argued all along: there exists an intersection of sets between CTR and CON, and that intersection equals CON. This means that it is *CTR* that entails CON; this is true via set theory, not its converse.

³²⁰ Another way to perhaps think of these relations is through a standard truth table. CON entails propositions to be either TF, or FT, whereas CTR entails propositions to be FF, or TF. Notice, CTR has the TF set *and so does* CON. However, Since CON may be simplified to be TF, it follows that CTR entails CON as CON is a subset of CTR. It is therefore not true, logically, that CON entails CTR, contrary to the anticipated objection.

³²¹ Special thanks to the anonymous reviewer to whom this quote belongs; they have articulated this very point.

³²² This of course assumes that one is responsible for omissions in a symmetrical manner in which one is responsible for actions. For a good discussion on this contented symmetry, see Fischer and Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control*, chapter 5. Moreover, I am aware that this issue could be the reason why I differed from Bignon on the set of class actions. If you recall, Bignon seemed to equate negations with exclusions. I concede that this may be correct, but I am hard-pressed to find a decent counterexample to the negation of S_1 to *not* entail R_1 . Then again, even if I am wrong, I would simply (and humbly) regroup and assume Bignon's granularity of actions in their entirety. The falsity of PAP is shown in either case.

Secondly, and fundamentally building off the first point, in order for CON to entail CTR, CTR would have to be a proven subset of CON. Recall that the following conditions must be true in order to show a subset relation:

1. A is first and foremost a *set* (A cannot be a subset if it is not a set)
2. If $x \in A$, then $x \in B$.

Set A is also considered an improper subset of B if and only if all elements of A are also elements of B. To prove that A is a subset of B it must be shown that A intersects B, and the intersection between A and B also equals A. Set theory allows for the condition,

$$A \subseteq B \text{ iff } A \cap B = A$$

Putting this relation in terms of CON and CTR according to the objection at hand, we receive the following:

$$CTR \subseteq CON \text{ iff } CTR \cap CON = CTR$$

In order to show the intersection of CTR and CON equals CTR, one may use either roster formulations or Venn Diagrams. Let's take the unqualified rosters once again:

$$\begin{aligned} CTR &= \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee R_1 \vee R_2 \vee \dots \vee R_n\} \\ CON &= \{S_m \vee \neg S_m \vee R_n \vee \neg R_n\} \end{aligned}$$

Are there common elements in CTR and CON? Yes, the intersection is clearly shown: $\{S_m, R_n\}$. Now, does this intersection equal CTR? No, it does not; it equals CON! Thus, the objection is demonstrably false. We see that in order for this objection to work, one must first tamper with the original sets of CTR and CON. And seeing as it is perfectly plausible for the sets to remain as they are, there is no legitimate reason to suspect the fact that CTR entails CON, nor to further entertain the objection that CON entails CTR.

2.4.15 Analysis of Categorical Ability: Objection 5 - PAP_{If} to the Rescue?

One last objection may remain, and it was briefly mentioned above in order to semi-introduce the liberties of action. For the sake of clarity, I will quote Stratton's controversial position once again. He writes,

For example, perhaps one may contend that an unregenerate sinner does not possess the ability (left to his or her own devices) [i.e., categorical ability or PAP_{All}] to do anything

that is “spiritually good.” However, that does not rule out the unregenerate sinner’s ability to choose among a range of bad options that are each consistent with his sinful nature. He is free to rob the bank or to rob the liquor store and free to simply choose to sit on the couch and merely think about robbing the bank, robbing the liquor store, or watching some television instead.³²³

Stratton claims that although the sinner does not possess CON, he may possess CTR. He says that an unregenerate agent could simply have the categorical ability to choose between the elements within CTR: $\{S_1, S_2, S_3, \dots, S_m\}$. S_1 could be “robbing a bank”, S_2 could be “robbing the liquor store”, or S_3 could be merely “thinking about robbing the bank or liquor store”, and so on. In other words, the complaint asks, what if Stratton objects to *all* contradictory statements in the set? This objection says that the only reason why **CTR works as evidence against something like limited libertarian freedom is because the contradiction of S_m is presumptuously asserted when in fact it doesn’t (or shouldn’t) belong in the set. This new formulation would, or should, according to the objector, perhaps look like this:

$$*** \text{ CTR} = \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m\}$$

This set shows only *sinful* actions categorically available to P at t (categorical opportunities each of which is compatible with P’s unregenerate nature). This allows Stratton to evade all the headache of affirming CON (and the entailment of the class of righteousness) while presumably maintaining a coherent set of contrary actions within one single class (the class of sin). What should the compatibilist make of this set? I still don’t see how it works, namely because in order to be morally (or rationally) responsible under Stratton’s view, one must affirm the CON. That is to say, in order to be held morally responsible in loving God, given Stratton’s view, one must be able to categorically *not* love God, which is by definition CON (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 258, n7). In order to be held rationally responsible in our rational deliberation, one must be able to categorically choose (or have a broad opportunity to) a true belief over a false belief (Ibid., 177). Is Stratton seriously suggesting that CON is *not* necessary for morally and rationally responsible actions? Stratton wants to defend the fact that we *do not* need the categorical ability to love God or think about loving God. But the natural question follows: if P only has S_m categorically available at t , and P does not have $\neg S_m$ categorically available at t , then is P responsible for $\neg S_m$ at t ? Put differently, if P is unregenerate, and can only categorically *not* love God (S_m) as a class action at t , then is P responsible to love God ($\neg S_m$, or R_n) at t ? If Stratton says no, then it seems P has an excuse and P would not be accountable to God for his unregenerate nature (under his view, taken consistently). If Stratton says yes P is still responsible, then how does he remotely maintain or rescue an inkling of coherency in his limited libertarian freedom? It would have just been conceded that even though the agent could not do otherwise under a class action of sin, they remain morally responsible. That is, even though P could not do *righteousness*, they are still held

³²³ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164.

responsible and accountable to God. But, this *is* the compatibilist view. P does not have PAP_{All} regarding the class action of righteousness, but P *does* have PAP_{If} regarding the class action of righteousness. It seems then that PAP_{All} is *not* necessary for responsibility after all; PAP_{If} is.

Now, going back, what if Stratton does concede **CTR? What if he ultimately agrees that CTR entails CON, and the ability attached to these “liberties” of action is the categorical (PAP_{All}) ability? The arguments defended above would remain the same, of course. But, now, what if Stratton also concedes that CTR has the categorical liberty, yet CON has the *conditional* liberty (as it was shown to be a major implication of ***CTR)? This maneuver would allow Stratton to allow the modified sets, invite the entailment, yet still (presumably) remain coherent in his “limited libertarian freedom” proposed in the above quoted paragraph.³²⁴ Does this work?

In order to see that it does not, let’s formulate the potential objection or rebuttal here. In other words, the objection supposedly wants to argue this:

- 45. CTR_{PAP-All} \Rightarrow CON_{PAP-If} (*premise*)
- 46. CTR_{PAP-All} (*libertarian premise*)
- 47. \therefore CON_{PAP-If} (*from (45), (46), Modus Ponens*)

It seems that he wants to hold onto the categorical (PAP_{All}) for contrary actions (i.e., sinful actions) yet reject the PAP_{All} for the contradiction of actions (i.e., righteous actions). He goes on to quote MacGregor noting the fact that humanity may not have freedom in “matters above” (i.e., having faith in Christ), yet we may just have freedom, interpreted categorically, in “matters below” (i.e., robbing banks or liquor stores). Stratton wants to say that P can categorically choose specific sins, but cannot categorically choose specific actions of righteousness. Instead, P has the *conditional* ability to do righteousness, or that P could do R₁ or R₂, for example, but it is just the case that he does not want to, *given* his unregenerate nature. P does not have categorical access to the contradiction of S_m because that is not according to (compatible or consistent with) one’s nature. Besides the fact that, if this interpretation from Stratton is correct, it outright borrows from the compatibilist defense, thereby tacitly affirming the power of the conditional ability, the interpretation also, as noted many times above, could be considered as metaphysical flip-flopping, and thus will simply not help because it would be inconsistent.³²⁵ It is this “flip-flopping,” I take it, that is along the same lines as when Stratton says that P could be determined in “matters above,” yet not determined with “matters below” because determinism

³²⁴ Elsewhere, Stratton argues something (to what I take to be) rather similar when he considers whether or not we have freedom in heaven. See “Free Will in Heaven?” <https://freethinkingministries.com/free-will-in-heaven/>.

³²⁵ For a good argument pertaining to libertarian flip-flopping and why this maneuver should be something of an avoidance in the free will debate, see Fischer, “Libertarianism and the Problem of Flip-flopping,” *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*, ed. by Kevin Timpe and Daniel Speak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

should not automatically mean *exhaustive* determinism. We have discussed, at great length in previous sections, that this maneuver simply fails.

Why would the categorical not transfer from the antecedent to the consequent? Why wouldn't the same liberty be understood all the way through the entailment? Is Stratton contending the fact that P could not categorically do otherwise regarding *righteous* actions (like love God), and yet P remains morally responsible for the fact she cannot categorically love God? In other words, is Stratton conceding that P *cannot* do R_1 , if R_1 is said to be loving God via worship, yet P remains "free" and responsible in the relevant sense? This is literally the compatibilist dream. It seems then that the problem for Stratton is *not* CTR, but the PAP_{All} ; if the PAP_{All} is true, then the entailment holds and I do not see any reason yet offered by Stratton (or any other incompatibilist for that matter) to grant the fact that the liberties do not safely and logically transfer.³²⁶ If that is the case, then Stratton's last line of defense seems to be a dead-end. He should just concede that the entailment exists, the categorical ability is transferred, and something like "limited libertarian freedom" is incoherent. (RO) Hard Calvinists do not have access to this form of metaphysical freedom, contrary to what Stratton would like to argue throughout *Mere Molinism*. Why would that be such an awful concession?

2.4.16 Conclusion

In this section we have discussed responsibility and how it entails a sense of freedom. We have looked at this sense of freedom and distinguished between various senses of ability (PAP_{All} , PAP_{If} , broad/specific, or narrow/general). We have found that Stratton's opportunistic definition of "broad" ability is lacking and virtually useless in describing freedom accurately. Instead, the PAP_{All} (or the categorical ability), the sense of ability often posited by libertarians, and the sense of ability that Stratton himself has affirmed repeatedly in *Mere Molinism*, turns out to be a much better candidate as the necessary condition for the sense of freedom that is equally necessary for responsibility. However, if that is the case, it is actually problematic for the libertarian as we have seen through the entailing liberties of contrariety and contradiction. Stratton wants to maintain the categorical while denying the liberty of contradiction, yet still have a coherent view of libertarian freedom. I do not see it that way. I have argued that libertarianism entails the liberty of contradiction, and if that is the case, that allows for the compatibilist to attack the libertarian position rather strongly. All the possible potent objections against this unfortunate libertarian entailment were shown to be ultimately unfruitful, contrary to libertarian hopes.

³²⁶ Stratton may still argue that he is in "good company" for suggesting this modified form of libertarianism because the early reformers apparently held to something similar, as well as Molina himself. If that is his response, and their views are truly the case, I would respond by saying that, although I agree with many of the historical reformers, especially in their systematic theology, their supposed philosophical thoughts on this modified form of libertarianism is wrong. I see no issue with saying that these reformers, like Calvin, Luther, or Melancthon, were essentially right in their systematic theology but wrong in their philosophical theology. They were, after all, not philosophers by trade.

Therefore, Stratton's own definitions of libertarianism, coupled with his definitions of ability and responsibility, remain deeply incoherent. If that is the case, then it appears that one of the primary pillars of his mere Molinism has fallen considerably, at least if we are concerned with basic cogency. In the next section, we will consider Stratton's non-interaction of Frankfurt-style counterexamples, as well as his repeated notions of sourcehood, and the many ways a compatibilist could respond.

2.5 Frankfurt-style Counterexamples (FSCs), Causation, & Sourcehood

2.5.1 Introduction

In our next section, I will attempt to analyze a form of the infamous Frankfurt-style counterexample (FSC) implicitly³²⁷ articulated by Stratton himself, as well as advanced forms of FSCs from others found in the philosophical literature. Then, I will attempt to show how Stratton's critique of FSCs is in fact misguided because of these other advanced forms of FSCs, and the common objections and rejoinders found alongside them in the literature (none of which Stratton has referenced). Next, I will try to show that one can have a certain sense of "source" in the midst of FSCs, also known as source compatibilism, and how that contrasts with source incompatibilism. I will then attempt to argue that there are two kinds of sourcehood: formal and efficient. Last, I will defend compatibilism in light of this evidence and of the two types of sources by showing a logically consistent way of looking at determinism and agential responsibility.

But first, it must be said that Stratton has only analyzed FSCs *implicitly*, not explicitly. For me, as a compatibilist, I find this non-interaction of FSCs grossly flawed. As I have mentioned previously in §2.1, Stratton has barely interacted with FSCs in *Mere Molinism*.³²⁸ He summarizes a familiar variation of a FSC by William Lane Craig on page 5, and then mentions "Frankfurt examples" by name *as a mere footnote* in his philosophical chapter on page 165. One of the most famous arguments, in recent decades, advocating for compatibilism is Harry Frankfurt's counterexample to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP).³²⁹ Yet, in a book involving

³²⁷ I say "implicit" because Stratton does not mention the fact that this is indeed an FSC. Only those familiar with the philosophical literature on freedom would recognize that he is articulating a type of FSC.

³²⁸ Granted, he does have some articles found on his website that do in fact mention FSCs explicitly. The following articles will be pieced together later in this section in order to provide conclusive evidence on Stratton's professional opinion of FSCs. You find such work listed below:

1. ["The Failure of Frankfurt?"](#)
2. ["Yoda & K-2: Semi-Compatibilism & Responsibility"](#) (discussed more in §4.3)
3. ["Freethinking Needs the PAP!"](#)
4. [Frankfurt Cases and Libertarian Freedom | Reviewing The Free Will Show \(pt3\)](#) (YouTube video)

³²⁹ It is conceded that not all compatibilists utilize FSCs as actual *arguments* for compatibilism. After all, they are just *counterexamples* to PAP, not necessarily *arguments* for the truth of compatibilism. For instance, John Fischer, probably the foremost defender of FSCs, says the following on using FSCs as an argument for compatibilism (in response to Timothy O'Connor, who also raised this concern):

free will, and whether freedom/moral responsibility is compatible with determinism, Stratton only mentions Frankfurt twice. This is difficult for me to comprehend, let alone understand. Because of this, I find his non-interaction, in a supposedly academic work such as *Mere Molinism*, with arguably the most well-known counterexample to incompatibilism to be disastrously inexcusable.

2.5.2 Stratton & FSCs

That aside, I would now like to interact with Stratton's single use of a FSC found in the introduction of *Mere Molinism*.³³⁰ In order to do this, I will quote it in its entirety and then quote his basic response to it. Then, I will see if his response is worthy of admission. Stratton, quoting Craig, gives the following FSC:

Imagine a man whose brain has been secretly implanted with electrodes by a mad scientist. The scientist, being a ... supporter [of politician X], decides that he will activate the electrodes to make the man vote for ... [politician X] if the man goes into the polling booth to vote for ... [politician Y]. On the other hand, if the man chooses to vote for ... [politician X], then the scientist will not activate the electrodes. Suppose, then, the man goes into the polling booth and presses the button to vote for ... [politician X]. In such a case it seems that the man freely votes for ... [politician X] (he is responsible for his vote). Yet it was not within his power to do anything different!³³¹

This FSC is considered the most basic variation of an FSC; call it (P). There are much more sophisticated FSCs than this one, which we will discuss later, but this one does justice to what Stratton apparently wants to argue. Before heading to his exposition of (P), it is helpful to note two features, or sequences, within (P). The first sequence of events is what we call the "actual sequence," whereas the second sequence of events is what we call the "alternative sequence." These distinctions are not original to me, nor are they new; they have been floating around the philosophical literature for more than a dozen decades, primarily in the writings of Fischer.³³²

I do not know how others would be inclined to proceed, but I have never argued that the mere fact that alternative possibilities are not required for moral responsibility issues in the compatibility of moral responsibility and causal determinism. Indeed, I have been at pains to point out that the claim that alternative possibilities are not required is the *first step* toward compatibilism, but that ancillary argumentation is certainly needed. (Fischer, "Responsibility and Agent-causation," in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, edited by Widerker and McKenna, 239-40)

I concede this maneuver. However, as Fischer himself conceded, FSCs are the "first step" towards compatibilism. So, for the remainder of this section, I will understand this concession of "step" as synonymous with the first "argument" towards compatibilism.

³³⁰ This case is virtually synonymous with the case he argues against in his article "The Failure of Frankfurt?" (linked in the above footnote).

³³¹ Craig, quoted in *Mere Molinism*, 5.

³³² See, for example, *Responsibility & Control, The Metaphysics of Free Will*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), "Compatibilism" in *Four Views of Free Will*, and "Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities" in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*. For a contemporary rendition of what has come to be

The “actual sequence” of events is the event in (P) in which the agent chooses to vote for X and the scientist *does not* activate the electrode. In this event, the agent chooses to vote for X on his own, and because of this the counterfactual intervener, the scientist, does not in fact intervene. The agent did exactly what the scientist wanted him to do: vote for X, so no intervention is necessary in this sequence. In contrast, the “alternative sequence” of events is the event in (P) in which the agent does not choose X on his own; maybe he tries to choose Y instead. Because of this, the scientist *does* intervene and activate the coercive electrode in the agent’s mental substrate, thus interfering with his actual deliberative processes in order to vote for X.

In typical FSCs like (P), it is said that what is most important, or what ought to remain fixed, is the actual sequence of events. Compatibilists agree with their incompatibilist friends that in the alternative sequence the agent is not responsible (albeit for arguably different reasons); the intervener would be. But in the actual sequence, detailed introspection upon (P) is supposed to elicit an intuitive response that the agent *is* responsible for his vote for X, even though the outcome is the same in both sequences: voting for X. And so, it is said, the agent does not have the categorical ability to do otherwise (PAP_{All}), and because of this access to alternative possibilities (APs) don’t exist. And yet, the agent remains morally responsible (in the actual sequence of events); therefore, the argument goes, PAP is false as we supposedly have a clear counterexample to PAP being necessary for moral responsibility.

Now, Stratton exposit (P) and says,

This thought-experiment suggests that, in order for a person’s will to be free, his choices, actions, and some of his beliefs must really be “up to” him and not due only to external factors. This is known as “agent causation” and implies *libertarian* freedom. An agent, although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, is free to think otherwise and make his or her own decisions (at least some of the time) according to reason and without being completely controlled by deterministic laws of nature or some other external cause. Moreover, if humans are free to make their own choices through reasoning and freely weighing alternatives, then they may be held responsible and accountable for their choices and free actions. This, then, is the essence of libertarian freedom.³³³

known as “actual-sequence compatibilism” see also “An Actual Sequence Perfect Being Theology,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOFtj2nDoYs>.

³³³ Stratton, *Ibid*. Stratton’s claim that this FSC entails something akin to agent-causation *and that* implies libertarian freedom is not only a flub, but is actually philosophically hilarious. First, as we shall see in later sections, the fact that some of the agent’s beliefs were really “up to him” in the midst of the FSC does *not* imply incompatibilism because it does *not* imply efficient causal sourcehood as the correct and only suitable interpretation of “up-to-him-ness.” It could be “up to him” in the formal sense. Second, the notion of agent-causation itself does *not* even imply libertarian freedom. This is a highly contentious claim, one in which Stratton does not once defend or support. To see exactly why libertarian agent-causation is not required for agency, see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 252-55. Last, in the spirit of the overall charge from Stratton here, he seems to think that agency is only possible *given* libertarian-incompatibilist freedom. In other words, if one does *not* possess libertarian freedom, one does *not* possess the locus of

A word considering the proper context of this exposition is in order. Stratton articulates this specific type of FSC in order to show a logically coherent way that libertarian freedom, specifically the categorical leeway ability, could obtain even in the midst of this science-fiction scenario. This is contrary to what (P) tries to show, namely that the mere presence, not intervention, of the nefarious scientist seems to rule out those alternative possibilities for the agent (in both sequences). Stratton writes,

[T]he primary use of the term “libertarian freedom” in [*Mere Molinism*] will... refer to the... categorical ability to choose among a range of alternative options, each of which is consistent or compatible with one's nature. This concept of libertarian freedom can be more clearly articulated with the [FSC above].³³⁴

In Stratton's view, it seems that (P) doesn't necessarily show libertarian freedom to be true, but it does allow for it to be true given the particular context. In other words, (P) apparently does not show that the agent *doesn't* have categorical APs available, thus, (P) doesn't show libertarian freedom to be false. FSCs, then, are concluded to be compatible with libertarianism, or at least with Stratton's version of libertarianism. He argues that, in (P), the agent still, presumably, has categorical APs available: “... although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, [the agent] is free to think otherwise and make his or her own decisions,” (Ibid., 5). The agent can apparently still think otherwise, while not being able to physically act otherwise; call the categorical ability to think otherwise PAP-T.³³⁵ Stratton argues that if the human agent is “free to make their own choices through reasoning and freely weighing alternatives... This, then, is the essence of libertarian freedom.” In the actual sequence of events, the agent has APs by virtue of PAP-T being true; therefore, libertarian freedom obtains. And so, FSCs are compatible with PAP-T (the ability to *think* otherwise), but may not be compatible with PAP *simpliciter* (the

agency necessary to be morally (or rationally) responsible. This is an absurd claim, and I have not only dealt with it briefly in §2.3.5, but I will also tackle the question of agency in determinism in §2.5.14 with the help of an advanced type of FSC.

³³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³³⁵ Here, I utilize the same notation that Stratton himself has assumed in his article “Freethinking Needs the PAP!” (previously linked above) in order to delineate physical alternatives (PAP_{All}) and mental alternatives (PAP-T). In the article, he writes, “I concede that, on a material level, there could be circumstances where P cannot ‘do’ otherwise (referring to a physical action); however, I believe for there to be moral and rational responsibility/accountability, the ability to ‘think’ or ‘will’ otherwise, is necessary. (I refer to this as the principle of alternative possible thinking or “PAP-T”).” Throughout this section, I will understand that PAP-T is to be utilized or seen equivalent to the categorical ability to think otherwise, or PAP-T_{All}. Of course, the compatibilist can agree that agents have the *conditional* ability to think otherwise (PAP-T_{If}), but libertarian incompatibilists (such as Stratton) hold to PAP-T_{All}. It is this latter sense of PAP-T (the categorical) that I will assume when discussing Stratton's response to FSCs (though it must be said that I think PAP-T_{If} is evidently true given the counterfactual or conditional nature embedded within all FSCs).

ability to *do* otherwise).³³⁶ Put differently, using the terminology of Robert Kane, FSCs indeed eliminate the agent's *freedom of action*, but they do not seem to eliminate the agent's *freedom of will*. This seems to be the most plausible explanation of Stratton's short exposition of (P).

Before diving into my response of Stratton's exposition of (P), it may be helpful to receive the whole scope of data upon which side of the debate Stratton appears to stand when considering the validity of FSCs, because given (P), at first glance, it's sort of a puzzle. Sometimes it appears as though Stratton defends FSCs, but then again, at other times it appears he critiques them heavily. Overall, Stratton does not say much about FSCs in *Mere Molinism* as previously mentioned. But a few of his articles (the most relevant ones are linked above) do explicitly cite FSCs. Given this, I believe that to be the best starting point in gathering the pieces of the puzzle. However, one piece to the puzzle is found in an article not linked above, and it is titled "Droids in Heaven?"³³⁷

In the article, Stratton seems to *defend* FSCs. He writes, "It is not true that one who possesses libertarian freedom *MUST* possess a categorical ability to do otherwise. Indeed, Frankfurt examples show how an agent can possess libertarian freedom and still not have the power to act otherwise."³³⁸ Besides the fact that he is wrong about the first sentence (recall the argument for the libertarian condition (b*) in §2.1), I will assume that the words "do" and "act" are considered material or physical actions, not necessarily mental ones. That seems to be the only way the first sentence logically connects to the second. If "do" is considered a physical action, then it makes sense that Stratton would posit something like a FSC in response since, according to his view, the agent could not "act" otherwise in the actual sequence. Again, we see then that Stratton wants to suggest that FSCs show PAP false (for physical actions), but presumably not PAP-T (for mental actions). So Stratton *defends* that FSCs show PAP is false, but *argues* that FSCs do not show PAP-T false.

Let's consider another piece of the puzzle. In the article "Freethinking Needs the PAP!" Stratton seems to argue *against* FSCs. Stratton writes, agreeing with Bignon (amazing!),

Not only did Molina affirm the PAP, some determinists believe that if libertarianism is true, then the PAP would also be true. In fact, Guilla[u]me Bignon (although he is

³³⁶ Kadri Vihvelin, a leeway (dispositional) compatibilist, argues something quite similar. And, because of this, Vihvelin rejects FSCs. See Vihvelin, *Causes, Laws, and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn't Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92-97.

³³⁷ Stratton, "Droids in Heaven?", <https://freethinkingministries.com/droids-in-heaven/>.

³³⁸ I want to take a moment to simply remind the reader that APs are considered necessary for libertarian freedom, as argued in §2.1. This means APs of *any* kind; APs in actions *or* thoughts. Stratton argues the latter, but those are *still* APs. Stratton's own definition of libertarianism entails this as well: "libertarian freedom *is* the [categorical] ability to choose among a range of options, each of which is consistent or compatible with one's nature," (Stratton, *Mere Molinism* 146; "Rejoinder," 20). The "is" denotes a necessary (and sufficient) condition for libertarian freedom to be true.

definitely not a libertarian) argues that all libertarians should affirm the PAP in his recent book. Bignon writes:

“No matter how modestly one defines libertarianism, and its underlying indeterminism, then, they necessarily entail the existence of alternate possibilities ... the possession of libertarian free will entails the categorical ability to do otherwise than one does.” (Bignon:Excusing Sinners & Blaming God:2018:126)

Although I do not agree with Bignon on many accounts, I think he might be on to something in this regard.³³⁹

Bignon is merely affirming what I have been defending all along: libertarian freedom entails APs (or the condition (b*)), or more formally the PAP. My humble hunch is that Stratton agrees with Bignon insofar as libertarian freedom entails PAP-T, but perhaps libertarian freedom does not entail PAP. Again, we see Stratton throwing PAP out with the bathwater, yet keeping PAP-T. Stratton continues in the article defending PAP-T quoting various philosophers that support his case.³⁴⁰ He even defends PAP-T against his fellow libertarian Kirk MacGregor:

Some of my fellow libertarians [MacGregor] think that PAP-T is not necessary for rationality. I disagree and have made it clear why “free thinking” is vital to the concept of rationality (See *A Revised Freethinking Argument*).³⁴¹

Once again, Stratton’s professional opinion on FSCs seems to lean towards the fact that they do not work. They do not work primarily because PAP-T is found to be true, and thus libertarian incompatibilist freedom still obtains. PAP-T would be defended and found true in the midst of FSCs, even if PAP is shown false. The last piece of the puzzle is found in “Failure of Frankfurt?” He writes,

Now, even in the original scenario, where the voter could not vote other than for Obama and Obama alone, it does not follow that the voter did not possess libertarian free will. Namely, the libertarian freedom to think or think otherwise. This is the case because it seems that this famous Frankfurt Experiment still assumes the libertarian ability to be a free thinker! It was only after the voter deliberated (thought freely) regarding for whom

³³⁹ Stratton, “Freethinking Needs the PAP!”, <https://freethinkingministries.com/freethinking-needs-the-pap/>.

³⁴⁰ Recall that Stratton’s case is that rational responsibility entails PAP-T. So, given the above conclusions in other sections, if moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, and rational responsibility entails PAP-T, then moral responsibility entails PAP-T, under Stratton’s view. If this is the case, then one cannot be held morally responsible without having PAP-T, or categorical deliberative alternatives available to the agent.

³⁴¹ Ibid.; Stratton, *A Revised Freethinking Argument*, <https://freethinkingministries.com/a-revised-free-thinking-argument-two-birds-with-one-stone/>.

he should cast his vote, that the mad scientist decides whether to step in and rig the election or not.³⁴²

Stratton argues explicitly that in the actual sequence of events, the agent could *freely think* (PAP-T), and because of this fact, FSCs, contrary to their intended purpose to show PAP to be false, assume that the agent has “the libertarian ability to be a free thinker!” The nefarious intervener cannot “rig the election” before the voter actually “freely thinks”; in other words, it is *too late* for the intervener to actualize the alternative sequence.³⁴³ The agent would have still had categorical APs accessible to him in order to (libertarianly) freely think, even in the actual sequence. Thus, FSCs fail to show that APs are not necessary for moral (and rational) responsibility. Given this last piece, how is the compatibilist to respond to Stratton’s stance on FSCs? I have two basic responses, one that is positive and one that is negative. I will start with the positive.

2.5.3 Positive Response: PAP-T & Flickers of Freedom

It may be a surprise to Stratton, but I essentially agree that (P), in its most basic form, does not demonstrate the agent has a lack of accessible categorical alternatives. I contend along with Stratton that in (P) the agent still has the categorical opportunity to think otherwise (PAP-T).³⁴⁴ This maneuver Stratton pin-points is none other than the *flicker of freedom* strategy often rebutted by incompatibilists defending PAP against compatibilism. The flicker objection states that the agent still has a small freedom of inclination in the midst of FSCs, like (P), and thus maintains PAP-T, and so, (P) fails to reveal a proper counterexample to PAP *simpliciter*; hence, the agent still has a “flicker” of freedom. Flicker defenders say that the agent has the categorical ability to *begin* to refrain from X, or *try* to vote for Y instead of X via deliberation or some other form of inclination such as *willing* to vote for Y. If the agent is fully indeterministic, and possesses libertarian freedom (so as to not presuppose compatibilism and beg the question against incompatibilism), then of course, incompatibilists contend, the agent may very well have PAP-T. In fact, this flicker is present within the *actual* sequence, not the alternative one. The actual sequence is the sequence compatibilists press, yet, if the flicker theory works, then even in the actual sequence compatibilists are left scrambling to patch up the exposed alternative possibility. As Bignon notes, “as long as the free will of [the agent] is not presupposed to be

³⁴² Stratton, “The Failure of Frankfurt?” (linked above).

³⁴³ Similar responses to FSCs have been defended by David Widerker. See the relevant footnote below in his interaction with Eleonore Stump.

³⁴⁴ This agreement with Stratton does not mean that I equally agree that FSCs assume libertarian freedom. This claim doesn’t make sense. FSCs are meant to show PAP to be false. If they are utilized, yet they fail, they do not fail because they assume libertarian freedom; rather, they fail because they do not demonstrate what they are intended to show, namely that PAP is not necessary for moral responsibility. Just because PAP is still present within the FSC does not mean that the FSC in principle *assumes* PAP, and therefore libertarian freedom. That is a non-sequitur.

determinist, there will always remain *some sort* of alternate possibility categorically available to him [i.e., PAP-T],” (*Excusing Sinners*, 102).

The most common rebuttal to the flicker strategy comes from FSC champion John Martin Fischer. He maintains that although these “flickers” are indeed present in (P), they cannot, and should not, be considered as “sufficiently robust” enough in order to ground “proper ascriptions of moral responsibility.” Fischer writes,

I believe that the arguments developed above against the flicker-of-freedom strategy are extremely plausible, albeit not ineluctable. I maintain that the arguments come very close to establishing that alternative possibilities are not required for moral responsibility. I am convinced, even in the absence of a knockdown argument, that the alternative possibilities posited by the flicker theorist are simply not sufficiently robust to ground our ascriptions of moral responsibility... Even if there is some sort of flicker of freedom here, it does not seem capable of playing the requisite role in grounding ascriptions of moral responsibility—it does not seem sufficiently robust.³⁴⁵

Yet, given Stratton’s libertarian incompatibilism, this is presumably what he wants to do: sufficiently ground *rational* responsibility given these alternatives. The agent still, according to Stratton, has categorical deliberations available in (P), and thus, in virtue of these present alternatives, the agent still has PAP-T. The agent *can* freely think, or transcend the scientist’s nefarious “physical” inability imposed upon the agent. Although Fischer realizes that these flickers will always be available to the agent, nonetheless he still does not find the flicker defense from the incompatibilist helpful nor attractive. But, why does this matter? As a compatibilist, he knows full well that any amount of categorical alternatives (mental or physical) prove determinism false, and thus PAP or PAP-T true, as indeterminism would be true. Sure, it is possible that one could be a compatibilist though determinism is found to be false, but it would be an awkward position to hold, let alone defend.³⁴⁶ Given this, however, I myself do not find

³⁴⁵ Fischer, “Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities,” 39, 47. Elsewhere, he has conceded:

The Frankfurt-type cases seem at first to involve no alternate possibilities. But upon closer inspection it can be seen that, although they do not involve alternative possibilities of the normal kind, they nevertheless may involve *some* alternative possibilities. That is to say, 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”. Thus, there is an opening to argue that these alternative possibilities (the flickers of freedom) *must* be present, even in the Frankfurt-type cases, in order for there to be moral responsibility... One can see that there *are* such possibilities, if one scratches the surface just a bit. And although they may not be quite the alternative possibilities traditionally envisaged, they are alternative possibilities nonetheless—and just the sort that would be ruled out... by causal determinism,” (Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 134, 140).

³⁴⁶ This is the primary reason why Fischer has developed his “semi-compatibilism”. Semi-compatibilism is a thesis that remains agnostic about the determinism question. So, even if determinism is false one could still maintain “semi-compatibilism.” See his essay “Frankfurt-Type Examples and Semicompatibilism: New Work” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2e).

Fischer's rejoinder very attractive. FSCs are technically a compatibilistic argument, which Fischer espouses. If he gives (P) as an argument, and then some libertarian like Kane (or Stratton) comes back to rebut with the flicker defense at hand,³⁴⁷ it should not matter if Fischer finds the defense attractive (at least in my humble estimation): PAP-T is still present within the agent regardless! Indeterminism would obtain and determinism would be false. Thus, continuing to defend compatibilism in light of this would seem to be a failing enterprise. Therefore, FSCs seem to have failed to show a counterexample which does not first presuppose determinism (or really that PAP is false), and secondly they fail to show PAP to not be necessary for moral responsibility (and Fischer openly admits to these concessions). The burden, then, is still firmly on compatibilist shoulders.

In fact, given the basic structure of (P), *Bignon* himself even agrees with Stratton. According to Bignon, it does not matter whether or not these flickers are indeed “crippled” or weak when they present themselves to the agent for this precise reason: they are still alternatives. Bignon says,

I think the compatibilist contention [to the flicker defense] is best read as follows: “if an agent can be morally responsible even when the only alternate possibility he faces is a crippled, mere flicker of freedom, then he might as well have no alternate possibility at all.” ... Unfortunately, I think incompatibilist advocates of the PAP can answer this challenging question very satisfyingly and quite ironically: why does adding a mere flicker of freedom rescue moral responsibility? Because PAP is true! While I believe PAP to be false myself, this strikes me as a fine answer.³⁴⁸

I agree, and indeed it does appear to be a “fine answer.” Of course, Bignon realizes that this may sound question-begging on the incompatibilist part, but now, in the current tides of the debate, if the libertarian is *given* an FSC like (P), the burden belongs to the *compatibilist*, as (P) would be considered an argument for compatibilism. Thus,

Contrary to appearances, it is not begging the question [from the incompatibilist]. At this point of the debate, the tables have already been turned, and PAP defenders are no longer in the position of *arguing* in favor of PAP; they are now merely defending it against the claims of Frankfurt-style cases aiming to refute it. Therefore it is not demanded of them that they provide an *argument* for why flickers of freedom are better than no alternate

³⁴⁷ In fact, Kane does just that. See “Libertarianism” and “Response to Fischer, Pereboom, and Vargas” in *Four Views of Free Will*, as well as “Responsibility, Indeterminism and Frankfurt-style Cases: A Reply to Mele and Robb.” In this last essay, Kane replies to Mele and Robb’s more sophisticated FSC (one that will be discussed in later sections). But one of his remarks towards their FSC is that the agent still may have *robust* alternatives available. It is not Kane that needs to show whether or not these alternative flickers are indeed robust; it is Mele and Robb, because it is *their* FSC, *their* argument. Kane can assume that *all* alternatives are robust, and that should be sufficient for his libertarian defense. The same applies to Stratton’s exposition of (P).

³⁴⁸ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 103.

possibility at all, and they can simply hang this question on the sheer truth of the PAP as long as they believe PAP is true and obvious to them.³⁴⁹

To summarize the positive response, and recapping Stratton's use of (P) in order to justify a potential allowance of libertarian freedom, and PAP-T by extension, Bignon and I agree that this is a coherent use of PAP. The agent could, given the basic structure of (P), still have categorical deliberative alternatives available (PAP-T) by simply *trying* or *beginning*, or plainly *willing*, to vote for Y instead of X. Since (P), in general, is considered an argument *for* compatibilism, Stratton can indeed use this example to show why libertarian freedom is still present after all while not begging the question against compatibilism. Again, however, it must be reiterated for the sake of clarity that (P) is poised in *Mere Molinism* not as a compatibilist argument, nor as an explicit FSC. Stratton is not defending libertarian freedom in the face of (P), rather he is simply demonstrating that the definition of libertarian freedom that he affirms could obtain *even if* something like (P) were true. That is, if an agent is weirdly unable to physically do otherwise (i.e., PAP is false), he could still *think* otherwise (i.e., PAP-T is true).

2.5.4 Negative Response: Advanced FSCs

Moving ahead to the negative response, I will begin by pressing the following question: why should we continue to grant this basic form of (P)? Even granting the fact that in (P) the agent is still in possession of PAP-T because of his deliberative processes, why can't (P) be pushed into the mental substrate? Further, why should we continue to grant that the mental substrate is virtually distinguishable from the physical substrate given some advanced forms of (P)? This distinction between mental and physical actions may be distinguishable in (P), but according to the most sophisticated FSCs concocted, there is no difference between an agent physically acting otherwise or an agent mentally deliberating otherwise; an alternative possibility is an alternative possibility in these cases, regardless of where the nefarious mechanism that initiates the alternative sequence is placed or how it functions. PAP is synonymous, in these examples, to PAP-T, which means the qualification of alternative possibilities while deliberating is useless. If an FSC can be articulated in which the agent has no physical actions available (i.e., PAP being false), *and* no mental deliberative actions available (i.e., PAP-T being false), then it would seem Stratton's distinctions make no difference.

To see whether or not an FSC can be articulated that rules out this distinction, let's consider the FSC story (G) developed and defended by Eleonore Stump, a libertarian incompatibilist. She is considered as one of the leading philosophers defending libertarian freedom in the face of FSCs; these philosophers are known as the "Frankfurt-Libertarians." Linda Zagzebski and David Hunt both defend similar FSCs as Stump's. Their primary aim in these cases is to show that libertarian freedom may still be had, along with moral responsibility, *without* alternative possibilities (PAP

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

or PAP-T). These “Frankfurt-Libertarians” try to demonstrate that the agent in the actual sequence had indeterministic freedom, yet at the same time, could not do otherwise. They call this indeterministic freedom “libertarian freedom.” In order to show this, they push the counterfactual coercive mechanism so far back in the agent’s mental substrate that there remains no categorical deliberative options or opportunities available *at all* for the agent to exercise (i.e., PAP-T would be shown to be false). This would be contrary to what Stratton argues. Stump’s example (G) goes like this:

(G) Suppose that a neurosurgeon Grey wants his patient Jones to vote for Republicans in the upcoming election. Grey has a neuroscope which lets him both observe and bring about neural firings which correlate with acts of will on Jones’s part. Through his neuroscope, Grey ascertains that every time Jones wills to vote for Republican candidates, that act of his will correlates with the completion of a sequence of neural firings in Jones’s brain that always includes, near its beginning, the firing of neurons a, b, c (call this neural sequence ‘R’). On the other hand, Jones’s willing to vote for Democratic candidates is correlated with the completion of a different neural sequence that always includes, near its beginning, the firings of neurons x, y, z, none of which is the same as those neural sequence R (call this neural sequence ‘D’). For simplicity’s sake, suppose that neither neural sequence R nor neural sequence D is also correlated with any further set of mental acts. Again for simplicity’s sake, suppose that Jones’s only relevant options are an act of will to vote for Republicans or an act of will to vote for Democrats.

Then Grey can tune his neuroscope accordingly. Whenever the neuroscope detects the firing of x, y, and z, the initial neurons of neural sequence D, the neuroscope immediately disrupts the neural sequence, so that it isn’t brought to completion. The neuroscope then activates the coercive neurological mechanism which fires the neurons of neural sequence R, thereby bringing it about that Jones wills to vote for Republicans. But if the neuroscope detects the firing of a, b, and c, the initial neurons in neural sequence R, which is correlated with the act of will to vote for Republicans, then the neuroscope does not interrupt that neural sequence. It doesn’t activate the coercive neurological mechanism, and neural sequence R continues, culminating in Jones’s willing to vote for Republicans, without Jones’s being caused to will in this way by Grey.

And suppose that in (G) Grey does not act to bring about neural sequence R, but that Jones wills to vote for Republicans without Grey’s coercing him to do so.³⁵⁰

Stump continues,

That is the Frankfurt story; and, as I said in presenting it, it certainly seems as if Jones is morally [and rationally] responsible for his act of will to vote for Republicans, although it

³⁵⁰ Stump, “Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 140.

also seems true that it was not possible for Jones to do anything other than willing to vote for Republicans... It seems, then, that there is no obstacle to supposing that the victim in this Frankfurt story acts indeterministically.³⁵¹

And after defending (G) from objections by David Widerker,³⁵² she concludes,

Consequently, Widerker has not given us a reason to doubt that Frankfurt stories [like (G)] show what they clearly appear to show, namely, that alternative possibilities are not necessary for moral responsibility or for indeterministic free acts of will. What is required for libertarian freedom and for moral responsibility... is not that the agent could not have done otherwise, but that the ultimate cause of the agent's act lie in the agent's own intellect and will, so that the agent himself is the ultimate source of what he does.³⁵³

What are we to make of (G)? Is it true that (G) provides a counterexample to PAP-T? According to Stump, it still seems as though Jones does not possess PAP-T, nor PAP. In the actual sequence, Jones votes Republican, and in the alternative sequence, where Jones may will to vote for Democrat, Grey “immediately disrupts the neural sequence [x, y, and z, or ‘D’], so that [the neural sequence a, b, and c, or ‘R’] isn’t brought to completion... thereby bringing it about that Jones wills to vote for Republicans.” Before getting to the analysis of (G), one thing should be clear: Stratton’s distinctions between PAP and PAP-T are now seen as useless. (G), regardless of whether or not it provides a true counterexample to PAP-T, presents a story in which the counterfactual intervener detects Jones’s neurological sequences in his mental deliberative processes. It does not matter if Jones, “although unable to physically act otherwise in this case, is free to think otherwise and make his... own decisions,” (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 5). Perhaps, then, it is the case that Stratton’s distinctions between mental and physical actions are rendered null. This is the first part of my negative critique on Stratton’s stance on FSCs. Stratton’s (P) is simply inferior to Stump’s (G),³⁵⁴ and as a result, Stratton should do away with these unnecessary

³⁵¹ Ibid., 141.

³⁵² Widerker, “Blameworthiness and Frankfurt’s Argument Against the Principle of Alternative Possibilities”, in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 56-58.

³⁵³ Stump, “Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities,” 152.

³⁵⁴ Interestingly, Stratton realizes that (P) is considered a very basic FSC. He said as much in his article “The Failure of Frankfurt?” (linked above) in a footnote. Stratton admits that there are other FSCs that may not be as easily privy to the presence of PAP-T, or flickers. (G) seems to be one of them.

distinctions.³⁵⁵ These differences between (P) and (G) must not be underestimated or misunderstood.

2.5.5 Flickers of Freedom Defined

In order to appreciate the second criticism, it would be helpful to compare the exposition of (P) to (G), as well as come to a conclusive analysis of (G). So far we have seen that the reason why (P) fails to provide an argument for compatibilism, according to Stratton, is because in (P) “it does not follow that the voter did not possess libertarian free will. Namely, the libertarian freedom to think or think otherwise. This is the case because it seems that this famous Frankfurt Experiment still assumes the libertarian ability to be a free thinker!” (Stratton, “The Failure of Frankfurt?”). (P) ultimately fails due to the fact that there remains categorical APs available (PAP-T) and accessible to the agent *before* the intervener “rigs” the election. Therefore, (P) fails to provide APs as unnecessary for proper ascriptions of rational responsibility (contrary to their intended purpose). This, then, allowed Stratton to use (P) as a mere tool for demonstrating PAP-T in the absence of PAP.

Compare the exposition of (P) to (G). The reason why (G) fails is similar, nonetheless fundamentally different, than why (P) fails. (G) fails, *not* because Jones could not do otherwise physically (\neg PAP) yet still could have thought otherwise mentally (PAP-T) (rendered by the conclusion of (P)), but rather (G) fails because *even though* Jones could not have thought otherwise mentally (\neg PAP-T) in the *class* of thoughts, Jones still could think otherwise in *specific* thoughts. So, Stratton may be right in his anticipated objection to (G): *flickers of freedom are still present*; however, I believe if he takes this rebuttal then he would unfortunately approach that conclusion in the wrong way. What I mean by this is that both compatibilists and incompatibilists can agree that there are still flickers present in (G), similar to (P), but the *kind* of

³⁵⁵ In fact, Stratton should adopt (G) completely. After all, it is compatible with Molinism. This seems to be what Stump wants to suggest that (G) indeed shows:

[I]f, as I argued in presenting (G), libertarianism does not require the acceptance of PAP, then the fact that we can use Molinism to generate Frankfurt stories does not show that libertarianism and Molinism are incompatible. (Stump, “Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities,” 150).

I imagine Stratton mic-dropping at this moment. Stump suggests that libertarianism and Molinism are compatible (no surprise!), and (G) seems to grant that conclusion. Often, Molinists are bombarded with something like the grounding objection: how can God know the truth-value of indeterminate free creatures? (discussed in §6.3). Well, Stump concludes, it seems that (G) gives the answer. Jones is indeterministically free, votes Republican on his own accord (in the actual sequence), and was not causally determined to vote for Republican by Grey (or God), yet, all at the same time, Jones could not do otherwise, and God knew of this choice perfectly.

This is all well and good. However, here is the problem: (G) claims to deny that Jones has PAP *and* PAP-T, whereas Stratton is committed to PAP-T given his Freethinking Argument. Does this mean (G) is not compatible with Molinism after all? I think that depends upon one’s definition of indeterminism. For now, I will allow the reader, and Stratton himself, to decide which avenue has more explanatory power for the Molinist: (G) or the Freethinking Argument.

flickers present in (G) differ from the *kind* of flickers present in (P). In (P), the flickers present (that Stratton has correctly identified) are arguably considered *strong flickers*, whereas in (G), the flickers present (that Stratton fails to see because of his unnecessary business attacking useless distinctions in an FSC) are arguably considered *weak flickers*.

