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Reply to Sarah Broadie

Sarah's exceptionally interesting paper makes one version of a general point which others have also made in their responses to *A Metaphysics*. The point is one which I am inclined to concede – and it is this: that my critique of compatibilism really focuses only on one, rather specific type of compatibilism – the one perhaps found or assumed most frequently in fairly contemporary literature in philosophy of mind and action, which seeks to reduce agency to the causation of movements by certain sorts of mental events and states. But not all compatibilists will accept such a reduction – and so the question Sarah asks may fairly be raised: namely, could there be a non-reductive (or even just differently reductive) compatibilism? – one which accepts that agency does *not* just reduce to causation of movements by mental events and states, and yet insists that "for each stage of world-history there is only one physically possible next stage" (p.?)? Does the argument for Agency Incompatibilism really establish *incompatibilism*? – or merely the inadequacy of what is perhaps its most familiar compatibilist rival?

In the service of an attempt to show that the argument of *A Metaphysics* succeeds only with the former of these tasks, the second section of Sarah's paper sketches an account of agency rather different from the Causal Theory of Action, as it is generally stated. The aim, I think, is to show that one can characterise agency in such a way that it remains potentially consistent with determinism, without at the same time endorsing an account which falls foul of my main criticisms of the CTA. I am still not completely sure I have entirely understood the account – but thinking about it in connection with the problem of deviant causal chains has helped me see what its role is supposed to be in Sarah's argument. Sarah claims that any causal theory which seeks to reduce agency to a causal relation between the creature's being in a certain psychological state (the cause) and the creature's moving in a certain way (the effect) would "locate(s) the causation in the wrong place" (p.?). The central *why*-relation involved in agency, according to Sarah, holds between something we can call an item intentionally present to the subject (which might, for example, be a reason in the case of a human being, or perhaps an object wanted, or place to be reached, for a non-human animal)

and what Sarah calls the start and continuation of a *movement,* here meaning not, I think, a movement$_T$, in Hornsby's sense (e.g. not a raising, by S, of her arm) – but a movement$_I$ (e.g. a rising of an arm which happens to be S's).

I confess to having been puzzled, at first, as to why Sarah is so insistent that the causal relation central to agency must not be placed "between events or states of affairs or facts of which ...[the agent] is a constituent" (p.?). Can't the fact that John wants to be rid of the burden of supporting his companion cause, or at least causally explain, the fact or event of his letting go of the rope? But thinking about deviant causal chains has made me understand why Sarah is inclined to say what she says. Consider this: the fact that John wants to be rid of the burden of supporting his companion can be causally relevant to the fact or event of his letting go of the rope in the *wrong way* – by e.g. making him nervous in such a way that his hand involuntarily opens – so the fact that such a causal relationship exists cannot be constitutive of agency per se, since in this case, an *action* has not occurred at all. What we need, then, is a causal relation between kinds of entity which is such that, when instantiated, it simply *guarantees* that an action had occurred, so that causal deviance is not possible. This is what the relation between the items on the right hand side of Sarah's diagram is supposed to accomplish, I think. Where the presence of an intentional item of the right sort, in the causal field which is S, causes the start and continuation of a movement, we have an action. And since we have said what an action is without having to invoke any of the talk of settling, or things being up to the agent, which motivated Agency Incompatibilism, we have undermined that thesis.

Let me register two worries about Sarah's suggested model of the causation involved in agency. The first is a version of a worry raised by Sarah herself – it is the worry about how an intentional item as such can actually generate a full-blooded physical movement. Can it do so? If so, how? Sarah notes that it is unlikely to appease those philosophers who feel uncomfortable about this suggestion to remind them that the movement-generation in question only occurs in creatures such as are capable of hosting the type of causal nexus she has in mind. In fact, it is sufficient, in a way, to appease me – and so far as the cause is concerned, I feel quite persuaded by the points Sarah makes about how reasons – the explanantes – are best identified not with subjects' believing and desirings but with *what* is

desired and believed, and with her reminders about the nebulousness of the concept of cause. My concerns lie not so much with the causes in Sarah's story, as with the effects. Can a content (or other simpler intentional item) give rise to a sheer physical movement, except by way of an *action*? Surely what is explained by intentional contents, at least of the propositional sort – contents such as 'It was hot' or 'He was heavy', things we might offer as reasons for things we have done - is, first and foremost, such things as why *I opened the window* or why *the climber loosened her grip*. And these propositions make claims not about movements$_{I,}$ but about movements$_{T}$ – about *actions*. Movements$_{I}$ may of course then be explained in their turn when they happen as a result of actions – but the primary nexus is surely between content and action (or proposition concerning action). And now we are back facing a version of the difficulty I raised in Chapter 3 concerning the disappearance of the agent. We were trying to give a causal account of the nature of action in which the existence of a causal relation between certain sorts of thing was (in its entirety, as it were) to constitute an action. But it has turned out that actions are needed within the chain itself – to be the link which connects intentional item to movement. And this, according to me, is no accident. As I put it in *A Metaphysics:*

" It is the *agent* who has to settle the question whether ... mental antecedents will result in a movement or not. That is the way commonsense psychology tells the story of action, and it cannot be retold at this level of ontology without her participation" (p.65).

The result is that no attempt to *reduce* the occurrence of actions to the existence of causal relations between entities whose effect-end is a mere movement$_{I}$ is going to work. The agential input constitutive of action is needed *within* the chain of causation.

My second worry is also one which Sarah anticipates – namely, that Sarah's account of agency might seem to make essential to action something that is not in fact essential to it – namely, the presence in the 'field' of an intentional item. According to Sarah, in a typical case of animal agency, this will be an object, O, which is cognitively present to the agent as a goal or object of aim – e.g. food, or a place of safety. Sarah has in mind, clearly, a typical case of purposive action. But I remain worried about the vast array of small movings that we and other animals effect during the course of our lives which seem to me agentive and yet where there is no obvious intentional item of this kind in view. To those who are inclined to believe

that these are marginal and unimportant phenomena, I advocate a period of, say, ten minutes of close attention to one's own bodily movings. One will be scratching one's ear, crossing and uncrossing one's legs, licking ones lips, swallowing, etc. – and these phenomena *feel* agentive. I submit that they are our doings – and need to be incorporated by any fully accurate account of agency.

One possibility, I suppose, is that one might try out the idea that the body itself – or some relevant part or parts of it – is the object which is cognitively present in the case of these sorts of sub-intentional agency. The idea of cognitive presence will have to be read in a very minimal way if this is to be plausible, given that sub-intentional actions are often performed in the absence of intentional awareness – but perhaps it is not impossible that some suitably minimalistic account of cognitive presence might be forthcoming. After all, there is something which seems right about the general idea that the body is always, in some sense or other, an object of awareness to an embodied creature. And if the account is to do for the wide variety of animals that I think ought to be regarded as agents, it might be argued that a very minimal account of cognitive presence is in any case going to be needed if an account along Sarah's lines is going to work. I offer that suggestion up, at any rate, as a possibility for consideration; it seems to me a not implausible means of enfolding sub-intentional agency within the category of movings started and continued in response to the cognitive presence of an intentional item. But it seems to remain true that it is *movings* (and not movements) thus started and continued that remain at the heart of the account – and hence no reduction of agency has been attained.