Kevin Timpe defines the basic flicker strategy often lobbied by incompatibilists as the following:

AP_f : an agent is free with respect to an action A and time t only if there are morally relevant alternative possibilities related to A at time t .³⁵⁶

This is the general flicker definition that Stratton has alluded to that is present in (P) at the time of choosing X or Y. This same flicker is present in (G) as well. Timpe says,

Given that all *FSCs* involve some alternative possibilities, the Flicker Strategist might insist that AP_f is not refuted by *FSCs*. In other words, the Flicker Strategist can insist that the relevant alternative possibilities condition needed by the incompatibilist is AP_f . Let us call this version of the Flicker Strategy the “Weak Strategy”.³⁵⁷

Stratton clearly insists that AP_f is present in (P) (and later, we will see how AP_f is equally present in (G)), and *that* flicker (or AP) is significant and indeed relevant for responsibility. Timpe advocates for distinctions within the flicker defense (AP_f), namely, *weak flickers* compared to *strong flickers*. So, in light of these helpful distinctions, allow me to slightly tweak or modify AP_f to fit both the weak and strong flicker strategies as well as our present purposes in this reply. Let $W-AP_f$ stand for the “weak flicker principle” and let $S-AP_f$ stand for the “strong flicker principle”. Further, assume Stratton’s prized distinction between rational and moral responsibility (though, we have already concluded that moral responsibility entails rational responsibility, and thus entails APs) for clarity and charity.

$W-AP_f$: an agent is free with respect to an action A and time t only if there are *any* rational categorical alternative possibilities related to A at time t .

$S-AP_f$: an agent is free with respect to an action A and time t only if there are *robust* rational categorical alternative possibilities related to A at time t .

According to the principle $W-AP_f$, we see that it doesn’t matter if the present AP is itself significant or robust for rational responsibility. As long as there remains an AP, determinism is false as indeterminism would be true (by virtue of the fact that APs obtain), and *that* is arguably what grants relevance to responsibility.

³⁵⁶ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 103.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

According to the Weak Strategy, the alternatives remaining in an *FSC*, however minute, are relevant to free will and thus also to moral [rational] responsibility. If the falsity of determinism is relevant to free will, as the incompatibilist under consideration claims, then *any* alternative possibilities are also morally relevant in that they are a necessary presupposition for the agent's being free. Even if it turns out that the remaining alternative possibilities are not relevant to free will in any further way, or tell us nothing further about the nature of free will, beyond being a sign that the necessary conditions for freedom are satisfied, their absence is sufficient for the incompatibilist to claim that an agent is not free... The presence of these alternative possibilities, no matter what sort of alternatives they may be, is sufficient for the falsity of causal determinism.³⁵⁸

This is exactly why Bignon rejects *FSCs* as arguments for compatibilism. Given (P), and *W-AP_f*, the agent still is indetermined, and thus shows determinism false. It does not matter how small, minute, crippled, or weak the AP is when the agent comes in contact with it (whether that AP is physical or mental, moral or rational) because as long as the agent has that AP accessible, *W-AP_f* is satisfied and determinism is shown false.

Contrasting *W-AP_f* with *S-AP_f* we see that the difference is the type of APs. To satisfy *W-AP_f*, *any* AP will be sufficient for responsibility and freedom, whereas to satisfy *S-AP_f*, the AP must be *sufficiently robust* in order to count as significant, and not merely relevant, for responsibility and freedom. This is Fischer's initial ploy and attack against *AP_f*: expose the fact that the APs present in the given *FSC* are not sufficiently robust; that is, just because the agent possesses some form of a flicker does not mean that that flicker is enough to grant proper and/or significant ascriptions of moral responsibility. That flicker could satisfy *W-AP_f*, but it presumably could never satisfy *S-AP_f*, and in order to be found morally (or rationally) responsible *S-AP_f* needs to be satisfied, not merely *W-AP_f*. The APs found in *W-AP_f*, according to Fischer, are simply not morally or rationally significant (even if they are considered morally or rationally relevant). The robustness of APs is what grants relevance to responsibility, not simply *that* APs are present.

Fischer thinks that the incompatibilist who wishes to defend *AP* must not only show that *FSCs* contain alternative possibilities, but also that the remaining alternative possibilities are relevant for free will in some way beyond *merely* insuring the falsity of determinism. Let us call this "the Robustness Requirement."³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 103-104. (emphasis added)

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 106.

Robustness Requirement: an alternative possibility is “robust” only if the presence of that alternative possibility is relevant for moral [and rational] responsibility in some way beyond *merely* pointing out that determinism is false.³⁶⁰

In order to show compatibilism to be false, according to Fischer, $S-AP_f$ must be satisfied. However, given $S-AP_f$ along with the Robustness Requirement, “Fischer thinks the remaining alternative possibilities fail—the remaining flickers simply are not robust enough,” therefore these small APs should not even be considered as relevant for responsibility, for compatibilists and incompatibilists alike (Ibid.). For Fischer, the remaining APs must be of a certain sort or *kind*, not prone to flimsiness or exiguity.³⁶¹

2.5.6 Flickers of Freedom & Liberties of Action

Coming back to our analyses on (P) and (G), we are now ready to argue the following: (P) is seen as a *strong flicker* case because the agent has the categorical PAP-T at his disposal in the actual sequence right before the alternative sequence kicks in. The agent can *think* not just about X, and how he could will to vote for X, but also the agent can *think* of Y, and how he could will to vote for Y. What is present in the actual sequence is the $S-AP_f$ condition, arguably, because the agent can think to will for X *and* think to will for Y. In other words, what is present is none other than the *liberty of contradiction* (CON) detailed in the last section. What makes (P) prone to a strong flicker, and not (G), is because the agent still has the ability to *contradict* his will to vote for X or *not* vote for X (and of course a possible vote for Y is part of that chosen set). The agent has categorical access to evaluative judgment options (EJOs), and thus has the ability to infer a true belief over a false belief; hence, CON. Because CON was also seen as a necessary condition (not only a sufficient one) for libertarian freedom, in (P) the agent could be said to possess libertarian freedom because he also possesses CON (the PAP-T to choose X or *not* X; to choose true beliefs or *not* true beliefs). Stratton is correct in defending against (P) in his articles using this line of defense. (P) satisfies $S-AP_f$ along with the Robust Requirement, because CON is present, and if CON is present, so is libertarian freedom.

In contrast to (P), however, I want to argue that in (G) Jones *does* have in his possession a *weak flicker* available. Contrary to what Stump wants to suggest, Jones *does* have categorical APs

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 107. Other formulations of the “Robustness Requirement” may be found in Pereboom, “Source Incompatibilism and Alternative Possibilities,” 188, 194, and McKenna, “Robustness, Control, and the Demand for Morally Significant Alternatives: Frankfurt Examples with Oodles and Oodles of Alternatives,” 204, both in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, edited by Widerker and McKenna.

³⁶¹ I want to reiterate that I do not find Fischer’s defense of flicker objection to be satisfying. FSCs are usually posited as a compatibilist argument, and because of this, it is *not* the incompatibilist that must show that the remaining APs satisfy $S-AP_f$, but rather it is the compatibilist. It is the compatibilist burden to show that the remaining APs, rightly pointed out by incompatibilists, do not meet the $S-AP_f$ condition (nor the $W-AP_f$ condition). This is a hefty burden.

available. It is certain that Jones does not possess PAP in (G) (i.e., he could not *do* physically otherwise than vote Republican), but is it true that Jones does not possess PAP-T?

Timpe argues that even given Stump's modified libertarianism, Jones still has a form of PAP-T available. According to Timpe, "there is still a flicker lurking in her account of free action," (Ibid., 153). In order to see that (G) still provides a flicker, it would be beneficial to see how Stump evaluates the flicker strategy as a whole. She writes,

There is something right about the claim made by the proponents of the flicker of freedom defense of *PAP*, that there is an important difference between an agent's doing an act on his own and his doing it because he is caused to do so by an external intervener. As I have been at pains to argue, the difference is not a difference between different actions the agent does, as the flicker of freedom proponents suppose. Rather, the difference has to do only with *how* the agent does what he does. Even if the victim in a *FSC* has the same act of will *W* in the actual and alternative sequence, there nonetheless remains a difference in *how* the victim wills what he does. He is causally determined to an act of will *W* in the alternative sequence, but not in the actual sequence. In the alternative sequence, the ultimate cause of what the victim wills is the intervener; in the actual sequence, it is the victim himself.³⁶²

Generously interpreted, according to Stump, the correct way to post the flicker defense against the compatibilist is by identifying the fact that the agent does not have PAP, but rather a *form* of PAP; perhaps PAP-T (as Stratton suggested). Of course, we should not worry about whether or not the agent could do otherwise (PAP), but rather we should worry about *how* the agent could think or *will* otherwise (PAP-T). Stump argues that this "willing" in the actual sequence is still up to the agent. Even though the agent could not physically choose Democrat, they *may* be able to mentally deliberate on *how* to choose Republican. Though choosing Republican in (G) is the only *class* option available for Jones, that does not rule out the fact that Jones could still vote for Republican in a *specific* way, or in Stump's words, in a different *mode*. "Stump insists that every *FSC*" ...

leaves it up to the victim whether the act in question is done by the victim without coercion or is done as caused by the intervener. Consequently, although it is not up to the victim whether or not he does the act in question, it is evident that the *mode* of the action is up to the victim. ... The one and only act open to the victim can be caused by the intervener or brought about by the victim of his own accord, and which of these modes is the one by which the act is done depends on the victim.³⁶³

³⁶² Stump, quoted in Ibid., 153.

³⁶³ Stump, quoted in Ibid.

Stump thinks that there are no differences in the actual sequence and alternative sequence when looking at the act of Jones. In both sequences, Jones still chooses Republican, and so, he could not have done otherwise. However, Stump argues that what is still up to Jones is *how* he chooses to will for Republican. Thus far we have led up to this idea that flickers of freedom can be seen as either morally (or rationally) relevant or significant. In addition we have also alluded to the fact that these are presumably two different things, or at the very least, two different levels of robustness. We are now ready to see why this is perhaps the case. Precluding moralistic actions and focusing solely on rationalistic deliberations, let the following principles be true:

CON_{PAP-T}: an agent is free with respect to deliberative process *A* at time *t* only if she has rationally *significant* alternative possibilities, that is, possesses the categorical liberty of contradiction.

CTR_{PAP-T}: an agent is free with respect to deliberative process *A* at time *t* only if she has rationally *relevant* alternative possibilities, that is, possess the categorical liberty of contrariety.

With these two distinctions fully spelled out, Jones, then, may not have CON_{PAP-T}, but apparently he has CTR_{PAP-T}, whereas the agent in (P) may have CON_{PAP-T}. Reformulating the Robustness Requirement:

**Robustness Requirement*: an alternative possibility is “robust” only if the presence of that alternative possibility is significant for rational responsibility (CON_{PAP-T}) in some way beyond *merely* pointing out that determinism is false.³⁶⁴

We will expound upon this new formulation later when we ponder whether or not Stratton presents an exposition where the agent, *not* in (P), but rather in something like (G), fulfills this **Robustness Requirement*. But for now, the agent in (P) seems to possess CON_{PAP-T}, but in (G) Jones can *will* to vote for Republican by neural sequence R with the neurons firing *a*₁, *b*₁, *c*₁, or *a*₂, *b*₂, *c*₂, or *a*₃, *b*₃, *c*₃, and so on; this, then, is principle CTR_{PAP-T}. Each of the neural sequences

³⁶⁴ This formulation is similar to McKenna's found in McKenna, “Robustness, Control, and the Demand for Morally Significant Alternatives: Frankfurt Examples with Oodles and Oodles of Alternatives,” 204, in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, edited by Widerker and McKenna. In this essay, McKenna lays out a particular type of FSC called a “blockage” case where the FSC “blocks” all neural pathways of the agent except the one leading to the desired choice (see §2.5.14 for more details). However, McKenna presents a “limited” blockage case where the FSC only eliminates or blocks morally significant alternatives leaving only morally relevant alternatives. This move seems to align nicely with CON_{PAP-T} and CTR_{PAP-T} formulated above. Basically, McKenna grants that FSCs of this type (i.e., limited or modified blockage scenarios) do not eliminate *all* alternatives, but they do indeed eliminate the alternatives that ought to matter: *morally significant alternatives*. And if these alternatives are not necessary for responsibility, then neither should weak flickers be necessary for responsibility. In other words, if CON_{PAP-T} is not necessary for rational responsibility, then neither should CTR_{PAP-T} be necessary for rational responsibility. This much I have tried to make clear in the sections analyzing the categorical ability.

are detected using Grey's awesome neuroscope, and each of them read, correlated to be with completion of the sequence, the choosing to vote for Republican because each sequence is a *type*, *form*, or *mode* of neural sequence R. And so, we can further stipulate the latter principle into the following. Let's call this principle the "mode" of action AP_m :

AP_m : an agent is free with respect to action A at time t only if she has alternative possibilities regarding the mode of action A at time t .³⁶⁵

Timpe argues that even in a sophisticated FSC like (G), where PAP is shown false and presumably PAP-T, there still remains a tiny flicker in the *mode* of action. "[I]n an *FSC* the agent does have [APs] regarding the mode of the action, [therefore,] *FSCs* do not rule out AP_m . In the actual sequence of any *FSC*, the mode of the action is up to the agent," (Ibid.). And because Stump wants to hold to something like the sourcehood condition for libertarianism (a), "she thinks that the truth of causal determinism would mean that the agent wouldn't be the proper source of the mode of an action in the way required by AP_m ," (Ibid.). Timpe's principle of AP_m is very similar to my principle of CTR_{PAP-T} in that both stipulate the agent is free with respect to action A at time t only if APs (such as rationalistic deliberative APs) are relevant. The *mode* Timpe has in mind is precisely relevant in order to properly ascribe responsibility (whether that moral or rational). What is more, looking at AP_m in this way, it is strikingly similar to the general flicker strategy defined as AP_f :

If the agent has [APs] regarding the mode of the action, that is, if it is up to the agent whether the act in question is done freely or only as the result of coercion, then there are [APs] of some sort related to that action... In other words, AP_m seems to entail AP_f . In fact, AP_m is simply a slightly stricter version of AP_f , since AP_m insists that the relevant [APs] related to the action just are the modes of the action. Thus, although Stump rejects one understanding of the Flicker Strategy, her insistence on the importance of the mode of the action can be understood as a different version of the Flicker Strategy. If determinism were true, then there would be no [APs] regarding either the action itself or the mode of the action; there would be no [APs] at all. But the mode of action is relevant to ascriptions of freedom and moral responsibility [according to Stump] ... It looks then as if the mode of an action is the sort of alternative that, while it need not involve a numerically distinct [class or CON_{PAP-T}] action, is relevant to freedom and moral responsibility nonetheless [i.e., CTR_{PAP-T}]. For this reason, I think that Stump's view is best understood as involving an [APs] condition such as AP_m .³⁶⁶

(G), then, does not eliminate PAP-T as AP_m is arguably a part of PAP-T; thus, (G) still entails AP_f . Jones' deliberative process could roughly be in the form of a_α , b_β , c_γ , and still lead to the

³⁶⁵ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 154.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

willing to vote for Republican because all those processes are detected as a form of R by Grey. Stump says that those varying specific modes of deliberative processes (the ones in which Jones *wills* to vote for Republican) are relevant to ascriptions of the moral responsibility of Jones. Jones may not have CON (because Jones cannot even *will* to vote for Democrat, therefore, willing to vote for *not* Republican is off the table for Jones), but he is still said to possess CTR, or the mode of willing to vote for Republican. That is still a flicker present and apparently relevant. The question, however, is whether or not these mode-flickers of CTR_{PAP-T} identified in (G) satisfy $W-AP_f$ or $S-AP_f$. I suggest that they only satisfy $W-AP_f$ given the fact that Jones cannot categorically contradict his *willing* to vote for Republican, and so cannot categorically produce an alternative possibility that is robust enough to be sufficient for rational responsibility beyond merely demonstrating determinism is false. Yet, isn't this the point Stratton attempts to make in (P), in that the agent *does* have CON_{PAP-T} ? It follows then that if (G) is true, then Stratton's defense of libertarian freedom in the midst of (P) fails utterly.

I have argued that within (P) the agent satisfies $S-AP_f$ because he could have willed to vote X or not X; thus, because the agent has PAP-T interpreted as CON, the agent was considered as libertarian free. Those flickers present in (P) were robust and they were robust (and thus rationally significant) because CON was present. In (G), it's a bit different. Jones may not be able to will to vote for Democrat as Grey will catch the neural sequence D formulating before it ever reaches completion and before the will to vote Democrat is ever considered a live alternative for Jones. Because of this, $S-AP_f$ cannot be satisfied as CON is not satisfied; Jones cannot even will to vote for *not* Republican. Taken broadly, Jones cannot even will to deliberate about a true belief over a false belief. But does this mean PAP-T is not true? Not exactly, as Jones can still decide *how* to vote Republican. He may not have CON, but he certainly has CTR.³⁶⁷ Those APs are not rationally *significant* (i.e., CON_{PAP-T} is false), but they can be understood as rationally *relevant* (i.e., CTR_{PAP-T} is true). He can choose to vote Republican in a variety of different ways that still allows for rational relevance, and so (G) seems to still affirm AP_f . But, because these APs are not considered as part of CON, they should not be considered as satisfying $S-AP_f$. At best, the present APs or modes in (G) should be considered as satisfying $W-AP_f$, that is, if the flicker strategist wants to gain some headway against the compatibilist.

2.5.7 Libertarianism, Source Incompatibilism, & Flickers

Thus far, we have seen that FSCs are prone to flickers of freedom, not in physical actions, but in mental deliberative ones. FSCs, according to Stratton, may show PAP to be false, but certainly not PAP-T. Mental deliberative flickers are present in (P) as well as (G). And because (G) is a

³⁶⁷ Of course, as noted in the last section, if an agent has CTR then CON is logically entailed. However, because of the dialectical context at hand, that question cannot simply be begged against incompatibilists here. Incompatibilists are more than welcome to deny that entailment between CTR and CON *as long as* the burden does not belong to them. In the present context, it seems the burden belongs to the compatibilist.

more advanced FSC on account that (G) pushes the chosen available APs within the confines of the mental substrate, it seems Stratton's advocated distinctions between mental and physical actions are superfluous; identifying the APs available to the agent in an FSC as mental (or PAP-T) is sufficient. However, the question now before us (and presumably before Stratton) should be whether those APs are *robust*; that is, the question should be whether or not these APs in FSCs should be considered as strong or weak, rationally significant or relevant, respectively; whether or not these APs actually ground responsibility rather than merely explain it.

I agreed with Stratton that in (P) the flicker is strong and therefore is significant to proper ascriptions of rational responsibility. But, in (G), it is highly dubious to consider the present flicker to be strong because the agent cannot will otherwise, rather they can only choose *how* to will.³⁶⁸ If CON is necessary for libertarianism, that is, if CON is essential to proper ascriptions of moral (and rational) responsibility, as it would be considered as a morally significant act, then (G) does not feature CON. If (G) does not feature CON, then Jones cannot be said to possess libertarian freedom, contrary to what Stump argues *and* what Stratton would potentially argue. At best, Jones, in (G), has *source incompatibilist* freedom, and at worst, Jones has *source compatibilist* freedom. To assert, or retort back, that Jones actually has libertarian freedom is simply waning. Yes, Jones has *indeterministic* freedom (because the present mode-flicker that is seen as weak is still, nonetheless, an AP); that much is conceded, but Jones cannot have *libertarian freedom* because he does not possess CON. So, contrary to what Stratton (not to mention Stump) might argue here (if Stratton ever gets the chance to interact with (G)), (G) does show libertarianism to be *false*. We do, however, get indeterminism from (G) because of the presence of weak flickers. (P) shows libertarianism to be present, but how does (G) show libertarianism if CON is missing? (G), I argue, demonstrates a logical counterexample to libertarian freedom. (G) demonstrates that an agent can act according to his own will yet not be able to do or *think* otherwise in a way that is said to be morally significant or robust. Yet, that's the problem: libertarianism, because of the very nature of its definition and because of the affirmation or proven entailment of (b*) (not merely (a)), *must* affirm that all alternatives are morally significant or robust. That is to say, libertarianism, by its very nature, must affirm W-AP_f; *any* and *all* flickers, no matter how small, *must* be seen as robust and significant, and not merely relevant, ascriptions to moral (or rational) responsibility. But, how that is possible given (G), coupled with the fact that Jones cannot contradict his own action, let alone in his own thinking of choosing to will *not* Republican, is fretful. In short, in (G), the libertarian must affirm W-AP_f, but (G) shows that those weak flickers are not robust; therefore, (G) does not show libertarianism, contrary to Stump, and possibly contrary to what Stratton would argue. All (G) shows is indeterminism.

³⁶⁸ In fact, I would go so far as to argue, along with Stump, presumably, that the agent cannot *not* choose to will otherwise. In other words, in FSCs like (G) the agent cannot refrain from willing Republican.

Now, I realize Stratton could argue back and say that indeterminism entails libertarianism, but then I would tag back and simply ask, “how”? Clearly, Timpe is an incompatibilist, and believes we are free insofar as we are not determined by external factors. Timpe agrees that we are indeterminately because he agrees that the weak flicker strategy present within all FSCs show APs, and if an agent has categorical APs, then the agent is indeterminately by definition. But if that is the case, why doesn’t he claim libertarianism by entailment then? He doesn’t because libertarianism doesn’t follow from indeterminism. Rather, it is the other around; the converse is true.

The reason why Timpe doesn’t seem to affirm libertarianism is because libertarianism, by definition, is a stronger view than source incompatibilism. If one claims libertarianism, it seems that they *must* affirm CON, and so they must show CON present in FSCs in order to refute them. As Timpe understands it, this is a “serious lacuna in the libertarian’s position,” (Ibid., 175). It seems, then, that Stratton does not have attractive access to the flicker defense against FSCs. If he puts forth the flicker defense for an FSC like (P), I would throw something back like (G). If he continues with the flicker defense, I would point out that they are weak flickers, and as such, cannot possibly be considered as robust enough for a view as strong as his leeway libertarianism. If Stratton argues back, as he so often predictably does, that sourcehood is all that is necessary for libertarian freedom (a), and not APs (b), I would direct back to condition (b*) as argued in §2.1.3. If Stratton still wants to argue and say that (b*) is misguided, and instead argues for something like the libertarian definition of (ii***), then I would respond in the exact same way I responded in that section when considering this option in §2.1.4: if (ii*** is argued as a definition of libertarianism, at best that is *source incompatibilism*. It is strange to me that the only incompatibilist that doesn’t want to affirm (b*) among Kane (libertarian), Timpe (source incompatibilist), and Stratton himself is *Stratton*.³⁶⁹ Both Kane and Timpe affirm the necessity of APs in the history of the agent (but more on that later).

Kevin Timpe, who is arguably the most prominent source incompatibilist, also agrees (ii*** is misguided for a libertarian if they advocate for it. The reason why it’s misguided is because sourcehood, as argued by Timpe, still necessitates APs. As Timpe says, “the need for alternative possibilities is not ultimately separable from Source Incompatibilism,” (Ibid., 146). He then critiques what is known as “Narrow Source Incompatibilists.” These incompatibilists consist of some philosophers, such as Stump, Zagzebski, and Hunt (or the “Frankfurt-Libertarians”) for thinking that PAP is not a necessary condition for sourcehood and for libertarianism in general. These incompatibilists want to “reject all AP principles,” yet still want to hold to a strong position like libertarian incompatibilist free will (Ibid., 147).³⁷⁰ This seems to be exactly what

³⁶⁹ I am fully aware that the primary APs Stratton shows an interest in defending and holding as necessary are APs in the deliberative process (PAP-T). So, it is not exactly true that Stratton doesn’t hold APs as necessary *at all*, but *it is* true that Stratton doesn’t hold APs as necessary regarding physical actions resulting in (perhaps) moral responsibility. This is why he uses (P) as a tool to demonstrate just that.

³⁷⁰ It is noteworthy to review that Bignon rejects FSCs because of the flickers present within them. It is even more interesting to add that if FSCs fail for this reason, then these so-called “Frankfurt-Libertarians”

Stratton wants to do if he presses something like (ii***) as a true definition of libertarianism. In contrast, Timpe advocates for “Wide Source Incompatibilism”:

These [Wide Source] incompatibilists insist that what is most fundamental to free will is ultimacy or sourcehood, but still maintain that there is some AP-like condition that is also true insofar as it is implied by the sourcehood condition, and that in virtue of this alternative possibilities of some sort are a necessary condition for having free will.³⁷¹

Timpe argues that the grounding of an

agent’s free will is *not* the satisfaction of an [APs] condition, but rather the satisfaction of a sourcehood condition. And what I have tried to argue... is that *if* the incompatibilist agrees that free will is primarily a function of sourcehood, then she should also grant that some minimally weak [APs] condition is also true insofar as it is entailed by the sourcehood condition. In other words, the Source Incompatibilist should be a Wide Source Incompatibilist... the Source Incompatibilist should admit that her commitment to the sourcehood condition also carries with it a commitment to some [APs] condition,

equally cannot appeal to FSCs in order to show that PAP is unnecessary for the proper establishment of something like “source” libertarianism. Bignon writes,

In response [to “Frankfurt-Libertarians” or “Narrow Source Incompatibilists”], I must simply reference my above rejection of Frankfurt-style cases as a successful argument for compatibilism. The reason why Frankfurt-style cases cannot establish the compatibility of libertarian free will with an inability to do otherwise is the same reason why they earlier failed to establish the compatibility of moral responsibility with an inability to do otherwise: they do not in fact feature a categorical inability to do otherwise, unless they additionally presuppose determinism. If instead we suppose that the agent *has* libertarian free will, then although he cannot do otherwise than perform the action [i.e., PAP is false] (because of the counterfactual intervener), he does have the ability to do otherwise than “freely performing the action without the intervention of the counterfactual intervener [via PAP-T, or the weak flicker],” and the access to this alternate (though crippled) possibility hangs on the exercise of his libertarian free will. He has the ability to bring about this alternate possibility. This shortcoming of Frankfurt-style cases was the reason why Peter van Inwagen and I rejected them as a successful proof of compatibilism, but then it follows that they equally fail at dissociating libertarianism from the categorical ability to do otherwise... (*Excusing Sinners*, 127)

This concession from Bignon is highly significant for a couple of reasons. First, the reason why Bignon rejects FSCs as an argument for compatibilism is the exact same reason why I myself would reject FSCs as an argument for compatibilism. I alluded to this above when detailing my positive response to Stratton’s minuscule use of FSCs: the agent still has categorical flickers available, though they are “crippled” or weak. Secondly, if the flicker strategy works as a successful rebuttal to FSCs, then, as Bignon noted, FSCs cannot be used to show compatibilism *nor* can they be used to show “Frankfurt-Libertarianism.” Thirdly, if this is the case, then FSCs like (G) do not and *cannot* successfully demonstrate libertarianism from the mere truth of indeterminism. That is to say, if indeterminism obtains in an FSC like (G), libertarianism does not follow; APs follow as that is what indeterminism definitionally entails. It is simply not the case, then, that if indeterminism obtains, libertarianism obtains. PAP (which I take as synonymous with indeterminism, or at the very least entail it), it seems, is not sufficient for libertarianism. This is in direct conflict with what Stratton defines as libertarian condition (b).

³⁷¹ Ibid., 147.

even if it is a very weak one which insists on no more leeway that the sourcehood condition's requirement of the falsity of causal determinism already secures.³⁷²

Timpe is trying to make the case that “sourcehood is at the heart of freedom and thus at the heart of responsibility and agency in general,” (Ibid.). However, in order to see that the sourcehood condition is met, one must *also* have metaphysical access to APs, no matter how weak or crippled. As long as determinism is shown false, as these weak flickers present in FSCs seem to show, then the sourcehood condition is met. But, Timpe argues, those flickers *needed* to be there in order for the sourcehood condition to be adequately seen, secured, or otherwise satisfied. In other words, according to Timpe, sourcehood entails APs (at least at some time in the history of the agent). Timpe continues onto what could arguably be said as his main thesis:

In other words, if the remaining flickers are due to the presence of sourcehood in the actual sequence but not the alternate sequence, then they will be morally relevant beyond just showing that causal determinism is false... flickers are the result of the agent satisfying the sourcehood condition only in the actual sequence, they merely result from what does ground freedom and responsibility: sourcehood. It is sourcehood which simultaneously grounds freedom and also provides morally relevant [APs].³⁷³

The difference, however, between a libertarian like Kane and Timpe is that Kane believes that *every* AP available to the agent is indeed robust and morally significant, not simply morally relevant.³⁷⁴ This is what makes him a libertarian. Kane argues that in order for the agent to be morally responsible, and therefore free, she must have had *some robust* APs in her causal history available to her at one time or another. Kane agrees with Timpe that she needn't have these APs available at all times, but rather she only needs them in order to fulfill what Kane calls “self-forming actions” (SFAs). Through the categorical effort of her will, via APs at one time or another embedded within her causal history, the agent could use those APs in order to sufficiently “form” her character or will into what it is today. These APs, or more specifically these SFAs, are cultivated by the effort of the agent producing what Kane calls “ultimate responsibility,” (UR). If the agent possesses UR, then the agent is said to entail SFAs. And, according to Kane, SFAs entail APs, and so, underneath, the foundation has always been robust APs. Even for a hardcore (event-causal) libertarian like Kane, UR entails APs, via hypothetical syllogism. So while Timpe and Kane both agree that sourcehood entails some form of APs available to the agent at one time or another,³⁷⁵ though presumably not at all times, they disagree

³⁷² Ibid., 157-158.

³⁷³ Ibid., 159.

³⁷⁴ To see a concise but detailed exposition on Kane's argument for libertarianism, see “Libertarianism” in *Four Views of Free Will*, or “Free Will: A Libertarian Perspective” in *Do We Have Free Will?*

³⁷⁵ Timpe says later in his book, after clearly making the case that sourcehood entails some commitment to APs, that “an agent need not have alternative-possibilities open to her at the very moment of every choice. Her volitional or agential structure at a particular time can be such that she simply sees no reason

with whether or not those APs are robust. According to Kane, those APs, or weak flickers *are* robust, and according to Timpe, they are not. This is why Kane is a libertarian and Timpe is just a source incompatibilist. Libertarianism is a stronger position to hold to because it claims that *any* and *all* weak flickers present in FSCs are, and should be, considered robust, and therefore morally significant, as it provides a foundation to producing something like UR.

And this is what I find baffling and utterly strange to me. Stratton, Kane, and Timpe all agree that the sourcehood condition is what is considered primarily relevant to the free will debate. Kane departs from Timpe, however, in claiming that the flicker-APs available to the agent in FSCs are actually robust even in the actual sequence. Kane wants to say that every flicker fulfills even the **Robustness Requirement* regardless of how flimsy. Timpe, on the other hand, only commits to saying that the agent only possesses *W-AP_f* because he is unsure that an AP said to be seriously that weak could ever produce proper ascriptions of moral responsibility beyond merely pointing out the fact that the agent is indetermined; Timpe is of course making a much more modest claim. Then we have Stratton, who allegedly wants to argue not only that every *rational* flicker fulfills the **Robustness Requirement* along with Kane, but also that *every agent* must have PAP-T *at all times* during *any* of the agent's deliberative process throughout their causal history in order to successfully rationally infer or affirm knowledge claims (or to access EJOs). Stratton takes an even stronger position than his own libertarian colleague. He doesn't merely say that APs are available at some time or another in the causal history of the agent (deliberation notwithstanding), but rather Stratton wants to argue that these APs in PAP-T are not only robust, but are also available at *all times* to the agent while they deliberate; in fact, the agent *must* have robust APs available in order to deliberate, and thus, if true, the agent has PAP-T.³⁷⁶ Otherwise, how could the agent rationally infer or affirm knowledge claims unless the agent has categorical access to EJOs and thus fulfill PAP-T? On top of that, and what is even more baffling is that Stratton *still* wants to claim that libertarianism does not hold to (b*), but rather (b), and thus (ii***). To quote John Lennox, "the mind boggles, ladies and gentlemen."³⁷⁷

at all in choosing a particular course of action... This is why leeway is not always necessary," (*Free Will* (2e), 172).

As for Kane, he writes,

... UR does not require that we could have done otherwise (AP) for *every* act done 'of our own free wills' ... UR condition *does* require that we could have one otherwise with respect to *some* acts in our past life histories by which we *formed* or *shaped* our present characters, motives and purposes (that is, our wills). I call these character and will-forming actions **Self-forming Actions (SFAs)**... But these self-forming actions will then satisfy the condition of [AP] as well, because if one can do or do otherwise, voluntarily, intentionally and rationally either way [e.g., PAP-T], it follows that one can do or do otherwise [i.e., PAP]. One has alternative possibilities. AP would therefore be necessary for free will after all, *at least sometimes in our lives when we engage in self-formation*," (Kane, "Free Will: A Libertarian Perspective," 12, 19).

In other words, according to Kane, PAP-T entails PAP (surprise!). Once again, this shows that the distinction between mental and physical action is worthless. We will return to these claims later in §2.5.11.

³⁷⁶ It almost seems as if Stratton wants to pull the "Naïve Leeway Incompatibilist" move here. Recall earlier footnotes in this present work for more details.

³⁷⁷ John Lennox, [Christopher Hitchens vs John Lennox | Is God Great? Debate](#).

A libertarian like Kane does not make such a strong claim. It is enough, according to Kane, that the agent has only categorical APs available at one time or another, but surely not at *all times*, especially located in the deliberative process; it's simply unnecessary. But, it seems clear to me that Stratton cannot afford such a conclusion when it comes to his specific flavor of leeway ability. He *must* have PAP-T available at all times, even if by virtue of being implied by the sourcehood condition. Otherwise, how would anyone, according to Stratton's view, be able to categorically deliberate options and then choose an option without having a genuine reason for choosing said option? According to Stratton, that person would be irrational, if PAP-T was not present, in the sense that they would not be able to rationally infer or affirm knowledge claims. Given these reasons, I don't think Stratton has *any* access to the flicker defense against FSCs. Because an FSC like (G) exists, Stratton would actually be inconsistent in defending the flicker strategy against it.³⁷⁸

2.5.8 The Dilemma Defense

So then what is Stratton to do? If he cannot successfully press the flicker strategy to the compatibilist, then how could he defeat FSCs? He could switch gears and argue that FSCs are shown false in a different way, perhaps by objecting with the Dilemma Defense.³⁷⁹ The basic idea revolving around the Dilemma Defense is for the incompatibilist to press two horns. Horn A is considered the indeterministic horn, while horn B is considered the deterministic horn. It goes something like this:

Incompatibilists and libertarians about free will like [Kane] believe that if we are to be ultimately responsible [UR] for being the way we are, then there must be some choices in our lifetimes that are undetermined right up to the moment when they occur. These undetermined choices are the "will-setting" or "self-forming" actions (SFAs) ... that are required at some points in our lives if we are to be ultimately responsible for forming our own wills. Now a Frankfurt controller faces a dilemma in trying to control these will-setting or self-forming choices. Since they are undetermined up to the moment they occur, a Frankfurt controller cannot be sure which way the agents are going to choose *before* they actually do choose. Thus, if the controller waits till the agents actually make one choice or the other, it will be *too late* to intervene and the agents may choose against

³⁷⁸ I will attempt to look at one more potential objection from Stratton regarding alternatives in §2.5.11.

³⁷⁹ The Dilemma Defense, also known as the Kane-Widerker objection after its primary advocates, is found in a plethora of different areas with those familiar with the philosophical literature. For those interested, helpful summaries of the dialectical context, objections, and rebuttals surrounding this defense can be found in Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), chapter 6; Pereboom, *Free Will*, chapter 1; Kane, *Contemporary*, chapter 8, "Libertarianism" in *Four Views, Significance of Free Will*, 142–143, 191–192; Beebe, *Free Will*, 146–150; and Preciado, *A Reformed View*, appendix, 231–246. Also see Robb, David, "Moral Responsibility and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/alternative-possibilities/>, §4.3.

the controller's wishes (since the will-setting choices are undetermined and may go either way). In that case, the agents may be *responsible* for acting on their own, but they will also have *alternative possibilities* at the moment of choices. [This is Horn A: the indeterministic horn]. By contrast, if the controller is to *ensure* that the agents will do what the controller wants, the controller must act *in advance* to *make* the agents choose as the controller wishes. In that case, the agents will indeed not have [APs], but neither will the agents be ultimately responsible [UR] for the outcomes. The controller will be responsible, since the controller will have intervened in advance to determine which outcome would occur. [This is Horn B: the deterministic horn].³⁸⁰

Kane argues that the compatibilist who presses the FSC argument has a dilemma. While constructing an FSC, they either fall for horn A and assume indeterminism or they fall for horn B and assume determinism. Horn A shows that the agent *does* have APs available that would not be counterfactually intervened on time by the nefarious Frankfurt controller. And if the sole purpose of an FSC is to show how one can be morally responsible *without* having access to APs, then obviously horn A shows this to be false; FSCs would be rejected as they do not show what they are intended to show as PAP would still be true. On the other hand, if one assumes horn B, then sure, the Frankfurt controller could eliminate the agent's AP before they had time to indeterministically deliberate, but in doing so this *presupposes* determinism, which of course would be question-begging against incompatibilism.

There has been much push-back on the Dilemma Defense, such as Pereboom's "Tax Evasion" case in which he claims to have constructed a successful FSC that falls on horn A, yet the agent still could not do otherwise all the while having allegedly indeterministic free will.³⁸¹ Even then, Kane retorted back, arguing that

[T]he old dilemma for all Frankfurt-type examples returns in full force: If the controller waits till the agent chooses A or B to find out what the agent is going to do, the agent will have [APs] [Horn A]; and if the controller intervenes before the choice is made (even a short time before), the agent will not be responsible, the controller will be [Horn B].³⁸²

Interesting objection no doubt, and a rather fun one at that. Unfortunately, for my purposes in the present reply, I will not continue to dive into the details of the Dilemma Defense as Stratton himself has written virtually nothing on the objection. Indeed, I find the flicker objection to be much more potent anyways, and apparently so does Stratton.³⁸³ But, let's consider whether

³⁸⁰ Kane, "A Response to Fischer, Pereboom, and Vargas" in *Four Views*, 169.

³⁸¹ Pereboom, "Hard Incompatibilism" in *Four Views*, 90-92. For a more updated version, see Pereboom, *Free Will*, 14-18.

³⁸² Kane, "A Response to Fischer, Pereboom, and Vargas," 171.

³⁸³ This is not to say that I think the Dilemma Defense works against FSCs, however. I actually agree with Pereboom's "Tax Evasion" case, cases known as "blockage" cases (as we will discuss later), as well as Timpe's concession that the prior sign of the agent is not exactly necessary to the construction of a valid

Stratton could have consistent access to the Dilemma Defense regardless. Let's say he presses the Dilemma Defense; would it be successful? I am inclined to think not.

The reason for this is because if he presses horn A or horn B to the compatibilist, both horns end up backfiring, at least if Molinism is upheld. Recall horn A (the indeterministic horn) says that "[i]f the controller waits till the agent chooses A or B to find out what the agent is going to do, the agent will have [APs]," (Ibid.). What this horn demonstrates is that the controller is *not* omniscient; the controller cannot know in advance what an indeterministically free agent would do in any given circumstance. But, because Stratton claims Molinism, this seems to be at odds with what he wants to argue. So, if Stratton presses horn A, I would argue he is committing the "taxi-cab fallacy," which is another form of special pleading. Even in one's defense, it must be logically consistent or in alignment with their own arguments. If Stratton presses horn A, it seems then that this is not logically consistent with his argument for middle-knowledge. Moreover, if he presses horn B, he would be tacitly assuming that in order for the controller to know what the agent would do, he would have to *determine* the agent's action. But, that admission *is* Calvinist-determinism! Under this horn, the knowledge of the controller *could* be seen as actually causative, yet, all Molinists are against that very notion. Therefore, Stratton does not have logically consistent access to not only the flicker defense against FSCs, but also the Dilemma Defense as well.

2.5.9 Dialectical Stalemates & Defenses: Turning the Tables

Thus far in the present section I have considered whether FSCs work as an argument for compatibilism. I have also considered Stratton's initial responses to basic formulations like (P) while also pressing more advanced formulations like (G). I have shown that as an argument for compatibilism, weak flickers appear to always be seeping out the cracks of FSCs. Because of this unpleasant feature, compatibilists would be question-begging to rebut that these flickers are not robust for responsibility. Incompatibilists like Stratton have every right to defend against FSCs using the flicker strategy. However, I have also argued that Stratton himself does not seem to have logical consistency to the flicker defense anyways (not to mention the Dilemma Defense). So, what is the committed compatibilist to do at this point in the dialectic? Fischer thinks that this "sort of metaphysical gridlock [is] characteristic of Dialectical Stalemates," (Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 147).

Perhaps it will now be evident that we have reached the sort of Dialectical Stalemate... A number of examples have been invoked to support the general claim that moral responsibility does not require [APs]. It has then been pointed out that they do not *decisively* establish the claim; the examples fall just short... of absolutely establishing the

and sound FSC (which the defense arguably depends upon). See Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 90. These responses, among others, all show the Dilemma Defense to fail.

claim. And any example which would decisively support the principle would seem (at any rate) to be the underlying question of whether (say) causal determinism is compatible with moral responsibility... But, as in the above discussions of Dialectical Stalemates, I do not believe there is cause for alarm or despair. One should not expect decisive, knockdown arguments in most areas of philosophy... But the fact that one cannot decisively resolve the dispute about the putative necessity of [APs] for moral responsibility does *not* imply that one ought to suspend judgment about the issues. And I maintain that the arguments developed above against the flicker of freedom strategy are extremely plausible, albeit not ineluctable. I believe that the arguments come extremely close to establishing that [APs] are not required for moral responsibility. I am convinced, even in the absence of a knockdown argument, that the [APs] posited by the flicker theorist are simply not sufficiently robust to ground our ascriptions of moral responsibility. Thus, I conclude that moral responsibility does not require regulative control [i.e., PAP].³⁸⁴

Fischer thinks that it does seem the case that if compatibilists reject the flicker strategy, on the account that they are not robust enough, it would perhaps be question-begging on their part. However, he tries to persuade us that there is no real worry here: “knockdown arguments” are rare in philosophy and thus, the flicker strategy should not pose a true dilemma for the compatibilist. We are in a Dialectical Stalemate with the incompatibilist; we pose FSCs, they rebut back with the flicker defense, and we disagree they are robust and therefore unattractive for proper grounding of responsibility. Fischer then says, given this, it’s okay to still withhold a judgment concerning the issue, namely, that flickers are not robust, though plausibly tenable.

While I agree with Fischer that “knockdown arguments” are rare, especially concerning the philosophy of freedom, as a compatibilist, I must say that I reject such a “Dialectical Stalemate.” Who has the burden here? Who must show compatibilism beyond reasonable doubt? It is the compatibilist, *not* the incompatibilist. I have mentioned this previously, and I think this is a solid reply. Fischer, though I appreciate his sentiment and his admiration to stay in the “ring” of the debate, I believe if the incompatibilist presses the flicker defense, then FSCs are toast; they simply do not prove what they are intended to prove beyond a reasonable doubt. There is not a “Dialectical Stalemate” in the debate currently, contrary to Fischer. Compatibilists would lose if that were the case.

Ultimately, I think we ought to avoid this supposed “stalemate.” Therefore, I propose a “restructure” of the dialectical context. Compatibilists should view FSCs not as an *argument* for compatibilism, but rather as a *defense* of compatibilism. Helen Beebe offered this solution to the compatibilist in her lovely introductory book *Free Will: An Introduction*. In the book, she tests the boundaries of an FSC and its objections. When considered the Dilemma Defense, she turned the tables and simply flipped FSCs as a defense, not an argument. She argues that this

³⁸⁴ Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 146-147. More will be said on regulative control in §4.3.

essentially solves the dilemma for compatibilists. I think the same could be said given the flicker of freedom.

In order to show this dialectic switch, I will quote Beebee at length. However, I will switch out Beebee's considered incompatibilist argument (the Consequence Argument) in the quote with something more familiar and at home to Stratton: the Freethinking Argument (FTA). This will allow my point to be fully aimed against Stratton and the general incompatibilist defense of the flicker, as is my present purpose in this reply. Beebee writes,

If your interest is in defending compatibilism, however, you might be inclined to reply: *So what?* We can grant that if we think of the nefarious neurosurgeon case as an *attack* on incompatibilism, then it fails for the reason given by the [flicker defense]. But if we think of it as a *defence of compatibilism* against [FTA], why should we care if we beg the question against the incompatibilist? After all, the question we are addressing [in that particular dialectical context] is whether [FTA] constitutes a *good argument for* incompatibilism. So, let's agree that the incompatibilist – or at least the kind who has *already* assumed that [PAP-T] is true – is going to be unmoved by Frankfurt's argument because of the [flicker defense]. But then, what business do they have being an incompatibilist in the first place? What, exactly, is their *argument* for that position. If the incompatibilist's answer to that question is: [the Freethinking Argument], then it looks like it is the incompatibilist, and not Frankfurt [or the compatibilist], who is begging the question. After all, it is the very claim that acting freely (and, hence, [rationally] responsibly) requires the ability to do otherwise, and hence the soundness of [FTA], that Frankfurt is calling into question. True, the [flicker defender] will not accept Frankfurt's argument... But in invoking the [flicker defense], the incompatibilist has *already* committed himself to a principle - [PAP-T] - which, without [FTA] to justify it, is simply an intrigued assumption that the compatibilist should see no need to accept. So, insofar as we read Frankfurt's argument as a defence of compatibilism against [FTA], it works just fine.³⁸⁵

This move, in my humble estimation, is utterly brilliant. Not only does it remove the nasty “metaphysical gridlock” proposed by Fischer, this move also allows for the compatibilist to “come out on top” as it were. To see this clearly, let's imagine a constructed hypothetical dialogue with an incompatibilist seeking to argue incompatibilism against compatibilism.

Incompatibilist: The Freethinking Argument gives us good reasons to reject EDD. After all, “If humans do not possess libertarian freedom, then humans do not possess the ability to rationally infer and rationally affirm knowledge claims,” (*Mere Molinism*, 167). In addition, “If libertarian

³⁸⁵ Beebee, *Free Will*, 149-150. In fact, Beebee does not seem to be alone in this maneuver. See Sartorio, “Reply to Bob Kane's Reply,” in *Do We Have Free Will?*, 193-194 for a similar defense.

free thinking does not exist, then the process of rationality is illusory,” (Ibid., 171). In order to be rationally responsible then, one needs libertarian freedom. EDD seems to be self-defeating. Therefore, we should reject EDD.

Compatibilist: What about the FSC (G)? This seems to show that Jones, though he could not think otherwise (i.e., did not possess PAP-T) in a way that is rationally robust (because of the absence of CON), he is still plausibly held rationally responsible for his decision to vote Republican.

Incompatibilist: Yes, but a flicker of freedom exists! Even though he could not CON_{PAP-T}, he could arguably CTR_{PAP-T} via the *mode* of action. *That* is still present, and that means he could choose *how* he could will to vote Republican. It may satisfy W-AP_f, not S-AP_f, but that is enough for rational responsibility.

Compatibilist: How do you know it is enough for rational responsibility, though? W-AP_f does not satisfy the “Robust Requirement” for rational responsibility. You are merely assuming that (G) presents a case where Jones can do otherwise in such a way that is rationally robust for responsibility. Unless you mean to argue that these alternatives, by their sheer nature of being alternatives, are enough to rescue responsibility?

Incompatibilist: I am not “merely assuming” Jones has alternatives. I have argued that unless Jones has alternatives, he cannot be held rationally responsible. See Stratton’s Deliberation & Liberation Argument in *Mere Molinism*.

Compatibilist: Yes, and your support for FTA is the Deliberation & Liberation Argument. It still requires that key premise, namely that rationality entails liberation by virtue of alternatives. This still assumes the alternatives are robust. I am asking *why* they are robust. Can you give an independent reason or support, other than FTA, or the Deliberation & Liberation Argument, for not just *that* you have metaphysical categorical APs accessible to the agent, but also that those same APs are considered rationally robust, without begging the question against compatibilism?

What this short dialogue is intended to show is that if we flip FSCs and use them as a *defense* of compatibilism, rather than an *argument* for compatibilism, it grants significant dialectical advantage to the compatibilist in their all too common exchanges with incompatibilists. This is exactly why Beebe implores the compatibilist to think this way. If the incompatibilist poses FTA, the compatibilist will just respond with an advanced FSC like (G). The incompatibilist, no doubt, will respond exactly like Stratton and claim the deliberative flicker defense, yet, once they do, of course the compatibilist can rebut back and require the incompatibilist to give an account of robustness. If the incompatibilist cannot seem to give an account of APs with something like meeting the condition of S-AP_f, not merely AP_f, then those APs are weak flickers. Why should

we assume weak flickers are robust enough for responsibility? If the incompatibilist responds by stating that because they are still APs they are therefore robust, then the compatibilist will gladly respond by pointing out the question-begging nature of the incompatibilist contention: they must presuppose PAP(-T) to be true, and then *assume* all APs are robust for responsibility. A devastating admission for the incompatibilist to say the least.

This ploy is certainly not for the die-hard FSC fan like Fischer (or perhaps Preciado); however, it certainly works. Sure, we must surrender FSCs as an argument for compatibilism. But, I believe, we compatibilists are given something so much more advantageous and beneficial: avoiding some of the toughest objections to FSCs and pointing out the question-begging nature of PAP as being necessary for moral (and rational) responsibility, often rooted in incompatibilism. I find that this is almost as equal to arguing PAP to be false on independent grounds.³⁸⁶

2.5.10 Sourcehood, Alternatives, & FSCs: Taking Stock

At this point in our discussion, I have dealt extensively with flickers of freedom and their presence within FSCs. I have also spent time demonstrating that Stratton's weak flickers in the deliberative process may not be seen as rationally significant or robust enough for responsibility. And if this is the case, then perhaps FSCs may provide a strong *defensive* move for compatibilism against incompatibilist arguments like the Consequence Argument or the Freethinking Argument. Moreover, although source incompatibilism has been already discussed in comparison to libertarianism, up until now I have not discussed FSCs and its relationship to sourcehood and alternatives, at least not sufficiently. In order to take some stock, I will now turn to that discussion.

Timpe, wrapping up his arguments for source incompatibilism, writes:

If the arguments [presented] are correct, then an agent can only be free and responsible if she is the source of her actions in a way that requires the falsity of determinism... But if these conditions are met, then the agent will also have alternative possibilities for action.³⁸⁷

Recall that, according to Timpe, it is not the case that APs ground moral (or rational) responsibility; it is rather the case that the source of one's actions ground responsibility. This is similar to the libertarian condition (a) that Stratton affirms. However, one can know they are the causal source of one's actions *if* one first had APs available at one time or another. Under the source incompatibilist view, it is the AP-condition that allows for the sourcehood condition to be realized and thus fruitful in the debate surrounding FSCs. That is to say, the source condition

³⁸⁶ Again, I would encourage the reader to study Bignon's arguments for the falsity of PAP, and for the truth of compatibilism, independent of FSCs, in *Excusing Sinners*, chapter 6: "Beyond Mere Skepticism."

³⁸⁷ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 160.

depends or is *grounded* upon the AP-condition. Moreover, according to source incompatibilism, the “falsity of causal determinism is only a necessary, rather than sufficient, condition for moral responsibility,” (Ibid., 161). This is exactly where this view differs from libertarianism on the scale of incompatibilism. Sourcehood provides no such sufficient condition for the falsity of determinism, whereas libertarianism *does*, namely PAP, or according to Stratton, PAP-T. This is why, as I have argued earlier, libertarianism is a much stronger position than its sister view of source incompatibilism. But, that aside, we see Timpe still hold onto the AP-condition:

... having certain sorts of alternative possibilities is both a result of fulfilling the sourcehood condition and an indicator that that condition might be met in the actual sequence [of an FSC]. Thus, like other Wide Source Incompatibilists, I do not think that one can completely separate the source condition from the [AP]-condition. As a result of this, the debates regarding *AP* and *FSCs* are still important for free will... On this view, the mere presence of [APs] is important, not in and of itself, but rather insofar as their presence can indicate something about the actual sequence, namely that in the actual sequence the agent might fulfill the sourcehood requirement.³⁸⁸

Additionally, recall that Timpe calls “Wide Source Incompatibilists” as the type of incompatibilists that adhere to the *necessity* of APs while arguing for sourcehood. The reason why these philosophers argue this claim is because the AP-condition is said to *ground* sourcehood; thus the source condition *depends* upon accessibility of APs (not merely their existence) in order for the agent to “fulfill the sourcehood requirement” at least at some time in their causal history (perhaps in “crucial” moments, as Kane might suggest). These Wide Source Incompatibilists are in contrast to “Narrow Source Incompatibilists” (i.e., Stump, Zagzebski, and Craig) who want to argue that APs are not necessary for libertarianism and for moral responsibility in general. According to Timpe, all source incompatibilists should adopt “Wide Source Incompatibilism” as “one [cannot] completely separate the source condition from the [AP]-condition.” The reason why this is the case is because, again, APs in the actual sequence of any FSC indicate or reveal that the agent is the source of the action because APs are said to *ground* sourcehood; that is, the source condition *depends* on the AP-condition. Therefore, *without* APs available to the agent, the source requirement for responsibility could not be justified, and *without* FSCs we could never see what it is like to be an efficient source. APs, even given the view of source incompatibilism, are *still* necessary for something like sourcehood to obtain, in order for something like responsibility to be *grounded*. It is simply not enough to punt to sourcehood in the debate regarding free will without this realization; APs have their special place as well, even if it is to show that one can be or is the efficient causal source of those same APs.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 160-161.

³⁸⁹ If true, this applies to moral responsibility as well as rational responsibility, and so it does not matter if Stratton argues for rational responsibility because in order to be moral responsibility, an agent needs

2.5.11 Sourcehood, Leeway, & Mere Molinist Dilemma (Revisited)

At this point, Stratton could (predictably) object and say that he believes in the necessity of APs in *some* cases, but certainly not in *all* cases.³⁹⁰ The sourcehood condition may obtain at some time within the agent without the need for APs *at* that same time. After all, Timpe himself concedes that

... an agent need not have alternative-possibilities open to her at the very moment of every choice. Her volitional or agential structure at a particular time can be such that she simply sees no reason at all in choosing a particular course of action... This is why leeway is not always necessary.³⁹¹

So, it may be true that while the sourcehood condition is comprehensive when considering free will, the leeway condition (or AP-condition) is not always necessary at the same time. Fair enough. This objection is certainly reminiscent of Stratton's "exhaustive vs non-exhaustive" argumentation regarding libertarianism, compatibilism, and determinism discussed in previous sections. We see this continually repeated claim as a summary in his rejoinder to Bignon:

Of course, it is incoherent to say that (i) all free actions are compatible with determinism and (ii) some free actions are incompatible with determinism. Fortunately, that is not my claim, and I talk instead of "*exhaustive* divine determinism" and "*limited* libertarian freedom." I am simply accommodating the view that some free actions might be compatible with determinism while other free actions are not, and I propose that both the labels "compatibilism" and "libertarian" might be used, in a rather loose sense, to apply to those who hold this view. Sure, Bignon might complain that no one else has discussed these issues in this manner in the current literature. Be that as it may, I am suggesting an alternative and logically consistent way of thinking about things—the way things just might be.³⁹²

access to APs at some time just as if an agent is to be described as rationally responsible. In fact, I have argued that this must be the case. See the above conclusions (21), (26), and (27) in the present work.

³⁹⁰ In personal correspondence, Stratton has said to me: "I contend that if one is causally determined to happily affirm a false belief, then one has no opportunity (in said circumstance) to infer a better or true belief. Since rational agents possess opportunities to infer true beliefs over false ones, then YES, one must possess said opportunities. However, if EDD is true, then no such opportunity to exercise an ability is available... It's also vital to note (lest a straw man is attacked), *that I do not say that these opportunities are always essential*. There are some instances where libertarian freedom is essential for specific kinds of rationality and knowledge based upon these specific kinds of rationality," (accessed 6/15/21, emphasis added). It is clear from this quote that Stratton does not think leeway is always necessary or essential; however, they appear to be essential for specific kinds of rationality (perhaps epistemic duties of sorts).

³⁹¹ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 172. See also Timpe's *Reasons-Constraint View* in *Philosophical Theology*.

³⁹² Stratton, "Rejoinder," 4.

Now, I fully realize that Stratton does not claim that this *is* the way things are, rather he says that compatibilism obtaining at some time, and perhaps incompatibilism obtaining at some other time, would be or are “logically consistent” theses; it is “the way things just might be” or *could* be. I am also fully aware that Stratton tentatively allows for some form of compatibilism to be trivially true at some time, while not others.³⁹³ However, the difficulty for me as the interlocutor is to pin-point exactly *what time* in the Christian’s casual free-will history Stratton is particularly interested in. After much reflection on his book and rejoinder to Bignon, I have come to the conclusion that one of the crucial moments in the Christian’s causal free-will history that Stratton is more than likely interested in is deliberative actions regarding *salvation*. In his “Rejoinder,” he writes,

Recall the goal of my book. I first offered several definitions of libertarian freedom with a focus on sourcehood freedom and an ability to choose between or among a range of alternative options each of which is compatible with one’s nature at a given moment. If any of the great theologians of the past made claims that seemed to align with these definitions, then it seems fair to say that at least occasionally, they explicitly or implicitly affirmed that humanity possesses libertarian freedom. I made it clear that these theological thinkers of the past may have been determinists regarding soteriological matters, but that to them, there was nothing incoherent with the notion that human salvation can be determined by God, and that humans still possess libertarian freedom in matters other than salvation. Not only do some Reformed theologians hold that view today, it seems that Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin may have held that view centuries ago.³⁹⁴

Stratton argues that if these early reformed thinkers of the past held to something like *non-exhaustive* freedom, then it may be aptly justifiable to claim something like that today (and this would be irrelevant to whether or not Stratton himself holds to something like this view; although, I think he does given the amount of times he stresses it). These early thinkers, according to Stratton, almost unanimously held to something like *non-exhaustive* freedom. These thinkers may have held to determined acts in salvific or soteriological matters (i.e., “matters above”), while holding onto indetermined acts in non-salvific or non-soteriological matters (i.e., “matters below”). As Stratton says, “as I explain in my book, it is a huge extrapolation to affirm that *some* things are causally determined, to then jump to the conclusion that *‘all* things are causally determined,” (‘Rejoinder,” 5). Again, fair enough; however, as noted in the introduction, it is not my aim to argue for “exhaustive” determinism in this present reply, rather I seek to defend it.

³⁹³ See §2.3.2.

³⁹⁴ Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 4. I will come back to this quote in my critique of Stratton’s historical section.

In the spirit of defense, even though this basic claim of exhaustiveness has, in my humble estimation, been adequately dealt with and settled in previous sections (almost *ad nauseum*), it may suffice to input specific details into the equation which were missing in earlier discussions of the claim; details such as the sourcehood condition and PAP-T. Essentially, what these previous discussions have attempted to show is that Stratton cannot consistently hold to incompatibilism and compatibilism at various times or in various aspects within the totality of a Christian's life or causal free-will history. For a brief review, I have argued that Stratton must fall on one of the two horns. That is the gist of what I have called the **Mere Molinist Dilemma**. Recall from §2.2.1,

Mere Molinist Dilemma: Either the agent while being determined unto salvation is A) not rationally responsible, or B) rationally responsible. If horn A), then his EDD definition is a useless redundancy and its distinction between exhaustive and non-exhaustive would be proven superfluous. Incompatibilism would obtain and his project of mending Mere Molinism with Reformed theology would be quizzical. If horn B), then the debate against compatibilism would be surrendered. We can be free in a most relevant sense necessary for rational responsibility though we are determined.

Call these two horns the A) *Calvinist Horn*, and the B) *Freethinking Horn*. If Stratton falls on the first horn, he would be throwing his Calvinists friends under the bus by assuming that one cannot both be rationally responsible (in the desert sense) and determined unto salvation at the same time. I contend that no Calvinist (except for maybe hyper-Calvinists) would accept that they are not free or responsible for their decision to follow Christ. If Stratton falls on the second horn, then he would have to forsake his Freethinking argument as one can be determined unto salvation *and* be rationally responsible (in the desert sense) at the same time. But the latter is just compatibilism. Here, if the agent is rationally responsible, yet their own rationale for believing in Christ is determined, this is by definition compatibilism, *not* libertarianism, thereby undermining the Freethinking argument. Given this background and in response to Stratton's objection that leeway may not need to obtain *all* the time, but perhaps more or less in a non-exhaustive way, I will provide three rebuttals.³⁹⁵

The first of these rebuttals is straight-forward: the jump to non-exhaustiveness regarding the comprehensiveness of indeterminism and determinism is all too quick, for the dilemma is still present. But, in order to see this, it may first be pedagogically helpful to visualize exactly what is being argued when on the timeline of an agent. What it appears Timpe is suggesting with the quote above is something of the following timeline sequence:

³⁹⁵ These rebuttals, albeit more advanced and technical, will remain largely similar to the ones defended in the previous sections.

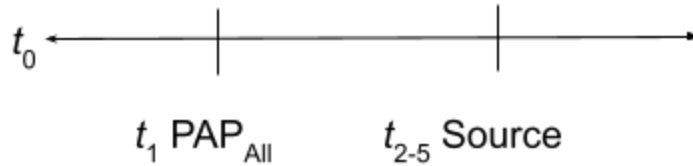


FIGURE 1

It could be true, Timpe argues, that at t_{2-5} , the agent's "volitional and agential structure" renders the event such that leeway is not necessary in order for the action to be responsible, and therefore free. Given this, however, it is still conceded, under the Wide Source Incompatibilist view, that PAP_{All} at t_1 is still necessary in order for something like sourcehood to kick in for the agent at t_{2-5} . To be fair as well, I believe Timpe would still argue that at t_1 , the agent still was the source of their action, and I concede this. Leeway according to **Figure 1** is seen as non-exhaustive, whereas sourcehood should be seen as exhaustive because it's a necessary condition for freedom (this is uncontroversially true for incompatibilism). To accommodate this concern, we would add the source condition:

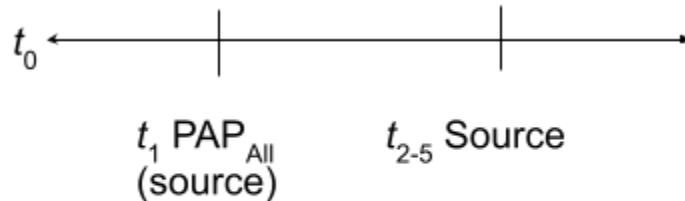


FIGURE 1*

Figure 1* is arguably a more fair representative of what the timeline of an agent, according to a source incompatibilist, would look like (albeit simplified). Let's proceed, then, to place Stratton's supposed non-exhaustive "leeway" view on top of the source incompatibilist's timeline:

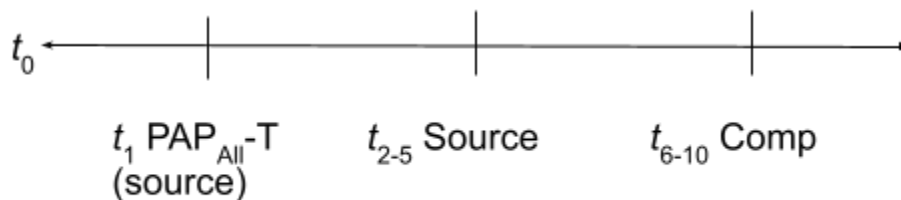


FIGURE 2

Here, **Figure 2** represents categorical PAP-T, sourcehood freedom, and compatibilistic freedom all on the same timeline. This brings us back to the original objection that prompted this section: the APs condition for freedom and responsibility may not be necessary *all* the time for libertarian freedom, whereas the source condition must always be necessary. To put the objection another way, determinism need not be exhaustive or comprehensive, and the same goes for

compatibilism; they may occur at varying times within the causal history of the agent. But, if this is the case, standard logic would forcefully suggest that this means indeterminism would equally be non-exhaustive, in addition to incompatibilism being equally non-exhaustive. **Figure 2** presents just that: at t_{1-5} , incompatibilism would be true,³⁹⁶ but at t_{6-10} , compatibilism would be true (exactly in the way Stratton describes it). Sourcehood incompatibilism may obtain at some time within the agent *without* the need for APs, while compatibilism would obtain at another time within the agent; this was the anticipated objection-response from Stratton.

Now, I want to be clear: while I agree that sourcehood *may* obtain without leeway being present at that same time, I do not agree that APs are *not* at all necessary (or essential) for the source condition to be grounded, and I think, as per the initial objection, that is where the problem lies. The problem then, and the thrust of my first rebuttal to this bizarre recurring claim, is this: *the dilemma is still present*. At t_1 , the agent still has PAP-T, and that kind of AP *grounds* the sourcehood condition available to the agent at the later time under source incompatibilism. In order to be seen as the efficient causal originating source of one's actions at t_{2-5} , categorical APs (or opportunities) must still be present and available to the agent at some earlier time, t_1 . The source condition, as stated earlier, *depends* upon the AP-condition, according to source incompatibilism. But, if this is true, this talk of non-exhaustive leeway incompatibilism does nothing in the debate for Stratton's incompatibilist contention; it would be synonymous, in my estimation, to a blatant red herring. Not only would Stratton be fully and inadvertently conceding that compatibilism is true (at some time or another), but he would also be fully conceding that that action from the agent would, or could, be compatibilistically *free* (at some time or another). Moreover, if sourcehood *is* in fact necessary at *all* times within the agent, then this includes at t_{6-10} : Stratton would (perhaps) be committing himself to source compatibilism! What this seems to imply, then, is that one could actually possess whatever conditions necessary in order to be compatibilistically free at that time. What a lovely concession.

But, perhaps **Figure 2** still doesn't quite do justice to show the dilemma nor the concession. Stratton may be okay with the agent being compatibilistically free at t_{6-10} . Rather than a direct concession, however, this could simply be an indirect concession. That is, the agent may be compatibilistically *free* according to Stratton, but that does not mean that the agent is compatibilistically *responsible* (at least in the way Stratton defines responsibility in the basic desert sense). Let's remodify the timeline, then, in order to see Stratton's probable view even more acutely as well as potentially address this concern:

³⁹⁶ For simplicity's sake, I am assuming the "source" condition means what the source incompatibilist argues what it means: the ultimate or originating causal source. This kind of "source" is incompatible with determinism, therefore incompatibilism obtains. I will discuss more on different kinds of sources below in the relevant sections.

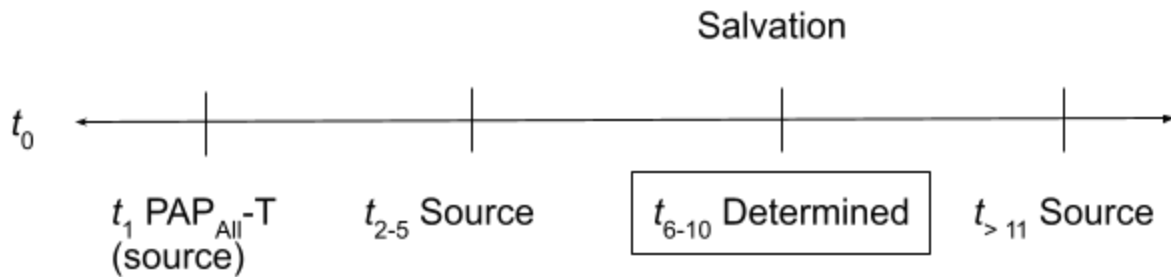
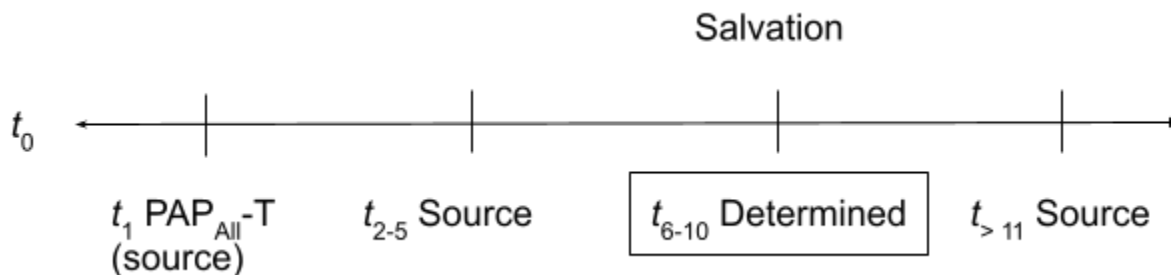


FIGURE 3

Figure 3 now shows the contended action: belief in Christ at salvation. Let's say Sally has deliberative alternatives available to her at t_1 (PAP-T). Of course, she is the ultimate source of her deliberation at that time by virtue of present APs (so as to not beg any question against libertarianism). Imagine now that Sally does not have categorical alternatives available to her at t_{2-5} in the exact way that Kane or Timpe would suggest (and arguably Stratton as well). She would still be free in the source sense, as she would satisfy the UR condition from Kane, and perhaps because, according to Stratton, she is not causally determined to do what she does at that same time. At t_{6-10} , however, Sally is determined to believe in Christ (in "matters above"). During this time, Sally deliberates and reasons about the truth of the Gospel. She weighs the pros and cons of following Jesus, and let's say she evaluates and judges whether or not belief in Christ is the best option available to her. She decides that it is, and she comes to the glorious (and right) conclusion that Jesus lives and He is King; Sally is now a new believer in Christ. But, at t_{11} and onward, she remains the source of her actions without any leeway ability; she is still ultimately responsible. This seems to be the timeline Stratton is offering in *Mere Molinism* (or at least something quite similar). Question: Is Sally *rationally* responsible for her belief in Christ at that time? Is Sally *free* during t_{6-10} ? In what sense is she *free*? This is the crux of the dilemma. Something is still missing from **Figure 3**, however, and that is the nature of Sally's freedom, or the sense in which she is considered *free* during those same timestamps. Once again, let's modify the timeline in order to include these crucial details:



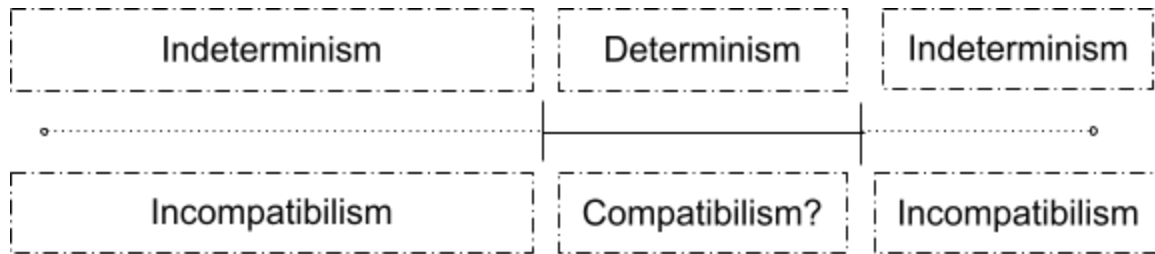


FIGURE 4

In **Figure 4**, I have allowed the nature of freedom to parallel the timeline, as well as offer a potential location to whether the compatibility question obtains a negative answer or perhaps an affirmative answer (depending upon the horn of the dilemma). First, from t_{1-5} , Sally is indeterminism. According to Stratton, if Sally possesses the causal categorical access to evaluative judgment options or opportunities (EJOs), or Sally is seen as the source of her actions because of the categorical access to those EJOs, then Sally is free. In this case, Sally possesses PAP-T at t_1 , so she is free because she is said to have access to EJOs so indeterminism obtains. At t_{2-5} , although leeway (PAP-T) does not obtain, Sally is still indeterminism because nothing causally determined her to think of and about things; she is the efficient causal source. At these times, t_{1-5} , it is clear that what obtains is incompatibilism. PAP-T is incompatible with determinism and being the efficient causal source of your actions (even if leeway doesn't obtain at the same time) is incompatible with determinism. This is all well and good, and I think Timpe would argue for something very similar. Because Sally is back to being the efficient causal source of her actions at $t_{>11}$, she would be indeterminism (according to Stratton), and incompatibilism would obtain (according to Timpe).³⁹⁷ The dilemma, however, presents itself in the moments of salvation.

³⁹⁷ The reason why I split the views according to Timpe and Stratton is because I don't think Timpe would affirm **Figure 4**, at least not all the way. In fact, I think he would reject the indeterminant/source relation attached to t_{2-5} and $t_{>11}$. For Timpe, what shows indeterminism is the fact that categorical APs are available to the agent (t_1), weak or strong. Indeterminism *by itself*, however, does not demonstrate that the agent satisfies the source condition, rather it is the other way around. Though for Stratton it might: "If something or someone else causally determines alternative EJOs to be blocked off and locked away from your access, then how do you know if you *should* have evaluated or judged otherwise? One can offer question-begging assumptions, but it is impossible to offer rational affirmations. This is one reason that rational thinkers ought to reject the exhaustive causal determinism of humanity," <https://freethinkingministries.com/a-mad-scientist-and-a-pop-quiz-a-case-for-freedom/>.

In other words, if you are not the source of your deliberations, you cannot offer rational affirmations or inferences of knowledge; you do not have access to EJOs or APs (PAP-T would be false). Taking the contrapositive, if PAP-T is true (EJOs are available to the agent), then the source condition is also true. To put it differently, if indeterminism is true, then the source condition is true. I think the converse is certainly true, and that would be the premise Timpe advocates for and affirms. But why does Stratton seem to think the contrapositive is true? While I don't necessarily disagree (though Timpe might), the relationship for sourcehood being a necessary condition for indeterminism appears to be lacking. Perhaps it is safe to say that indeterminism entails sourcehood by virtue of *application*, but not *definition*, in a similar way as we could say that compatibilism entails determinism by virtue of *application*, but not *definition*. Regardless, even if I am wrong about this, I can still affirm that Timpe and Stratton still disagree

At t_{6-10} , Sally would be determined to believe in Christ. In “matters above,” she is being determined to believe, but presumably is indetermined everywhere else on the timeline. During t_{6-10} , she is either deliberating about believing in Christ (weighing pros and cons) or she is not. If she is deliberating about whether or not she should believe in Christ, this means that deliberation is compatible with determinism, and Sally can be said to be rationally free (in a compatibilist sense) and rationally responsible even though she does not possess PAP-T (contrary to what Stratton may want to argue in his Freethinking Argument). This is the second horn of the **Mere Molinist Dilemma**. If Sally is not deliberating about believing in Christ, then would Stratton consider her still free? If she is not considered free, because determinism is true, then how could compatibilism obtain? If she is not free because determinism would be true, then incompatibilism would obtain, not compatibilism. This is to say, incompatibilism would be *exhaustive* in describing the timeline of Sally even through her salvific process. This horn is contrary to what Stratton argues. He argues that compatibilism need not be exhaustive, or always describe reality. But, in this case, it seems Stratton must either affirm the exhaustiveness of incompatibilism (or compatibilism by negation) or forsake the core of the Freethinking argument because Sally could be rationally free yet still determined.

Additionally, the mere metaphysical punt to sourcehood will also not do for Stratton, at least without further clarification, as noted in previous sections,³⁹⁸ categorical APs are still necessary for Stratton especially in the deliberative process of thinking, whereas they are not as necessary in the deliberative process for other incompatibilists such as Kane and Timpe. Recall that without PAP-T, Stratton loses his Freethinking Argument. But, at t_{6-10} , are categorical APs available to the agent? We have said that t_{6-10} represents the moments of salvation, and the agent is deliberating about believing in Christ and, *because* of this deliberation, chooses to follow Him as Lord. We have further supposed that, at this time interval, the agent is being determined because the moment arguably represents a “matters above” situation. Now, given this particular set-up, without the punt to sourcehood, is Sally rationally responsible (in the desert sense) according to Stratton at t_{6-10} ? The dilemma reappears: 1. If yes, then compatibilism is conceded, and the Freethinking Argument has been proven false, or 2. If no, then why does Stratton argue something like non-exhaustive incompatibilism when the agents are not free at the time when compatibilism could obtain? This move would be useless as it would clearly be an instance of

on whether or not indeterminism entails libertarianism. Recall that Timpe argues that indeterminism does not entail libertarianism, whereas Stratton argues that it does. For Timpe, indeterminism simply entails weak APs, whereas for Stratton indeterminism *must* entail strong APs (at least regarding deliberation). Timpe doesn't see how these weak flickers ground responsibility, whereas Stratton seems to suggest that they might. The difference, then, is not in the mere *presence* of alternatives, but rather the *robustness* of alternatives.

³⁹⁸ Stratton has tried on many occasions to punt to sourcehood. I would classify this maneuver as a Motte and Bailey fallacy. As soon as the stronger position is attacked (leeway), one would retreat to the weaker position (sourcehood): “Be that as it may, even if it could be demonstrated that this is not a categorical freedom, it would still be libertarianly free in the source-hood sense (even if there is not an ability to choose otherwise for some weird reason),” <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-freedom-to-trick-god/>.

exhaustive incompatibilism if Sally is said to *not* be rationally free or responsible. Further, why even grant this option as a live option to (NRO) Soft Calvinists if the answer is no? That would literally defeat the systematic of TULIP as there would be no rationalistic way to affirm determinism and salvation (“matters above”) at the same time while also affirming irresistible grace. Which (NRO) Soft Calvinist would be willing to admit that they were not free (in some relevant sense), not deliberative (in the way Stratton suggests deliberation entails), and not rationally responsible (in the desert sense) for their salvation? Isn’t the entire project of *Mere Molinism* to present a way that (NRO) Soft Calvinists could be consistent in their systematic yet still hold to limited libertarian freedom? Isn’t *Mere Molinism* supposed to demonstrate that TULIP Calvinist systematic theology could be compatible with something like the thesis of (MM)?³⁹⁹ As it turns out, this project is absurd; hence, the dilemma.⁴⁰⁰

Stratton may modify the timelines all he wants, but I see no other way one can salvage this non-exhaustive incompatibilism/compatibilism given his strong leeway position. All that to say, I concede and agree, to a certain extent, with the original objection. Leeway does *not* need to obtain at every slice of the timeline in order for Sally to be free. Sally could be “free” in the source sense at a different time slice ($t_{2.5}$) and still be considered responsible. Additionally, Sally could be determined at one event in her life, while all other events remain indeterminated, or vice versa. This is possible. So, indeterminism and determinism may indeed occur at various moments in the timeline. If this, I contend, is all that the objection amounts to, then I concede. But, then again, it would just be the case that some events are determined, and it would not be the case that non-exhaustive determinism is true (as non-exhaustive determinism *is* the same as some events being determined and other events being indeterminated). However, what I do not concede is the fact that *compatibilism* and *incompatibilism* may indeed occur at various moments in the timeline; these *must* be seen as *exhaustive*. After all, the most minimal definition of libertarianism is understood as the conjunction of incompatibilism (in the desert sense) and free will volition (at least some of the time, where “free will” volition is regarded as categorically indeterminated); recall definition (i) and (iii) in §2.1.1. While the “indeterminated” part of libertarianism could, technically, be classified as *non-exhaustive*, the “incompatibilism” part of libertarianism *cannot* be classified as *non-exhaustive*. I believe the dilemma has shown at least that much, especially if the objection is one that aims to go further than indeterminism and determinism into the nature of freedom.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Recall from the introduction that (MM) is the thesis that libertarian freedom is true and that God possess middle knowledge: (MM) =_{df} LFW \wedge MK.

⁴⁰⁰ Guillaume Bignon (obviously) agrees. In personal correspondence he has stated that Stratton’s use of “determinism” to mean that some (but not all) things are determined isn’t just weird, it’s absurd. It makes determinists out of Peter van Inwagen, Robert Kane, and literally everybody, since absolutely no one ever denies this. Stratton’s claim to be a determinist because he believes some (but not all) things are determined is exactly as funny as Jim Gaffigan’s claim to be a vegetarian because he avoids some (but not all) meats, except Gaffigan *intended* his to be stand-up comedy.”

⁴⁰¹ Recently, Stratton has provided a helpful exposition of his “non-exhaustive” and “exhaustive” compatibilism/incompatibilism in a podcast episode (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6H8kJEaVy4>). In the first ten minutes, Stratton seems to fall on the first horn of the dilemma: Sally (in my example)

Let's say I am wrong about all of this, thus far. Am I in a worse position than when I started off? I don't believe so, because my second rebuttal could remedy or assuage my potential error in the first rebuttal. My second rebuttal to the claim of the non-exhaustiveness of leeway (however that is interpreted) is that, given **Figure 2**, compatibilism would not obtain during t_{6-10} ; *virtue libertarianism* would obtain. Crudely, virtue libertarianism is the thesis that one does not need leeway at all times in their causal history. As long as the morally relevant APs (rational APs in Stratton's case) were once present in an agent's history, she could be determined at a later point in her history via her own freely formed moral character yet still be considered free (in a morally relevant sense).⁴⁰² Perhaps this is what Stratton means to argue, but if that is the case, it still wouldn't be classified as "compatibilism" at t_{6-10} , rather, it ought to be classified as virtue libertarianism, which is still *incompatibilism*. Dean Zimmerman initially coined the view (as far as I know), and here he describes it as follows:

According to virtue libertarianism, (i) we sometimes bear moral responsibility for choices we make even when our doing so is not a base case of free choice; what matters is whether the choices spring from genuinely moral virtues and vices. As a consequence, (ii) God could often, when it serves his purposes, override our freedom without jeopardizing the chief good for which freedom is given. So long as frequent genuinely free choices are made, God's occasionally determining what we will choose would not seriously undermine the role of freedom in securing the possibility of moral growth... Libertarians think that, if all of our choices were determined by prior states of the universe, or divinely determined by God, we would never freely choose to act in one way rather than another. For us, at least, the "base case" of a free action must be one in which the choice to act was the outcome of an indeterministic process. The reason libertarians care about whether free choices of this sort occur is *not* that they think that such choices are always important, in and of themselves.... Freedom is needed primarily as a necessary condition for other moral goods... We might even want to say that such actions and choices are "freely undertaken" in the sense that they are the expression of a

would be determined, yet not rationally responsible because determinism of any stripe is incompatible with the kind of rationality worth wanting (i.e., deliberation, EJOs, etc.). Fair enough. However, if that is the case, then Stratton would be piercing himself with the first horn by throwing (NRO) Soft Calvinists under the bus and thus demonstrating, according to the construction of the dilemma, that Mere Molinism is in fact *incompatible* with Calvinist systematic theology.

⁴⁰² Timpe argues that something like virtue libertarianism would probably be true of the saints in heaven. See *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, chapter 6. It must be noted that this view seems completely compatible alongside Kane's self-forming actions theory for ultimate responsibility, as well as Timpe's source incompatibilism because virtue libertarianism can be seen as a subset of sourcehood (see Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 103). However, whether or not virtue libertarianism is compatible with these other theories is not debated or discussed here. Perhaps this is what Stratton means by his use of a magnet analogy to describe the freedom of those in heaven:

<https://freethinkingministries.com/free-will-in-heaven/>.

character formed by a history of freely chosen action, despite the fact that the agents no longer have a choice about their behavior in these circumstances.⁴⁰³

Kevin Timpe summarizes virtue libertarianism in the following way:

Insofar as this view is an incompatibilist view, it requires that an agent not be determined by anything outside of her volitional structure when she's acting freely and, given that free will is necessary for moral responsibility, responsibly. On this view, a human agent who never had the ability to do otherwise because her actions and choices were determined entirely by factors outside her control would be neither free nor morally responsible. However, I think it is false that an agent needs to have had alternative possibilities at the moment of a choice for which she is morally responsible, if the reason *why* she lacks the ability to do otherwise can be traced back to earlier free and responsible choices. My own view is thus a version of what John Martin Fischer calls a "historical notion" of freedom and responsibility.⁴⁰⁴

According to virtue libertarianism, it does not matter if God occasionally determines the choice of an agent, so long as the agent had the categorical opportunity to freely express their character formation "by a history of freely chosen action[s]," though they, seemingly, could not do otherwise in a later circumstance because of God's determination *or* their very own freely chosen ingrained moral character prohibits a certain alternative from their range of options. Moreover, this branch of libertarianism, according to Zimmerman, is primarily concerned with *non-derivative* freedom, not necessarily *derivative* freedom; this *non-derivative* freedom is the same freedom Zimmerman calls the "base case" of free action. Derivative and non-derivative freedom are best illustrated using an example of a drunk driver. While the driver may not have a "choice" to swerve off the road at some time, as it was perhaps "determined" by antecedent conditions (such as drinking to the extent to which his blood-alcohol level is enormously dangerous and uncontrollable), the driver *may* have had the "choice" to drink or not drink at a previous time in her history. The former scenario is a derivative morally responsible action,

⁴⁰³ Zimmerman, quoted in Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 11-12.

⁴⁰⁴ Timpe, *Ibid.*, 103-104. In the same book, Timpe has also described virtue libertarianism as ... the ability to form a moral character which later precludes that person from willing certain things. By forming one's character in such a way that it aligns with God's character, one would become unable... to perform morally evil actions. For instance, I am not presently capable of torturing my daughter Emmaline for a nickel. My character is such that I cannot will that; I simply cannot see a good reason for engaging in such behavior. But it doesn't follow that I am not free, particularly given that my evaluative conclusions are not a necessitated product of external forces in the way that it would be if either form of determinism (i.e., theological determinism and causal determinism)... were true," (*Philosophical Theology*, 87).

This definition or description of virtue libertarianism is strikingly similar to what Stratton seems to want to affirm, even down to the "evaluative conclusions" of the agent not being a result of "external forces" such as theological determinism. As aforementioned, *theological* determinism need not be defined as "external" forcing upon God's part to the human agent. This is simply a swift thoughtless caricature of what determinism truly entails, especially if God runs the show.

whereas the latter is a non-derivative morally responsible action. And compatibilists are welcome to agree with this conclusion.⁴⁰⁵

David Robb puts it this way:

But a more common reply to such examples is to clarify our principle by allowing the relevant alternatives to occur before the time of acting. Insofar as Luther should be praised for his refusal, it's because the character compelling the action was itself the result of Luther's past choices in which he could have done otherwise. This important qualification to PAP, sometimes called "tracing", has been standard since Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* iii.v; cp. John Locke 1689: II.xxi.56; C. A. Campbell 1957; Lamb 1993; Kane 1996: 39–40). Only by moral struggle, choosing a certain path among the many available, did Luther finally arrive at a point in which his character and conscience necessitated his actions. In light of this, let us formulate PAP with an additional clause (closely following Mele 1999: 282):

PAP-historical: a person is morally responsible for what she has done at time *t* only if (i) she could have done otherwise at *t*, or (ii) even though she could not have done otherwise at *t*, the psychological character on the basis of which she acted at *t* is itself partially a product of an earlier action (or actions) of hers which was performed at a time when she could have done otherwise.

This less demanding version of PAP was needed all along, even for more ordinary cases. Tom, who becomes violent when drunk, couldn't help himself when he punched someone: Tom's intoxication put him at the mercy of his anger. Yet, assuming other conditions on responsibility are met, we should blame him, especially when learning that he willingly drank beforehand. It's the prior act of drinking for which Tom had

⁴⁰⁵ For more details on compatibilism and non-derivative moral responsibility, see Hart, *Theological Determinism*, 21, https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3090336/1/201049109_Sep2019.pdf. Hart defines the thesis of compatibilism as the following: "Compatibilism =df it is possible that an agent makes a decision, that every aspect of that decision-making process is determined, and that the agent is non-derivatively morally responsible for that decision." I honestly like this definition as it defines exactly the kind of compatibilism I aim to defend against Stratton throughout this reply. The distinction between derivative and non-derivative responsibility has been utilized in the philosophical literature for quite some time. For a small sampling, see Sartorio, *Causation*, 80; Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 8-9 (though Bignon uses the term *indirectly free* to mean *derivatively free*, and *directly free* to mean *non-derivatively free*); and Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 237. In the latter reference, Preciado surveys responses in favor of the Dilemma Defense to Pereboom's "Tax Evasion" case, and one of the responses to this case is from Widerker. In that response, Widerker brings up the idea of derivative/non-derivative responsibility. Pereboom responds to Widerker's concerns. Pereboom also grants an answer to the proper avenue of handling derivative responsibility in light of the "Tax Evasion" case in his own book *Free Will*, 18-20.

alternatives, and it's these alternatives, not those at the time of action, that satisfy our new condition.⁴⁰⁶

This is presumably the “historical requirement” that Timpe is thinking of and it jives well with what most incompatibilists want to claim. The idea of “tracing” supposedly saves the strict version of PAP into a much more weak version, a version that is both modest yet defensible. The agent is *non-derivatively* responsible due to historical alternatives being available to him, even *if* he did not have these alternatives available at a later time. To the incompatibilist, *that* is what matters most in the debate of free will. I contend that this is the main motivation for the thesis of virtue libertarianism: *non-derivative* responsibility at t_n , not *derivative* responsibility at t_{n+1} .

Given the above formulations of virtue libertarianism, is this not exactly what **Figure 2** seeks to describe? Stratton adheres to the fact that compatibilism may obtain at some time and incompatibilism obtain at another time; thus, the “non-exhaustive” element. What Stratton seems to mean when he defends non-exhaustive compatibilism is that God may determine an agent at one time (and the agent still retains a sense of freedom, thus they may be described as “compatibilistically free”), while the agent could be indeterminate at another time. For Stratton, he might think the former means “compatibilism” obtains; but as I argued in §2.3.2, I think that is incoherent.⁴⁰⁷ That said, I think there remains yet another reason to think that compatibilism obtaining in that timeline is false: it's not compatibilism! It's actually *virtue libertarianism* (or perhaps a soft event-causal libertarianism), which is still, technically, incompatibilism.

What Stratton wants to say is that we are *derivatively* compatibilistically free in some sense (though, perhaps not rationally responsible if he desires to fall on horn A of the dilemma posed), even though we were *non-derivatively* libertarianly free in the sense required for rational responsibility. But this is the problem. What grants the derivative freedom when compatibilism supposedly obtains in **Figure 2** is *not* compatibilism but *incompatibilism* because that time-slice stemmed from an incompatibilist *non-derivative* free choice (PAP-T), *not* a compatibilist free choice. This means Stratton should adhere to *exhaustive* incompatibilism as argued above in my first rebuttal. It seems that the conclusion to the second rebuttal is the same as the first: while indeterminism and determinism may (technically) obtain at various time slices, incompatibilism and compatibilism cannot. That is to say, incompatibilism or compatibilism (whichever one is true) *exhaustively* describes reality, especially when the distinction between derivative and

⁴⁰⁶ Robb, David, "Moral Responsibility and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/alternative-possibilities/>.

⁴⁰⁷ In that section, I interacted with Stratton's own example of being at a restaurant, ordering one's greatest desires. The summary of that rebuttal went something like this: not only does Stratton conflate compatibilism with following after one's greatest desires here (a grave error quickly patched up by contemporary compatibilists), but also Stratton apparently forgets that if libertarianism is true (no less *virtue* libertarianism), one could simply categorically choose whether or not he should choose according to the greatest desire at that same time.

non-derivative responsibility is uncovered. As such, the compatibility question is more crucial to the free will debate than ever. As I said in §2.1.4, I can concede that the agent need not possess the ability to *actualize* categorical alternatives *at all times* in their causal history of choice and deliberation. However, this does *not* entail that the agent does not have the *capacity* to actualize categorical alternatives *at all times*. Since it is true that the agent under virtue libertarianism possesses the *capacity* to actualize categorical deliberations *at any time*, regardless of their freely formed *non-derivative* deliberations, incompatibilism must be seen as *exhaustively* describing reality. Before closing, I have one more rebuttal to drive it home.

Going back to Zimmerman's quote above, the following was said: "The reason libertarians care about whether free choices of this sort occur is *not* that they think that such choices are always important, in and of themselves..." This is correct. Libertarians usually don't argue that the mere presence of alternatives grants freedom. That is to say, libertarians are not usually committed to what Timpe calls Naïve Leeway Incompatibilism. These alternatives that are available to the agent must be of a certain sort, such as satisfying the "Robustness Requirement." But, according to Stratton's view, the agent must have PAP-T available in order to be rationally responsible or to have access to EJOs, even if those APs are not considered robust, or part of the set of CON. These alternatives, according to Stratton, *are* "important, in and of themselves." Stratton must hold weak flickers in the deliberative process as robust for rational responsibility in order for PAP-T to get off the ground. However, it is difficult to see how these weak flickers are seen as robust, hence it is difficult for PAP-T to indeed get off the ground, especially given some counterexamples like (G) discussed earlier. And if that is the case, then even Stratton could not hold to something like virtue libertarianism as this view holds that there are some alternatives that *are not* robust for freedom, yet that is okay and not seriously detrimental for responsibility. Stratton argues differently; in fact, he argues the exact opposite. For him, those weak deliberative APs *are* robust as they do show a measure of rational responsibility, and thus provide libertarian freedom; for without the weak APs, the agent cannot be held rationally responsible. Stratton seems to be advocating for Naïve Leeway Incompatibilism (any AP is "good enough" for responsibility)! So, putting it altogether, even if Stratton concedes the first two rebuttals of the dilemma posed, he cannot, according to my estimation, logically back-track and hold to virtue libertarianism as it would be self-defeating for his own strong leeway position. That is, even if Stratton agrees that his leeway incompatibilism must be reformulated to be understood as exhaustively encompassing, he still could not hold to virtue libertarianism on the account that his particular strand of leeway (as far as I can tell) requires for *strong* flickers (i.e., CON_{PAP-T}) while ascribing responsibility whereas virtue libertarianism seems to only require *some* flickers, namely *weak* ones.

Therefore, the view that compatibilism may obtain at some time non-exhaustively while something like libertarian incompatibilism may obtain at other times non-exhaustively is a worthless endeavor. Stratton should simply concede that his strong incompatibilist position must

be consistently held within a framework of *exhaustive* libertarian incompatibilism. This means the original objection to which this section was dedicated appears to be refuted. Sourcehood may obtain at some time without the need for categorical APs, but then Stratton would be inconsistently upholding his own unique (and rather obscure) view of libertarianism.⁴⁰⁸

2.5.12 Moral Responsibility & Casual Responsibility: An Interlude

Our discussion in this section has primarily been focused upon FSCs, sourcehood, alternatives, and flickers of freedom. Other corollary topics that are usually discussed with FSCs are moral responsibility and its relation to causal responsibility. Is Jones morally responsible for X even though he did not have the ability to cause any other alternative than X? Does Jones actually cause X? Is efficient causation necessary for responsibility? Does causal responsibility entail moral responsibility? These are all great questions, and I hope to answer the general schema from which these questions tend to rise. We have already touched on moral responsibility and rational responsibility in the last section. But now, I wish to touch on moral responsibility and its relation to causal responsibility within the context of FSCs. I aim to show that efficient causation is *not* necessary in order to be morally (or rationally) responsible. In the following closing sections of this part on FSCs, I wish to argue that one does not need efficient causal sourcehood in order to be held responsible. The agent may still be a type or kind of source, or cause, within something like the FSC and *that* is all that is necessary for responsibility. Allow me to begin with some basic structure on the nature of moral responsibility, as well as its relationship between causal responsibility.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes the ascription of moral responsibility as the following:

The judgment that a person is morally responsible for her behavior involves—at least to a first approximation—attributing certain powers and capacities to that person, and viewing

⁴⁰⁸ Bignon has answered some of the concerns discussed in this subsection as well, though in a different manner. The objection that leeway may not obtain all the time is an objection Bignon interacts with in *Excusing Sinners*, 138-40. There, he formulates the incompatibilist thesis as PAP_{Past}, stating that “a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise all things being just the way they were either in that instance, or at some relevant point in his past.” The idea is much like virtue libertarianism (or Timpe’s source incompatibilist view) where an AP may be available to an agent at some earlier time *t*, but not necessarily available at some later time *t*+1, thereby “blaming today’s sin on yesterday’s sin.” The idea is also reminiscent of derivative versus non-derivative responsibility and correlates nicely with the overall project of virtue libertarianism. Bignon considers whether or not this slide will help the incompatibilists (specifically libertarians) avoid his Pelagian argument. Not surprisingly, the maneuver does not help and the Pelagian argument goes through full force: “Is the sinner morally responsible for his very first free will sin? If he lacked the ability to refrain from the first sin, he is not morally guilty on this view, and we are back to universalism. If on the other hand he continually has the ability to refrain from committing a first sin, then he can live a sinless life, and we are back to Pelagianism. Hence, despite its initial allure, the PAP_{Past} offers its advocates no way out of the above dilemma,” (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 139). The alert reader should recognize that Bignon’s PAP_{Past} is similar to Robb’s **PAP-historical**.

her behavior as arising (in the right way) from the fact that the person has, and has exercised, these powers and capacities. Whatever the correct account of the powers and capacities at issue (and canvassing different accounts is the task of this entry), their possession qualifies an agent as morally responsible in a general sense: that is, as one who may be morally responsible for particular exercises of agency.⁴⁰⁹

In order to ascribe moral responsibility to an agent, one must meet certain conditions. The two most well-known conditions are the epistemic condition⁴¹⁰ and the freedom-relevant control condition; the latter entails ability and capabilities, or a sense of “control”. These “powers and capacities” discussed here in the present work are none other than Stratton’s argued leeway condition: PAP-T. The compatibilist obviously disagrees that the freedom-relevant condition necessary for the agent to possess in order to be described as morally responsible is PAP-T. The compatibilist may posit PAP_{If} (or PAP-T_{If}), reasons-responsiveness, or in general, guidance control.⁴¹¹ Not only must the *right* freedom-relevant conditions be met on the part of the agent, but it also must arise within the agent *in the right way* in order for the agent to be held morally responsible. And so, one “may be morally responsible for particular exercises of agency” if these historical notions are kept fixed. But what kind of particular exercise are we thinking here? Can an agent be considered an agent *without* efficient causal access to a said action?

In addition to the basic nature of moral responsibility, there comes the relationship between moral and causal responsibility. In the same article, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states,

Moral responsibility should also be distinguished from causal responsibility. Causation is a complicated topic, but it is often fairly clear that a person is causally responsible for—that is, she is the (or a) salient cause of—some occurrence or outcome. However, the powers and capacities that are required for moral responsibility are not identical with an agent’s causal powers, so we cannot infer moral responsibility from an assignment of causal responsibility. Young children, for example, can cause outcomes while failing to fulfill the requirements for general moral responsibility, in which case it will not be appropriate to judge them morally responsible for, or to hold them morally responsible for, the outcomes for which they may be causally responsible. And even generally morally responsible agents may explain or defend their behavior in ways that call into

⁴⁰⁹ Talbert, Matthew, “Moral Responsibility”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-responsibility/>.

⁴¹⁰ If I do not know if something is morally right or morally wrong, arguably, I cannot be held morally responsible. For example, let’s say I went to pour coffee creamer into my wife’s coffee but after she drinks it, she dies of poisoning. Well, unbeknownst to me, the coffee creamer was replaced with liquid poison. Because I did not know this, I cannot be held responsible. For more information and discussion, see Talbert, Matthew, “Moral Responsibility”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-responsibility/#EpisCondResp>.

⁴¹¹ The relationship between these compatibilist freedom-relevant conditions will be made clear in §4.3.

question their moral responsibility for outcomes for which they are causally responsible. Suppose that S causes an explosion by flipping a switch: the fact that S had no reason to expect such a consequence from flipping the switch might call into question his moral responsibility (or at least his blameworthiness) for the explosion without altering his causal contribution to it.⁴¹²

To summarize one of the most basic distinctions between moral and causal responsibility, Carolina Sartorio says,

The concept of moral responsibility applies quite broadly; in particular, we hold agents morally responsible both for their own acts and for outcomes. Causal responsibility, on the other hand, applies most fundamentally, if not exclusively, to outcomes.⁴¹³

Causation is said to apply solely to consequences or outcomes whereas morality applies to agents in both “acts and for outcomes.” Another distinction between the two responsibilities is embedded in the fact that the “powers and capacities” required for moral responsibility are different for causal responsibility. Therefore, “we cannot infer moral responsibility from an assignment of causal responsibility.” That is, because of these distinctions, we cannot simply argue that causal responsibility entails moral responsibility. Let’s combine these two distinctions into one: call it the ‘outcome and power’ distinction (hereafter, OPD).

Finally, McKenna and Pereboom also agree that causal responsibility should not be merely equated with moral responsibility. They write,

Mere causal responsibility, which is not evaluatively loaded, is just a matter of being the cause of something—a matter of brute fact, so to speak. A lightning bolt can be causally responsible for something, like a house fire. And a person can be merely causally responsible—but not morally, legally, or otherwise responsible—for something too, as when a person innocently flips a light switch causing a short-circuit and then a house fire.⁴¹⁴

This is a clear counterexample to the claim that causal responsibility entails moral responsibility. And as we have seen, arguably, these responsibilities are to be distinct by virtue of OPD and obvious counterexamples. But, unfortunately, it is all too common for one to think that causal

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Carolina Sartorio, “Causation and Responsibility,” *Philosophy Compass* 2/5 (2007): 749. <https://sartorio.arizona.edu/files/cr.pdf>. In this article, Sartorio details four ways that the link between causal and moral responsibility could be understood. While Sartorio argues that causal responsibility does not entail moral responsibility (because of OPD), it could be true that causal responsibility *grounds* moral responsibility, or explains or depends upon moral responsibility. Though I do not have the time nor space to detail each of them here, even though I will utilize some bits of her insights here in this present subsection, I would encourage the reader to dive into contemporary philosophy on the metaphysics of causation and how it relates to moral responsibility.

⁴¹⁴ McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 12.

responsibility entails moral responsibility, especially in the *theological* arena surrounding free will. Often, it is exclaimed that if God causally determines Sally to believe a false belief X, then it is not Sally who is morally responsible for her false belief in X, but rather it is God. It is argued that God is the efficient causal source of the outcome, and if the agent is morally responsible, it is said that the agent is the efficient causal source of their actions. In other words, it is usually argued that sourcehood is essential to proper attributions to moral responsibility (and rational responsibility, according to Stratton). Without it, one cannot be held morally responsible.

At this time, I would like to briefly turn to a potential application to a much anticipated objection geared towards all Calvinists, not only (RO) Hard Calvinists. This objection involves the usage of causal responsibility and moral responsibility, and it goes something like this: “If God were to pass by, refrain, or omit His saving grace from the reprobate, then how is it not the case that He is held morally responsible for the suffering of the reprobate in hell?” In other words, why is God not morally culpable for failing to save or offer His saving grace to the reprobate?

John Sanders has formulated the objection this way:

God [under Calvinism] is not dependent on a human decision for the decree of who will or will not be saved. God has always known who would be saved and who would be damned... God is thus the sole cause of salvation and damnation. God is, in fact, the sole cause of everything (he is omnicausal)... If God does not cause all events, then he has ceased to be God. God has simply decreed all that happens, just as a novelist does.⁴¹⁵

It is true that the Calvinist view God is said to be utterly independent of human decision and will. It is equally true that, given Calvinism, “God has simply decreed all that happens, just as a novelist does.” This is referring to the Authorial Model of Providence articulated and defended by James N. Anderson in §2.2.3. In that section, we have discovered that although the usage of causation is not necessarily harmful when utilized by Calvinists to describe an industrious method of providence, it is also not necessary either. But, according to Sanders, God should be considered as the “sole cause of everything” if Calvinism is true. So, the obvious question is, what does it mean for God to be the “sole” cause? Does this include sin? Another proponent of non-Calvinism who argues something remarkably similar to Sanders comes from the pen of Richard Rice. He writes,

On the logical level, God’s omnicausality involves omniresponsibility. If everything happens just the way God plans it, then God is responsible for everything. This excludes creaturely freedom, and it seems to make God responsible for all the evil in the world.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ John Sanders, “God as Personal,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 171.

⁴¹⁶ Richard Rice, “Divine Foreknowledge and Free-Will Theism,” in *Ibid.*, 132.

We see the same sort of claim driven against Calvinism: causation entails (or “involves”) responsibility, specifically in the blameworthy sense. Granted, this entailment is only explicitly stated with Rice, though, I would argue, it is heavily implied with Sanders (especially given the disposition of the rest of his essay). But the question remains, does God's all-encompassing causation entail His all-encompassing responsibility? If God causes X to occur, does this mean that God is morally culpable for the occurrence of X?

Clearly, the question is serious and it deserves a serious response if not a credible answer from the Calvinist. To answer this question, we should rephrase the objection in its strongest form:

48. The sufficient reason as to why the reprobate are in hell is because God unconditionally omitted extending saving grace to them.
(Calvinist premise)
49. If God unconditionally omits His extension of saving grace to the reprobate, then the reprobate will not receive saving grace.
(premise)
50. If the reprobate does not receive saving grace, then the reprobate will suffer in hell.
(premise, from (49))
51. Therefore, if God unconditionally omits His extension of saving grace to the reprobate, then the reprobate will suffer in hell.
(from (50), (51), hypothetical syllogism)
52. Omission is a type of cause.
(assumption)
53. If God unconditionally omits His extension of saving grace to the reprobate, then God causes the reprobate to suffer in hell.
(new premise)
54. If God causes the reprobate to suffer in hell, then God is morally responsible for the suffering of the reprobate in a morally culpable sense.
(new premise, from (53))
55. Therefore, if God unconditionally omits His extension of saving grace to the reprobate, then God is morally responsible for the suffering of the reprobate in a morally culpable sense.
(from (53), (54), hypothetical syllogism)
56. But, God is perfectly good and cannot be held morally culpable or blameworthy for any cause.
(premise)
57. Therefore, God does not unconditionally omit His extension of saving grace to the reprobate.
(from (55), (56), Modus Tollens)

Symbolically, the argument could be formulated as the following. Let O = God's unconditional omission of saving grace, G = God's divine saving grace, S = Reprobate suffering in hell, C = Causation, and MR_{Blame} = God's moral culpability or blameworthiness.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 48. O | (Calvinist premise) |
| 49. $O \Rightarrow \neg G$ | (premise) |
| 50. $\neg G \Rightarrow S$ | (premise, from (49)) |
| 51. $\therefore O \Rightarrow S$ | (from (50), (51), hypothetical syllogism) |
| 52. $O \Leftrightarrow C$ | (assumption) |
| 53. $(O \wedge C) \Rightarrow S$ | (new premise) |
| 54. $S \Rightarrow MR_{\text{Blame}}$ | (new premise, from (53)) |
| 55. $\therefore (O \wedge C) \Rightarrow MR_{\text{Blame}}$ | (from (53), (54), hypothetical syllogism) |
| 56. $\neg MR_{\text{Blame}}$ | (premise) |
| 57. $\therefore \neg(O \wedge C)$ | (from (55), (56), Modus Tollens) |

The argument is valid, but is it sound? Should the Calvinist compatibilist accept the reduction of conclusion (57)? Obviously the Calvinist will accept (48), (49), (50), and thus conclusion (51) on the count that these premises directly teach consistent Calvinism found in the writings of John Calvin,⁴¹⁷ the WCF,⁴¹⁸ and other reformed scholars.⁴¹⁹ This now leaves us with the assumption of (52), and if this assumption is warranted, then God's unconditional omission of saving the reprobate entails that the reprobate suffer in hell and that He would be morally culpable for it. If true, it is hard to square a good omnibenevolent God with (54), hence premise (56). If true, then presumably the argument goes through yielding a not so pleasant conclusion (57) (at least for the Calvinist): if God is all good and perfectly righteous, then He does not unconditionally omit His saving grace from the reprobate (moreover, one could then argue that something like conditional election based upon the believer's contingent faith is true, rather than based upon God's eternal decree).⁴²⁰ How is the Calvinist compatibilist to respond?

⁴¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2008), (3.23.8) 630, (3.4.32) 429, (3.2.11) 362, (2.04.05) 193, (3.24.1) 638, (3.24.13) 647, (3.23.14) 634, (3.22.11) 632, (3.23.1) 625, (3.23.13) 633.

⁴¹⁸ WCF 3, 33.2

⁴¹⁹ See John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 330-34, 436-37, 766; for a more broaden scope of the doctrine of reprobation, God's general divine determinative decree, and its many implications, critiques, and perhaps its best summarized Calvinist responses, see John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 297-98, 502-03, chapter 13; on God's decretive and prescriptive will (to be discussed in greater detail in §5.5) and how it relates to compatibilism as well as the reprobate, see Scott Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, 102-06, 203-04; Sproul, "Double' Predestination," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/double-predestination/>; for a thoroughly detailed list on additional reformed Calvinist resources on the doctrine of reprobation, as well as a basic summary of reformed reprobation, see Richard Blaylock, "The Doctrine of Reprobation," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/doctrine-of-reprobation/>; lastly, for a list of Calvinist quotes on reprobation (albeit from a non-Calvinist source), see <https://redeeminggod.com/calvinist-quotes-reprobation/>.

⁴²⁰ Others have argued and reached a similar if not identical conclusion. See Baggett and Walls, *Good God: The Theistic Foundations of Morality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 4; Walls,

There are a number of ways. First, why should we accept (52)? Why must it be the case that omission is a type of cause? In fact, the claim that omission is a type of cause is problematic in philosophical literature. Consider one view from Phil Dowe who claims “that omissions are not actual, genuine causes.”⁴²¹ Dowe articulates in what he finds to be the basic “genuinist” intuition that omissions are indeed causes:

You say that the father’s inattention was the cause of the child’s accident. Surely you don’t mean that he literally made the child run into the path of the car, or that he made the car hit the child. Rather, you mean that his failure to guard the child was the cause in the sense that if he had guarded the child, the accident would not have happened. You don’t mean that he literally caused the accident; you mean that it was possible for him to have prevented it.⁴²²

This “genuinist” intuition strives to point out that the father is morally culpable for the child’s death *because* of his omission or failure of attending properly to guard the child. In that sense, we tend to think that the father ought to be held morally blameworthy for the child’s death. Moreover, we want to say that *because* the father was *supposed* to properly guard the child through his attendance, he is thus morally culpable for the outcome; an outcome that would not have resulted if his omission of attendance was not actual. So “why [does] the genuinist intuition [seem] so plausible”? (Ibid., 62). Dowe’s account of omission claims that “every seeming case of causation by omission should be understood ‘primarily’ as a counterfactual claim about genuine causation” or rather as the “mere possibility of causation,” (Ibid., 62). Timpe is useful in articulating his view further:

In other words, while omissions aren’t genuine causes, they are intimately related to cases of genuine causation in that they involve the possibility of genuine causation. So omissions aren’t causes, they are only “quasi-causes” [or (QV), for short] and apparent cases of causation involving omissions are really cases of [(QV)]. Here is Dowe’s analysis of “causation by omission,” where *A* and *B* name positive events and *x* is a variable ranging over events:

not-*A* quasi-causes *B* if *B* occurred and *A* did not, and there occurred an *x* such that

“One Hell of a Problem for Christian Compatibilists,” in *Free Will & Theism*; for a list of defenders to this kind of argument, see Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 167-68; Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 51-53; and of course, Stratton himself, *Mere Molinism*, 194, 243-44, 258-60. I will discuss Stratton’s basic Omni Argument and Divine Desire Argument in §5.4.

⁴²¹ Timpe, quoted in *Philosophical Theology*, 61.

⁴²² Ibid.

(O1) x caused B , and

(O2) if A had occurred then A would have prevented B by interacting with x .⁴²³

What this formulation does is allow for the application of “omissions to causally explain events without the metaphysical commitment to genuine causation by omission,” (Ibid.). In fact, other philosophers have attempted to jump on this train:

Helen Beebe: “to cite an omission in an explanation is to say something—albeit something negative—about the causal history of the event to be explained.”⁴²⁴

Sarah McGrath: “The gardener’s failure caused the plant’s death because he was *supposed to* water the plant, thus preventing its death. More precisely, had the gardener watered the plant, his watering it would have prevented the plant’s death, and in a *normal* way.”⁴²⁵

Judith Thomson: “Judith Thomson has suggested the following principle as an alternative way of grounding the gardener’s causal responsibility:

(P) If x is at fault for y , then x causes y .

For Thomson, fault is a normative notion but it is not an essentially moral notion.”⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Sartorio, “Causation and Responsibility,” 755.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. It is noteworthy to mention that while these philosophers agree (in some loose sense) that causality is dependent upon normativity because normativity *explains* causality, Sartorio herself does not find these accounts convincing. She calls this view above as the “Entailment-Reverse-Dependence” view, and in response writes:

Thomson and McGrath fail to explain why I am causally responsible for the outcome in this case. In order for Entailment-Reverse-Dependence to get off the ground, then, we should probably look for a more encompassing normative property to do the job.

Now, is the basic idea behind Entailment-Reverse-Dependence plausible? As Thomson herself acknowledges, it seems to ‘get things backwards’, in the sense that, assuming it is true that moral responsibility entails causation, it is not because causation rests on moral responsibility but because, on the contrary, moral responsibility rests on causation... In other words, Entailment-Reverse-Dependence seems to reverse the order of explanation. Granted, we are sometimes led to make causal judgments by our moral judgments, as when the causal contribution of an agent is made very salient to us by virtue of the fact that we want to commend what he did, or censure it. However, this doesn’t make the causal *facts* dependent on the moral *facts*. Indeed, the natural view is clearly the opposite: the moral facts are dependent on the causal facts.

I am neutral as to whether or not Thomson and McGrath’s views do indeed fail as suggested. Sartorio’s chosen flavor of causal relation to responsibility is the view she calls “Transmission-Dependence.” This view takes from the resources taught by Fischer and Ravizza in their great work on guidance control, *Responsibility & Control*. While it is past the scope of this reply to do a full length exposition on “Transmission-Dependence,” it is certainly worthwhile. In fact, while I cannot defend my assertive conviction here, I am confident that this view could be profoundly incorporated into Reformed theology. Perhaps I will leave this as homework to any noble reader eager to expand on this interesting topic in metaphysics.

These three philosophers, along with Dowe, all seem to argue that omissions, though they are not necessarily considered genuine causes by *definition*, do provide a powerful *application* to causation, namely that omissions provide a causal explanation of events. The “genuinist” intuition is only plausible because of the counterfactual nature of residually found in the innate crevices of omissions. Timpe writes that “it is very plausible that it is casual explanation, and not causation itself, that often motivates the genuinist intuition... omissions can be causal explanations,” (Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 62). That is, omissions, or the failure to do something, causally explain the outcome, but they do not necessarily by itself causally produce the outcome. To put it in another way, these philosophers seem to concede that the counterfactual claim of omissions is *necessary* for genuine moral responsibility, but it is not *sufficient*. If correct, then the so-called “genuinist” intuition may be misguided. Omissions are not simply “a type of cause” as (58) assumes, but rather omissions are a type of *causal explanation*, or counterfactual hypothetical.

In addition, the philosophers quoted above find themselves in another area of potential agreement: *normativity*. Not only should we see omissions primarily as causal explanations, rather than genuine causes, but we should also view omissions as *normative descriptors*. We see this idea of normativity appear in Thomson’s principle (P) as well as McGrath’s principle of prevention: “had the gardener watered the plant, his watering it would have prevented the plant’s death, and in a *normal way*,”; that is, the gardener is *supposed to* water the plant, and because he did not water the plan properly, he *should* be held responsible for the subsequent death of the plant. If the gardener did water the plant, the plant would not have died, but since he did not water the plant, the plant did in fact die. For Thomson, (P) is true because if the gardener (x) is at fault for the plant’s death (y), then the gardener caused the death of the plant (y). We see here that the *consequent*, not the antecedent, is where causation is placed. Causation is considered *after* the normative claim of moral attribution has been presented and established. In other words, the omission of the gardener in watering the plant *explains* the normativity of the gardener. But does the failure of the gardener’s part to water the plant, or the failure of the father to be attentive to his child, actually cause (by itself) the outcome of the dying plant or horrific death of the child? No, not obviously so, and that is the point.

Thomson’s principle (P) suggests that fault is also a normative notion, but it is *not* an essentially moral notion. The gardener causes the plant’s death, but the *fault* lies with the alarm or reminder that fails to alarm or remind the gardener to water the plant. Now, obviously God does not fail to be reminded, but that doesn’t automatically mean that the fault lies with him. According to Thomson, the fault lies within something being *defective* (such as my suggested theory of transworld deprivation, or (TWD*)). Defection is a “normal-would-be-preventor” of the outcome. In other words, the gardener’s failure to water the plant caused the death of the plant because he was *supposed to* water the plant, and so prevent its death. But then, if this is correct, it is hard to apply such a principle to God as He doesn’t *need* to save everyone from their defect

of (TWD*); indeed He *cannot* if (TWD*) is true. He isn't obligated to save everyone, and if one is not obligated to prevent an outcome, then it is hard to see how one is morally responsible for the same said outcome.

What's the application, then, of Thomson's (P)? God's saving the reprobate is *not* a "normal-would-be-preventer" for the sinner's suffering in hell. As Sartorio explains while detailing Thomson and McGrath's proposal,

... we don't ground the gardener's moral responsibility for the plant's death in his causal responsibility for it. On the contrary: we ground his causal responsibility in his moral responsibility. More precisely, we ground his causal responsibility in his instantiating a certain *normative* property with respect to the outcome of the plant's death (the property of being at fault for it, or of being such that acting otherwise would have resulted in the normal prevention of the outcome), and we claim that being morally responsible is one of the ways in which something can instantiate such a normative property.⁴²⁷

Given this view, and the analysis by Dowe, this may be applied in relation to our syllogism above involving God and His omission to save the reprobate. Let *A* be God's divine saving grace, *B*, be the reprobate being passed over and their subsequent outcome of hell, and *x* being the lack of faith upon the reprobate. We now are in a position to formulate the following in alignment with Dowe's analysis. Recall his analysis of "causation by omission":

not-*A* quasi-causes *B* if *B* occurred and *A* did not, and there occurred an *x* such that

(O1) *x* caused *B*, and

(O2) if *A* had occurred then *A* would have prevented *B* by interacting with *x*.

God not applying or gifting saving grace quasi-causes via omission that the reprobate progress to hell, and if the reprobate's procession to hell occurs and God's saving grace did not, then there occurred a lack of faith on the part of the reprobate such that: (O1) the lack of faith caused their procession to hell, and (O2) if God's saving grace had occurred then that same saving grace would have prevented the reprobate's unfortunate peril specifically by interacting with the reprobate's lack of faith. What this analysis shows is God's passive, negative, or deficient decree on the part of sin in our world which was discussed earlier in this reply in our section detailing compatibilist agency and the displacement of determinism. God is said to have deficiently caused (or rather quasi-caused) the reprobation of individuals under Calvinism, but He is *not* said to have efficiently determined or caused their reprobation. Yet, because God is said to be nonetheless decisive in this quasi-cause, it is considered a positive or active event. As we have seen previously (see earlier footnotes on Stump and Timpe's account of quiescence and divine

⁴²⁷ Sartorio, "Causation and Responsibility," 755.

grace as well as §3.4), an active event is considered a righteous action or a sinful action. This now brings us full circle to omissions not simply being a causal explanation, but a *normative descriptor*, in the way Thomson and McGrath may suggest.

The reason why premise (54) is considered intuitive is probably because it is attached implicitly to the “genuinist” intuition discussed earlier, and this type of intuition is none other than the intuition argued by Rice and Sanders above: God’s causal responsibility (even if by omission) entails His moral responsibility, namely, His moral culpability. But as we have seen, this intuition is misguided because an omission is not a cause in and of itself, rather it is a *quasi-cause* through God’s deficient decree. Now, one could argue that a “quasi-cause” is still a *type* of cause, and that is all premise (52) attempted to convey. If that is the case, then I concede,⁴²⁸ however, what, then, are we to make of (54)? Does that premise go through? No, primarily because, like Welty suggested above, intentions are not closed under known entailments. Just because we have a known entailment (53), and the Calvinist compatibilist concedes, along with the concession that omissions being a quasi-cause could technically be considered as a “type” of cause, does not mean that (54) is somehow vindicated or awarded to being sound. The implication from Rice, Sanders, and possibly even Stratton, is that since God is good and because He is love, He is *supposed* to grant saving faith to all people (i.e., universalism would then be true), or, at the very least, He is *supposed* to provide opportunity for all people to come to him (i.e., prevenient grace, not irresistible grace, contrary to Calvinism).⁴²⁹ God being maximally great, loving, and good, *ought* to do His level best in preventing His own creation from a terrible fate in hell; that is the objection. To put it more candidly, it is God’s job to ensure that all people are either saved or that all people have adequate or sufficient provision in order to be saved. If Calvinism is true, God apparently would fail at being God.

Premise (54), as intuitive as it may be, does not work to justify the conclusion (57) namely because *we don’t know* God’s intentions.⁴³⁰ God may be the quasi-causal factor in explaining why

⁴²⁸ Though, I would still be skeptical of this route. What does it mean for a deficiency to be a genuine cause? It seems to me that it would be akin to asking someone to see darkness or hear silence. Such a proposal is silly and absurd, and that is exactly how I see the claim that a deficiency is still a *type* of cause.

⁴²⁹ Stratton puts it like this: “Would not the majority of people, including this writer, have enough love in their hearts honestly to say that they sincerely desire all people to go to heaven? If this would be how imperfect persons feel about humanity, it seems intuitive that God—a perfect, morally good, and all-loving being—would at least desire the same thing,” (*Mere Molinism*, 201).

⁴³⁰ James N. Anderson puts it differently, while reinforcing earlier points argued and defended in this section. The initial objection we are considering states that if God omits saving the reprobate, and if that primary omission is in fact considered a “cause”, then that causation *transfers* culpability to Himself. This would be true of the first sin (which Anderson is answering) or any other sin, such as the rejection of God Himself (which I am attempting to answer). Anderson responds to this objection:

The idea here is that any sinful action is an evil, thus if God causes (either directly or indirectly [via omission] one of his creatures to sin then God must be culpable for evil. But this rests on another dubious inference. If S causes some evil E it may well follow that S is *responsible* for E (at least in part) but it doesn’t necessarily follow that S is *culpable* for E.... culpability depends not only on whether there is certain kind of causal connection between S and E, but also on S’s

the reprobate do indeed proceed to hell, but that is not up for debate; the Calvinist readily acknowledges this because God would be the sufficient reason for the reprobate's suffering. However, God is *not* the efficient reason for the reprobate's suffering; He is merely the deficient reason. The objector wants to say that God is normatively obligated to save all, or to save some via provision to all, otherwise, He is not a good God. God's normativity should explain His causality. The problem with this dilemma is that none of the horns follow because God's intentions are either assumed or equivocated upon. The Calvinist does not say that God does not desire all to be saved (left unqualified), rather they say that God prescriptively desires all to be saved, yet decretively desires some to be saved.⁴³¹ As skeptical theism pushes, God has His morally sufficient reasons, and it is rather arrogant to argue that God *must* be obligated to save those who are sinners and who have violated His law (albeit compatibilistically violated), and thus must receive a provision from God, otherwise God is not doing His job as God. This line of rhetoric is hard for me to understand.

Therefore, we can conclude that not only does causal responsibility not entail moral responsibility primarily because of the presence of OPD, as well as obvious counterexamples, omissions are not as easily defined as a straight genuine cause either. And even if it were granted that omissions are a type of cause (i.e., quasi-cause, or deficient cause), it still does not follow that God is held blameworthy for omitting His saving grace from the reprobate. The counterfactual claim of omissions on the part of God's supposed failure in extending salvific grace upon the reprobate is indeed a *necessary* condition for God's questioned moral culpability, but it is difficult to see how the mere counterfactual event of omitting grace to some is *sufficient* for His moral culpability. God's omission to save the reprobate certainly *explains* their suffering, as He would be the sufficient cause, but at the same time, His omission is not an efficient cause in itself, and so His negative act may very well be vindicated. Further, efficiency is not to be equated with sufficiency as we will see more in the closing sections. The reprobate are sinners deserving of damnation, and God is obligated to grant justice (and not in violation of His perfect love). Yet, out of His sheer grace coupled with His abundant mercy, while we were yet sinners, He saves some, and that is the beauty of the doctrines of grace. In addition, we do not know His intentions in saving some but not all, nor should we presume to know why He saves some when He could have possibly saved more. God has His morally sufficient reasons. Premise (54), then, does not follow even if (52) is granted, and so the argument fails to establish that God would be

intentions in bringing about E and whether S has morally justifying grounds for bringing about E. In fact, not only is causation not *sufficient* for culpability, it isn't strictly *necessary* either—a point too often neglected by those who assume that attenuating or denying the causal connection between God and the evil actions of his creatures will get God “off the hook” for evil. (Anderson, “Calvinism and the First Sin,” 212).

The point made in this quote mirrors the point made earlier: the omission (or consequence) explains the potential normativity or responsibility of the sufficient determiner, but it *does not* obviously explain culpability precisely because causation is *not*, and should *not* be, seriously considered as sufficient for moral blameworthiness.

⁴³¹ More on God's two wills (decretive and prescriptive) will be discussed in §5.5.

morally culpable for omitting His saving grace to the reprobate.⁴³² After all, even Garrigou-Lagrange, “a conservative Thomist friendly to [theological determinism]” argues that these kinds of premises do not follow as support for a legitimate argument:

[The objection runs:] If, in fact, the bestowal of efficacious grace is the cause of one's not resisting [sufficient grace], which is a good, then its non-bestowal is the cause of one's resisting, which is an evil. [In reply:] the Thomists say... the fact that grace is not bestowed is not the cause of the omission of the salutary act. The omission is a defect that proceeds solely from our defectibility and by no means from God. *It would proceed from Him only if He were bound, if He owed it to Himself, to keep us always in the performance of good* [which he does not] ... Thus... it is not true to say that man resists or sins because he is deprived of efficacious grace. He resists by reason of his own defectibility, *which God is not bound to remedy*.⁴³³

So much for causal responsibility and moral responsibility. We will now end this discussion by previewing types of causation and sources in FSCs. Recall that in previous sections, we have said that basic formulations of FSCs like (P) allow for the truth of PAP-T, while demonstrating the falsity of PAP for actions. I then introduced a more advanced FSC: Stump's (G). In (G), it

⁴³² Bignon argues something similar when piecing out the differences between causal and moral responsibility while considering God's involvement with sin:

... if causal responsibility in this world does not necessarily entail moral responsibility, how much more in the case of God who is the prime candidate for such an exclusion from the norm, are we owed an argument for why his being causally responsible for sin (which Calvinists are quite open to concede) should entail his being morally responsible (guilty) for it?

I here note also that this issue is one of *guilt* more than one of *responsibility* proper. Calvinists maintain that God's moral *guilt* doesn't follow from his causal responsibility for evil, but if these evils have morally sufficient reasons for why their occurrence would be overall preferable (which is exactly the claim being made here), then it could well be that God is even *praiseworthy* for bringing about these preferable states of affairs that include evil. So in that sense, God *would* be morally responsible, just not morally *guilty*. In any case, the more modest claim made by Calvinists is that God's moral guilt just doesn't follow from his providentially determining the occurrence of sin and evil... Now, if they are wrong about this, further argumentation to show this is welcome, but the equivocal claim that a deterministic causal relation entails “responsibility” left unqualified will not suffice to dissipate this ambiguity of this still foggy recipe. (*Excusing Sinners*, 189-190)

I think this is exactly right. Even if we Calvinists concede that omissions are indeed causes, a quasi-cause or deficient cause, this does not entail the fact that God does not have morally sufficient reasons to bring about a more profitable (or preferable) state of affairs which in turn negates His overall *praiseworthiness*. In other words, even if Calvinists agree that God is in fact causally responsible and that entails his moral responsibility, it *doesn't* follow that God is therefore held morally *blameworthy* for the state of affairs, and thus premise (55) in the argument above is completely without defense at worst, or dubious at best. We need an independent argument for why that must be the case given the fact that God is indeed a peculiar agent that breaks the basic “norm” for causality and morality.

⁴³³ Quoted in Heath White, *Fate and Free Will*, 302. In fact, this quote from Lagrange is telling, seeing as it is indeed compatible with transworld deprivation. We do not primarily resist because God omitted to bestow sufficient grace to the reprobate, but rather we resist because we are inclined to resist, and that inclination is “by reason of [our] own defectibility...” Thus, God's “omission” to save the reprobate is merely a “defect that proceeds solely from our defectibility and by no means from God.”

was argued, with the aid of Timpe, that while Jones does not have CON_{PAP-T} , nor CON_{PAP} , available, Jones *does* have CTR_{PAP-T} . All Jones has in (G) is the weak flicker: the ability to deliberate about *how* he will *will* to vote Republican. Jones in (G) does not possess the ability to categorically do will other than Republican (i.e., not will to vote for Republican, or CON), nor does he have the ability to think to will other than voting for Republican. Jones can only will to vote Republican, but *how* he wills to vote Republican, however, is considered “up to him”; he possesses a flicker-mode. In this way, Timpe identified that in that weak flicker, Jones is said to be the efficient causal source of his willing to vote Republican. The reason why he is said to be the source is because he has APs (albeit non-robust weak ones) available to him. By the sheer virtue of possessing these weak APs, Jones is said to be the source. In other words, the source condition *depends* upon the AP condition as the AP condition *explains* why the source condition is presently justified via intuition in FSCs. Willing to vote Republican was “up to” Jones in the efficient sense *because* of the present weak APs. This then introduced a series of questions: does Jones *cause* his own willing to vote Republican? If yes, then should Jones be considered the actual efficient causal source in bringing about the neural sequence R upon completion?

I think it is safe to say that in the actual sequence of events, Jones does in fact cause his own willing to vote Republican. Black, the counterfactual intervener, does not actually intervene in the actual sequence, rather only in the alternative sequence. Because of this, it is not right to suggest that it is Black, not Jones, that causes the neural sequence R to fire. Jones’ willing to vote Republican is “up to him” in a real sense, and this is seen because Jones is the actual cause of the willing. But, can we infer from this answer that Jones is then the *efficient* causal source in bringing about R? I would say so, yes. Recall Timpe’s analysis. He argued that if one is the efficient causal source of an action (i.e., being the originator or ultimate cause), then this is plausible because the agent has categorical APs available, regardless of their robustness status. So, efficient *causal* sourcehood entails PAP_{All} . In (G), then, Jones still has $PAP-T_{All}$, though they are crippled, and these APs metaphysically *explain* the reason why it is intuitive that he is the source. If we take Stump’s proposition that (G) does actually count as an actual situation in which Jones is held morally responsible yet could not do otherwise, then the intuition runs in the following way: Jones’ *normativity* in (G) explains his *causality*. This relates the discussion back to Thomson and McGrath’s view of causality and responsibility and how they are appropriately linked. It seems that given Jones’ apparent normal responsibility in (G), regardless of the minute APs at his disposal, this allows us to see why Jones is a cause and why willing Republican is truly “up to” Jones (and not someone like Black). Black *may* be causally responsible for Jones willing Republican, but his casual responsibility is only a *quasi-cause* via omission, and not a genuine cause. It is Jones who causes his own will to vote Republican, and therefore it is Jones who is morally responsible.

But the question could arise at this point in objecting that this is only true *if* (G) successfully demonstrates a situation in which Jones is responsible. If he is not responsible, then Jones cannot

be said to be the cause. But, this objection, I reply, is false. Even if Jones is not responsible, it does not follow that Jones is not *a* cause; all that follows is that Jones is not the *efficient* cause. So, Jones' normativity in (G) explains his causality *only* given the assumption that (G) demonstrates Jones is in fact responsible. But, even if Jones is not found responsible, Jones is still a cause, and because he is still *a* cause, we can say he is still *a* source, albeit not the efficient causal source. Now, I do say that Jones *could be* more than sufficiently responsible in (G), but not because he possesses PAP_{All} or efficient sourcehood (as the incompatibilists are so quick to claim). Rather, it is *possible* that Jones is responsible because his *agency* or *subjectivity* is still intact; Black is not overriding his cognitive faculties in the actual sequence. His first-person perspective is still present, aware, and active in the actual sequence. While Jones' normativity, or responsibility, explains his causality, and thus his apparent efficient sourcehood, his *subjectivity* explains his responsibility. Jones can be a cause, and a source by extension, to his actions, *not* because he has PAP_{All}, but because he *owns* his subjective mechanism (i.e., his neural sequence leading to R).⁴³⁴ This ownership in the actual sequence suggests that his agential properties are still intact. Now, the trick before us is to answer whether or not there is a way for Jones to be *a* source, or *a* cause, to his actions while not sacrificing his agency, and thus his responsibility, while, at the same time, not being able to (categorically) do otherwise. Before answering this intriguing puzzle, we must first answer the sub-question as to what type of cause we are to consider Jones. If Jones is not the efficient cause, then what sense is there to say that Jones is a cause at all? To this question, and hopefully a promising solution, we now turn.

2.5.13 Efficient vs Formal Sourcehood: Aristotelian Causation

To begin, remember that Timpe's discussion on sourcehood and APs help us identify a crucial entailment: efficient causal sourcehood entails PAP_{All}. Of course, if we negate PAP_{All}, we negate sourcehood via modus tollens, but not sourcehood *simpliciter*; we only negate *efficient* sourcehood. In this section, I argue that there is a source condition that remains the sufficient condition for the sense of ability, or rather the control condition necessary for responsibility. Furthermore, I wish to argue that there is a causal condition that remains a sufficient condition for the source condition. Later, I will show that, given some FSCs, the efficient sourcehood is not necessary for sourcehood *simpliciter*, and in addition to this I will also show that being the efficient *cause* is equally not necessary. We can tee off with this basic incompatibilist syllogism:

- 58. Cause_{Efficient} \Rightarrow Source_{Efficient} (*Aristotelian causation*)
- 59. Source_{Efficient} \Rightarrow PAP_{All} (*argued above*)
- 60. \therefore Cause_{Efficient} \Rightarrow PAP_{All} (*from (58), (59), hypothetical syllogism*)

The syllogism starts with a basic appeal to Aristotelian causation (58), tagged with Timpe's conclusion and argument (59), and ending with our hypothetical conclusion (60): efficient causal

⁴³⁴ More about mechanism ownership will be discussed in §4.3.

access entails the categorical ability to do otherwise than what one does. This conclusion seems intuitive, hardly controversial, and natural. Of course, it is argued (especially by incompatibilists) that if we have efficient causal access to alternatives this entails that something like PAP_{All} is true. For the incompatibilist (e.g., the devoted libertarian), what would it mean to have causal access but not categorical causal access? To assert one without the other would be incoherent. And, I argue, how we receive this conclusion is through the process of linking premise (58) and (59) together. Premise (59) has been adequately defended above from none other than the chief source incompatibilist Kevin Timpe, and arguably by the event-causal libertarian Robert Kane. Both of them, I contend, would argue (and have argued) for conclusion (60). Categorical access *explains* the source condition, that is, if one is the source, we *know* they are the source and are justified in claiming that they are the source by virtue of the fact that they have, or have had, or will have before them the presence and availability of APs. So much for the defense of (59). As for the justification of premise (58), we must look closely at Aristotle's use of the four causes.

Andrea Falcon discusses Aristotle's four causes in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. She writes:

In *Physics* II 3 and *Metaphysics* V 2, Aristotle offers his general account of the four causes. This account is general in the sense that it applies to everything that requires an explanation, including artistic production and human action. Here Aristotle recognizes four kinds of things that can be given in answer to a why-question:

- The material cause: "that out of which", e.g., the bronze of a statue.
- The formal cause: "the form", "the account of what-it-is-to-be", e.g., the shape of a statue.
- The efficient cause: "the primary source of the change or rest", e.g., the artisan, the art of bronze-casting the statue, the man who gives advice, the father of the child.
- The final cause: "the end, that for the sake of which a thing is done", e.g., health is the end of walking, losing weight, purging, drugs, and surgical tools.⁴³⁵

Aristotle delivers his account of four causes as a holistic explanation for things. For my purposes, however, I will focus on the material, formal, and efficient cause, and in that order. To be the material cause is to explain the "that out of which" question, while to be the formal cause is to explain the "what-it-is-to-be" question. Applied to Calvinism, "the reformed make a distinction within the sinful act between the substance of the act and the badness of the act," (Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 101). This distinction is seen as a distinction between the material cause and the formal cause. The former is considered as an explanation to the "substance of the

⁴³⁵ Falcon, Andrea, "Aristotle on Causality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-causality/#FouCau>.

act” while the latter is considered as an explanation to the “badness of the act.” As Preciado notes,

Bavinck puts this in terms of material/formal distinction:

This applies even more intensely to the sinful deed. Materially, certainly, this must be attributed to God, but formally it remains the responsibility to human beings. When a murderer kills somebody, all the planning ability and the power he needs for that purpose comes from God, but the act, from the formal point of view, is his, not God’s. Indeed, the fact of homicide taken by itself is not yet a sin, for the same thing frequently occurs in war and on the scaffold. What makes homicide a sin is not the matter, the substrate, but the form, that is the depravity, the lawlessness (anomia) of the deed; not the substance of the accident in the act.

The point of this material/formal distinction is to distinguish the essence of the sinful act from the good material or substance of the action.⁴³⁶

I find this compelling for several reasons. What makes the act of murder sinful is *not* simply the taking of another life, but rather the taking of an *innocent* life. There is a distinction between the act of killing and the act of murdering, as demonstrated in war. And as Bavinck expressed, we can find similar distinctions in the act of murdering itself. God being the sufficient cause (following after Anderson’s definition of determinism (DD) as detailed in previous sections), God is the material cause of a murder. God is the One who has given the “planning ability” and “power” available to the agent that commits the murder. But is God the one who commits the murder? No, it is the agent. The act of killing is simply a matter of act or substance of act, but *murder* is an intentional act. Thus, being a material cause entails “substance of action” while being a formal cause entails “intention of action”, or its essence; that is the difference. While God’s actions are never not intended or active, He intends for *good* and not evil (Genesis 50:20). In the case of humanity, however, we intend for *evil*. God can be seen as the sufficient and material cause of Joseph’s enslavement, and yes even the deficient cause of all the wickedness dished to Joseph unjustly in the decade of his trial. Clearly, without God’s intervention, the nation Israel would die from the famine in the land; therefore, God is the sufficient cause of Joseph’s unfortunate life *in order to bring about* the survival of the nation of Israel. In addition, God *materially* provided the means for Joseph’s enslavement (either through action or omission), while the human agents involved in the abuse of Joseph throughout those years *formally* intended

⁴³⁶ Preciado, *A Reformed View*, 101-102. Preciado continues to develop a reformed account of material/formal causation by quoting Voetius, Turretin, and Vermigli, all of which argue the essentials of what I am arguing here.

Joseph's demise for evil.⁴³⁷ These distinctions tie extremely close to our last section on causation and responsibility as well.⁴³⁸

As for the efficient cause from Aristotle, we have already seen in previous sections that it is this sense of cause or source that incompatibilists are most interested in defending and articulating in their arguments. In §2.2.5, we discussed that incompatibilists (such as Stratton) claim that what is truly necessary for ultimate responsibility is to be the originator or primary source of your actions. This is the efficient cause. So, in order to be responsible, one must be the “primary [causal] source of the change or rest” to their actions. If an agent is not the efficient causal source of an action, as the argument tends to go, how can that agent be responsible for that same action? In other words, what is necessary for responsibility *is* to be an efficient causal source, for that is truly the *essence* of responsibility; that is how one cultivates “ultimate responsibility.” But, given the above conclusion (60) and its leading premises (58) and (59), that is not the entire incompatibilist argument. The entire argument would look something of the following:

- 61. $MR \Rightarrow (\text{Cause}_{\text{Efficient}} \Rightarrow \text{Source}_{\text{Efficient}})$ (*Aristotelian causation, incompatibilist premise*)
- 59. $\text{Source}_{\text{Efficient}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{All}}$ (*argued above*)
- 60. $\therefore \text{Cause}_{\text{Efficient}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{All}}$ (*from (61), (59), hypothetical syllogism*)
- 22. $\therefore MR \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{All}}$ (*from (60), hypothetical syllogism*)

This conclusion is once again significant because it affirms the defense against the incompatibilist contention throughout this reply that APs are actually not necessary for responsibility. But, this is severely misguided. As we have seen, Timpe does not think this, and neither does Kane (or perhaps Pereboom for that matter, and that is precisely why he is a free will skeptic). In fact, Kane writes,

Libertarians and incompatibilists do not want indeterminism for its own sake... indeterminism is something of a nuisance for them. It gets in the way and creates all sorts of trouble. What they want is ultimate responsibility and ultimate responsibility requires indeterminism [i.e., APs].⁴³⁹

“[U]ltimate responsibility” (or (UR)) entails indeterminism (or APs, by definition). The source condition entails the AP condition for moral (and arguably rational) responsibility. Further, in the

⁴³⁷ For a great essay defending compatibilism while at the same time appealing to FSCs in the story of Joseph, see Charlotte Katzoff, “The Selling of Joseph - A Frankfurtian Interpretation,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*.

⁴³⁸ By the way, distinctions within causes are not explicitly nor exclusively found in the writings of Calvinist scholars alone. John Sanders, to give one example, actually describes Calvinist providence in terms of Aristotle's four causes as well. See Sanders, “God as Personal,” in *The Grace of God*, 171.

⁴³⁹ Kane quoted in Vihvelin, Kadri, “Arguments for Incompatibilism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/#SourArgu>.

§2.5.11, we saw that although APs are not necessarily required at *all* times in the causal history of the agent in order to be free, the relevant categorical APs are *still* necessary at least in one time-slice of the agent's causal history. Non-derivative responsibility is the kind of responsibility at play here, not merely derivative responsibility. As discussed earlier, an agent may not need leeway in order to be held derivatively responsible, but *that* is only granted because we can still hold the agent non-derivatively responsible in which case leeway *was* present. So, obviously the punt to sourcehood from Stratton will not suffice here either because, as we have seen, he must admit (along with his incompatibilist brethren) that incompatibilism deals a hand in which APs are entailed at one time or another. While APs are not necessary *all* the time, they are certainly necessary at least *one* time; hence, (UR) entails indeterminism, or, at the very least, an indetermined event. In addition, recall that we have seen from §2.2.5 that (UR) entails being the sufficient causal source of an action as well. That is, if an agent is the efficient causal source, this requires that the agent must *also* be the sufficient causal source.⁴⁴⁰ Incompatibilists such as Kane and Pereboom have both defended this thesis. We have additionally seen that arguments for efficient sourcehood are often question-begging in their best light. We saw this while discussing a “steel-man” sourcehood argument constructed by Carolina Sartorio.⁴⁴¹ This is the incompatibilist contention, although it is one that I find implausible. While I agree with conclusion (60) as it states incompatibilism well, I do not agree nor concede conclusion (22) as stated and defended.

⁴⁴⁰ With regards to God, Calvinism, and evil, I would like to take a brief moment to reiterate the fact that God can be the sufficient cause of evil while *not* being the efficient cause of evil, but rather the deficient cause. If He were to be the efficient cause of evil, He would inevitably be the author of evil and sin (in the same way non-Calvinists have argued *ad nauseum*). But thank our lucky stars that is not the case. God can be the sufficient cause of evil while *not* being the efficient cause, because being the sufficient cause does *not* entail being the efficient cause; rather the converse is true. This ensures that God is the sufficient cause of all things (including evil) in the way WCF 3.1 suggests and teaches, and in alignment with the (RO) Hard Calvinist agenda (as well as definition (DD)), while *not* being the efficient cause of all things; thus, exculpating God in evil.

⁴⁴¹ Another such argument could be articulated in the following way:

1. We act freely (in the way necessary for moral responsibility) only if we are the ultimate sources (originators, first causes) of at least some of our choices.
2. If determinism is true, then everything we do is ultimately caused by events and circumstances outside our control.
3. If everything we do is ultimately caused by events and circumstances outside our control, then we are not the ultimate sources (originators, first causes) of any of our choices.
4. Therefore, if determinism is true, we are not the ultimate sources of any of our choices.
5. Therefore, if determinism is true, we never act freely and we are never morally responsible.

(Vihvelin, “Arguments for Incompatibilism,”
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/#SourArgu.>)

Premise (2) is the definition of determinism, and as such, (3) follows: given determinism, no one is the efficient causal source or the originator of our own actions. We are not the “ultimate” source. And if theological determinism is true, God is the “ultimate” source. But, so what? While I agree with conclusion (4), I reject conclusion (5) because premise (1) is question-begging. We need an independent reason for *why* it is the case that being the efficient causal source or originator of our actions are what is necessary for responsibility. Why is it the case that in order to be considered “free” we must also be considered the efficient source of our actions? We are not told. Sartorio’s argument followed a similar pattern.

However, compatibilists and incompatibilists may rejoice in that we have like intuitions. We both agree that in order to be (UR), we must have a “freedom-relevant” condition, that is, we must possess a certain sense of control over our actions. We equally agree that it is intuitive that we must be a source in our actions. But, where the conflict really lies is *not* that compatibilists reject sourcehood or reject alternatives, but rather the conflict lies in that we reject *efficient causal sourcehood* and *categorical alternatives* as necessary for (UR). So, what must the compatibilist do? How are they to respond? Are we at a Fischer “Dialectical Stalemate”? Not at all. The compatibilist must replace the necessary condition of efficient sourcehood with something a bit more modest: *formal sourcehood*.

I contend that what is “culpable-making” or responsibility-undermining is *not* efficient sourcehood (i.e., being the primary or ultimate cause of our actions), but rather *formal sourcehood* (i.e., being the instrumental cause of our actions). To see this, recall Preciado’s exposition of Bavinck. The material cause explains the substance of an act, but the *formal* cause is the *intention* or *essence* of the act. According to Aristotle’s four causes, the formal cause is defined as “what-it-is-to-be,” or the *essence* of a thing. For someone to be morally responsible, either in the blameworthy or praiseworthy sense, the *intentions* or *essence* of the agent are critical and must be carefully evaluated. We see this intuition in our court systems as well when the motive of a prosecuted innocent party is identified as either criminalizing or exculpating. If the motive or *intention* of the individual is found to be maligned beyond reasonable doubt, the agent is criminalized by being found guilty upon verdict. If the motive or *intention* is not found to be maligned or in error, the agent is found innocent. So, for an act to be a sin, it is not simply the substance of the act that is necessary for moral responsibility, but the *essence* (or perhaps the *quality* of will) of the action, which is the intention.⁴⁴² Moreover, it is not at all obvious that the efficiency or origination of the act is what is utilized in determining proper responsibility to an agent.

An analogy might prove useful here. Imagine an undercover FBI agent. He has been undercover for months, perhaps years, in the deep recesses of the Columbia drug cartel. He earns the drug lord’s trust, friendship, loyalty, and patronage as a result. Let’s say that this FBI agent sets up an extremely high-risk international drug trade. What is the intuition here? Is this FBI agent morally responsible for setting up a drug trade? By no means. *Even though* he is arguably considered the efficient causal source of the drug trade (i.e., the drug trade idea originated with him), this is not enough information in order to adequately attribute a proper ascription of moral responsibility. Why not? Because, I contend, the efficient causal source is *not* necessary for responsibility. Rather, what we see is that while the FBI agent *intended* the drug trade for good, the drug lords

⁴⁴² For an excellent exposition on a theory of responsibility allocating blameworthiness or praiseworthiness based upon the *quality of will* (or *essence* of action), see White, *Fate and Free Will*, chapter 4. For intentions grounding responsibility, see Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 206-13; *What About Free Will?*, 163-65..

intended the drug trade for evil, namely for criminal activity. *The drug lords* are found intuitively guilty, while the FBI agent is not, and that is because, I submit, the efficient source is not at all necessary for responsibility, but rather the formal source.⁴⁴³ Intentions or motivations are literally the instrument in properly ascribing blameworthiness or praiseworthiness to an agent, and those properties are not found in the *efficiency* of an action; they are found in the *formality* of an action.⁴⁴⁴

Consider another example of a musician wonderfully and skillfully playing her guitar. What rings when the instrument is being played? Is it the *agent* or musician that rings a melody, or is it the *string itself* that rings? The musician does not ring, though she is the one who is the sufficient and efficient cause of the ringing. Instead, it is the string that rings and it is the string that allows

⁴⁴³ James N. Anderson has a similar example in his essay ("Calvinism and the First Sin," 212):

Consider, for example, a police sting operation in which a dangerous criminal is lured into committing a felony so that he can be arrested and prosecuted, thus preventing further (perhaps more serious) crimes. Suppose that in such a scenario the police indirectly cause the criminal to break the law. Should we infer that culpability for the crime is transferred to the police, such that the police become guilty of the crime? That seems very implausible. Part of the problem here is that culpability depends not merely on whether there is a certain kind of causal connection but also on the *intentions* of the agents involved and whether the agents have *morally justifying grounds* for their actions. Causation alone is not sufficient to transfer culpability.

This is exactly right, and it consolidates our earlier point that causal responsibility does not exactly entail moral responsibility. As Genesis 50:20 states, what men *intend* for evil, God *intends* for good. The police in Anderson's example (and the FBI in mine) demonstrate that their intentions are not for criminal activity, but rather for *justice*.

⁴⁴⁴ An objection could be placed at this point. Greg Welty discusses this objection from none other than Stratton himself. Here is Welty's response:

Stratton seems to think that if God exhaustively determines all events ('omni-causality'), then "God made the Holocaust happen – not Hitler!" But this last phrase – "not Hitler!" – is unmotivated by divine determinism. For there is no reason to think, either logically or biblically, that divine causation precludes human causation, such that if God makes something happen then human agents *don't* make it happen. Logically, if God causes X to cause Y, then obviously X is a real cause. Perhaps Stratton has some subtle argument according to which unless an agent satisfies incompatibilist sourcehood conditions, he cannot be a genuine cause. But in the absence of such an argument, there's not much for the Calvinist here to worry about, logically speaking. Able defenders of libertarian free will, such as Robert Kane, make this point for me: "Determinism... does not imply that we have no influence on how things turn out, including the molding of our characters. We obviously do have such an influence, and determinism alone does not rule it out" (Kane [summarizing a point made by John Stuart Mill], *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2005, p. 20).

(<https://www.gregwelty.com/2017/04/freethinking-about-molinist-gunslingers-a-response-to-stratton/>)

The objection implies that if determinism is true, then there cannot be a real secondary or formal cause from the agent that is determined. But this is patently false. As Welty notes, "... if God causes X to cause Y, then obviously X is a real cause." Precisely; this additionally fits nicely with Anderson's intramundane and divine causation industrial model we saw earlier in our determinism section. To drill the point further, even incompatibilist Robert Kane goes on record to agree with his compatibilists friends that if determinism is true, that proposition by itself does *not* rule out secondary causation such as influencing or character molding. This again proves my point: *formal causation* (or "intention-making") is *compatible with determinism*. The agent under determinism *can* be a genuine cause, though not the efficient cause.

for the note to be sung aloud. God is the musician, and we are simply an instrument, and He is indeed playing a lovely composition of history full of consonance and dissonance by efficiently determining which notes are rung or deficiently determining which notes are not rung, respectively. The consonance and dissonance find their explanation in the sufficiency of God's hands as the ultimate sufficient cause, yet all the while He is to be praised for the beautiful orchestra composed under His guidance and providence.

What these analogies show is that being either the instrumental cause,⁴⁴⁵ the secondary cause,⁴⁴⁶ the proximate cause,⁴⁴⁷ the intramundane cause,⁴⁴⁸ or the formal cause is what is shown to be necessary for responsibility, not simply the efficient cause. Without the intentions or *essence* of

⁴⁴⁵ "... the Holy Spirit serves as the *efficient* cause of regeneration, whereas the Word serves as the *instrumental* cause," (Christensen, *What About Free Will?*, 198). Christensen argues, in alignment with the reformed orthodox, that God is the efficient cause of the good (such as the great good of regeneration), whereas the instrumental cause of regeneration remains in the preaching of the Word: humans evangelizing. Here, Christensen makes the brilliant move in connecting the means with the instrumental or formal cause, while holding that God determines the ends, or is the sufficient cause of all things. And this is the crux of compatibilism, is it not? The *means* (or the formality of our actions) are important, even though they are just as determined as the ends themselves (the finality of our actions). Just because God determines (via omission) the formal cause of our actions, we are still responsible because all that is necessary for properly attributing responsibility is the *intention* of the agent (the formality of the action). This is true regardless of the ends themselves (or the final cause as determined by God).

Christensen includes definitions of primary cause, proximate cause, remote cause, and secondary cause in his glossary, *What About Free Will?*, 259-60 (see also 77-81). In addition, he argues that although humanity could be considered as formal or instrumental causes, this is not to detract from our own sufficiency in the bringing about of actions. He argues that there is a "dual explanation," or dual sufficiency, in why "bad" or "good" things happen (see chapters 5 and 6 in *What About Free Will?*). I don't believe any Calvinist must be committed to affirming a dual sufficiency in actions (one where God is the sufficient reason, as well as the human agent, for the same action). Because of this, I will remain neutral on my conviction as to whether or not I agree with Christensen's assessment. Last, given all this, Christensen seems to affirm responsibility being found or located in the depths of formal causation or the agent's intentions, and in this I agree (*Ibid.*, 45-47).

⁴⁴⁶ "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, *nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away*, but rather established," (WCF 3.1; emphasis added).

⁴⁴⁷ "We are accustomed to thinking of nature as a complex sequence of causes and effects, in which cause A brings about effect B, which in turn serves as the cause of effect C, and so on. We may picture these relationships on a billiard table: the motion of one ball causes the motion of a second, and of a third, and so on. We sometimes describe A as the 'primary' or 'remote' cause of C, and B as the 'secondary' or '*proximate*' cause of C.

This model has been common in Reformed thought. Calvin defended God against the charge of being the author of sin by pointing out that God was not the *proximate*, but only the remote cause of human sin," (Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 155; emphasis added). Frame goes on to say that this line of thinking is unpersuasive; I agree. What is being described here is the Domino Model of Providence, castroized by Anderson in our determinism section for the exact reasons Frame would go on to discuss. Both Frame and Anderson agree that although the terms "proximate causes" are somewhat helpful, the *model* for incorporating them should be improved upon; hence, the construction of the Authorial Model of Providence.

⁴⁴⁸ See Anderson's defense of the Authorial Model of Providence and intramundane causation with regards to Calvinism and the problem of evil in §2.2.3.

an action, proper ascriptions of responsibility (specifically blameworthiness) cannot possibly be allocated; this is true *regardless* of the origin of action or volition. What it is for sin to be sin requires nothing other than the formality of an action, or the intention of an action.⁴⁴⁹ That's it.⁴⁵⁰

We have seen thus far that responsibility requires the intentions of the agent to be intact, and not that the agent must be an efficient source of those same intentions. As long as the agent is indeed an instrument to bring about his or her intentions that is enough for proper ascriptions of responsibility. In closing this subsection, we must now consider the connection to FSCs. It is clear that in (P), the agent is the determining efficient causal source of their action. The choice between politician X or Y is truly “up to” the agent in the efficient sense. We know this because the agent had $PAP_{All}(-T)$ available at the moment of choice. This categorical access to APs *explain* the agent's efficient sourcehood. Now, given Stump's FSC (G), we can still see that the Jones is the efficient causal source of willing to vote Republican because although Jones could not will to vote Democrat (CON_{PAP-T}), the weak flicker was present and Jones could choose categorically *how* to will to vote Republican (CTR_{PAP-T}). Thus, the categorical PAP-T is present, and that explains Jones' efficient sourcehood. Even in (G), the choice was “up to” Jones in the efficient sense.

Now, what if we posit an even stronger FSC than Stratton's (P) or Stump's (G)? What if we develop a case in which the agent has *no* categorical access at all to alternatives? Would such a case demonstrate that Jones is not a cause at all? No, for it would only demonstrate that Jones is not the *efficient* cause or source, but not that he is not a cause or source *at all*. He could still be a cause without having in his possession PAP_{All} or $PAP-T_{All}$. In fact, I aim to tell a story in the next section demonstrating the plausibility of formal sourcehood (as defended above in this section). Jones does not need categorical APs nor efficient sourcehood (as the incompatibilist thesis argues); Jones only needs the dispositional (and therefore conditional) ability and formal sourcehood, and both of these conditions, I contend, are compatible with determinism. Jones could be an agent because he would possess a subjective first-person perspective in the case, and *because* of this agential property, it would explain his formality in action as well as his responsibility, all the while he could not categorically choose otherwise because he would be determined to not just *do* but to *will* whatever it is that he chooses. In short, Jones would be an

⁴⁴⁹ This is seen heavily on Christ's Sermon on the Mount (see also James 1:14-15).

⁴⁵⁰ I imagine Stratton continuing to object at this point by complaining that the formality of a determined agent's action is *still* determined, especially if “EDD” is true. To this I reply, it depends. The agent's inner *telos* or ontological deprivation is *not* efficiently determined, though it is *sufficiently* determined by God actualizing the world full of ontologically contingent creatures. This is the essence of (TWD*). But, more to the point, the objection fails to appreciate what is necessary for responsibility as I demonstrated in §2.4.5 regarding the conditional ability. There I argued that it does not matter if the conditional ability of an agent is determined, or if the formality of the action from an agent is determined because the question is *not* “does determinism exclude these properties?”, but rather the question is “*are these properties compatible with determinism?*” And the answer is a resounding yes. The only properties that are not compatible with determinism are the *efficient* source and the *categorical* ability, not, in contrast, the formal source or conditional (or perhaps even dispositional) ability which this present reply seeks to defend.

agent *in the midst* of determinism. In the next section, these claims will be addressed and defended.

2.5.14 Formal Sourcehood & FSCs: Agency in Determinism | A Defense

We have now come to our final section in our arduous, yet philosophically entertaining, discussion concerning FSCs and its relation to ability, responsibility, sourcehood and causation. I now aim to show how the agent residing in a specific type of FSC may still be considered an agent though he is determined. In addition, I aim to show that the agent is *a source* and *a genuine cause* in the FSC, and that it is only the case that the agent is *not* an efficient source or an efficient cause. To be clear: in this section, my aim is *not* to show PAP to be false, nor PAP-T to be false. I don't believe FSCs have the ammunition to fully argue this claim, as I defended earlier. I think the Calvinist compatibilist would be much better off relying upon Bignon's arguments for the falsity of PAP. My aim also isn't to show the compatibility of responsibility and determinism—an independent argument for compatibilism would suffice to demonstrate that fact (e.g., Bignon's "definitional" argument)—nor is it my aim to show that Jones is actually responsible in such a case. I will take it, given the overall assumption of this reply, that compatibilism as well as determinism are in fact true. Therefore, all I aim to show is that the agent under consideration may be determined yet *still be an agent*. The motivation for this particular, and rather peculiar maneuver, is due to the fact that Stratton has previously argued that if determinism is true, there is no such thing as "I".⁴⁵¹ I take this to mean that given determinism, for Stratton, the locus of agency is completely diminished. But is this true? I contend that Stratton's claim here is not only false but *demonstrably* false as there remains an FSC that is a direct counterexample.

Before articulating the exact FSC I have in mind, I believe it would be dialectically helpful to understand the context in which this FSC is constructed. I will also find it helpful to explain the alternatives to such an FSC and why it could potentially "run afoul" given the same context it is placed in (Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 90). However, what I do not find helpful is exhaustively articulating the objections and rebuttals to the specific FSC I have in mind *in its original dialectical context*. Because I am not using the FSC in its original context, I personally see no reason in answering *all* the problems raised against it, though some will be briefly mentioned. Last, it is not my plan to make considerable progress in the debate surrounding FSCs; that, I believe, is futile. The debate surrounding FSCs, especially the one FSC I am particularly

⁴⁵¹ "Be that as it may, for the sake of argument suppose intentionality exists on naturalistic determinism just as it would on a divine deterministic view. **Although a human would possess mental states of and about things, he would not possess any ability as to WHAT he will think of and about, or HOW he will think of and about things.** These thoughts are not up to the thing you call "I" and are not up to you but things other than you. Thus, the thing you call "I" is left with no epistemic grounds to rationally affirm a current mental state. At best, all the self is reduced to on any deterministic view is a mere bag of beliefs — none of which are up to the bag!" (Stratton, "The Vanishing 'I'", <https://freethinkingministries.com/the-vanishing-i/>).

interested in, spans twenty-some years. It is chalk-full of objections, rebuttals, rejoinders, revisions, and counters. Although I find all this philosophical drama exciting and otherwise fruitful (in some other context), I must resist the temptation to expound upon them any further than necessary. It is my only aim to show how Stratton is wrong in claiming that agency is diminished given the truth of determinism. I believe this specific type of FSC, though out of place in the dialectical context in which it was originally constructed, demonstrates just that. Now, onto the example.

The FSC that I have been leading up to this point is called a “blockage Frankfurt-style case” (hereafter, B-FSC). The original context in which this B-FSC was thought-up was to rebut the Dilemma Defense from Kane and Widerker. Timpe summarizes the overall strategy of this case:

... one general line of response to the Dilemma Defense involves the attempt to give *FSCs* that are not susceptible to the dilemma and thereby showing that while some, or even many, extant *FSCs* are problematic in this way, not all *FSCs* are. If it can be shown that *FSCs* can be developed that are able to eliminate alternative possibilities without tacitly presupposing the truth of determinism, then the dilemma can be avoided.⁴⁵²

“The Dilemma Defense was initially suggested by Robert Kane and then systematically developed by Widerker (Kane, 1985: 51, 1996: 142-4, 191-2; Widerker, 1995: 247-61; cf. Ginet, 1996),” (McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 108). For review, recall that the Dilemma Defense posed two horns to the FSC defender: an *indeterministic* and *deterministic* horn. Pereboom and McKenna describe Widerker’s version as follows:

For any [FSC], if causal determinism is assumed to hold in the actual sequence that results in the action, then no libertarian can be expected to have the intuition that the agent is morally responsible—it’s ruled out by the nature of the actual causal history of the action. If, on the other hand, indeterminism in the actual sequence is presupposed, the scenario will not serve the Frankfurt defender’s purpose, for any such case will fall to a dilemma. In [FSCs] the actual situation will feature a prior sign, such as Jone’s’ blush, that signals the fact that intervention is not required. If the prior sign causally determined the action, or if it were associated with some factor that did, the inventor’s (or his device’s) predictive ability could be explained [this is the *deterministic* horn]. However, then the libertarian, again, would not and could not be expected to have the intuition that the agent is morally responsible. If the relationship between the prior sign and the action was not causally deterministic in such ways, then it would be open that the agent could have done otherwise despite the occurrence of the prior sign [this is the *indeterministic*

⁴⁵² Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 86.

horn]. And then it's open that the intuition that the agent is morally responsible can be explained by access to an alternative possibility after all.⁴⁵³

Earlier in our section detailing the Dilemma Defense we concluded that Stratton does not have consistent access to this defense as Molinism seems to rule out its initial plausibility. I will not repeat such sentimental conclusions here. However, pertaining to the Dilemma Defense, some philosophers have attempted to give an FSC that is altogether formulated in such a way as to remain "immune to the defense."⁴⁵⁴ Alfred Mele and David Robb are included in this community of philosophers and they contend that "it is nevertheless possible to give *FSCs* that are immune to the dilemma because 'a counterfactual controller's having a prior sign (Widerker) or prior knowledge (Kane) of what the agent will do is an inessential feature of [*FSCs*], despite the details of Frankfurt's own case,'" (Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 86). Mele and Robb hold fixed that "while certain processes and causal chains in it are deterministic, the thesis of determinism is false," (Ibid.). Let's call this case from Mele and Robb case (B). Here is the B-FSC (B):

Our scenario features an agent, Bob, who inhabits a world at which determinism is false... At *t*₁, Black initiates a certain deterministic process *P* in Bob's brain with the intention of thereby causing Bob to decide at *t*₂ (an hour later, say) to steal Ann's car. The process, which is screen off from Bob's consciousness, will deterministically culminate in Bob's deciding at *t*₂ to steal Ann's car unless he decides on his own at *t*₂ to steal it or is incapable at *t*₂ of making a decision (because, for example, he is dead by *t*₂) ... The process is in no way sensitive to any 'sign' of what Bob will decide. As it happens, at *t*₂ Bob decides on his own to steal the car, on the basis of his own indeterministic deliberation about whether to steal it, and his decision has no deterministic cause. But if he had not just then decided on his own to steal it, *P* would have deterministically issued, at *t*₂, in his deciding to steal it. Rest assured that *P* in no way influences the indeterministic decision-making process that actually issues in Bob's decision.⁴⁵⁵

Of course, seeing as the case is an FSC, "Mele and Robb claim that it is plausible that Bob is acting freely and is morally responsible for his choice despite not having been able to do otherwise" than to steal Ann's car (Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 87). Mele and Robb contend that this FSC has three significant points that distinguish this story from common FSCs.

First, Bob appears to be morally responsible for deciding at *t*₂ to steal Ann's car, even by the libertarian's standards. The cause of Bob's decisions is his own indeterministic decision-making process - 'process *x*.' Process *x* is indeterministic in the following sense: even though *x* actually causes Bob's deciding at *t*₂ to steal Ann's car, there are

⁴⁵³ McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 108-109.

⁴⁵⁴ See Ibid., 109.

⁴⁵⁵ Alfred R. Mele and David Robb, "Bbs, Magnets and Seesaws: The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases," in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 128.

nomologically possible worlds just like the actual one up to t_2 , in which (1) Bob is capable at t_2 of making a decision, (2) x is not at t_2 preempted or otherwise disturbed by any event or process external to it, yet (3) x does not cause Bob's deciding at t_2 to steal Ann's car.⁴⁵⁶

This is Mele and Robb's first point concerning (B). Bob's indeterministic process x causes Bob's decision by the sheer exercise of his PAP-T categorical ability. That necessary condition for libertarianism is present in (B). In addition, x is not overcome by the normal counterfactual intervener lurking in the shadows in normal FSCs. In the actual sequence of events, it is not the external deterministic process P that causes the final decision at t_2 , but rather it is the indeterministic process x is the final decision-maker (just as the libertarian would contend). However, the "final decision-maker" is not meant to be understood as the event of indeterminacy (or in other words, x itself). It is the agent Bob who is, presumably, the sole cause of deciding to steal Ann's car; x is only present as it defines Bob's deliberation process that was utilized. Mele and Robb continue:

Second, P , the deterministic process in Bob's brain, makes it impossible for Bob to avoid deciding at t_2 to steal Ann's car, given that he is capable of making a decision then... P is deterministic in the sense that unless it is preempted by some event or process external to it, it will cause Bob to decide at t_2 to steal Ann's car. And the only thing that can preempt P is Bob's so deciding at t_2 on his own, that is, a result of process x ... In this sense, P makes Bob's decision inevitable, but since P does not actually cause Bob's decision, Bob is in a [situation in which although P makes it impossible for him to avoid performing that action, P in no way brings it about that he performs it].⁴⁵⁷

In (B), Mele and Robb describe the relationship between x and P , and it is one that involves a certain type of preemption. We will discuss more about varying types of preemption below, as well as what the formal definition of preemption is, and whether or not this type of preemption mentioned in (B) is in fact coherent. But for now it is safe to say that in (B) x is said to preempt P , and that is the only preemption that is said to be held fixed in the story. The deterministic process of P does not actually intervene upon x , nor does P cause Bob's decision at t_2 . However, given the presence of P , (B) does show a situation in which Bob cannot do anything other than steal Ann's car; it is unavoidable.

Third, in the actual scenario, P is preempted by x at t_2 . P is not sensitive to a prior sign of Bob's decision. At every moment up to t_2 , P is poised to cause Bob to decide to t_2 to steal Ann's car. P is deactivated (preempted) only at the very moment that Bob makes his decision.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 128-129.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 129.

Here we see what was only implied earlier that x preempts P , or in another way, “ P is preempted by x .” But the significant part about this particular FSC is not necessarily preemption by itself, but the type of preemption (again, this will be discussed below). P is said to be preempted by x at t_2 , not before or after, thus assuaging the common worry often complained in the early formulations of the Dilemma Defense. The worry was that the counterfactual intervener would be either too early or too late. If P preempted x *before* Bob made his decision, then it would be too early, thus *determining* Bob to make his decision (deterministic horn). If P preempted x *after* Bob made his decision, then it would be too late, thus demonstrating Bob’s indeterminacy (indeterministic horn).⁴⁵⁹ In (B), however, P and x are said to converge on the decision of stealing Ann’s car at t_2 ; it is only the case that x preempts P at t_2 and thus avoids the nasty horns of the Dilemma Defense.

Last, with these three emphasized points in mind, Mele and Robb spell out in more detail what actually goes on with Bob’s neural processes. They describe that there are “decision nodes” that may help distinguish what happens with process x and process P .⁴⁶⁰

The ‘lighting up’ of node $N1$ represents [Bob’s] deciding to steal the car, and the ‘lighting up’ of node $N2$ represents his deciding *not* to steal the car. Under normal circumstances and in the absence of preemption, a process’s ‘hitting’ a decision node in Bob ‘lights up’ that node. If it were to be the case both that P hits $N1$ at t_2 and that x does not hit $N1$ at t_2 , then P would light up $N1$ [this is the alternative sequence]. If both processes were to hit $N1$ at t_2 , Bob’s indeterministic deliberative process, x , would light up $N1$ and P would not [this is the actual sequence].⁴⁶¹

We see here the alternative sequence as well as the actual sequence clearly delineated. In the former, the two processes under consideration are said to *diverge* instead of converge as they do in the latter. Later, we will come back to this idea of convergence and how it proves useful to my purposes in this section, but for now this idea of divergence poses probably the most significant problem for cases like (B). Mele and Robb’s case is different than, say, (P) and (G) because there

⁴⁵⁹ See McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 116-120 for a brief summary of these types of defenses.

⁴⁶⁰ The alert reader will come to understand that the formulation of (B) and (G) are extremely similar. After all, Stump constructed (G) *in response* to not just the Dilemma Defense but to (B) (see Stump’s essay, “Moral Responsibility without Alternative Possibilities”). Her goal (though not her primary goal) was to patch-up the supposed short-comings of (B), and so (G) was born. As we will see later, (G), according to Timpe, is a form of cutting preemption, one in which still falls to the Dilemma Defense. This, however, does not mean (G) cannot be salvaged, and so Timpe tries to do just that with his own version of (G) called a “trumping preemption case”. How these cases resolve the Dilemma Defense, or how (B) fares any better, is not my primary worry here in the present reply as stated previously. However, if I had to choose, I would put my money on Pereboom’s *Tax Evasion 2* case in order to completely disarm the Dilemma Defense (see McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 113-116). That, or, as I said in earlier sections, claim FSCs as a defense of compatibilism, and not an argument.

⁴⁶¹ Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 129.

is no mention of a counterfactual intervener. In addition, there is no mention of a prior sign (usually taken to be traditional in FSCs). But this was purposeful as the original context in which (B) took place was in response to the Dilemma Defense, as noted above. Without the prior sign or the knowledge of the counterfactual intervener, the Dilemma Defense is harder to uphold. However, because of the divergence that occurs in (B)—where *P* lights up *NI* at t_2 even if *x* does not light up *NI* at t_2 —proves to be real problematic regardless of the absence of the intervener and prior sign. This unfortunate built-in property of divergence in (B) ends up being, to what I consider, the most potent objection to it. In order to clearly articulate the difference between the diverging processes and converging processes, Mele and Robb depend upon a specific type of preemption, but exactly what it entails is where the problem lies. And to this we now turn.

There are other objections to cases with the same basic structure as (B) such as intervention and coherence problems,⁴⁶² both of which Mele and Robb discuss at length in their essay.⁴⁶³ Whether or not these problems are actual problems, I will leave up to the reader. For now, I will only state my conviction that these are not actual problems, at least not in a manner that is made out to be overly significant or detrimental to the project of (B) in general. Aside from this, one of the major issues given in response to (B) is that the deterministic process *P* is said to preempt Bob's indeterministic process *x*, as previewed above in the last paragraph. The kind of preemption that (B) exposes is one that leaves the libertarian in an uncomfortable position in the sense that they must accept (if (B) is in fact demonstrably true) a result that yields too close to the characteristics of determinism. Of course, the libertarian would be happy to deny such a position as they reject determinism. So what is this type of preemption?

First, preemption is “where one causal chain leading to a particular event is preempted by another causal chain which brings about the very same event.” (Ibid.). So, in the case of (B), if deterministic process *P* and indeterministic process *x* converge, then, in the actual sequence of events where Bob does indeed decide (on his own) to steal Ann's car, *x* is the causal chain that lead to Bob's indeterministic decision to steal Ann's car, *not* the deterministic sequence *P*; Bob's indeterministic process *x* is said to “preempt” the deterministic process *P* as both processes hit *NI* at t_2 . In this case, the actual sequence, as Mele and Robb say, “Bob's indeterministic

⁴⁶² I personally think that these objections are funneled from the objection I will consider below. For example, Timpe is willing to grant that cases like (B) provide coherency, even if libertarians like Kane aren't nearly as willing. However, this fact, to Timpe, is not the primary concern; I agree. He writes:

How then should we evaluate the ability of blockage cases of the sort developed by Mele and Robb and Hunt to avoid the Dilemma Defense? First, I agree with Fischer regarding the following conditional: “If the blockage cases (suitably filled in and developed) are coherent, then Kane's [and Widerker's] argument that there must be alternative possibilities in an indeterministic context in which the agent acts freely fails.” Nevertheless, I think that such cases are coherent *only if* they involve complete blockage, but in such cases they presuppose that the choice or action in question was determined by something outside the control of the agent. If this is correct, then they run afoul of the second horn of the Dilemma Defense [the deterministic horn]. (Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 89-90; brackets original on “[and Widerker's]”, emphasis mine)

⁴⁶³ Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 131-136.

deliberative process, x , would light up NI and P would not.” Thus Bob is said to be morally responsible, intuitively, while also supposedly avoiding the heart of the Dilemma Defense. Timpe adds that “[b]y their very nature, *FSCs* are cases involving preemption—that is, one causal chain sufficient for an effect produces the effect before another causal chain, which is also sufficient for the effect, is able to produce that same effect,” (Ibid.). There are several types of preemption found in the *FSC* literature. For example, normal *FSCs* such as the one Stratton initially described, (P), is said to possess a “cutting preemption.” Cases like Stump’s (G), however, *could* be said to be a non-cutting preemption. The idea behind “cutting preemption” is due to the fact that in a normal *FSC*

one of the causal chains involved is cut, or prevented from going through to completion, by the other, efficacious causal chain. In the alternate sequence [of (P), the agent’s] decision to do other than A is cut by [nefarious neurosurgeon] forcing [the agent to do] A . The prior sign is important to letting the counterfactual intervener know whether he needs to intervene or not by cutting the causal chain that the agent has already begun.⁴⁶⁴

This type of preemption is pretty standard in *FSCs*, but the problem, however, is that they are then open to the heightened criticism that follows from the Dilemma Defense. Now, some have claimed to have constructed *FSCs* in which avoid the tactic of cutting preemption and instead offer an example where the type of preemption is, say, non-cutting. Timpe gives his own such case of non-cutting preemption after seeing whether or not Eleonore Stump’s own revised example of (G), which she calls *RCE* (shortened for “revised counterexample”) seems to do the trick. He concludes, however, that *RCE* (and therefore (G) *a fortiori*) is still a type of cutting preemption, contrary to appearances (Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 90-91). Timpe, being committed to the fact that such non-cutting preemptive *FSCs* do exist, formulates one himself (Ibid., 92-93). Unfortunately, the details of such a case are irrelevant to my purposes here in this reply, though I find his case rather satisfying. Regardless, the conclusion Timpe finds is the same echoed in this reply:

But cutting is not essential for *FSCs*. Other types of preemption will do the job. Arguing against extant counterfactual accounts of causation, Jonathan Schaffer postulates a type of preemption that does not depend on the cutting or severing of a causal chain called “trumping preemption.”

[...]

The sergeant and the major are shouting orders at these soldiers. The soldiers know that in case of conflict, they must obey the superior officer. But as it happens, there is no conflict. Sergeant and major simultaneously shout “Advance!”; the soldiers hear them

⁴⁶⁴ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 87.

both; the soldiers advance. Their advantage is redundantly caused: if the sergeant had shouted “Advance!” and the major had been silent, or if the major had shouted “Advance!” and the sergeant had been silent, the soldiers would still have advanced. But the redundancy is asymmetrical: since the soldiers obey the superior officer, they advance because the major orders them to, not because the sergeant does. The major preempts the sergeant in causing them to advance. The major’s order *trumps* the sergeant’s.⁴⁶⁵

Frankfurt-style counterexamples need not be constructed solely on the basis of cutting preemption. Other forms of preemption do just fine as long as the constructed FSC with that supposed type of preemption one is interested in remains coherent. The example above with the sergeant’s order being preempted by the major’s orders is a clear example of how something like *trumping* preemption can be conceptually coherent. And after all, that *is* what the FSC defender is attempting to do when constructing an FSC: provide a clear conceptually coherent counterexample to APs (even weak ones) being necessary for responsibility, thus showing PAP to be false. The key here is to understand this idea of *simultaneous* preemption, as described by Shaeffer in Timpe’s quote above. This is what could be said to be present in (B). However, in (B) resides a much stronger form than mere trumping preemption. In (B), it is said to incorporate “occurrent preemption.” Once again, Timpe’s commentary will prove monumentally useful:

With this distinction in mind, let us return to Mele and Robb’s *FSC*. In order for their example to rule out [APs], in addition to *P*’s bringing about Bob’s decision to steal Ann’s car at t_2 being occurrently preempted by Bob’s deciding on his own at the very same time, the case must also have a way of preventing Bob from deciding to do something else prior to t_2 . In other words, the case must contain a way of *blocking* alternative decisions and not just a way of having Bob’s decision be preempted by the working of the failsafe mechanism.⁴⁶⁶

In (B), Bob’s indeterministic process x is said to occurrently preempt the deterministic process P , that is, in the actual sequence. But, the upshot of this strong type of preemption is that the “case must contain a way of *blocking* alternative decisions” instead of simply x preempting P , as suggested by Timpe. Occurrent preemption does not necessarily give an answer as to how Bob is kept from deliberating about something else prior to t_2 , rather, it just ensures that if x and P converge that x would indeed preempt P . But here is the problem that I had mentioned earlier: what happens if x and P diverge, and what would that entail?

Well, Mele and Robb once more attempt to answer this question. They write:

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 91-92; cf. McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 92.

⁴⁶⁶ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 88.

Furthermore, if x and P were to ‘diverge’ at t_2 , so that x hits $N2$ and P hits $N1$, P would light up $N1$ and x would not light up $N2$. Why? Because ‘by t_2 P has neutralized all of the nodes in Bob for decisions that are contrary to a decision at t_2 to steal Ann’s car ... In convenient shorthand, by t_2 P has neutralized $N2$ and all its “cognate decision nodes” ... John Fischer calls this sort of neutralizing *blockage*. While P ensures that $N1$ will light up at t_2 , blockage ensures that the other relevant nodes will not light up at t_2 .⁴⁶⁷

On convergence of x and P at t_2 , we see that x will preempt P through a means of occurrent preemption. However, this entails the price-tag on what it means to diverge at t_2 . On divergence, P lights up $N1$ and x will not have the chance to light up anything other than $N1$, let’s say $N2$, because by t_2 , as Mele and Robb contend, “ P has neutralized all of the nodes in Bob for decisions that are contrary to a decision at t_2 to steal Ann’s car.” That price-tag, then, is *blockage*; Bob’s “cognate decision nodes” are blocked off, so to speak, so that Bob cannot access them (at least not categorically). To Mele and Robb, they do not find this overly problematic. To others, however, this notion of blockage is one that does not go too far in rescuing B-FSCs: “Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom and Laura Eksrom all worry that blockage renders Bob’s choice deterministically cause,” (Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 129). Consider, for instance, the words of Pereboom: “[The libertarian] might be tempted to claim that P ’s neutralizing procedure is equivalent to P ’s causal determination of Bob’s decision to steal the car,” (quoted in *Ibid.*). Similarly, Timpe takes the position that these alternatives, which libertarians are so privy to rely upon, do seem to be “wiped out” under blockage cases given the neutralizing process that occurs if x and P are said to diverge. While quoting Pereboom, he writes:

‘[In blockage scenarios], one’s intuitions about whether the agent is morally responsible might become unstable,’ since it seems that complete blockage of the sort proposed by [(B)] renders the action in question determined. In blockage cases, the restrictions involved *might* be relevant to the causal history of the action in question, Pereboom argues, thereby begging the question against the incompatibilist [by falling on the deterministic horn of the Dilemma Defense].⁴⁶⁸

Lastly, Kane, who “expresses the same worry in much stronger terms” writes:

In [a case in which every other alternative is blocked except the agent’s choosing A at t], of course, there *are* no alternative possibilities left to the agent; every one is blocked except the agent’s choose A at t . But now we seem to have determinism pure and simple. By implanting the mechanism in this fashion, a controller would have predetermined exactly what the agent would do (and when); and, as a consequence, the controller, not

⁴⁶⁷ Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 129.

⁴⁶⁸ Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), 89.

the agent, would be ultimately responsible for the outcome. Blockage by a controller that rules out all relevant alternative possibilities is simply predestination; and on my view at least, predestination runs afoul of ultimate responsibility.⁴⁶⁹

Elsewhere Kane has described the general strategy of B-FSCs, how they could be constructed into what he calls “pure blockage scenarios” and “modified blockage scenarios.”⁴⁷⁰ Once again, I will resist the temptation to further explain the fascinating divots that Kane has so brilliantly articulated in that essay when honestly considering B-FSCs. Needless to say, he considers (B) to be a form of a “modified blockage” instead of “pure blockage,” even if he used the words “pure and simple” in the quote above; no matter. Given these criticisms, I do find the sentiments from Pereboom and Kane to be, overall, convincing. But the reader must recall that my aim in this section is not to somehow show PAP to be false via positing a specific type of FSC, nor was my aim ever to show the compatibility of responsibility and determinism in the entire FSC section in the present reply; these shall simply be assumed as it is not my job to argue for them here, only to merely defend them. The reader should additionally recall that I deny FSCs can be successful against incompatibilism *if* they are used primarily as an *argument* against PAP, or *for* compatibilism more generally. Thus far, I have only claimed that FSCs may be used as a *defense* of compatibilism. In this strategy, B-FSCs like (B) work just fine. Nevertheless, in the interest of the original dialectical context, I must bring the critics’ objections to (B) to mild completion while addressing some potential rejoinders from Mele and Robb.⁴⁷¹ Afterwards, we will see how I plan to use the case of (B).

Mele and Robb respond to the criticism of Kane and Pereboom that (B) shows a case in which indeterminism is actually false and determinism is actually true.

⁴⁶⁹ Pereboom quoting Kane, quoted in Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 129-130. It is noteworthy to point out that Kane thinks predestination and determinism are virtually one in the same. I realize that Stratton does not think this and rather thinks that one can ultimately hold exhaustive predestination without holding exhaustive determinism. This is a debate I wish not to enter. However, I do wish to goad and ask if libertarian Kane thinks they are one in the same, can a Molinist truly uphold his overall theory of freedom while, in the same breath, upholding predestination? To me, I humbly do not think so. This is remarkable seeing as how Stratton himself has quoted Kane in his book.

⁴⁷⁰ See, for example, “Responsibility, Indeterminism and Frankfurt-style Cases: A Reply to Mele and Robb,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, chapter 5. Basically, a “modified” B-FSC only blocks the *robust* or *morally significant* alternatives (while leaving intact weaker alternatives), whereas a “pure” B-FSC blocks *all* alternatives. See also Michael McKenna’s “modified” B-FSC in “Robustness, Control, and the Demand for Morally Significant Alternatives: Frankfurt Examples with Oodles and Oodles of Alternatives,” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, chapter 11.

⁴⁷¹ Of course, it must be said that I do not plan to exhaustively give a detailed analysis on the many objections to (B) or B-FSCs in general, as well as the many rejoinders to it. In this sense, I know full well I am not doing “justice” to the original context in which (B) was placed in. However, once again, the reader must understand that it is not necessarily my job to give a full detailed analysis *especially* when I do *not* plan to keep (B) in the original context. Therefore, this worry of not exhaustively hunting down the exact objections and rejoinders to (B) is not much of a worry at all. Nevertheless, I have done some homework. For the interested reader, please see Kane, Widerker (pg. 55-56) and Mele and Robb’s essay in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*; Timpe, *Free Will* (2e), chapter 6; McKenna and Pereboom, *Free Will*, 108-113.

In saying that Bob's deciding a t_2 to steal Ann's car ('Bob's decision') is 'determined,' 'predestined,' or occurs 'of physical necessity,' the objectors may mean either that the decision is *deterministically caused* or instead simply that it is *inevitable*. If they mean that it is deterministically caused, then we are entitled to ask *what* deterministically caused it, and given that the activities of P are causally isolated from Bob's own decision-making processes, it is hard to see how P could have caused his decision. On the other hand, if 'determined' just means *inevitable*, then we do not see how the inevitability of Bob's decision undermines his responsibility, given that what makes his decision inevitable has no actual causal role in his deciding to steal Ann's car.⁴⁷²

Kane responds to their distinction between *deterministically caused* and *inevitability* and argues that this ultimately is a distinction without a difference:

This is an interesting response. But we can see why it will not work, at least for cases of pure blockage of the kind now being considered. For, in such cases, P would be blocking or neutralizing every other option (including B , C , and D) at t_2 available to Bob except the choice of A at t_2 . And this would mean that, even if Bob himself by way of x were to make the choice A at t_2 , he would have been *determined* to make the particular choices he does make by P 's actions of blocking x 's alternatives... Though he may have caused or brought about A himself, nonetheless, by ruling out all his other options, you have *determined* that he would cause A . And since the controller's process P is supposed to be some sort of *causal* mechanism in the brain that is blocking off or neutralizing all of Bob's other options, P has not only determined what Bob would choose at t_2 (that is, A); P has *causally* determined what Bob will choose, even if Bob does the choosing.⁴⁷³

Obviously this requires some unpacking. In this excerpt, we see that Kane seems to equate the fact that having no alternatives at all (because the relevant alternatives are all blocked off) is the same as determinism. For Kane, it does not matter if Mele and Robb make the distinction between *inevitability* and *deterministically caused* because if decision A is inevitable (as Mele and Robb grant), that is tantamount to A being *deterministically caused*. Kane concludes:

Thus, to Mele's and Robb's query 'if Bob's decision A at t_2 was deterministically caused, we are entitled to ask *what* deterministically caused it,' the proper answer in pure blockage cases is the following. Bob's decision A at t_2 is deterministically caused by Bob's own decision process x *plus* the controller's process P , which neutralizes or blocks all alternatives to Bob's choosing A at t_2 . The two processes, x and P , together (along with other background circumstances) deterministically cause the outcome. Bob's own

⁴⁷² Mele and Robb, "The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases," 130.

⁴⁷³ Kane, "Responsibility, Indeterminism, and Frankfurt-style Cases: A Reply to Mele and Robb," 97-98.

decision process x is involved, to be sure, but it would not have *deterministically* caused A at t_2 on its own in the absence of P .⁴⁷⁴

First, remember that Kane does not think (B) constitutes an exact replica of what he calls a “pure blockage scenario.” He only thinks (B) is a “modified blockage scenario”; however, in this context, he uses insights from a pure scenario in order to reach conclusions in a modified scenario. This is granted. But, more importantly, Kane answered Mele and Robb’s question: what caused the decision of Bob’s to steal Ann’s car at t_2 ? The answer: “The two processes, x and P , together... deterministically cause the outcome.” As we will see later, to me, I virtually have no problem with this answer. In fact, I *agree* with Kane that the outcome in (B) is deterministically caused by virtue of it being inevitable. Moreover, notice that Kane recognizes that x and P *can* work together, and this is perhaps coherent in some sense. Later, I will show how this “working together” mirrors theological determinism, though not in the way that produces synergistic results, but rather in a way that occurrent preemption is upheld as well as concurrent freedom (i.e., compatibilism). Mele and Robb acknowledge this criticism as they make a few last remarks to this objection:

Perhaps matters are not so simple, however. One [e.g., Kane] might argue that P does deterministically cause Bob’s decision, since P is nomologically sufficient (in the circumstances) for its occurrence. That is, the presence of P (including the blockage P produces), the laws of nature, and the circumstances at t_2 ... entail that Bob will decide at t_2 to steal Ann’s car. And this, Pereboom, Kane and Ekstrom might argue, is enough for saying that P deterministically caused Bob’s decision. This would follow immediately on a nomic subsumption model of causality. One could get to the same conclusion with a version of the counterfactual model of causality: P is counterfactually sufficient (in the circumstances) for Bob’s deciding at t_2 to steal Ann’s car, in the sense that if P had not been in place and Bob had not decided to steal Ann’s car, then if P *had* been in place, Bob would have decided at t_2 to steal Ann’s car. On some counterfactual models, this is enough for saying that P deterministically caused Bob’s decision.⁴⁷⁵

Mele and Robb concede that P is “counterfactually sufficient... for Bob’s deciding at t_2 to steal Ann’s car” and oftentimes that is enough to conclude that P has in fact “deterministically caused Bob’s decision.” This concession works nicely with hypothetical necessity as discussed in §2.2.7. Notice, if hypothetical necessity is in place, this does not diminish the contingency of the agent’s act. The only result is that the act *once* determined is now inevitable. But this is precisely what we have in (B). Once P is in the picture, so to speak, though it does not *efficiently* cause Bob’s decision, the decision becomes *inevitable*. And if one wants to additionally press that inevitability does entail causal determinism, *fine*, though, the form of determinism would still be

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁷⁵ Mele and Robb, “The Metaphysics of Frankfurt-style Cases,” 130.

a form that is harmonious with hypothetical necessity, and not an absolute necessity. Mele and Robb end their discussion on this criticism of occurrent preemption and the charge of determinism by making one last distinction (one in which Kane is actually willing to grant):

We do not deny that *P* is, in these senses, nomologically and counterfactually sufficient for Bob's decision. But we do deny that we are thereby required to say that *P* caused the decision. So perhaps the primary disagreement here between us and our objectors is over an issue in the metaphysics of causality.⁴⁷⁶

After Kane's tough, yet persuasive criticism, Mele and Robb concede that *P* is "counterfactually sufficient for Bob's decision." They claim that this simply means that *P* renders Bob's decision inevitable, rather than deterministically caused; sticking their original guns! They have always maintained that it is *x* that causes *A* at *t*₂ to light up the decision node to steal Ann's car, not *P*. Most interestingly, Kane grants their concession:

One can even grant that Bob's own deliberation process *x* (and not *P*) is what directly causes *A* at *t*₂. But what cannot be granted in a pure blockage scenario is that Bob's decision-making process *x* *indeterministically* causes *A* at *t*₂ *given the added presence of P*. For if *x* had indeterministically caused *A* at *t*₂, there would have been some alternative possibilities (APs) at *t*₂; and given *P*, there were none.⁴⁷⁷

Kane, though he reluctantly grants their request that it is *x* that directly causes *A* at *t*₂, not *P*, he still argues that *x* plus *P* results in *A* being deterministically caused (he too sticks to his guns!). The indeterministic process *x* "given the added presence of *P*" ensures that *A* is brought to completion at *t*₂. For Kane, it does not matter whether *P* would be activated counterfactually or actually. The mere fact of *P*'s presence renders the conclusion that (B) is a case of determinism (especially if taken to be a pure blockage case). The presence of *P* would deterministically cause *A*, regardless of what directly caused *A* (for that point is not as important for Kane as is the presence of *P*, even in the alternative scenario).

We come to a close on our back and forth with Kane's primary objection to (B) and Mele and Robb's basic strategic defense against it. I have spent these last few pages detailing the original context *not* to show how (B) overcomes this potent objection from Kane and Co., but rather to show just how convincing *Kane's* objections are to (B).⁴⁷⁸ In fact, as I have conceded earlier, I find Kane's objections quite pleasing, satisfying, and overall sound. I will once again reiterate at

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Kane, "Responsibility, Indeterminism, and Frankfurt-style Cases: A Reply to Mele and Robb," 98.

⁴⁷⁸ I additionally wanted to show just how entrenched the debate about FSCs, and B-FSCs no less, go in the philosophical literature. As stated, I highly doubt that I will ever add, or do mere justice, to the literature in fully expounding the objections as well as the ins-and-outs of the back and forth replies, particularly considering the specific focus of this reply; but then again, that was never my intent in the first place.

the risk of unprofessional repetition that I am not at all interested in defending FSCs (like (B)) in the light of arguing for compatibilism. I am, however, interested in defending compatibilism in the light of Kane's criticism to (B). One might wonder in what context I wish to use (B) if not in its original context (that of Mele and Robb's), and I hope by now that framework is acutely clear: (B) shows a picture perfect counterexample to how one can be a *formal cause*, and thus a *formal source*, while possessing *conditional ability*, though the agent was deterministically caused to do as they do. This, then, means the agent, Bob for instance, *does* have agency though determinism is true, contra Stratton.

First, I agree with Kane that Mele and Robb's initial distinctions between deterministically caused and inevitable are irrelevant. I take it, along with Kane, in my mind, that if *A* is considered inevitable (something Mele and Robb are keen to agree to), then this by definition entails *A* is deterministically caused. Second, the reader will recall that I usually like to maintain as much distance from the causal notion of determinism especially if the kind of determinism under consideration is *theological* determinism. These reasons were thoroughly rehearsed in our earlier section on determinism and so they need not be reiterated here. However, as discussed in those sections, as well as in our section concerning moral responsibility and causal responsibility, if I were to use the word "cause" it does not pose a significant threat to God as the determiner nor humanity as the agent. God can *efficiently* cause (such as righteousness) or *deficiently* cause (such as sin) all the while being the *sufficient* cause of all events, including Bob's decision to steal Ann's car at t_2 . In this specific case, God is said to be the *sufficient* cause and the *deficient* cause, while Bob is said to be the *formal* cause of *x* while in turn causing *A*. This is quite coherent seeing as how Kane himself even grants that it is *x* that directly causes *A* and not *P* (i.e., God's divine decree). But that's my point. Even a libertarian incompatibilist may affirm that given arguably the strongest form of a FSC (i.e., B-FSCs), the agent is still a direct cause, though not the sufficient cause.

Of course, by "direct" I do not mean "sufficient" as Kane himself agrees that under (B) *P* is the sufficient cause of *A*, not *x*. However, he grants that *x* can be a direct cause to *A*. So this is where we see Bob as a cause and also a source of his action. He is not the sufficient cause, and thus not the efficient cause (see premise (58), (59)) because he lacks PAP_{All} (or, more technically categorical APs). But as argued earlier in that section, this does not mean Bob is *not* a cause or source *at all*; it only means that Bob is not the efficient and sufficient cause or source. Thus, I contend, given the initial story of (B), Bob is seen as a *formal* cause which means he is considered a *formal* source. And, since sourcehood entails some sort of alternatives available to the agent at t_2 , and since it cannot be PAP_{All} (according to Kane), this leaves it open that Bob has *conditional* ability (or PAP_{If}). The following syllogism allows for these conclusions to be thought about logically:

62. Cause_{Formal} \Rightarrow Source_{Formal}

(Aristotelian causation)

63. $\text{Source}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{If}}$ (argued above)
 64. $\therefore \text{Cause}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{If}}$ (from (62), (63), hypothetical syllogism)

In terms of moral responsibility (and rational responsibility by entailment):

22. $\text{MR} \Rightarrow \text{RR}$ (premise)
 65. $\text{RR} \Rightarrow (\text{Cause}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{Source}_{\text{Formal}})$ (Aristotelian causation, compatibilist premise)
 66. $\therefore \text{MR} \Rightarrow (\text{Cause}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{Source}_{\text{Formal}})$ (from (22), (65), hypothetical syllogism)
 63. $\text{Source}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{If}}$ (argued above)
 64. $\therefore \text{Cause}_{\text{Formal}} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{If}}$ (from (62), (63), hypothetical syllogism)
 67. $\therefore \text{MR} \Rightarrow \text{PAP}_{\text{If}}$ (from (66), (62), (63), hypothetical syllogism)

This syllogism mirrors the incompatibilist syllogism formulated in §2.5.12. But, notice, just because Bob can be said to be a formal causal source instead of an efficient causal source does not guarantee by itself that Bob is in fact morally responsible for *A* at *t*₂. Formality of an action does not entail responsibility of an action; it is not sufficient, only necessary. And this is where Kane and I will have to disagree. He argues that Bob given the presence of *P* and of course the occurrent preemption that results in blockage unfortunately renders the conclusion that Bob is not morally responsible for *A*. He agrees that Bob can be a causal source because of *x*, just not the sufficient causal source. I grant this, but what I cannot grant as a compatibilist-determinist is that Bob *could not* be morally responsible. In the last couple of immediately preceding sections (especially §2.5.12) I have ended by alluding to the fact that the agent in an FSC *could be* morally responsible (despite FSCs apparent failure to eradicate all weak flickers), *not* because of these weak flickers, but rather because of the agent's *first-person perspective* or *mechanism ownership* embedded within the FSC. It is *Bob* (in (B)) who caused *A* via *x* immediately or proximally. It is *Bob* who is considered the formal causal source and thus owns his first-person mechanism, not the counterfactual intervener. While Bob's normativity explains Bob's *formal* causality, his *ownership* in the sequence explains his normativity. It follows, then, if Kane grants Bob's (loose) ownership, there remains wiggle room for Bob's entailed (possible) responsibility. More will be said about mechanism ownership and its close sister reasons-responsiveness when we speak of guidance control in §4.3. But, for now, it suffices to say that it has not been shown that Bob is not an agent given a strong case in which determinism seems to prevail. Bob is a formal causal source and thus can indeed be considered an agent in the face of Stratton's claim that given determinism there is no *I* or agency left. If (B) proves to be a conceptually coherent case, then this claim is false.

So there you have it. We have a logical counterexample to the claim that determinism diminishes genuine agency. Determinism only diminishes *efficient* causal agency or sourcehood, not *formal* causal agency or sourcehood. Therefore, Stratton would only succeed in his original claim that determinism rules out agency if and only if he first begs the question against compatibilism.

Formal agency can be and is a form of genuine agency. Clearly, Bob is an agent with causal powers and thus should be considered a genuine source. Compatibilists have argued this from the very start. As Welty noted in a previous footnote, “If God causes x to cause y , then obviously x is a genuine cause to y .” Exactly right. The alert reader will also find just how reminiscent this conclusion is when discussing compatibilism and Bignon’s “God-given-ness” in §2.3.5 and the displacement of determinism in §2.2.8. God’s omission via quasi-causation (i.e., deficient causation) allows for Bob to be the formal cause in his decision to steal Ann’s car, all the while God remains the sufficient cause. We have found B-FSCs to be helpful in arriving at this conclusion. Though (B) is not in its original context, it allows for the fact that determinism does not prove harmful to the locus of agency. In addition, because determinism and compatibilism by extension are only *defended* throughout this reply, on the assumption of these two theses, I may use (B) as a defense of compatibilist-determinism while avoiding the Dilemma Defense and not presupposing determinism as I am not arguing that PAP is indeed false (it would have been assumed, and proven, upon conviction, false from the beginning).

Last, it is beneficial to note that the type of preemption observed in (B), that of occurrent preemption, could be incorporated in Calvinist theology, particularly with regards to regeneration. The specific details of which I unfortunately will not divulge; however, I will say that if x and P converge in the actual sequence to cause the decision A at t_2 , and if x preempts P , what follows is that x and P *simultaneously cause* A . This reminds me of Christensen’s dual-sufficiency claim. But, even if one is not necessarily committed to that controversial thesis, one could always claim that x is the formal cause and P is the sufficient cause of regeneration (though via omission, or quasi-cause, as argued in previous sections). At t_2 , Bob could be said to believe Christ though the counterfactual presence of P renders this belief to be ultimately inevitable, or *irresistible*. Applied to regeneration, Bob’s faith and God’s regenerative power happen simultaneously at t_2 . Regeneration does not precede faith nor does faith precede regeneration; they are simultaneously converging.⁴⁷⁹ This of course is not to suggest synergism; monergism is still upheld as P (and Kane agrees) is counterfactually sufficient for the occurrence of A , though not the direct cause of A ; Bob is through his indeterministic process x . This, I contend, is conceptually coherent and is compatible with Reformed theology (something in which both (NRO) and (RO) Calvinists may enjoy).

2.5.15 Conclusion | Frankfurt-style Counterexamples

The end has come on our journey of FSCs. We started by assessing whether or not Stratton indeed argues for or against FSCs. In (P), we saw that it was argued that the agent may have the

⁴⁷⁹ Of course the grandiose salvific claim of Calvinism is that, at least traditionally understood, regeneration precedes faith. There may be some truth to this given the distinction between logical and chronological priority. Regeneration is chronologically prior to faith, but faith is logically (or explanatorily) prior to regeneration. A Calvinist could make this move and still reap the benefits of (B) as applied to their soteriological systematic.

ability to think otherwise (PAP-T) without having the ability to do otherwise (PAP). I argued there with two responses, one that is positive and one that is negative. My positive response to (P) was that Stratton is correct in thinking that (P), as it stands, does not rule out significant or robust alternatives, even in the deliberative process; PAP-T would remain true. However, we can easily eliminate this victory by constructing more sophisticated FSCs such as Stump's (G) (or Stump's revised (G), *RCE*, *a fortiori*). These cases would show that the distinction between mental and physical actions (one in which Stratton is eager to make) is actually irrelevant. The cases also show that the agent under consideration does not have robust alternatives available even in the mental deliberative processes; PAP-T would be true only if one holds to weak flickers. But seeing as Timpe persuasively argued that weak flickers cannot successfully overcome the *Robust Requirement*, and that those same weak flickers are present in FSCs, it follows that indeterminism is true, even in the midst of strong FSCs like (G). It is equally true, then, that libertarianism *does not* follow, contrary to Stratton; at best, source incompatibilism follows.

We then moved on to see how these weak flickers apply to the liberties of action. We saw that weak flickers do not fulfill CON_{PAP-T} , but they do fulfill CTR_{PAP-T} . However, once again, Stratton cannot consistently hold to weak flickers as they are not significantly robust for they are too weak to be honestly considered as a sufficient alternative for libertarianism. Next, we analyzed FSCs and their dialectical context concerning compatibilism. There I denied that FSCs prove to be a good argument for compatibilism. Instead, the hopeful compatibilist should flip the argument on its head and only claim a *defensive* position against the incompatibilist instead of an *offensive* one. This allows the compatibilism to skirt the clutches of the Dilemma Defense *and* the weak flicker strategy. I then concluded that Stratton does not have logical access to either strategies to defend his arguments against FSCs.

Afterwards, I considered a potential objection that could be raised complaining that alternatives need not be available to the agent *at all times*, only that they are available at *one* time or another. There I revisited the Mere Molinist Dilemma that I have loosely constructed in earlier sections and "beefed" it up in order to answer the objection that Kane and Timpe have also given in the literature. I concluded that the dilemma still goes through for Stratton, especially considering Timpe's virtue libertarianism. I have implied that, from this section (as well as others leading up to discussion on FSCs), Stratton would be caught in a "vicious circle" because he would find himself either claiming Timpe's virtue libertarianism or Kane's SFAs (or UR) principles. If Stratton claims Timpe's virtue libertarianism, and he presses the flicker strategy to escape FSCs, then I would respond by arguing that those flickers are not robust. They are weak and weak flickers cannot significantly form moral characters. If Stratton claims Kane's principles, and he presses the Dilemma to escape FSCs, then I would respond by saying that Molinists cannot affirm the Dilemma because of the taxi-cab fallacy (as argued above). And even if I was wrong about that, then Pereboom's *Tax Evasion 2* case goes through and Stratton still fails. Either way

he fails as he has yet to provide a suitable answer to FSCs. Last, I formulated compatibilist terms of causal responsibility in relation to moral responsibility and how one could be a genuine cause given determinism; a causal source that is indeed compatible with determinism. Additionally, I attempted to formulate a steel-man argument for God's "omni-causality" and how it does not entail the fact that God is indeed blameworthy for the unconditional omission to save the reprobate. I then demonstrated how one's causal agency is not diminished under determinism given an even stronger FSC, (B), contrary to Stratton's claims that the *I* is vanished if determinism is in fact true.

2.6 Conclusion | Definitions & Philosophical Preliminaries

William Lane Criag has once astonishingly remarked that "the Christian seeking after truth will probably learn more about the attributes and nature of God from works of Christian philosophers than from those of Christian theologians."⁴⁸⁰ As I close this rather large part of this reply, I find this quote ironic primarily in the fact that I sincerely believe this applies to Stratton. I additionally find it ironic that the book in which this quote is taken from is a book specifically on divine foreknowledge and human freedom! I have spent a considerable amount of philosophizing in order to honor the sentiment behind Criag's concern. The issue, however, is that I cannot see how Stratton, a pupil of Craig, has reasonably honored the same sentiment given the above sections.

Part two of this reply was solely dedicated to definitions in the philosophical or otherwise (when appropriate) theological literature. These definitions are not only extant, but thriving in abundance. When I see a "mere theologian" passing around vain definitions of compatibilism and libertarianism, or forsaking a key part of a dialectical context in Frankfurt-style examples, all the while *not once* representing theological determinism and compatibilism in an honest contemporary light by considering how the views pose an alternative view of responsibility, agency, and sourcehood, it is to virtually scream the bastardization of Craig's request. The conclusion I will reiterate here, if it was not at all already clear, is that Stratton needs to do his homework. But it's worse in the fact that he *needed* (as in past tense) to do his homework, yet chose, for whatever crazy reason, not to. I have concluded that Stratton does not understand necessary conditions of his own view on libertarianism, nor does he ever consider the possibility that his specific brand of leeway may not even be sufficient for responsibility. Next, Stratton does not articulate the definition of theological determinism from scholarly theological determinists. He has not described the view accurately when he continues to throw the words "external", "exhaustive", "force", or "cause." The level of straw-men rises when considering the definition of compatibilism and its entailments. He blunders the fact that the definition of compatibilism ought to remain distinct from the application of compatibilism. In addition, he

⁴⁸⁰ William Lane Criag, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 11.

does not ever actually quote contemporary compatibilist arguments and show *through their quotations* that they are wrong, or clearly show why and how. What is more, Stratton fails to understand that relying upon mere intuition for abilities and responsibilities in a metaphysical debate is not the same as proving the view. Last, Stratton is apparently ignorant of FSCs and their actual role in the dialectic surrounding freedom and responsibility. This failure is simply miserable and gross.

For these reasons, and many more, I have found Stratton's work on definitions and philosophical preliminaries to be an inexcusable failure. Craig's call really does say it all. We now turn to part three where we will discuss Stratton's historical theology.

3. ON HISTORY

3.1 Historical Theologians | Introduction

As we approach Stratton's lengthy analysis on historical theology and his exposition of past Christian thinkers, along with their corresponding thoughts on freedom, providence, and sin, I will find it pedagogically helpful to rely upon Stratton's rejoinder to Bignon as well as Bignon's review of Stratton's exposition. I am choosing to exegete Stratton in this manner because the historical section is roughly 117 pages or 40 percent of the book. Obviously this is an obnoxious amount of ground to cover, and as I only have a few concerns I think responding to Stratton's rejoinder will suffice. And so, I will simply agree with Bignon on his analysis of Stratton on this section. Whatever Bignon's criticisms or concessions to Stratton's historical section are, I will likewise object to or agree to, respectively. One may find Bignon's responses in his review of Stratton, pages 12 to 18.

I agree with Bignon in that, "I think Stratton's attempt to do a bit of everything in a limited space backfires as he does none of them really well, but it does introduce the reader to all the facets of this debate, as there are indeed 'biblical, historical, theological and philosophical' issues to consider," ("Review," 2). However, I am not a historical theologian and I have not done nearly the amount of research Stratton has on this matter, nor have I studied the various theologians he has in mind, at least not at any considerable length. That said, this acknowledgment does *not* mean that I do not have major critiques regarding Stratton's conclusions. Therefore, I am focusing primarily on those aspects of Stratton's rejoinder that failed to address Bignon's (in my opinion) most pressing concerns.

But first, as an aside, I will briefly present concerns about the very presence of the section itself. The historical project is immense, ambitious, and, personally, wholly unnecessary. As one reviewer states,

One note here is to ask the rhetorical question, "what do the 10 chapters on historical theology do for the stated twin theses?" [i.e., libertarianism and middle knowledge]. Look at a theology or philosophy monograph, to the church or the academy. The chapters are usually split into three: the account (2 chapters for Thomas Flint [*Divine Providence*]), the objections (5 chapters for Flint), and the application to puzzles (4 chapters for Flint). If you deleted 10 chapters, nothing would be lost in the case for [libertarian] or counterfactual knowledge. At best, those ten chapters serve to tell us that Molinism might, possibly, not be clearly rejected. [Stratton] could have done that in a sentence.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸¹ Zach Reimer in personal correspondence while reviewing the present reply. Thomas Flint's book is a marvelously celebrated piece of Molinist literature, and arguably the best defense of Molinism on the

This is correct. There is virtually no reason (that I can think of) to warrant the justification of ten long chapters on historical theology which do not directly parallel the thesis of mere Molinism (MM). At best, the historical section is perpendicular to (MM), and in that case it should have been edited out or placed as an appendix.⁴⁸²

But, that aside, I understand that Stratton's overall project during these chapters is to produce the idea that (limited) libertarian freedom is compatible with several historical Christian thinkers that are typically regarded on the side of the Reformed Calvinist. As Bignon says,

The ensuing 150 pages [of the historical section], which amount to half of the book, are dedicated to surveying some important Christian thinkers of the past on the question of free will and providence. One of Stratton's goals here is to show that famous authors who are usually channeled by Calvinists (like Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther and others) actually all affirm libertarian freedom!⁴⁸³

Stratton's own summary of the exposition is stated as follows:

Recall the goal of my book. I first offered several definitions of libertarian freedom with a focus on sourcehood freedom and an ability to choose between or among a range of alternative options each of which is compatible with one's nature at a given moment. If any of the great theologians of the past made claims that seemed to align with these definitions, then it seems fair to say that at least occasionally, they explicitly or implicitly affirmed that humanity possesses libertarian freedom. I made it clear that these theological thinkers of the past may have been determinists regarding soteriological matters, but that to them, there was nothing incoherent with the notion that human salvation can be determined by God, and that humans still possess libertarian freedom in matters other than salvation. Not only do some Reformed theologians hold that view today, it seems that Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin may have held that view centuries ago.⁴⁸⁴

He is even more specific on his historical project by stating the following a few pages later: "There is no logical contradiction between the propositions, 'Soteriological matters are causally

philosophical market. See Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸² In personal correspondence to Stratton, he has alluded to the fact that his dissertation supervisors asked for (or required?) the historical survey on Reformed thinkers and freedom specifically because Stratton's alma mater was indeed a "reformed" school. That makes sense, to an extent. What doesn't make sense, however, is *keeping* the ten chapters after he has already been awarded the Ph.D! Gut the ten chapters from the dissertation to make an actual presentable book; the premises of (MM) would not be lost.

⁴⁸³ Bignon, "Review," 12.

⁴⁸⁴ Stratton, "Rejoinder," 4.

determined by God,’ and ‘humans possess libertarian freedom regarding some issues not pertaining to salvation matters,’” (Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 6). So how does Stratton fare on this endeavor? Is he correct in ascertaining that it is “fair” to infer libertarian freedom upon these theologians? There are of course many items of contention that one could draw out, but I will resist the temptation and rely upon Bignon’s critiques to apply where my comments are absent. But suffice to say, in short, no, I do not in fact think it is “fair” to infer the jump to libertarianism (at least on some of the theologians Stratton has in mind), and I will try to show this claim throughout this section. In order to accomplish this modest feat, I will briefly pin-point two contentions. These are contentions where Bignon convincingly shows Stratton’s historical (and philosophical) mishaps, yet when Stratton responds to Bignon he fails to address the concerns in a satisfying manner. Those two contentions concern two theologians: Calvin and Pelagius. I will start with Calvin as he is arguably the least complicated of the two.

3.2 Calvin & Smuggled Incompatibilism

Bignon begins his critique of Stratton’s commentary on Calvin’s theology of providence and free will by stating the following:

The French Reformer [Calvin] says Adam had “free choice of good and evil,” and Stratton unwarrantedly inserts libertarianism into his paraphrase: “Adam and Eve had libertarian freedom to choose either the good or evil.” ([*Mere Molinism*] p.115). No. Once again, the mere mention of free choice isn’t an affirmation of libertarianism, or Stratton should count me as a libertarian too.⁴⁸⁵

This is a serious issue. If Bignon’s criticism is right, then Stratton seems to imply that if one affirms “free choice” or “free will” then this automatically entails a *libertarian* “free choice” or “free will.” That maneuver is a mistake, and a rookie one at that. Of course, the compatibilist does, can, and should say that we have “free choice” and “free will” (as Bignon explicitly does); it is just the case that this choice is *compatibilist*, not *incompatibilist*. In other words, when a compatibilist claims we have free will, it is to say that our freedom of the will (and whatever necessary or sufficient condition(s) that follow it) is compatible with determinism. Stratton disagrees. He remains strong in the claim that Calvin allowed for libertarian freedom in “matters below” (i.e., Stratton’s “limited” libertarian freedom). As Stratton says, “But Calvin (along with Luther and Melancthon as well as other Calvinists surveyed in my book) do not all seem to assume EDD—exhaustive divine determinism,” (“Rejoinder,” 5). He then follows this sentence with a footnote:

Calvin seemed open to libertarian freedom regarding the “matters below” and also seems to affirm the libertarian freedom of Adam before the fall (See Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.15.8).

⁴⁸⁵ Bignon, “Review,” 15.

If man ever possesses libertarian freedom, and God is still sovereign over these free actions, Molinism seems to be the only game in town (See, *Mere Molinism*, p. 253).⁴⁸⁶

Unfortunately these quotes are just about everything we have from Stratton responding to Bignon's criticisms of misinterpreting Calvin. Stratton makes the grand claim that Calvin seems to be open to incompatibilism regarding "matters below" as well as "Adam before the fall." Is this correct? To see that it is not, it would be helpful to quote the original passage Stratton cited from Calvin. The quote from Calvin with an appropriate amount of context is as follows:

Man excelled in these noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and judgment not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled him to rise up to God and eternal happiness. Thereafter choice was added to direct the appetites, and tempter all the organic motions; the will being thus perfectly submissive to the authority of reason. In this upright state, man possessed freedom of will, by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain eternal life... Adam, therefore, might have stood if he chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell; but it was because his will was pliable in either direction, and he had not received constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell. Still he had a free choice of good and evil.⁴⁸⁷

Here is the problem: this quote says *nothing* about incompatibilism! Moreover, this quote says nothing about the categorical ability to choose between options each of which is compatible with our nature (i.e., "limited" libertarianism). It only states that God has given man certain gifts before the fall, and one of those gifts is the free choice of the will which aligns closely with our reason. Well, isn't that something? This is almost picture perfect of what the compatibilist wants to say regarding reasons-responsiveness (or compatibilist type (5) from our section on compatibilism). Moreover, Calvin said, "Adam, therefore, might have stood *if* he chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell." But notice the added emphasis on "if". There lies a conditional ability, *not* a categorical ability: *if* Adam chose life, he would "rise up to God and eternal happiness." This is type (1) of compatibilism surveyed above. Next, perhaps Stratton gets the "libertarian" part from Calvin's "... his will was *pliable* in *either* direction..." part. This would imply that Calvin believed that Adam has the ability to sin or *not* to sin, which of course implies the libertarian freedom (or so Stratton could argue). First, I fail to see how that implies libertarian freedom; it only implies *indeterminism*, at best. Second, the passage *still* does not imply *categorical* alternatives. And because Calvin mentioned a conditional *right before* the statement, I don't see how one can automatically jump to PAP_{All}. The passage could be interpreted as PAP_{If} (or conditional ability). Last, another interpretation that could be made is one that says Calvin believed in the *existence* of options, but not necessarily the *accessibility* of options. I have argued above that the compatibilist can wholly accept the *existence* of options

⁴⁸⁶ Stratton, "Rejoinder," 5n12.

⁴⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.8.

without necessarily accepting the *accessibility* of those options. So, again, the passage still says virtually nothing on the incompatibility of options for Adam.

There is nothing with Calvin's statements here that entail the thesis of incompatibilism as traditionally understood. In fact, I think it is quite the opposite. Calvin believed in "free choice", and that man was responsible because we have been given certain "endowments" such as our ability to reason, yet all the while God is the determiner and the agent is responsible by his *own* accord and action (this rings of FSC (B)!). And so, no, Molinism is actually not the "only game in town." Stratton cannot forcefully insert his idea of freedom into the text of a historical figure who virtually had no professional (or theological) interest defending that idea of freedom (i.e., incompatibilism). But, at the end of the day, the careful reader will modestly surmise with Bignon: "Calvin's view sure sounds like Calvinism," ("Review," 15). That is because (shockingly) it *is* Calvinist. Bignon goes on to critique Stratton some more:

Stratton's treatment of Calvin to make him out to be a libertarian is most tortured when Calvin says that men sin of *necessity* and that it's compatible with their sinning *voluntarily*. Stratton responds as follows:

It is hard for this writer not to conclude that by what he says he is evading the issue. One can readily agree that Adam freely chose—without compulsion—to disobey God. But how is it that a person does something "voluntarily" if the "*will is deprived of liberty*"?? Does not "necessity" refer to what a person *must* do because of his nature? (p.119)

So, Stratton brings his own incompatibilist conviction to the table and accordingly doesn't understand how Calvin can affirm human choices are both "necessary" and "voluntary." But how Calvin can do so is trivial: Calvin is simply not an incompatibilist!⁴⁸⁸

Trivial indeed. Yet, again, we see the same mistake from Stratton. Just because Calvin claims that men sin *voluntarily*, does *not* mean that libertarian (incompatibilist) freedom is the entailing freedom that makes the most abductive sense out of the view, especially when Calvin *also* sees to it that "men sin of *necessity*." That is compatibilism, by definition; Calvin thought our sin was out of necessity, yet done so voluntarily all the while being held *desert* responsible. The awkward position Stratton has to paint Calvin in order to twist his words is nothing more than classic historical eisegesis. To place Calvin on his side of the debate, is not just maddening but comical. As Bignon concludes,

But Stratton can't here assume his incompatibilism, force it onto Calvin's defense of human freedom, apply redacting tape on Calvin's affirmation of necessity in that very sentence, and conclude that since Calvin affirms voluntariness he must be denying

⁴⁸⁸ Bignon, "Review," 15.

necessity and be a libertarian! I'm not sure why Stratton would want Calvin in his team, but that's not the way to draft him.⁴⁸⁹

This type of smuggled incompatibilism is not necessarily surprising coming from the incompatibilist survey of debate tactics from laymen, but *it is* surprising coming from a supposed scholar on the subject with a decade plus of research. The assumption of incompatibilist freedom imposed upon Calvin's writings is simply cruel and gross. Calvin whole-heartedly believed in the strong predestination *and* determination of God in not just soteriological providence but also mundane human choices. Moreover, he believed that these choices were voluntary, yes, and of "freedom of the will" on the part of the human agent, yet nonetheless of necessity. That is definitionally compatibilism, not incompatibilism.⁴⁹⁰ Just because one sees the word "voluntary" or the phrase "free choice" in another's writings does *not* grant justification to an incompatibilist conclusion because that would be question-begging. But, what is even more damning is the sobering fact that Stratton does not respond to this clear-headed concern.

3.3 Pelagius, Bignon & the Anti-Pelagian Constraint

The second (and last) concern on my agenda of critiques on the historical section regards Stratton's brief comments on Pelagius' theology of grace. In order to provide a healthy framework of my critique of Stratton's analysis of Pelagius and its argued entailments, it will be helpful to first set out a semi-detailed discussion between Bignon and Stratton.

Bignon quotes Stratton in that "for Pelagius free will meant the ability to do what was right and good. This must be seen and understood as his reaction to Augustine's determinism."⁴⁹¹ Bignon replies to this definition by relaying the fact that this seems to coincide with the exact view that Stratton himself wants to hold. Bignon writes: "Isn't that exactly Stratton's view that when a sinner freely sins, his free will means he had 'the ability to do what was right and good' instead? In 'opposition to Augustine's determinism'?" ("Review," 13). Stratton responds by saying that this conclusion is premature as his view does "[n]ot necessarily" entail that one has the ability to do what is right and good.

As I explain in my book, a sinner might not have the ability to choose not to sin, but he could still freely choose between a range of alternative options each of which is compatible with his sin nature. For example, why think that an unregenerate sinner could not choose between the range of alternative crimes: to rob the bank or rob the liquor store? Moreover, why assume that he could not stay home and fantasize about robbing

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹⁰ And yes, the sense of responsibility at interest here is *basic desert*, and so compatibilism is understood exhaustively; that is to say, Calvin understood that men were *desert* responsible yet under necessity, and so he was an *exhaustive* compatibilist

⁴⁹¹ Stratton, quoted in Bignon, "Review," 13. (originally in Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 62).

the bank or liquor store? Each option is sinful and compatible with an unregenerate's nature (not to mention a Christian's regenerated nature).⁴⁹²

While I agree with Stratton that Bignon's misappropriation of his view is evident, I do not agree that positing limited libertarian free will (hereafter, LLFW), as alluded to in the quote, in order to address the concern mitigates it any less. In other words, though Stratton's specific flavor of libertarian freedom *is* not to be defined simply as "the ability to do what was right and good" in "opposition to... determinism," it certainly *entails* it. This, I believe, is Bignon's point (albeit articulated rather poorly). As we will see later in §3.5.2, this retreat to LLFW will not work. For now, however, I will merely point out the fact that this view of LLFW has been addressed in this present reply in §2.4 when discussing liberties of action and levels of action. There, I argued that libertarian freedom, no matter how modest or "limited" one articulates the view, *must* entail the liberty of contradiction, not merely the liberty of contrariety. If libertarianism is true and indeterminism is true from this fact, then this entails the categorical ability to do otherwise (PAP_{All}). This includes the ability to do "right and good" *regardless* of one's nature (regenerate or unregenerate); that is, regardless of the *limitations* imposed upon it. But, as I said, I will save most of my additional response for §3.5.2.

For now, notice that Stratton's response to Bignon here is virtually the same as his articulation of LLFW in *Mere Molinism* page 164-165 (also quoted in this reply) right down to the "robbing a bank or liquor store" detail. All things considered, then, it seems as if Stratton is placing most (if not all) his chips in the basket of LLFW in order to respond to the serious charge of Pelagianism. To frame the dialectic straightforwardly, Bignon responds to Stratton by explicitly arguing that his view entails Pelagianism and Stratton responds by implicitly stating that it does not because of (apparently) LLFW. But, if this is correct, I am afraid this move does nothing to defuse the charge as it does not answer the objection. This issue here is not what Stratton's view *is*, but rather what his view *entails*. Bignon and I agree on this conclusion, though we demonstrate it in different ways. He writes, "Stratton should really tell us *how* he avoids the Pelagian view on this, not just tell us *that* Pelagianism should be rejected," ("Review, 13). Of course this is what one should expect, but sadly it is what one does *not* find in *Mere Molinism*.

This is precisely where I think Stratton fails in this section. Instead of actually addressing Bignon's concerns, Stratton promotes his own view once more all the while (somehow) forgetting the fact it is *that* view which is currently under dispute. Interestingly, Stratton doesn't write anything more in response to Bignon concerning Pelagius, but instead conveniently leaves out Bignon's actual points in the rest of the paragraph from which he quoted him above. As a result, the full paragraph of Bignon's reply to Stratton's analysis on Pelagius was not addressed in Stratton's rejoinder. Thus, I will place it here for context, and exegete it in chunks:

⁴⁹² Stratton, "Rejoinder," 4.

And if Stratton responds that an unregenerate man can only sin but is still free to choose between different sins, then he's not out of the Pelagian woods yet, because if the principle of alternate possibilities is true at all, it plausibly applies to all levels of granularity for action. There is no reason to claim blameworthiness for specific sin X requires the categorical ability to not commit specific sin X, if one denies that blameworthiness "for sinning" in general requires the categorical ability not to sin. Stratton correctly notes that "Pelagius said it was possible for some people to live without sin." (p.62). Again, that's a consequence of the categorical PAP: if moral responsibility requires the categorical ability to do otherwise, (or "ought implies can"), and if we are responsible for failing to live without sinning, then it follows that we can live without sinning. That point is repeatedly made by Luther, affirmed by Edwards, and defended anew in my own book *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God*.⁴⁹³

Bignon anticipates the very response that I had anticipated Stratton to make in the charge that his view entails Pelagianism. What is that response? Limited libertarian freedom! It is all the more idiotic in that though Bignon anticipates this response from Stratton, Stratton *still responds that way* all the while touching none of Bignon's actual points as to *why* his view of LLFW is problematic. Bignon notes what Stratton does indeed want to say when LLFW is at play, namely that though an "unregenerate man can only sin" he is "still free to choose between different sins." What Bignon is describing here is the categorical liberty of contrariety (CTR_{PAP-ALL}), one of the central tenets of LLFW. The agent could have, according to LLFW, CTR_{PAP-ALL} without having the categorical liberty to contradict his own action (i.e., liberty of contradiction, or CON_{PAP-ALL}). In other words, one needn't have morally *significant* freedom (CON_{PAP-ALL}) to refrain from sinning so that he can do "right and good" in order to be libertarianly free; the agent needs only morally *relevant* freedom (CTR_{PAP-ALL}). The latter is what is entailed by LLFW, not the former, or so it is argued by Stratton. The exact issue Bignon presses is the exact issue Stratton avoids in his rejoinder. What is that issue?

Given the quote above, Bignon says that even if this maneuver were taken (i.e., holding to categorical CTR within the class of sinful options instead of categorical CON within the class of righteous options), "[Stratton] not out of the Pelagian woods yet, because if the principle of alternate possibilities is true at all, it plausibly applies to all levels of granularity for action," (Ibid.). That is, if PAP_{ALL} is true, this applies to low level actions (i.e., CTR) as well as high level actions (i.e., CON). As Bignon says (in the same quote),

There is no reason to claim blameworthiness for specific sin X requires the categorical ability to not commit specific sin X, if one denies that blameworthiness "for sinning" in general requires the categorical ability not to sin.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Bignon, "Review," 13.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

Precisely. And this is what was argued in §2.4: the liberty of contrariety entails the liberty of contradiction, or that the specific low levels of action entails the class high levels of action. So it is philosophically vain to argue that one need not have the liberty of contradiction while still retaining the liberty of contrariety because the former is entailed by the latter. Obviously if we negate the contradictory action, then we must also negate the contrary action. Moreover, I will argue later that regardless of the model the incompatibilist could conjure up in order to defend against the charge of Pelagianism, it does not work for similar reasons that Bignon mentions here. Bignon continues,

Stratton correctly notes that “Pelagius said it was possible for some people to live without sin.” (p.62). Again, that’s a consequence of the categorical PAP: if moral responsibility requires the categorical ability to do otherwise, (or “ought implies can”), and if we are responsible for failing to live without sinning, then it follows that we can live without sinning.⁴⁹⁵

This argument is a summarized version of Bignon’s reformulated Pelagian argument against incompatibilism from Luther, and it is demonstrated via inductive recurrence (*Excusing Sinners*, 110-119, 133-141) and set theory (as I have shown in this reply). Therefore, it is indeed true that “if we are responsible for failing to live without sinning [as Stratton claims we are according to LLFW], then it follows that we can [categorically] live without sinning” as “ought implies can,” in the same way most leeway incompatibilists wish to suggest. Stratton has not addressed this argument *whatsoever*.

However, in the interest of charity, not all incompatibilists treat the Pelagian charge as flippantly as Stratton. Kevin Timpe, in his book *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*, describes the seriousness of Pelagianism as follows:

The most dangerous pitfall an incompatibilist account of the role of the human will involved in conversion is Pelagianism. At the heart of Pelagianism is the claim that a fallen human agent is able to will the good of reestablishing union with God apart from concomitant grace. At the heart of Augustine’s disagreement with the Pelagians is his insistence on what I call the “anti-Pelagian Constraint,” or (*APC*):

(*APC*): No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 13.

Timpe's main thesis in that chapter is to show how his particular brand of accounting for grace and freedom in the Christian life is "neither deterministic nor Pelagian," (*Philosophical Theology*, 51). He believes his view "allows one to maintain both (i) that divine grace is the sole non-instrumental efficient cause of saving faith (thereby avoiding what [he] take[s] to be the central objectionable feature of Pelagianism) and (ii) that humans control whether or not they come to saving faith (thereby avoiding theological determinism)," (Ibid.).⁴⁹⁷ Timpe's framework of answering the Pelagian charge (while borrowing heavily from Eleonore Stump) would no doubt prove useful to Stratton in answering Bignon; but as it happens, Stratton does not pull from these awesome incompatibilist resources. Shame. Nonetheless, it is not as if Timpe's view goes without its critics. In fact, Bignon himself has already addressed Timpe's (*APC*) (albeit briefly) because it serves as a potential objection to Bignon's own reformulated Pelagian argument (*Excusing Sinners*, 136-137). Bignon says,

Timpe takes it that his model successfully dodges the charge of Pelagianism if it satisfies the "anti-Pelagian constraint"... I agree that this constraint is necessary to avoid charges of Pelagianism (and concede that Timpe's model [of non-determining grace] satisfies it), but I dispute that it is sufficient for such, since one is still left with fallen sinners who out of their free will can full well live a perfect sinless life and gain heaven by their good works. That is still Pelagian.⁴⁹⁸

Bignon does not go any further in detailing his reasons *why* (*APC*) is not sufficient to avoid Pelagianism. As a humble substitute, I hope to shed some light on whether or not Timpe's incompatibilist model of divine grace entails Pelagianism.

3.4 Metaphysics of Grace | Determining & Non-determining Grace

In the last section, we discussed whether or not Stratton's short response to Bignon was strong enough to avoid the charge of Pelagianism. We concluded that it is not because it does not address Bignon's argument nor his reason as to *why* Stratton's view *entails* Pelagianism. Stratton implicitly suggested that his view doesn't entail Pelagianism without detailing the reason *why* it doesn't entail Pelagianism, while in the face of Bignon's very own exposition as to why *it does*. We then turned briefly to Timpe's model in hopes that he could show that his brand of incompatibilism (i.e., virtue libertarianism) does not entail Pelagianism. Though we ended with Timpe's construction of (*APC*) thereby conceding its necessity, we saw that it is perhaps still not

⁴⁹⁷ Any well-read philosopher worth his salt should recognize that Timpe's (i) and (ii) can both be held consistently within the compatibilist framework. Of course, the theistic compatibilist can hold to the fact that God is the efficient cause of their salvation (i), while equally holding onto the fact that this is within our control (ii). It is just the case that the sense of "control" necessary here is not *regulative* control (i.e., incompatibilist) but *guidance* control (i.e., compatibilist). In Preciado's *A Reformed View of Freedom*, its main thesis argues this distinction beautifully while relying on Fischer and Ravizza's original formulation in *Responsibility and Control*.

⁴⁹⁸ Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 137.

sufficient to avoid the charge. In hopes of rescuing Stratton from Pelagian clutches, let us dig into Timpe's model a bit. I will show that even if Stratton relies on a robust model such as Timpe's in order to answer Bignon fully (as Bignon's response to Timpe is unfortunately unsatisfying), the view still does not work and Pelagianism will burst out the seams once more.

Timpe's model of divine grace begins first with an analysis on "determining and non-determining views of grace and its relation to saving faith...

Determining Grace (*DG*): Divine grace is a sufficient condition for the human response of faith in God.

Non-determining Grace (*NG*): Divine grace is not a sufficient condition for the human response of faith in God."⁴⁹⁹

Timpe then spends time detailing some important logical subdivisions within (*DG*) and (*NG*), "depending on whether divine grace is necessary for saving faith:

(*DG*₁): Divine grace is a necessary and sufficient condition for the human response of faith in God.

(*DG*₂): Divine grace is a sufficient but not necessary condition for the human response of faith in God.

(*NG*₁): Divine grace is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the human response of faith in God.

(*NG*₂): Divine grace is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the human response of faith in God.⁵⁰⁰

Before moving onto Timpe's chosen position of non-determining grace, it will be helpful to lay out exactly what each subset of (*DG*) or (*NG*) entails. The key takeaway is that, in general, Calvinist-determinist views on the metaphysics of grace usually end up arguing for (*DG*₁) while non-Calvinist indeterminist views end up arguing for (something like) (*NG*₂). In a footnote, Timpe claims that he is unaware of any (*DG*) advocate who embraces (*DG*₂), and I agree; that position is far too unorthodox to faithfully maintain an honored theological or traditional status. However, (*NG*₁) is none other than Pelagius' view of grace. Timpe writes,

⁴⁹⁹ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 51.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 51-52. One could argue that (*NG*₂) is a type of *efficient grace*, whereas (*DG*₁) is a type of *efficacious grace*. Of course, the latter is pretty much seen as synonymous to Calvinist's *irresistible grace*.

In discussing Pelagius' view of grace, one must keep in mind that Pelagius consistently maintained that the giving of human nature is itself a grace; thus, even on his account, grace is required for an individual to will the good... The grace that is needed throughout [the Christian's life] is sometimes referred to as "enabling grace" or "the grace of creation."⁵⁰¹

This "grace of creation," according to Augustine, is "not enough to will the good", and thus "[w]hat is at issue, then, is whether another grace—sometimes called 'cooperative grace' or what Augustine calls 'a unique grace'—is also required for a human to will the good..." (Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 54). The "unique grace" that Augustine is apparently concerned with is the same grace that Timpe had in mind while formulating (*APC*). Mankind *cannot* realign his fallen will in order to cause, choose, or will any good *apart from a unique grace*. "Augustine therefore insists on the need for cooperative or unique grace," (Ibid., 55); grace that is beyond the mere gift of creation or nature (as Pelagius held). Now, of course, Augustine sees this "cooperative or unique grace" as *compatibilist* instead of *incompatibilist*, and therefore *monergistic* instead of *synergistic* (see relevant footnotes in §2.3.2 concerning Couenhoven's argument that Augustine was indeed a compatibilist). Regardless of this small debate, one thing is clear: Pelagius affirmed a type of (*NG*), specifically (*NG_I*), because he believed this "unique grace" is neither necessary nor sufficient for salvific faith in Christ. The only grace that *was* necessary (though not sufficient) for salvation in Christ, according to Pelagius, was the grace of creation. But this fails to meet the criteria of a unique grace, as Augustine notes. Timpe agrees, and concludes the following:

Pelagius and Caelestius thus represent one non-determining approach to grace, namely (*NG_I*). I agree with the proponent of (*DG*) that there is good reason not to endorse (*NG_I*), since (*NG_I*) has been deemed to be heretical. Pelagius was excommunicated by Pope Zosimus in 418 largely because of his teachings regarding grace. The teachings of both Pelagius and Caelestius, among others, were condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 for holding that humans could do good apart from the [unique] grace of God. The Council of Orange in 529 furthered this condemnation...⁵⁰²

It seems Pelagius' view of grace (*NG_I*) ultimately meets the demise of heresy. I take it that the heart of Pelagianism, then, is to deny the sufficiency and necessity of a unique grace in salvation. Therefore, the term "Pelagianism" will hereafter refer to (*NG_I*). Now, like Augustine, Timpe is also concerned with this unique grace, and it is his primary aim to construct a model that avoids Pelagianism, yet, at the same time, avoids determinism. So, the real challenge for the incompatibilist is to produce a coherent model in which avoids Pelagianism (*NG_I*) while also

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 55.

affirming (*NG*). It appears the only way to do so is to affirm (*NG*₂). But before diving into the details of Timpe's view (*NG*₂), let's briefly head back to Bignon's quick analysis of (*APC*).

Recall that Bignon thinks that Timpe's (*APC*) is a necessary condition for avoiding the charge of Pelagianism, but it is in fact not a sufficient condition for avoiding the charge of Pelagianism. That is to say, according to Bignon, the mere adoption of (*APC*) does not sufficiently grasp the heart of (*NG*₁) (i.e., Pelagianism). But this is interesting because Bignon's description of Pelagianism implies that one can live a fully sinless life, *not* that a unique divine grace is neither necessary nor sufficient for salvation (*NG*₁). I think this description is more or less Pelagian *in nature*, but I have doubts as to whether this description of Pelagianism *simpliciter* is correct. And so, because of this hiccup, I contend that what Bignon calls Pelagianism is only a *consequence* of Pelagianism instead of Pelagius' actual view of grace. If Bignon were to articulate Pelagius' actual view of grace, then his articulation would be something like (*NG*₁). That is, if one embraces (*NG*₁), the consequence of this affirmation is that one could live a fully sinless life; but, unfortunately, we do not see this connection in Bignon's reformulation of Luther's "Pelagian" argument. Given this acknowledgment, it is better if we say that Timpe's (*APC*) as well as his model of non-determining grace (*NG*₂)—which is specifically constructed to satisfy (*APC*)—does not successfully evade the consequences of (*NG*₁), despite its robustness, "since one is still left with fallen sinners who out of their free will can full well live a perfect sinless life and gain heaven by their good works. That is still Pelagian," (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 137). So according to Bignon, the consequence of living a fully sinless life is a *consequence* of not only (*NG*₁), but *also* (*NG*₂) – Timpe's model. I concede this much; however, I cannot concede that Timpe's model (as we will see shortly) entails Pelagianism *forthright* or (*NG*₁). Timpe's model (*NG*₂), at best, entails the same *consequences* of Pelagianism, but I fail to see how this consequence warrants the direct charge of Pelagianism. But, then again, since Bignon was not necessarily clear on this fact, perhaps he agrees.

We have seen that Bignon thinks that (*NG*₁) along with (*NG*₂) entail the unfortunate consequence of a fallen human being able to live a perfect sinless life. It seems, then, for Bignon, this is a worry for *all* models that espouse (*NG*). Call this worry, the "anti-Pelagian Consequence Constraint":

(*APCC*): No fallen human individual is able to cause or will a perfect sinless life.

If (*NG*) models cannot avoid (*APCC*), then this is sufficient to classify (*NG*) models as Pelagian. In another way, if one accepts a model of non-determining grace in order to accurately explain the metaphysics of grace, one must also accept that a fallen human individual is able to cause or will a perfect sinless life, and to Bignon, this is sufficient for the classification of Pelagian. However, as I mentioned above, I do not share this conclusion. I agree that (*NG*) models are sufficient to entail a violation of (*APCC*), but I fail to see how it follows that the violation of

(*APCC*) in turn entails (*NG₁*), or Pelagianism *simpliciter*. Apparently Bignon sees (*NG*) models as *necessary* and *sufficient* for the violation of (*APCC*), whereas I only see (*NG*) models as *sufficient* for the violation of (*APCC*): if one affirms non-determining grace, then one must be able to live a sinless life. The negation of (*APCC*) is only a necessary condition for the charge of Pelagianism (*NG₁*), *not* a sufficient one. While I can see how (*NG₁*) is a sufficient and necessary condition for Pelagianism (and therefore, a sufficient and necessary condition for the violation of (*APCC*)), I cannot see how (*NG₂*) (Timpe's view) is a sufficient and necessary condition for Pelagianism; (*NG₂*) remains only a *sufficient* condition for the violation of (*APCC*).

The technicality of this discussion has allowed us to see that while (*NG₁*) just is Pelagianism by definition, (*NG₂*) is not, though it entails a violation of (*APCC*). All this to say, I deny Bignon's worry that (*NG₂*) presents a model that entails Pelagianism, though I do agree that there is a sentiment that must be honored. In order to accommodate this sentiment, I therefore propose that (*NG₁*) entails Pelagianism, while (*NG₂*) entails *semi*-Pelagianism. Let the following stand for the "anti-*semi*-Pelagian Constraint":

(*ASPC*): No fallen human individual is able to act or cooperate with any good, including the cooperation of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.⁵⁰³

When Bignon says Timpe's model is not sufficient to satisfy (*APC*), he is saying that it entails Pelagianism. However, given the anatomy of necessary and sufficient conditions for the charge of Pelagianism above, we can only say that Timpe's model is not sufficient to satisfy (*ASPC*) (as I will argue soon), though it still entails a violation of (*APCC*). In addition, contrary to Bignon, (*NG₂*) does not entail Pelagianism (unqualified); that is, (*NG₂*) does not entail (*NG₁*). But, we can say that (*NG₂*) entails the conjunctive violation of (*ASPC*) and (*APCC*). We are now at a position to argue this claim.

⁵⁰³ The term *semi*-Pelagianism is often defined as "[t]he name given to doctrines upheld in the fifth century by a group of theologians who, while not denying the necessity of grace for salvation, maintained that the first steps towards the Christian life were ordinarily taken by the human will and God's grace supervened later." *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1481.

Semi-Pelagianism does not deny the necessity of God's grace (as Timpe's formulation of (*NG₂*) confirms), though it *still* denies the sufficiency of God's grace, thereby avoiding any inclination to determining grace (*DG₁*). The idea here has to do with the human sinner *cooperating* with God's initial efficient grace.

Pastor Charles Biggs states that "**Semi-Pelagianism** is a **synergistic soteriological system** and states that man *cooperates* with the grace that God gives before his conversion, and he has the power to choose grace, which is in disagreement with Augustine (and more importantly the Apostle Paul)... The Semi-Pelagians, in order to align themselves theologically with Christ's and Paul's clear teaching on the sinfulness of man, wrote that man was not dead in his natural state, merely sick and he needed some form of Grace and help from God as a prerequisite for salvation," <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/Ancient%20Church%20History.council%20of%20orange.semi.pelagianism.pdf>.

With the above criticism in mind, let's begin Timpe's exposition of (NG_2). After arguing that (DG) and its entailed subdivision (DG_1) end up with (allegedly) nasty consequences that appear at odds with orthodox Christianity,⁵⁰⁴ Timpe concludes that (DG) cannot accurately describe the metaphysics of grace. And so, after first articulating Eleonore Stump's view on divine grace in relation to faith and free will as an alternative to (DG), he gives his own account of actions relating to faith, grace, and control.⁵⁰⁵

He agrees with Stump that actions may be considered as either active or inactive (positive or negative, respectively). To put it briefly, in the case of divine grace and freedom, one's will may actively resist grace (call this (R)), or actively accept grace (call this (A)), while, at some other time, be quiescent or inactive to grace (call this (Q)). So, while the unregenerate sinner may not be able to (A) (otherwise, Pelagianism obtains because (A)-ing is considered a *good* thing under Christian orthodoxy), they may be indirectly in control of (and thus morally responsible for) their own salvation by means of what Timpe calls "quasi-causation" via their own quiescence. In other words, if agent P *refrains* from (R)-ing this entails (Q). According to Timpe, this wholly avoids not only Pelagianism (NG_1) but also the need to argue for the thesis of determining grace (DG_1) as the Calvinist systematic teaches. P can PAP_{All} become (Q) with regard to divine saving grace, and once (Q) via an act of their own (indeterministic) free will, unique grace will efficiently save the agent. This act of the will is a result of indirect control on the part of P (therefore, P is morally responsible), as well as an omission classified as refraining from (R)-ing. So, P is then considered the quasi-cause of her own salvation while not considered as the efficient cause, thereby wholly avoiding the theological violation of claiming Pelagianism without the need for determining grace; (APC) is not violated.

This brilliant incompatibilist model has proven to be challenging and exceedingly difficult for theological determinists. Stump and Timpe argue that P's will can be either *active* in sin or righteousness, or *inactive* in P's quiescence. As long as P refrains from (R)-ing P may be saved, though she never actively (A)-ed. That is to say, $\sim(A)$ entails (Q), not (R). Equally, $\sim(R)$ entails (Q), not (A). This is damaging not just to any compatibilist internal argument against Pelagianism (such as Bignon's) but also to my case above (see §2.4.9). I had wanted to argue that $\sim S$ (not sin) entails R (righteousness)—for the class and specific actions. $\sim(A)$ and (R) are not strictly entailed as $\sim S$ entails R. In other words, applying Timpe and Stump's account to my specific case above in §2.4.9, my refraining or omission from loving my wife only entails (Q), *not* S, as I claim. For Stump and Timpe, the contradiction of an active will to (A) is not simply a

⁵⁰⁴ Timpe's full analysis on the failure of (DG) can be found in *Philosophical Theology*, 51-53. Obviously, as a firm believer in (DG_1), I deny that these "consequences" are indeed harmful to orthodox Christianity. While I will not take time nor space to articulate the reasons as to why I find Timpe's arguments for denying (DG) to be misguided, I have (I think) sufficiently alluded to the majority of these concerns throughout this present reply. For a more robust defense of theological determinism, see Heath White, *Fate and Free Will*.

⁵⁰⁵ Stump's full exposition of (NG_2), along with Timpe's reformulation, shall not be included in this reply for the sake of space; however, it can be found in Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 56-66.

result of another active will but rather an *inactive* will, namely to (Q). Applied to my case, $\sim R$ isn't the result of an actively rebellious will S but of an inactive quiescent will (Q), and likewise, $\sim S$ isn't the result of an actively righteous will (R) but of an inactive quiescent will (Q).

My response to these claims are fourfold. First, it has not been conceded on Stump and Timpe's view of non-determining grace (*NG*₂) a commitment to morally neutral actions. In fact, because their primary purpose is to avoid Pelagianism while keeping their incompatibilism, they must hold that (Q) is in a certain sense an absence (or privation) of good (or (A)), thus sinful; I agree. Though (Q) is not as actively sinful or rebellious as (R), it still remains sinful. Therefore, (R) like (Q) are sinful (though the former is active and the latter is inactive), while (A) is actively righteous.⁵⁰⁶ Nothing in these claims demonstrate a clear absence or departure of the theological impossibility of a morally neutral action. This is a good sign. Second, and most importantly, their view states that if I refrain from (R) or if I refrain from (A), this entails (Q). So, if I am said to refrain from not loving my wife, the result is *not* "loving my wife", but rather my will is said to be *quiescent* to my wife (which is still in the class action of S). Or, if I am said to refrain from loving my wife, my will is said to equally be quiescent to my wife (inactively pursuing the lack of good in loving my wife). But right here is what I find implausible, or at least dialectically unattractive. If I refrain from not loving my wife, or $\sim R$, this should (and I claim *it does*, logically, if "refrain" means "not") entail R, loving my wife. Or, if I refrain from loving my wife, or $\sim R$, this should (and I claim *it does*, logically) entail S, not loving my wife (I wouldn't be loving her as Christ loved the church, and I am pretty confident that Christ is not simply (Q) towards His love for the church!).

So much for the first two problems. The third problem is much more of an attack: adopting (Q) does not "solve" the dilemma between determining grace and Pelagianism, rather it inflames it as it results in an infinite regress. Stump and Timpe's view states that when P refrains from grace, their will is (Q) not (R). But can we not prod and ask what is the sufficient reason for P's will to be (Q) with regard to divine grace and not actively (R)?⁵⁰⁷ In other words, P may not be active in refraining from (R), thereby resulting in the quiescent inactive state (Q), but even in the midst of this inactivity P certainly appears to be *decisive* in refraining from (R). The sufficient reason for P's (Q) will is still the result of a categorical decisive will, and to that I ask why did P choose to

⁵⁰⁶ Of course, I take it as a matter of fact that in order to do righteousness the will must be *active* on the part of the agent. The will cannot simply stumble upon *being* righteous by mere happenstance or *luck*.

⁵⁰⁷ I suppose a reviewer could object and claim that the incompatibilist does not need a sufficient reason for their actions as that would presumably presuppose determinism and thus compatibilism. I would respond by asking why we should accept a denial of the Principle of Sufficient Reason? Reasons *should* determine our thinking and guide our decision-making, for this gives us the necessary control over our actions (I am thinking loosely of the Humean-type *luck* objection to incompatibilism here). Otherwise, wouldn't actions be classified as inexplicable? That is, wouldn't our action to believe in Christ be mysterious and unexplained even, by our very own reason? This is wholly unattractive to me and thus unconvincing. Quite obviously our reasons *should* determine our decision-making. For a great argument on this very topic and how it applies to God's decision-making processes in creation, see Rebekah L. H. Rice, "Reasons and Divine Action: A Dilemma," in *Free Will and Theism*, chapter 14.

be (Q)? P presumably chose to be (Q) and not (R) for a reason, so what is that reason? Is it to (A)? If that is the reason, then Pelagianism obtains as willing to (A) is a good thing wholly apart from any divine grace; (APC) would be violated. Is the reason to simply not resist? If so, why? While Stump appears to answer these questions by giving a few reasons as to why P's will may ultimately become (Q),⁵⁰⁸ Timpe denies that these reasons in turn prove to be satisfactory.⁵⁰⁹ And unfortunately, it appears that Timpe leaves his reformulation of Stump's view as a punt to inexplicable mystery; he does not grant an answer as to how P's will can become (Q) without falling into this unsavory dilemma.

Now, if Timpe concedes that P is decisive, but only in their intentions, then are P's intentions not to *resist* or *not resist*? To resist is (R) and to not resist is (A), otherwise, if it is (Q) (as Timpe may like to argue), then I would ask what is P's second-order intention to sufficiently choose to be (Q) and not (R)? Again, this then seems to place P's intentions in the circle of an infinite regress, or just wholly inexplicable, both of which I find deeply unattractive. But, intentions, just like actions, can still be either in the set of S or R *because* they are active. So, we can rephrase these actions as "intending to love my wife by listening to her" or "intending to not be adulterous to her," etc. Intentions are not quiescent though, at least not obviously so in the sense Stump and Timpe may like to suggest. Intentions, it seems, are decisive or active, by definition.

On the basis of this critique, it is quite ironic that Timpe himself makes this point for me:

... if one holds that fallen humans are able to be *a* cause of their own saving faith, just not the *sole* cause, then one faces the following dilemma: either the cause that the individual contributes to his own salvation is independent of a unique grace or it is not. The first disjunct is often elaborated along the line that individuals cooperate, on their own, with God's grace so that the individual's cooperation and the divine grace are jointly efficacious. However, since cooperating with divine grace is itself a good, if agents can cooperate apart from a unique grace given by God as suggested by the first disjunct, (APC) is violated on even the weaker reading. The agent is doing a positive act apart from grace. On the other hand, the second disjunct begins a potentially infinite regress that would only be terminated by embracing the first disjunct at some level.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 59: "Stump canvases a number of reasons that an agent could become quiescent with regard to her will, including simple inattention, distracted inattention, willed inattention or mere abstention. But none of these are the kind of quiescence involved with the will of faith, for in none of these cases does quiescence follow active rejection, as she thinks it must with regard to the case involving grace. Instead, Stump suggests that in the case of quiescence with regard to grace, the will becomes inactive because the intellect comes to be divided against itself."

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 60. Timpe thinks that the agent's will becoming divided against is either the product of a volition on the part of the agent, or it is not. If it is a volition on the part of the agent, then this is a good thing, and therefore (APC) is violated; Pelagianism obtains. If it is not a volition on the part of the agent, then the agent's quiescent will is wholly inexplicable, left to chance, and therefore not within the agent's control. Thus, the agent is not considered morally responsible for coming to saving faith.

⁵¹⁰ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 57.

Timpe holds to a strong reading of (*APC*) which essentially denies that “a fallen individual cannot even be *a* cause of her coming to saving faith apart from a unique grace” (Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 57); this is one of the reasons for his motivation in articulating the above dilemma. But the brute fact remains that his (*NG₂*) model of quiescence is insufficient to avoid the clutches of *his own stated dilemma*. Either P is *a* cause of her own salvific faith, this cause is either independent of a unique grace or it is not. If this cause *is* independent of a unique grace, then P is said to *cooperate* with God’s grace, thereby entailing the unfortunate consequence that the individual’s cooperation and the divine grace granted are jointly efficacious. In other words, (*ASPC*) is violated, and *semi*-Pelagianism obtains; “the agent is doing a positive act [i.e., cooperation] apart from grace.” If P’s will is *not* independent of a unique grace, then what has caused P’s will to suddenly become inactively (Q), when it was originally actively (R)? What is the decisive reason for P’s will becoming (Q)? Despite Stump’s reasons for why P suddenly becomes (Q), Timpe does not indulge such a poignant, though obviously wanting, discussion. Instead, he leaves us with only a lackluster absence on the issue.

Therefore, because of these reasons, P’s quiescent will, though it remains in the set of S, is *not* inactive precisely because of P’s decisive will to refrain from (R) can (and should) be seen as active. That decisiveness is active which means P’s will remains (R) or (A), *not* inactive, or (Q). The nuance of decisiveness removes the confusion as intentions are always active, while still securing the only available actions for me: S or R. Also note that Timpe cannot appeal to sourcehood by saying P is the source of her intentions, or the source of her decisiveness to (Q), because, for Timpe, if an agent is the source of their actions they are the ultimate originator of the action. Thus, P would be the efficient causal source of her quasi-causal decisiveness. But, Timpe has already conceded that P cannot be the (or, really, even *an*) efficient cause of her own salvation, only the quasi-cause, or else Pelagianism is conceded (*Philosophical Theology*, 65-66). So, it seems that Stump and Timpe’s view of (Q) cannot aptly provide the resources for articulating a decent rebuttal to not just my case in §2.4.9, but also to the Pelagian charge more generally. The sufficient cause of their salvation still lies with the agent in being actively decisive, contrary to avoiding Pelagianism (or, more specifically, *semi*-Pelagianism). When Bignon claims, then, that (*APC*) is only necessary and not sufficient to defuse the charge, it turns out that he is right; (*NG₂*) does not exonerate Timpe’s incompatibilism as this view still entails Pelagianism, albeit *semi*-Pelagianism. If Stump and Timpe’s model does not exonerate incompatibilism from Pelagianism, then it does not appear Stratton’s measly defense (or lack thereof) will either, *a fortiori*.

My fourth and final response to Timpe’s view of realigning our fallen will by use of his *virtue libertarian* model concerns his idea of morally significant actions. Timpe believes that character formation is pertinent to his view of incompatibilism because without it we would not be morally responsible. Recall that *virtue libertarianism* is simply the thesis that an agent need not have

categorical alternative possibilities (APs) at all times in her causal history in order to be held morally accountable. As long as the agent has freely formed her own moral character at a previous time in her past that led to her decisions up until now, though her character can do no other in the present, she can still be held at least *derivatively* responsible, precisely because of her previous *non-derivatively* responsible decision. Timpe details the view:

I have just argued that an agent's reasons, both intellectual and affective, affect her free choices by influencing both the weight or strength she assign to reasons, and by affecting the scale by which she compares a set of reasons for acting one way against a reason or set of reasons for acting another. Given this fact, as well as the fact that our moral character can change over time, an agent may develop her moral character in such a way that, given how that agent evaluates and compares her reasons, there may be actions which she no longer sees as reasonable in any way at a particular time, even though another agent may see good reason to perform that same action at that time and the agent herself may have had similar reasons at an earlier time. Our characters can be such that we are simply no longer capable of freely choosing certain courses of action without our character first changing from what it is given the role that our character has in shaping our reasons for action.⁵¹¹

As Bignon notes, this view is a coherent one to make, but it is “still not entirely without difficulties,” (*Excusing Sinners*, 140). The kind of incapability Timpe has in mind is *psychological impossibility*, and this type of incapability answers *how* an agent can be such that she *can't* choose *not* to perform certain courses of action (Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 74-79, 88).

Here is the criticism. Even granting *virtue libertarianism* along with *psychological impossibility*, the agent still *non-derivatively* made a morally significant action in order to freely form her own character to what it is at present time. But that is the problem, because that morally significant action (an element of CON) is not a morally relevant action (or an element of CTR). To see this, imagine that at t_1 , agent P categorically chooses A, where A is said to be morally significant in order to shape her character. At t_2 , P cannot choose to *not* perform B as this action is now a part of her freely formed character, out of habit; P has successfully developed A as a virtue at t_1 which led P to be *psychologically incapable* of choosing any other alternative than B at t_2 . P is *derivatively* responsible for B at t_2 because she was *non-derivatively* responsible for A at t_1 , all

⁵¹¹ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 28. Elsewhere, Timpe along with Timothy Pawl argue:

On our view, while an agent must have alternative possibilities open to her at some time in order to be free, the agent need not always have alternative possibilities open to her. She may freely form her character such that she *can't* choose *not* to perform some particular action at a later time, and nevertheless do the latter action freely. (Pawl and Timpe, quoted in Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 140)

This view describes *virtue libertarianism* and it is what Bignon classifies as “PAP_{Past}”. See previous footnote in §2.5.11.

the while being the (quasi-)causal source of her action at t_1 and t_2 , though she did not possess (strong) APs at t_2 .

But, at t_1 , P possesses $CON_{PAP-All}$ (a morally significant action) rather than merely $CTR_{PAP-ALL}$ (a morally relevant action, as Stratton may argue). The agent may possess only $CTR_{PAP-ALL}$ at t_2 , but that is irrelevant to the objection; what is relevant is that P can choose the class action of righteousness *over* the class action of sinfulness (or $CON_{PAP-ALL}$) at t_1 . This is because P *needs* the liberty of contradiction in order to evaluate her reasons for choosing action A over C, or D, etc. What would it mean to *choose* between options to freely form one's character unless they possess CON? Actually, this aligns well with what Robert Kane wants to say about character formation too.⁵¹² And so, if Timpe's view requires moral character formation at least *non-derivatively*, then it follows that in order to properly form one's character, one needs the liberty of contradiction. But, if Timpe's view needs the liberty of contradiction, then it follows that his view entails CON (at least some of the time), which seems to entail Pelagianism as per Bignon's argument, contrary to Timpe's own conclusion that "virtue libertarianism does not entail Pelagianism," (Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 67). This is true because it would entail that P would need $CON_{PAP-All}$ perhaps even *before* her salvific faith is actualized, meaning P would have the categorical ability (in order to freely form her moral character) to (A) *over* (R), but of course this is exactly what Timpe rejects. And therein lies the inconsistency.⁵¹³

So even if we take a stronger argument against Pelagianism like Timpe's *virtue libertarianism* (instead of Stratton's wimpy *limited libertarian freedom*), the charge, though it is taken a bit more seriously under Timpe, is still fully armed and aimed against the incompatibilist. We compatibilists still await an answer. At the end of the day, Timpe's *virtue libertarianism* borrows from Aristotle's virtue theory. Timpe writes:

But if, as Aristotle claims, an action must be done for the right reason (as well as at the right time and to the right degree, etc....) in order to be virtuous, then the forming of a

⁵¹² See Robert Kane, "Free Will: A Libertarian Perspective," in *Do We Have Free Will? A Debate*, 34, 38-46. In fact, Kane thinks his **Will-Setting Condition** (a condition broken off of his SFAs condition) demonstrates the falsity of FSCs because agents, in FSCs, would not be able to (i) freely form their characters, or (ii) have the power to avoid or prevent their wills from being "settled". My curt, though cordial, response is that (i) is demonstrably false as FSC (B) clearly shows this as possible, and (ii) is question-begging because it has not been independently argued that we need the categorical power to avoid or prevent my wills to be "settled" in the exact way they form.

⁵¹³ Another reason for rejecting Timpe's quiescent will model can be found in McKenna, "Robustness, Control and Morally Significant Alternatives," in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, ed. Widerker and McKenna, 211. McKenna argues, albeit in an orthogonal manner, that quiescent wills are virtually useless, and therefore "deliberatively insignificant." Human wills that end up quiescent are simply wills that are not morally robust enough to ascribe moral responsibility. This is more or less my claim above: P's will being (Q) needs to entail $CON_{PAP-All}$ in order to possess moral *significance* instead of mere moral *relevance*. But, if that is the case, then Timpe's model busts under violation of (ASPC).

virtuous moral character will require us to consider the goal not only of our individual actions, but also the larger pattern of behavior that those actions are a part of.⁵¹⁴

And this is exactly where I would like to place the final nail. If Timpe's model is correct, this entails the "forming of a virtuous moral character will require us to consider the goal not only of our individual actions, but also the larger pattern of behavior." And given my first criticism above, this brings us full circle. What exactly is the *goal* of P choosing to become (Q)? Is it to (A)? Then this is Pelagianism. Is it to \sim (R)? But then what is the "larger pattern of behavior" when P chooses to not resist God? These small questions (among others), according to my estimation, have not been adequately answered. I agree under Stump and Timpe's view that (NG_2) provides a model in which divine grace is not sufficient for P to (A). (NG_2) escapes Pelagianism; that is coherent. I disagree, however, that this model escapes *semi*-Pelagianism. Under (NG_2), P is still *a* cause, a *decisive* cause of her own will becoming (Q) from (R)-ing. Contrary to Timpe's model, it is P's sufficient choice to omit (R), or to be (Q), and while P still not being the efficient choice, at least outwardly, P is still *a* decisive cause; therefore, *semi*-Pelagianism obtains. I cannot concede the inexplicable reason as to *why* P chose to \sim (R) and to be (Q) in the first place. P's will, by the very nature of an unregenerate will, is to be actively (R)-ing. So why is P all of a sudden (Q)? It seems to me that either P *actively* chose (Q) in order to (A), which entails *semi*-Pelagianism, or P *actively* chose (R) and God sufficiently determined P to (A), but that would therefore entail determining grace (DG_1). Until this concern is answered, it is safe to conclude with Bignon that if incompatibilism is true, PAP is true, and if PAP is true, Pelagianism—in some form or another, either by violating ($APCC$) or ($ASPC$)—seems to rear its ugly head. It's either that or universalism.⁵¹⁵

Before closing our section on historical theology, there appears to be a few more worries from the incompatibilist that may be left unchecked. I wish to show that a popular incompatibilist response known as *prevenient* grace is not a view to which one should retreat in order to salvage the blows of Pelagianism. I additionally wish to tighten up Stratton's idea of *limited libertarian freedom* by showing its final incoherency. To this we now turn by starting with the former.

3.5 Objections: Prevenient Grace & Limited Libertarian Freedom?

3.5.1 Prevenient Grace

One avenue in which an incompatibilist could take in order to avoid Pelagianism is of course the ever popular *prevenient* grace. This type of grace is typically well-known to non-Calvinists, specifically in Arminian camps. If this sense of divine grace proves true, it could damage the

⁵¹⁴ Timpe, *Philosophical Theology*, 29.

⁵¹⁵ For Bignon's full treatment of his reformulated Pelagian Argument and the dilemma it provides between Pelagianism and universalism, packed with incompatibilist responses and compatibilist rejoinders, see *Excusing Sinners*, 133-154.

Calvinist agenda here by showing that although the agent *does* have (libertarian) freedom to choose God, he nonetheless avoids the charge of Pelagianism. Before jumping into the view, it is helpful to understand prevenient grace as, in some sort, antithetical to irresistible grace. Conveniently, Stratton has written on Arminius' view of grace in chapter 9 of *Mere Molinism* and mentions some things there (such as Article #3 and #4 of Remonstrance) that may prove useful in articulating what prevenient grace is and how it is utilized in Arminian circles. And so, let us begin there.

Stratton quotes Article #3 of the Remonstrance:

Article #3: *Man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, [and] ... can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good ... It is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit.*⁵¹⁶

Stratton adds his own commentary by saying that “Man is fallen, depraved, and powerless to even recognize and choose the good,” (Ibid.). Amen. The Calvinist whole-heartedly believes this fact, which is exactly why they believe irresistible grace is necessary. Next, Article #4:

Article #4: *This grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and co-operative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil ... But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible.*⁵¹⁷

Stratton helpfully comments once more:

God gives grace to all, without which none can respond to God. Thus, a special grace (“irresistible”) is not necessary for human response. All—having received this grace—can reject or not reject this grace.⁵¹⁸

To summarize, Article #3 unequivocally states that P cannot choose righteousness out of his own (libertarian) free will. In other words, P only has the class action set of S (sinfulness) at his disposal, not of set R (righteousness). The Calvinist agrees. However, Article #4 claims that P *can* do good, but only when *prevenient grace* is granted to P. This grace begins P's enablement process of unrestricting the class set of R actions, and therefore allows P to *choose* God in light of this special grace. So, with this grace, P can *categorically* choose God because the class set of righteous actions (such as the action to *choose Christ*, or *trust in Christ*) is no longer prohibited but rather enabled; without this grace, P cannot *categorically* choose God because his class set of

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 127. (original brackets and ellipsis)

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

actions are restricted, specifically restricted to the class set of sinful actions. This apparently allows the Arminian to claim that God is still the efficient cause of one's salvation because it was *He* who enabled P via unique grace to categorically choose God, all the while allowing P to be the sufficient cause, thereby presumably upholding (*NG*₂). God is still the efficient cause, while P is only the sufficient cause; thus Timpe's (*APC*) is not violated, or so it is argued.

This is, of course, where the Calvinist will disagree and object to Article #4. This article does not entail Pelagianism because it affirms (*NG*₂), a special unique grace necessary for salvation; but, to the Calvinist, the article *does* entail *semi*-Pelagianism. In the remainder of this section, I wish to argue the following objection to the model of prevenient grace: *semi*-Pelagianism. Recall the "anti-*semi*-Pelagian Constraint":

(*ASPC*): No fallen human individual is able to act or cooperate with any good, including the cooperation of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.

As noted above, Bignon thinks that (*APC*) is not sufficient to avoid the charge of Pelagianism, though it is necessary. I too concede that (*ASPC*) is not sufficient to avoid the charge of *semi*-Pelagianism, though it is necessary. Unfortunately, the precise details of such a claim are usually obscure and foggy in the literature (often replete with mischaracterizations from Calvinists); this is precisely why Bignon was careful in his reformulation to avoid just the charge. I too will try to be careful as I venture in showing that though Article #3 is a point of substantial agreement between Calvinists and Arminians, Article #4 is where the debate lies. As we shall see, this model of incompatibilist *prevenient* grace does no better in defending against *semi*-Pelagianism than Timpe's *quiescent* model. The model of prevenient grace is another coherent move to make, and so, if a critique must be made, it must be made internally. I will try to show that prevenient grace still falls to the clutches of *semi*-Pelagianism. But, before I show this, I believe a more well-rounded definition of prevenient grace from some top Arminian theologians shall prove beneficial.

Roger E. Olson, a renowned critic of Calvinism and advocate for contemporary classical Arminian theology, writes the following:

Arminianism has always insisted that the initiative in salvation is God's; it is called "prevenient grace," and it is enabling but resistible. It would come as a shock to many Calvinists to know how much of salvation and the whole Christian life both Arminius and Wesley attributed to grace—all of it... [Prevenient grace] is powerful and persuasive but not compelling in the determinative sense.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁹ Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2011), 169.

Olson quotes Baptist theologian Robert E. Picirilli on his take of prevenient grace:

What Arminius meant by “prevenient grace” was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration. He was quick to observe that this “assistance of the Holy Spirit” is of such sufficiency “as to keep at the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism.”⁵²⁰

Lastly, Olson finishes with his own definition by defending that

Arminian theology... places the initiative in salvation and all the work of salvation squarely on the divine side of the equation. God’s grace is the effectual cause of salvation, but the human person’s faith as response to prevenient grace is the instrumental cause of salvation. What is that faith? Simply trusting God; it is not a “good work” or anything meritorious of which the saved sinner could boast.

Before moving any further in Olson’s defense of prevenient grace, a few words are in order. First, Olson seems to think that given prevenient grace, the efficient cause of one’s salvation, *even if* one comes to Christ categorically via their libertarian free will, is still God. It is still God who enabled the sinner to choose in the first place; He is the initiator. I agree that God is the efficient cause, but I disagree that the sinner is not *a* cause, and the reasons for such a disagreement will be made evident shortly. I also disagree that prevenient grace is sufficient for avoiding *semi*-Pelagianism (though, it is sufficient to avoid Pelagianism), and after our remarks with Timpe’s *quiescent* model of (NG_2) above, it seems as though any model that neglects this important crossroads is doomed to fail all the same (but more on that later). Secondly, Olson wants to affirm that one can be an instrumental cause (i.e., *formal cause*) of one’s salvation though they are the sufficient cause, all the while avoiding being the efficient cause. Recall that Timpe, as quoted above, agrees that God should be considered as the “sole non-instrumental efficient cause of saving faith,” as this is what ought to be considered as the heart of the Pelagian issue (*Philosophical Theology*, 51). If P is considered an efficient cause of their own saving faith, then this would of course entail a blatant accusation of Pelagianism according to Timpe, and I suppose according to Olson as well. But presumably not if P is only the formal cause of their own saving faith (or for Timpe the *quasi*-cause). Third, according to Olson, faith is simply “trusting God.” To Olson, this should not be considered a “good work” or “meritorious” for salvation. At a minimum, *trust in God* should be a good *act* because it is, by definition, a righteous action; however, according to Arminian theology, *trust in God* is never considered a good *work* because, if it were, it would be committing to meritorious salvation, and therefore Pelagianism.

⁵²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.* As I will show later, I disagree that Arminius succeeded in keeping his theology at the “greatest possible distance from Pelagianism.”

Olson realizes that not all Calvinists are content with his claim and so anticipates their next couple of responses:

But what about the Calvinist attacks on Arminian theology as a form of self-salvation and works righteousness akin to (they would say) Roman Catholic theology? Knowledgeable Calvinists do not say that Arminians believe they have to work for their salvation; they say that Arminians and other non-Calvinists make the human decision of faith the “decisive factor” in salvation and therefore bring it back, however unintentionally, to salvation by good works.⁵²¹

I think I agree with this push-back. I do not find it helpful to say that Arminians “earn” their way into heaven or “gain” entrance to heaven by their “good works.”⁵²² However, I do press, and I have pressed, in this present work, the much more modest claim that if PAP is true, the “human decision of faith” is in fact the “decisive factor” in salvation. This was my very response to Timpe’s quiescence. But that *alone* does not necessarily yield the conclusion that salvation is by “good works” (though, it certainly may even if I refuse to commit to such a premise in an argument); all it yields is what I take to be the more uncomfortable conjunction that one can *cooperate* with God’s grace *and* that one can live a perfect sinless life. Every righteous choice the agent commits would be logically posterior to this special prevenient grace, resulting in an *efficient* choice, not merely an *instrumental* or *sufficient* one. That is still *semi*-Pelagian.

Now, Olson claims that “this accusation is ridiculous” and then proceeds to defend prevenient grace by giving an account of a story illustrating the allegedly obtuse Calvinist conclusion by describing an agent in need of rescuing (Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 170). The story is supposed to elicit the intuition that the agent needing rescuing is actually *not* considered the decisive factor by his mere *accepting* the need for rescue. The story is one in which a professor gives a poor college student a check, and the student then deposits the check into his bank account after endorsement. Olson rhetorically asks whether or not the student should go around *boasting* about his *earning* of the check, to which, according to Olson, the answer is an obvious no; the check was a *gift* not a *wage*. I am inclined to agree. But unfortunately this last question of Olson’s does not adequately grasp the heart of the Pelagian dilemma, as understood by the Calvinist: the

⁵²¹ Ibid., 170.

⁵²² Christensen has conceded similar remarks: “Pelagianism holds that man has the ability to do good apart from the necessity of any divine grace, and Arminians reject this notion vehemently. I agree that there is no reason to equate Arminianism with Pelagianism,” (*What About Free Will?*, 145; see Christensen’s general assessment of prevenient grace—which reflects more or less what I propose below—in *ibid.*, 143-46). Though, sadly, Bignon is one of those Calvinists that Olson is speaking of, even in his defense of the Pelagian Argument: “Accepting the conclusion that it is within a fallen man’s power of will to live an absolutely sinless life and hence work his way to heaven,” (Bignon, *Excusing Sinners*, 136). Again, “... since one is still left with fallen sinners who out of their free will can full well live a perfect sinless life and gain heaven by their good works. That is still Pelagian,” (*Ibid.*, 137). However unfortunate Bignon’s choice of words wane in his defense, I of course think the overall sentiment of his argument still stands for reasons that conclude Arminianism entails *semi*-Pelagianism, as I will argue below.

student is still the *decisive* factor in accepting the check regardless of whether he chooses to “boast” about his decision later on.

But, why is this a problem? Well, according to the *Arminian*, the *decisiveness* of action causally explains the *efficiency* of action, which of course entails the *sufficiency* of action. I contend that if the Arminian is to be consistent, they must hold that being a decisive factor is *in virtue of* being an efficient one. Otherwise, if this is not the case, why would the Arminian accuse the Calvinist representation and systematic of God as sadistic as *He* is considered the decisive cause of the suffering reprobate? Of course the Calvinist denies that God is the efficient cause because God cannot be the efficient cause of suffering or evil for it is a privation; He is only the sufficient cause of such evil. The Arminian, unfortunately, does not seem to have this resource to pull from as their very attack on the apparent consequences of Calvinism demonstrates. Arminians want to say that God under Calvinism is the decisive factor of the suffering reprobate precisely *because* He is the efficient factor. The Calvinist should disagree with that premise (as defended at length in §2.5.12). But, the salient point is this: Arminians cannot press that premise on an attack of Calvinism while denying it in their defense. The Arminian, such as Olson, *must* hold to the premise that *efficiency* entails *sufficiency*; that is, if one is a *decisive* or *sufficient* factor of their salvation, it is precisely because he is an *efficient* factor. Otherwise, a failure to recognize this entailment will in turn reveal a nasty consequence for their argumentative dialectic; they would unduly forfeit one of their greatest arguments against Calvinist-determinism (i.e., God being the author of sin).

Olson continues by once again rhetorically pressing the issue of acceptance and decision. He writes, “In what situation in human experience is merely *accepting* a gift ‘the decisive factor’ in having it? It is *a* factor, yes—but hardly the decisive one,” (Ibid.). I find this rather odd seeing as a page later he writes, “Being saved is not a matter of doing a work; it is only a matter of *not resisting*. When a person decides to allow God’s grace to save, he or she repents and trusts only and completely in Christ,” (Ibid., 171). First, I have already conceded that I am not too privy on using the language of “earning heaven” or “doing a good work,” as Olson has previously complained. So, I can agree with Olson that, under Arminian theology, being saved is not simply a matter of doing a good “work”; that is, if something like *prevenient grace* is true (though I do think it is a matter of doing a good “act”). I cannot agree, however, with Olson’s subtle contradiction in the last sentence. On page 170 he claims that P’s decision to follow Christ is “hardly the decisive” factor, but then on page 171 he uses the word “decision” when describing a person’s path to salvation. That’s a problem! Agent P is the *decisive* factor to follow after Christ precisely because P made a *decision* to follow after Christ. Also, notice that Olson argues that being saved is simply a matter of “*not resisting*”, instead of it being simply a matter of “good works.” This can be connected to Timpe’s idea of quiescence. According to Olson, we become saved not because we (A), but rather because we \sim (R). Still, Timpe’s view is preferable here because he argues that P becomes saved when P *refrains* from (R), thereby enabling P’s will to

be (Q) towards divine grace instead of actively (R)-ing; Olson's view just says "not resisting." The problem here is that $\sim(R)$ is by definition (A), which is a *good action*, therefore entailing Pelagianism, albeit *semi*-Pelagianism (unless P is indeed the efficient cause; that would entail Pelagianism). It would fail to satisfy (*ASPC*).

Olson then gives an illustration in order to accurately picture Arminian "evangelical synergism":

Evangelical synergism says that God comes along and throws a rope down and yells, "Grab onto it and pull and together we'll get you out!" Nobody moves. They are too wounded. In fact, for all practical purposes they are "dead" because they are utterly helpless. So God pours water into the pit and yells, "Relax and let the water lift you out!" In other words, "Float!" All a person in the pit has to do to be rescued is let the water lift him or her out of the pit. It takes a decision, but not an effort. The water, of course, is prevenient grace.⁵²³

Not only does Olson describe his own position as straightforward *synergism*, he additionally embraces the title. Usually, as Olson notes earlier, Arminians tend to shy away from the term synergism as it often leaves a particular disdain, probably because of its tendency to be lumped together with Pelagianism or even *semi*-Pelagianism.⁵²⁴ My particular criticism is not focused on this small issue, though I would happily welcome any monergist argument against such a provocative title. The criticism I have in store takes issue with, of course, the *decision* of the agent along with prevenient grace, as it is in line with this current section. First, again, we see Olson use the word "decision." This is the problem, and as incompatibilist libertarian Robert Kane notes, making a *decision* is tantamount to producing "efforts of one's will," which in turn *form* one's character and will into a settled condition. So, it is quite clear that when the agent in Olson's story makes a decision to $\sim(R)$ and instead "relax" or "float," the agent is in effect, according to Kane, producing an "effort of will," contrary to Olson. That is, a categorical *decision* to follow Christ entails a categorical *effort* to follow Christ. This is how we know that the agent is the *source* of the action. The categorical alternative possibility of deciding to resist or *not* resist indicates a feature in the agent that resembles *efficient* sourcehood; a feature that would not be present if the agent did not possess alternative possibilities at the moment of choice. This is what libertarian freedom entails, so apparently Olson missed the meeting. Therefore, this mere claim of passivity on the part of the agent does not work, similar to how it does not work regarding Timpe's quiescence. Olson ends the story with a summary:

But I do have to do something—not a good, meritorious work of which I can boast but merely admitting my helplessness and utter dependence on God's grace and asking God to give me the ability and desire to remove the [obstacles from accepting Him].⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 172-173.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

Besides the fact that the language of “work” is confused with the language of “act” (as briefly noted above), this short paragraph accurately depicts the thought from Article #4 of Remonstrance. The agent is indeed *co-operative* or *synergistic* in his rescue. This, though, is not merely inactive as Olson would like to implicitly argue via *not resisting*, because *not resisting* is tantamount to *actively accepting* (especially if Olson affirms a robust total depravity as the Calvinist does). Therefore, Olson is wrong to say that this “something” in which the agent must do is not actually good; it, in fact, demonstrably entails something good: *accepting Christ*! Admitting that one is helpless and is in need of God’s grace is a righteous action. Admission of one’s guilt, and asking God for the “ability and desire to remove” certain impediments from salvation are all *righteous actions*. So it seems this would potentially violate (*APC*), not simply (*ASPC*). But, then again, recall (*APC*):

(*APC*): No fallen human individual is able to cause or will any good, including the will of her coming to saving faith, apart from a unique grace.

The issue here is whether or not Olson’s idea of prevenient grace fits under the umbrella of (*APC*). As it stands, it does not seem to violate (*APC*) as prevenient grace can be squeezed under the cloud of “unique grace”; it seems as if that phrase is the Arminian’s saving grace (that’s a pun)! But, then again, as Bignon argued earlier, though (*APC*) may be a necessary condition for an incompatibilist model (such as prevenient grace) in order to avoid Pelagianism, it is an insufficient condition, especially if one considers *semi*-Pelagianism. And because admission of one’s need of rescuing is indeed righteous, it follows that one can continue to categorically choose this action via recurrence. This is what I have tried to allude to above while critiquing Olson. The incompatibilist is not out of the woods yet.

Let’s grant the Arminian the benefit of doubt. In order to see just how “unique” this grace is, it might be helpful to map out the timeline of an agent while receiving this unique or otherwise prevenient grace. To my estimation, there are two broadly logically possible scenarios or models in which prevenient grace could apply to the unregenerate sinner: 1. *Restricted* at a certain time-slice within the agent’s causal history, or 2. *Unrestricted* in the agent’s causal history.⁵²⁶ I begin by detailing what I find the most troublesome scenario, at least to the Arminian or anyone else affirming prevenient grace: *restricted prevenient grace*. Let P = unregenerate sinner, PG = prevenient grace, t_n = time at a particular instant, (A) = accept divine grace, (R) = resist or reject divine grace, and MR = moral responsibility.

Imagine unregenerate sinner P. The only set of class actions categorically available to P is the class set of S (sinful actions). P does not possess the liberty of contradiction (CON), but only the

⁵²⁶ Wesleyan Arminians believe that prevenient grace is permanent (i.e., *unrestricted*), whereas Classical Arminians believe that prevenient grace is temporary (i.e., *restricted*). Thanks to David Pallmann for bringing this to my attention.

liberty of contrariety (CTR) within that class set of sin (i.e., P can do S_1, S_2, \dots, S_n , but not R_1, R_2, \dots, R_m) each compatible with his unregenerate nature (so as to fulfill Stratton's *limited libertarian freedom* conditions, but more on that later). In this nonregenerative state, P has only actively (R) with each action and volition of will he commits, as that is all he can do. Now, according to the Arminian, and by extension the advocate for PG, P cannot (A) because of his unregenerate nature, *unless* P was given PG (that "unique" grace so as to avoid full-blown Pelagianism).

Okay, so let's suppose that P was miraculously given PG at some arbitrary time, say, t_{6-10} in his causal history, surely by the abundant mercy of God. However, if P does not (A) before t_{11} , then God will refrain His divine grace from P such that P will remain in an unregenerate state. So, at t_{0-5} , P was unregenerate, but at t_{6-10} P will become *partially* regenerative, "but it is not a complete regeneration. It is an awakening and enabling, but not an irresistible force," unlike Calvinism (Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 171). This unique "awakening and enabling" has allowed P to now (A) instead of (R). In other words, P now has the *liberty of contradiction* (CON) instead of merely the *liberty of contrariety* (CTR); P can now categorically choose to trust in Christ (a righteous action) within the given restricted time-slice of PG. P does not only have *contrary* choice, but he now has, due to PG, *contradictory* choice. Due to this climatic event, one of two things could now happen in P's life between t_{6-10} : 1. P *chooses* Christ, or (A), or 2. P *rejects* Christ, or (R).

Of course, if P (R)-ed at t_8 instead of (A)-ed, then P would remain unregenerate, possessing only the class of sinful actions (or S) from $t_{>8}$. This would be P's categorical libertarian free will choice.⁵²⁷ But, now let us further suppose that P categorically (A)-ed at t_8 , instead of (R)-ed. Because of this, P has now become fully regenerative and his freedom of the will has been miraculously restored by God's divine grace. From $t_{>8}$, P may categorically access the class set of S (because he is unfortunately not fully sanctified, nor glorified), but also the class set of righteousness (or R). P can therefore categorically continue to (A) via avoiding temptation throughout his progressively sanctified Christian life, and instead seek Christ, the things above (Colossians 3:1-3; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13). And right here is where the problem lies. Contrary to popular Arminian thought, it *does* follow that if P can avoid *one* sin, then P can avoid *all* sin, from $t_{>8}$, due to Bignon's Pelagian recurrence.⁵²⁸ This conclusion, however, seems to be heavily

⁵²⁷ Of course, the (classical) Arminian could object and state that there could be multiple instances in which God grants PG throughout the life-time of P, say PG₁ at t_{6-10} , PG₂ at t_{21-30} , or even PG₃ from t_{45-47} . All these times are arbitrary, but the objection is that God could instantiate various time-slices of PG, thus granting numerous chances for P to (A). While this objection is interesting, it does not fare any better than its more simplistic counterpart of assuming only one PG time-slice. This is because my objections to PG *simpliciter* can be applied to *any* PG time-slice, say PG_n, recursively. Further, I fail to see this as an under-cutting objection at the start; it is honestly more of an explanatory factor than an undercut, let alone a rebutting defeater.

⁵²⁸ See earlier footnote on Jerry Walls and this line of rebuttal in §2.4.9, along with my brief, though more thorough, response.

at odds with the orthodox Christian doctrine of sanctification. Thus, (*APCC*) is violated and (*ASPC*) has failed to be satisfied.

But a more pressing issue occurs within this sequence of restricted PG, and that is the fact of MR for one's actions. Notice, the advocate of PG *must* say that P's MR to (A) at t_{6-10} is *incompatible* with divine determinism. The very articulation of PG is in response to Calvinism's irresistible grace, which implies a sort of divine determinism (at least in that one event). The Arminian argues that PAP is true by virtue of libertarian freedom, and P can choose or not choose Christ during this uniquely given divine time-slice. So, the fundamental premise for the Arminian in articulating PG is that without alternative possibilities, P is not MR (i.e., PAP). These alternatives do not just imply *contrary* actions, but *contradictory* actions (P must be able to not only (A) *but* (R) as well). But, with this in mind, notice that the advocate of PG *must also* say that P's MR to (A) at t_{0-5} is incompatible with divine determinism. The reason why this is a problem is the same reason why the **Mere Molinist Dilemma** was drawn out in previous sections. *Exhaustive* incompatibilism must hold true in the time-slices within the agent's history, otherwise *non-exhaustive* compatibilism would be true (by virtue of *non-exhaustive* incompatibilism). And *if* that is true, then it is a problem precisely because it would mean that P can be MR for his decision to (A) (in the basic desert sense) at t_{0-5} , though he could not do otherwise than (R). Consequently, it seems that if P is MR to (A) at t_{0-5} even though P could not (A) during this time, then compatibilism is true, *not* incompatibilism, contrary to what Arminians want to argue; compatibilism would obtain at the highest level of granularity of action. As Bignon has argued, if PAP is true at all, then this entails its application to the higher level of actions (CON) as well as the lower levels of action (CTR). So, even though P does not categorically possess the class set of R (righteous actions) at t_{0-5} , and even though P can only categorically choose S (sinful actions), P is still responsible at t_{0-5} (as well as $t_{>8}$ if he indeed (R) during the restricted domain of PG at t_8). The Arminian must hold to this premise. But, because they must hold to it, it demonstrates the lack of coherency by claiming P's MR at t_{6-10} . In other words, because P is considered morally responsible at t_{0-5} though he could not choose (A), why does P need PAP at all during t_{6-10} ? Why does P need the *categorical liberty of contradiction* at t_{6-10} when it is clear that P does *not* need the categorical liberty of contradiction in order to be morally responsible for his decision to follow (or not follow) Christ at an earlier time-slice, t_{0-5} ? Compatibilism would have been already surrendered, and so the need for libertarian freedom would be superfluous.

And so, because of this conclusion, PG would be worthless because the partial regeneration of one's fallen will to access specific actions within the class set of R (such as (A)) would prove PAP unnecessary and false; P still retains MR *regardless* of whether or not he has access to (A). What is worse, if the Arminian denies such a premise (that P is in fact morally responsible at t_{0-5}), then this would tie them to the unfortunate conclusion that PG would actually be *damning* P instead of saving P, contrary to the whole project of PG. This is so because if the Arminian denied P's MR at t_{0-5} , then universalism would obtain. When PG comes in the picture at t_{6-10} ,

since PAP is true (so as to not beg the question against the Arminian), and P now has categorical access to those contradictory alternatives, then P now possesses MR at t_{6-10} when he *didn't* possess MR at t_{0-5} . God has effectively damned P (specifically if P (R)-ed instead of (A)-ed) simply by giving him the grace necessary to save him!⁵²⁹

To recap: I have just argued that a *restricted* PG does not work in response to the Pelagian dilemma because it entails that PAP is false (at some time or another, specifically when the agent is *not* given PG). According to basic Arminian theology, P retains MR at t_{0-5} just as P retains MR at t_{6-10} when given PG. The difference, however, is that P cannot categorically (A) in the former time-slice, yet P *can* categorically (A) in the latter time-slice due to PG. The problem, or so I have argued, is that if we hold to P's MR in the former, though P does not possess CON (i.e., the ability to categorically contradict his own sinfulness in order to (A)), then this shows PAP to be false at higher levels of granularity. This in turn shows PAP to be unnecessary in the latter time-slice primarily because P possesses MR without PAP as shown in the earlier time-slice (i.e., without having the ability to choose Christ). The result is principally compatibilism.

Yet, one last problem arises if one affirms *restricted* PG, and it is one that was briefly alluded to already. P at t_{6-10} is *still* the decisive cause of his (A)-ing as well as his refraining from (R)-ing (i.e., quiescence). In Arminian theology, if one is the *decisive* cause of his action, this entails that he is the *sufficient* cause of his action. Now, the Calvinist agrees whole-heartedly, but the difference lies in that the Arminian view entails that he is the sufficient cause *because* he is the efficient cause; that is to say, if P is the efficient cause, then P is the sufficient cause. But, how can P be the efficient cause of his action to (A) during t_{6-10} if God is supposedly the sole initiator of P's salvation? While this effectively produces what Olson calls an "evangelical synergistic" co-operative grace, it equally produces a conclusive demonstration of *semi*-Pelagianism. Contrary to Timpe (and I suppose Olson), it is *not* God who is the "sole non-instrumental cause" of P's salvation, that is, if a *restricted* model of PG is upheld. If P is the decisive cause, via the categorical efforts of his own will (per Kane), even regarding his own quiescence or \sim (R), then P is the efficient cause. And if P is the efficient cause, then he is also the co-operative initiator of one's own salvation, and so at the very least *semi*-Pelagianism ensues (though, if P is the efficient cause, Pelagianism *simpliciter* ought to obtain). Again, (ASPC) is violated.

⁵²⁹ In personal correspondence, Grant Hageman mentioned the following: "Think of the implications of this position. Since grace was secured on the cross, the cross is not only necessary for God to save sinners, it was also necessary for God to judge sinners. And since God cannot save or judge a sinner apart from the cross, the cross was necessary for God to relate to sinners in any way." The rough idea is the same as mine: God's granting grace to the unregenerate sinner effectively damns them, because if He didn't grant grace, then the sinner would have an excuse; she couldn't have done otherwise. But because God grants the sinner PG, God effectively *gives* the sinner no excuse, thereby ensuring a possible climatic end for the sinner to suffer in hell. If I were an Arminian, I would just accept the universalism horn, or, at the very least, admit that God could have (and probably should have) not granted PG to the unregenerate sinner in whom He knew would never libertarianly choose Him. But, then again, that would tacitly concede the Calvinist point in the same stone that God has morally sufficient reasons for not saving some.

Now, at this point the Arminian may want to abandon the *restricted* PG for an *unrestricted* PG. This maneuver would allow them to maintain a coherent form of *exhaustive* incompatibilism. That is, instead of incompatibilism obtaining at some time and not another time in the causal history of the agent, incompatibilism would obtain at *all* times. The previous model of *restricted* PG entailed incompatibilism to be true at t_{6-10} during the given PG, but compatibilism obtaining at t_{0-5} during P's unregenerate state (if P is indeed said to have MR at t_{0-5}). This model, as argued above, has its problems. But the *unrestricted* model may prove to be a substantial revision as it at least holds to consistent and *exhaustive* incompatibilism throughout the agent's history. The *unrestricted* model of PG grants P to be given the unique grace at *all* times in their history (not simply a small time-slice, such as t_{6-10}). This means that God's unique grace occurs from $t_{>0}$. What are we to make of this revision and shift to *unrestricted* PG? Though I believe the improvement is noteworthy as it avoids the blatant incoherency issue the *restricted* model provided, I shall argue that the *unrestricted* model still has issues that run against the tide of orthodox Christianity.

Suppose, for a moment, that P now has *unrestricted* access to PG from the time he is born (t_0) to the time he dies (t_n). This means from the time P was born, God has given PG to P in order that he might believe at some later time (perhaps when P is morally reasonable or accountable to make such decisions). And because P has PG, this entails that P now has CON; P now has the categorical ability to choose from the class set of R *and* S. That is, P, from the moment of birth, can categorically choose via his own libertarian freedom to (A) *or* (R) at *any* single time-slice in his causal history (that is, again, any time-slice that P is available to be MR). This result yields two problems. The first is that an unrestricted PG goads the boundaries between general and special revelation. Both the *restricted* and *unrestricted* scenarios of PG understand that the unique divine grace is given to all men, that is, universally. Furthermore, both scenarios seem to safely assume that PG is considered under the umbrella of *special* revelation. It is only given the *unrestricted* model, however, where the grace is understood apart from the traditional classification of special revelation. The second problem with the *unrestricted* scenario is that it entails not just *semi*-Pelagianism (such as the *restricted* scenario shows), but rather *Pelagianism* forthright. I will begin my critique by focusing on the former problem, and then I will conclude with the latter.

The first problem associated with an *unrestricted* scenario of PG is that it effectively blurs special revelation with general revelation, thus making the special grace not as unique as it is originally branded to be. (I take it that PG is technically within the category of special revelation precisely because it is marketed as "special grace.") Special and general revelation ought to remain distinct; however, given an *unrestricted* model, the distinction is virtually impossible to delineate. If PG is universally given, and it is not restricted across its applied domain for each individual, this would entail that general revelation is *sufficient* in order to save P which is

contrary to Christian bibliology as traditionally understood.⁵³⁰ Put briefly, special revelation is the thesis that Christ and the Scriptures are *necessary* for God's salvific plan, while general revelation is the thesis that God's invisible attributes (such as His eternal power and divine nature; cf. Romans 1:18-23; Psalm 19:1), as well as the magnificent beauty and grandeur of creation itself, provides the unbeliever no excuse for the folly of his unbelief. In other words, special revelation is *necessary* for one's salvation, whereas general revelation is *sufficient* for one's condemnation (but not sufficient for salvation). So, if an *unrestricted* PG is applied to P from $t_{>0}$, this makes general revelation *sufficient* for one's salvation as well as *sufficient* for one's condemnation. To put differently, if an *unrestricted* PG is argued, then this entails that P has everything they need *from God* in order to be saved. This is simply not the case given the traditional understanding of general and special revelation. In other words, P does not need special revelation to be saved; he only needs general revelation in revealing PG in order to categorically (A). If an *unrestricted* PG is true, P actually does *not* need special revelation: general revelation via PG unrestricted is good enough. But, P *does* need special revelation in order to be saved, hence the problem.

What is more, if P never received special revelation in his life (as so many individuals experience, empirically; I am thinking specifically of lost tribes who have never heard the Gospel of Christ), *unrestricted* PG says that this is no worry because P can *still* choose (A) by the sheer categorical decision (effort) of his libertarian free will. This, in effect, completely diminishes the importance of special revelation for salvation, contrary to direct Scripture (Romans 10:17; 2 Peter 1:3). One can be saved simply by God granting PG as an extended subset of *general* revelation instead of special revelation. Yet this was Pelagius' exact error. He unduly confused *general* revelation with *special* revelation by claiming that God's unique or otherwise special grace is a grace *from nature* or *creation*. As we have seen in our last section, Augustine (as well as Timpe) wholly rejects this conclusion as this was Pelagius' exact meaning of divine grace. Also recall that this view was deemed heretical by the Council of Ephesus and the Council of Orange. This view of *unrestricted* grace just *is* (NG₁)! This view of *unrestricted* grace is definitionally Pelagianism. So, while the *unrestricted* domain of PG improves upon the internal coherence issue that apparently plagues the *restricted* domain of PG, it is still not without its own problems. The blurring of general and special revelation, I take it, is a serious charge and ought not be considered lightly. But that is not, unfortunately, the only problem that arises within the confines of an *unrestricted* PG.

The second problem for an *unrestricted* PG is one in which Bignon himself has already argued. If PG is *unrestricted*, it is wholly possible for P to live a fully sinless life (as opposed to a *restricted* PG, where P is unregenerate, and thus sinful, for a short time before (A)-ing). That is, if P has categorical access to the class set of R *and* S, then it is certainly possible for P to

⁵³⁰ For an orthodox exposition of general and special revelation, see Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 157-161.

categorically choose R from t_0 onward.⁵³¹ Recall that Stratton himself has implied that claiming it is possible for one to live a sinless life is just to commit oneself to Pelagianism: “Pelagius said it was possible for some people to live without sin,” (*Mere Molinism*, 62). But, as Bignon has already answered (quoted above):

Again, that’s a consequence of the categorical PAP: if moral responsibility requires the categorical ability to do otherwise, (or “ought implies can”), and if we are responsible for failing to live without sinning, then it follows that we can live without sinning. That point is repeatedly made by Luther, affirmed by Edwards, and defended anew in my own book *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God*. Stratton should really tell us *how* he avoids the Pelagian view on this, not just tell us *that* Pelagianism should be rejected.⁵³²

As it turns out, apparently this is a consequence of not just the categorical PAP but of an *unrestricted* PG that assumes a categorical PAP. The advocate of an *unrestricted* PG model thereby commits themselves to a hearty violation of (APCC).

And with that, it brings us around to the beginning section of non-determining grace (NG). I have shown that Timpe's *quiescent* model fails to avoid (APC) and (ASPC), as well as (APCC). The two models of *prevenient grace* (restricted and unrestricted) equally fail to avoid the danger and heresy of Pelagianism. What seems to be the problem plaguing *quiescent* and *prevenient grace* models is Pelagianism, and I contend that this is because both stem from non-determining metaphysics of grace. If non-determining grace models fail to provide an accurate metaphysical picture of divine grace in the salvific work of God in realigning our fallen state without falling prey to Pelagianism, then it logically follows that the best models that accurately depict our salvation must be something akin to *determining grace* or (DG). Once more, I echo Bignon’s concern that Stratton must tell us *how* he escapes Pelagianism, not simply “*that* Pelagianism should be rejected.” Given that incompatibilist theories of grace (*à la* Timpe) have been notoriously plagued by the charge of Pelagianism, I suggest that Stratton take his job a bit more seriously.

At this point, Stratton would no doubt wish to salvage what is left of incompatibilist (NG) by perhaps offering something orthogonal to *quiescence* and *prevenient grace*: Stratton’s very own *non-exhaustive* determinism or limited libertarian freedom. And as we have seen in the present

⁵³¹ One might object here and say something along the lines of, “Well, sure it is possible that one live a completely sinless life, but that does not mean that it is probable. And because it is improbable to live a sinless life, Pelagianism seems to be avoided.” The issue with this objection is that Bignon has already answered it (*Excusing Sinners*, 140-141). The fact that it is improbable is irrelevant to the charge of Pelagianism as it squarely has to do with *potentiality* not *actuality*. And regardless of the probability of living a sinless life, it remains true that it is in fact *potentially possible* for one to live a sinless life; *that* is still Pelagian.

⁵³² Bignon, “Review,” 13. This passage from Bignon is quoted in this section once more for clerical context; it should not be taken to be redundant or repetitive by the reader.

section, according to Stratton, world-renowned historical theologians such as Calvin, Luther, and Augustine⁵³³ (among others) have claimed something similar. For Stratton,

... it is logically possible for the majority of the universe to be causally determined. Indeed, it's even possible for the majority of human choices to be described as causally determined and yet "compatibilistically free." Be that as it may, it does not follow that the entire universe is deterministic, and neither does it follow that everything about humanity is exhaustively causally determined.⁵³⁴

Perhaps this *is* a model of (DG) allowing one to fully evade the trenches of Pelagianism. Perhaps. But, unfortunately, this model of (DG) cannot be a model that Stratton utilizes in tag-team with his limited libertarian freedom. That is to say, the model cannot be one in which determining grace is present in soteriology but not present in non-soteriological issues; yet Stratton envisages such a model. Stratton's model ultimately fails for reasons that resemble the

⁵³³ Though I have not entered into a discussion concerning Augustine's view of freedom, I think it is nonetheless worth mentioning that it is highly contentious to argue that Augustine had a view similar to Stratton's *limited* libertarian freedom. Augustine scholar Jesse Couenhoven writes,

Augustine rejects divine determinism because he does not believe God causes evil. Nevertheless, he is a kind of compatibilist, holding that responsibility is compatible with necessitating identity-forming powers like divine grace and original sin. He also holds that [APs] are irrelevant to freedom and responsibility since neither God nor the saints in heaven are able to will evil, and they are supremely free and responsible in the blessed necessity. (Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, 13; see also chapters 3 and 5 concerning Augustine's *compatibilism*)

I have no doubt Stratton will leap for joy when he reads the first sentence here (though, my personal opinion is that Augustine's idea of what determinism entails is not at all what it entails, but I will leave that discussion aside). However, *that* fact alone does not guarantee that Augustine was a *libertarian*, or even a *limited* libertarian. Augustine, as Couenhoven argues, ought to be considered as a flaming *compatibilist* precisely because APs are considered irrelevant under his doctrine of original sin. Stratton cannot afford this fact in his own limited libertarian view as his view entails CON_{PAP-T}. And even if Stratton argues that this is false, and that his view instead entails CTR_{PAP-T}, *that* fact still does not get Augustine to libertarian freedom. Augustine believed that *any* and *all* alternatives were irrelevant and that our wills were necessitated by original sin. That's compatibilism, *not* libertarian freedom, even with the *limited* caveat. More to the point, Couenhoven says,

... Augustine does not depend on determinism being true—it is perfectly compatible with Augustinian compatibilism that we might sometimes be what Alfred Mele calls "indeterministic initiators" of things in the world. Still, my view is compatibilist; it explains why responsibility and determinism are not necessarily inimical. (Ibid. 188)

First, these "indeterministic initiators" are perhaps what Stratton wants to call "matters below", and therefore "limited libertarian freedom." Second, it may even be conceded that Augustine was not an "exhaustive divine determinist" in the sense Stratton presses (cf. Stratton, "Rejoinder," 5). However, these two points alone do not prove that Augustine did not argue for a type of compatibilism, one in which *necessity* and *desert responsibility* were in fact compatible. *That* fact unfortunately does not bode well with Stratton's overall argument. Last, even if it were granted that Augustine believed in these "indeterministic initiators," the onus would be on the incompatibilist to show that these *flickers of freedom* are of the *robust* sort, not merely *weak*. I don't believe Stratton has succeeded in that endeavor thus far. For more discussion, as well as a thoroughgoing defense of Augustinian compatibilism, see Couenhoven, *Stricken by Sin*, chapter 7.

⁵³⁴ Stratton, "Rejoinder," 7.

reasons articulated in the Mere Molinist Dilemma as well as the analysis of the categorical ability. Let us return to some of these reasons one final time.

3.5.2 Limited Libertarian Freedom (Revisited)

The last response an incompatibilist could appeal to in order to salvage their rejoinder to the Pelagian charge is an appeal to Stratton's *limited libertarian freedom* (LLFW). I have, I think, sufficiently described Stratton's idea of LLFW in previous sections, but it will perhaps be useful to provide additional argumentation from Stratton's book on the matter, especially as it relates to the Remonstrants and the infamous *Canons of Dort*. He writes, concerning Article #4 of Remonstrance, the following:

What the Remonstrants's document states is that a person cannot "*think, will or do anything*" that would lead to "*faith*." Only Holy Spirit-regeneration ("*born again*") can make such possible. Further, what is explicit in the Remonstrants's document—contrary to the *Canons*—is that such gifting, grace, Holy Spirit-enabling is not irresistible. It is sufficient—yes, a necessary enablement—for all to believe and receive God's pardon, and, thus, this grace-enabled-faith—can only be attributed to God, but this "sufficient" grace can be resisted and rejected (or not), and as a consequence such persons engaged in this eternal resistance are responsible for their own eternal condemnation.⁵³⁵

Let's pause and highlight the fact that Stratton himself appears to affirm that PG (this "Holy Spirit-enabling" grace) is "sufficient... for all to believe and receive God's pardon." This is the exact problem I have mentioned above concerning an *unrestricted* PG and general revelation. In addition, Stratton notes that this "sufficient" grace "can be resisted and rejected (or not)" as a direct result of one's LFW (or, more specifically, LLFW). Actually, Stratton makes this point for me:

It is important to note that if one possesses the ability to resist or not to resist, then one possesses libertarian freedom. Be that as it may, however, if one does not possess the libertarian freedom to resist or not to resist the Holy Spirit's grace, it does not logically entail that no one ever possess the libertarian ability to choose among a range of options each of which is compatible with one's nature regarding matters that are not related to soteriological issues... Thus, the *Canons of Dort* (like Luther and Calvin) do not oppose the idea of *limited* libertarian freedom—the ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with one's nature—even if one's nature does not provide a "range of options" from which to choose regarding issues pertaining to salvation.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 146.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

First, I have already demonstrated above in the section on Calvin that he did not necessarily hold to Stratton's LLFW. At best, he held that voluntary action is compatible with the necessity of God's decree. That's compatibilism, by definition, so I will not rehearse those reasons here. Second, Stratton thinks that if one has the *liberty of contradiction* (the "freedom to resist or not resist the Holy Spirit's grace"), then this entails, by definition it seems, *libertarian* freedom. Third, this freedom to resist or not resist is not opposed to choosing "among a range of options each of which is compatible with one's nature", and, moreover, it is not automatically applied *exhaustively* to all things. One can have "freedom" in non-soteriological matters, while not having that same "freedom" in soteriological matters.⁵³⁷ Thus, we have Stratton's most simplified definition of limited libertarian freedom as the view that one has the "ability to choose among a range of options each compatible with one's nature."

To concise this definition a bit more, we could symbolically form the following:

$$(iii^*) \text{ LLFW} =_{\text{df}} \text{INC} \wedge ***\text{CTR}^{538}$$

This definition (iii*) is the conjunction of incompatibilism and the liberty of contrariety for the class set of sinful actions. Stratton makes this claim of contrariety quite a few times in his book and rejoinder (as I have interacted with in §2.4.15). But, in order to appreciate the claim in the present context, I will provide Stratton's claims of LLFW once more.

While comparing "exhaustive" divine determinism (or EDD) to "limited" libertarian freedom (or LLFW), Stratton writes:

According to exhaustive determinism, the past entails that an agent has one and only one possible thought, belief, or action compatible with his nature (as opposed to a choice among various options) at a given moment. However, libertarianism, or the ability to choose among a range of alternative options, each of which is consistent or compatible with one's nature, corresponds with the compatibilist's belief that a person's nature determines certain things about the person. The key difference is that the compatibilist often asserts that one's nature determines the *only* thing that will or must happen regarding the person—only one possibility—while the libertarian says that one's nature simply determines a *range of possible options* from which he is free to choose.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ See also Stratton, "Rejoinder," 5-6. Here Stratton quotes MacGregor, Craig, and reformed historical philosopher Richard Muller in order to bring about his point that soteriological determination in *one* thing (i.e., "matters above"), or perhaps many things, ought not to be equated to non-soteriological determination in *all* things (i.e., "matters below"). Unfortunately, for the purposes of this reply, I will table this discussion.

⁵³⁸ Recall from §2.1.2 definition (iii) LFW =_{df} INC \wedge IND, and from §2.4.15 definition ***CTR = {S₁, S₂, ... S_m}.

⁵³⁹ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164.

Obviously, I have several things to say about this chunky paragraph. For one, the first sentence seems to present the notion that the determinist does not make choices as he does not have at his disposal options in which to “choose.” This is false. Of course the determinist makes choices and I will try to demonstrate it effectively in our section on Bignon (§4.1). But, for right now, I will say what I have said earlier in §2.4.7: the *existence* of options does not entail the *accessibility* of those same said options. The existence of options is there for the determinist, but that does not mean we have categorical access to those same options; the latter cannot be inferred necessarily from the former. Fischer makes this unseemingly conflation between existence and categorical choice clear:

The existence of *various* genuinely open pathways is alleged to be *crucial* to the idea that one has *control* of the relevant kind. But if this is so, I suggest that it would be very puzzling and unnatural to suppose that it is the existence of various alternative pathways along which one does *not* act freely that shows that one has control of the kind in question. How exactly *could* the existence of various alternative pathways along which the agent does *not* act freely render it true that the agent has the relevant kind of control (regulative control)?... The proponent of the idea that regulative control [i.e., PAP_{All}] is required for moral responsibility insists that there can be no moral responsibility, if there is but one path leading into the future: to get the crucial kind of control, we must add various alternative possibilities.⁵⁴⁰

What Fischer is asking is how could the mere existence of APs entail access to those same APs; but we are not told. This seems to be what Stratton wishes to argue when he defends his Freethinking argument. I will not continue to indulge the defense here as I have in previous sections. It will suffice to say that the substantive compatibilist may believe in options (especially if they adhere to leeway compatibilism), though only the *existence* of a range of options, not the accessibility of that same said range of options. The compatibilist may reap the benefits of the former, without all the philosophical drama of the latter.

Second, Stratton describes his LLFW in the second sentence of the block quote above as corresponding to, or sharing with, the compatibilist view in that a “person’s nature determines certain things about the person.” But, this is not the only compatibilist view (even though Stratton used a definite article “the”, instead of an indefinite article “a”). This was thoroughly explained in my section on compatibilism above. That aside, yes, these two views do share similarities, but that is hardly justification for a “libertarian-compatibilist” view.⁵⁴¹ Such a view is incoherent as libertarianism by definition entails incompatibilism. Stratton does, however, make

⁵⁴⁰ Fischer, “Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities” in *Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities*, 35. Again, the notion of “regulative control” will be fleshed out in §4.3, along with what Fischer calls “guidance control.”

⁵⁴¹ See §2.1.1, along with its corresponding footnotes.

a crucial distinction between the two views. He says that substantive compatibilism entails one possible option while limited libertarianism entails a “*range of possible options*.”

This “range of possible options” is nothing more than ***CTR (as defined above): the class set of sinful options $\{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_m\}$. Stratton affirms this much in the very next paragraph of *Mere Molinism*:

For example, perhaps one may contend that an unregenerate sinner does not possess the ability (let to his or her own devices) to do anything that is “spiritually good.” However, that does not rule out the unregenerate sinner’s ability to choose among a range of bad options that are each consistent with his sinful nature. He is free to rob the bank or to rob the liquor store and free to simply choose to sit on the couch and merely think about robbing the bank, robbing the liquor store, or watching some television instead.⁵⁴²

This set (***CTR) seems to affirm precisely what Stratton is arguing for as it obtains *only* sinful options, but with *no* contradictions (assuming the example of “watching some television instead” is a sinful option given Stratton’s context).⁵⁴³ In other words, ***CTR does not possess any element from the class set of R, and because of this it does not possess the categorical *liberty of contradiction* ($CON_{PAP-All}$), rather it presses only the categorical *liberty of contrariety* ($CTR_{PAP-All}$), specifically within the class set of S. However, the above set does *not* rule out a *dispositional* or *conditional* liberty of contradiction (say, CON_{PAP-If}), as made clear in §2.4.15. So, it may be true that even the leeway compatibilist could whole-heartedly affirm something like ***CTR (given that they already accept the *existence* of options). But, why must ***CTR be interpreted *categorically*? Where is the independent reason for why we must accept *categorical* ***CTR? Absent such a reason, leeway compatibilists are safe to claim the set: a range of sinful options exist for the unregenerate, yet the metaphysical ability attached to such a liberty between the contrary actions need not be categorical. So the issue, or the main disagreement between compatibilism and libertarianism is not with regards to options (as both views claim that the existence of options are necessary for responsibility and thus freedom), but rather with regards to the *metaphysical ability* attached to the range of options.

As I have tried to show in §2.4, specifically on the sections analyzing the categorical ability, a claim to $CTR_{PAP-All}$ while denying $CON_{PAP-All}$ is incoherent as the former entails the latter. That is, if $CTR_{PAP-All}$ is necessary for moral (or rational) responsibility, then it follows that $CON_{PAP-All}$ is equally necessary. This is implicitly evident in Stratton’s own writing:

⁵⁴² Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164. See also Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 5. I have interacted with this particular strain of quotes extensively in the present reply, specifically in §2.4.10, §2.4.15, and §3.2.

⁵⁴³ Recall that I deny amoral actions (see §2.4.8). Therefore, given the rest of the context from Stratton, watching television can be taken as a sinful action. This, of course, is not to say that watching television *simpliciter* is sinful; it is only to say that given Stratton’s context, I will assume it as a sinful option. The same would be true for the “sitting on the couch” example in the same block quote.

Regarding this view, Moreland and Craig write: “If one is to have justified beliefs... then one must be free to obey or disobey epistemic rules. Otherwise, one could not be held responsible for his intellectual behavior.” The phrase “to obey or disobey” implies the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) and a range of options available from which one may choose when it comes to thinking, rationality, and “intellectual behavior.”⁵⁴⁴

It is clear in this quote that Stratton equates PAP with not only a range of options but also the *categorical liberty of contradiction* (CON_{PAP-All}). We see this in his highlighted phrase “to obey or disobey.” In other words, in order to be rationally responsible for one’s own “intellectual behavior” one must possess the ability to “obey” or “disobey” epistemic rules (i.e., CON_{PAP-All}). Thus, contrary to what Stratton defines as LLFW, it is not ***CTR that LLFW entails, it is actually **CTR! Recall from §2.4.13:

$$** \text{ CTR} = \{S_1 \vee S_2 \vee \dots \vee S_m \vee \neg S_m\}$$

For Stratton, LLFW entails nothing more than ***CTR, but given his remarks on Craig and Moreland, we see him contradicting his own view (about 10 pages later!). The “disobey” element is represented by any one of the S elements, as sin is by definition to disobey God. It is God who created these “epistemic rules” in which we are to follow. Yet, it is also God who has called us to obey these epistemic rules, such as sound argumentation for God’s existence, or, more simply, belief in God. But, given Stratton’s commitment to disobey *or* obey God’s epistemic rules, it follows that we do not only have the ability to choose between disobedient epistemic rules, *but also* obedient epistemic rules. This is not ***CTR, but **CTR, as $\sim S_m$ entails R_m which is to *obey* these rules. It follows, then, that LLFW entails **CTR. And because LLFW entails **CTR, it *also* entails CON as the definition of $\sim S_m$ is R_m , which is the contradiction (as explained in §2.4.13). Stratton’s view of LLFW does not simply claim that in order to be rationally responsible we must have rationally *relevant* options (or the liberty of contrariety, CTR), but that we must *also* have rationally *significant* options (or the liberty of contradiction, CON). Therefore, I cannot see how the *limited libertarian* could affirm something like ***CTR; the libertarian must affirm **CTR, or just straight CON. This is completely against Stratton’s own view of LLFW, which makes it all the more incoherent.

⁵⁴⁴ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 177. Quote from Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations* (2e), 66. Again, quoting Searle, “[A]ctions are rationally assessable if and only if the actions are free. The reason for the connection is this: *rationality must be able to make a difference*. Rationality is possibly only where there is a genuine choice between various rational and irrational courses of action. If the act is completely determined, then rationality can make no difference,” (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 176; quote from Searle, *Rationality*, 66-67, Stratton’s emphasis). Cf. Stratton, “Rejoinder,” 3: “*making a rational decision* seems, at least to me, to require (or entail) that one, simultaneously, has (i) the broad ability to choose an option, \underline{O} , that is good in light of certain evidence *and* (ii) the broad ability to choose an option, not- \underline{O} , that is bad and goes against the evidence.” Therefore, we can continue to substantially conclude that Stratton thinks the CON_{PAP-All} is necessary for rational responsibility.

Now, going back to whether or not LLFW could be seen as or is a model of *(DG)*, it is safe to say that it is *not*. Because LLFW entails, at the very least, **CTR (which therefore entails CON), *and* because it entails categorical APs (or PAP-T) in the rationality process, LLFW must be seen as a model of *(NG)*, probably *(NG₂)*. And so we are back to asking *how* Stratton ultimately avoids the Pelagian charge. He doesn't tell us. He does, however, say in defense of LLFW that

[m]any Christians reject libertarian freedom because they assume that, if a person possesses libertarian free will, then he must be free to choose to love and follow God apart from divine aid. This assumption seems to be unnecessary and based on a confusion. Libertarian freedom does not require maximal autonomy. Libertarianism simply requires an ability to freely choose some things some of the time, or the power to choose among a range of alternative options that are each consistent and compatible with one's nature.⁵⁴⁵

But this here, again, just explains LLFW as ***CTR (if one's nature is truly unregenerate). And as we saw above, this is incoherent. It is incoherent precisely because ***CTR claims that one's rational will need only rationally *relevant* options categorically available, whereas Stratton later defends the fact that one actually needs rationally *significant* options categorically available. But to claim the necessity of CON_{PAP-T}, instead of merely CTR_{PAP-T}, is to claim **CTR *not* ***CTR. And to claim **CTR is to equally claim CON as CON is a logical subset of **CTR. Therefore, still, Stratton's view of LLFW entails CON_{PAP-T}.

But what is interesting in the above quote from Stratton is that he does mention the fact that it is false that one "must be free to choose to love and follow God apart from divine aid." Okay, so, again, the model to avoid Pelagianism and adhere to Timpe's *(APC)* must be something akin to *(NG)*, not *(DG)*, even though Stratton concedes (kind of) that under compatibilism one's nature "determines the *only* thing that will or must happen," (Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 164). His view cannot be considered honestly as a *(DG)* model because, though he agrees that "it is logically possible for the majority of the universe to be causally determined," (Stratton, "Rejoinder," 7), one must still be "free" to obey or disobey epistemic rules; to *will* to believe in Christ or *not* to *will* to believe in Christ (for example). The non-exhaustive moments of *libertarianism* (i.e., LLFW) are precisely the moments to rationally "obey or disobey" these God-given epistemic rules. And so we are back to Bignon's criticism: it is not enough for Stratton to tell us *that* his view avoids Pelagianism, he must also tell us *how* his view avoids Pelagianism. How does LLFW fare any better than Timpe's *quiescent* model or the Arminian's *prevenient grace* model? We are not told.

⁵⁴⁵ Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 165.

In summary, Stratton cannot hold to (*DG*) as the non-exhaustive soteriological “matters above” model while also affirming LLFW as the non-exhaustive non-soteriological “matters below” model. The Mere Molinist Dilemma shows this to be incoherent, and the present section on strategies to avoid Pelagianism demonstrates this to be inconsistent. If Stratton argues for the “Calvinist” horn of the Mere Molinist Dilemma by holding that deliberation about whether to believe in Christ is incompatible with rational responsibility, then his fellow TULIP (NRO) Soft Calvinists are unfortunately thrown under the bus. Mere Molinism is then not compatible with Reformed Theology. But, on the other hand, if he presses the “Freethinking” horn of the dilemma by conceding that deliberation about whether to believe in Christ is truly compatible with rational responsibility, then the Freethinking argument has been defeated. Either way, *exhaustive* compatibilism and *exhaustive* incompatibilism wins the day precisely because it is a *principled* position. In other words, if *one* free act of the will is in fact compatible with determinism, then compatibilism is true *exhaustively*.⁵⁴⁶

If Stratton still stands ground, then *fine*! But then we ought to see *how* his supposed LLFW wins the day over Pelagianism, especially when “the most dangerous pitfall an incompatibilist account of the role of the human will involved in conversion is Pelagianism,” (Timpe, *Philosophical*

⁵⁴⁶ I anticipate a small objection from Stratton along the lines of the fallacy of composition: “Just because compatibilism is conceded at determined salvation (non-exhaustively), it does not follow that compatibilism must be true at all times (exhaustively).” I think this is true, but it misses the point, and because of this it is not the composition fallacy. It is not the fallacy of composition because the necessary condition for incompatibilist responsibility is not met under both scenarios, whereas the compatibilist conditions (whatever they may be) are indeed met at least in *one* scenario. *That* is enough for the *principled* thesis of compatibilism to be true. As Tyler Vela argued in personal correspondence,

If Compatibilism is true in even one possible world (the actual world as they grant), then it's true in every possible world. This is because Compatibilism is merely the claim that some variety of determinism and some kind of freedom sufficient for responsibility are possibly compatible with each other. That is, they are not, in principle, contradictory. Incompatibilism claims that they are, in principle, contradictory – that there cannot ever be an instance of a determined and yet free action.

Yet, there cannot be something that is in principle a contradiction and yet true in some possible world. There is no logically possible world where a contradiction is logically possible. So once they've granted Calvinism is even possible in some logically possible world, then they've granted that determinism and freedom are not in principle a contradiction and thus in every possible world they are not a contradiction. This means that Incompatibilism is necessarily false in every possible world. And since Libertarian Freedom is an Incompatibilistic view, the Libertarian freewill view becomes necessarily false. But Libertarian freedom is a necessary component of what Stratton calls “mere Molinism.” And as such Molinism would be false.

Now, it seems to me that they will more likely just bite the bullet and admit that one cannot be a Calvinist and affirm Molinism in any meaningful way (that is, affirm it in any way that isn't already accounted for in Reformed theology and Classical Theism), but they could also admit that Molinism is just absurd. Here's to hoping!

Vela's last paragraph ruminates a similar articulation of the “Mere Molinist” dilemma constructed above. The Mere Molinist could simply “bite the bullet and admit that one cannot be a Calvinist and affirm Molinism in any meaningful way,”; that would be the “Calvinist Horn” and if Stratton falls on this horn, he gives up his advertised enterprise of demonstrating compatibility with (NRO) Soft Calvinism with Molinism. But, the Mere Molinist could also state that “Molinism is just absurd” thereby forsaking the Freethinking argument; this is the “Freethinking Horn” of my dilemma.

Theology, 13). As I mentioned at the beginning of §3.3, Stratton has done *no demonstration* in reconciling incompatibilism with Pelagianism; he has only reasserted his LLFW position. The purpose of this section was to demonstrate that Stratton, even *if* he decided to claim an incompatibilist model other than LLFW, such as *quiescence* or *prevenient grace*, he would be unsuccessful. He must tackle these pertinent criticisms discussed in the sections above, otherwise he is left with a model of determining grace, which would force him to accept exhaustive compatibilism (if he indeed wishes to keep his “free will”).

3.6 Conclusion | Stratton’s Final Remarks

As we close this section on historical theology, specifically regarding Stratton’s use of limited libertarian freedom to wiggle out of uncomfortable positions, or to recast traditional reformers as actual libertarians, Bignon helpfully makes a claim that libertarianism should be treated as “*all or nothing*.”

Let me now make a point that applies to all the figures listed above as allegedly affirming “some” libertarian freedom in things that don’t pertain to salvation, while being determined in the things that pertain to salvation. Stratton had put it like this:

if one does not possess the libertarian freedom to resist or not to resist the Holy Spirit’s grace, it does not logically entail that no one ever possesses the libertarian ability to choose among a range of options each of which is compatible with one’s nature regarding matters that are not related to soteriological issues. (p.146)⁵⁴⁷

Bignon is framing Stratton non-exhaustive determinism or limited libertarianism in the “matters above” or for “things that pertain to salvation.” It should be noted that Stratton once again denies something like $CON_{PAP-All}$ in Bignon’s quote of him: “*resist or not to resist* the Holy Spirit’s grace.” To Stratton, the categorical liberty of contradiction is simply unnecessary in things that pertain to salvation, whereas the categorical liberty of contrariety is necessary for things that do not pertain to salvation. The latter shows libertarianism, according to Stratton, even if the former does not. And Stratton maintains that this is a wholly consistent maneuver to make as a theologian as, apparently, other (“reformed”) theologians argue in centuries previous. But, what is the problem with this?

The problem is that the only way to hold this view coherently is to deny that those determined actions that pertain to salvation are morally responsible. That’s because if any of our mundane choices are made with *libertarian* free will, then it means libertarianism is true, which means incompatibilism is true, and hence any given action cannot be both directly free and determined. So, on that view, if humans are determined “to resist or not to resist the Holy Spirit’s grace,” then they cannot be responsible for it. And while a

⁵⁴⁷ Bignon, “Review,” 17. Quote from Stratton, *Mere Molinism*, 146.

Christian may feel it's fine to remove all praiseworthiness for a sinner's choice to repent and believe, they shouldn't accept the other side of that same coin which is that a sinner's choice to reject the Gospel cannot be blameworthy. I don't think any of the historical figures surveyed in the book would be on board with that. Of course, Stratton may declare that all these historical figures are guilty of affirming just that incoherence, but interpretative charity says we probably should not.⁵⁴⁸

Would you look at that? Bignon presses the "Calvinist" horn of the Mere Molinist Dilemma! He says that the "only way to hold this view coherently is to deny that those determined actions that pertain to salvation are morally responsible." That is to say, if one is to hold to LLFW coherently, incompatibilism must be true at that moment of salvation, thus, (NRO) Soft Calvinists would not be rationally responsible (nor free) for their own determined deliberation for believing in Christ. Even if Stratton's non-exhaustive libertarian freedom (or LLFW) were true, this would entail that incompatibilism must be true at that moment. So, yes, as the "Calvinist" horn of the Mere Molinist Dilemma states, in Stratton's LLFW view, "if humans are determined 'to resist or not to resist the Holy Spirit's grace,' then they cannot be responsible for it." As Bignon says, we shouldn't simply declare these historical figures' views as incoherent, but then I say that instead we should perhaps place that same level of alleged incoherence on Stratton's view.

Stratton responds to these remarks (by only quoting the first half of Bignon's quote above, but conveniently not the explanatory half):

This seems to be a blind spot. To reiterate, it is logically possible for the majority of the universe to be causally determined. Indeed, it's even possible for the majority of human choices to be described as causally determined and yet "compatibilistically free." Be that as it may, it does not follow that the entire universe is deterministic, and neither does it follow that everything about humanity is exhaustively causally determined. This wild leap is unnecessary. Why can it not be the case that quantum indeterminacy occasionally describes reality or that humans occasionally possess the opportunity to exercise the ability to choose between a range of alternative options each compatible with an "image of God" nature at that moment (even though a majority of the time this opportunity is not available, and thus, there is only one choice option available)?⁵⁴⁹

Notice that Stratton did not even address Bignon's concern. Instead, he just doubles-down on his limited libertarian freedom! Bignon knows what the view is (as do I), and so we do not need another paraphrase on what the view *is*. What we need, and what we want, is *how* does LLFW remain coherent *given* my and Bignon's concern. Stratton claims that the "wild leap" to non-exhaustive to exhaustive determinism/compatibilism is "unnecessary." But, unfortunately,

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Stratton, "Rejoinder," 5.

instead of articulating *why* this claim is unnecessary, he asks a question as to why it can't just be the case. That is, in response, Stratton asks why LLFW cannot just be true. Interesting, but nauseating. Well, it cannot "just" be true precisely for the reasons Bignon gave, as it remains incoherent *definitionally*. It cannot "just" be true because of the reasons articulated in the Mere Molinist Dilemma.

My aim in this section was to show that Stratton's view of LLFW is incoherent as a response to the Pelagian charge, and that he cannot merely recast certain historical theologians such as Calvin (and Augustine) as limited libertarians; their views simply did not concede what he thinks they concede. I believe I have done this sufficiently and adequately with the help of Bignon and the previous construction of the Mere Molinist Dilemma.

Beginning with Volume 2, we will finally exegete Stratton's philosophical arguments for libertarian freedom as well as examine his supporting defense of the incompatibility thesis. But first, a friendly examination detailing Stratton and Bignon's "theological dust-up" is in order.