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Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Steward, H (2013) Responses. Inquiry: an interdisciplinary journal of philosophy, 56 (6). 681 - 706. ISSN: 0020-174X

https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2013.841055

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Reply to Sean Clancy

Sean's paper charges me with having taken on only a less good version of compatibilism than is potentially available. I have come to think, since I wrote *A Metaphysics*, that this charge is probably fair in many ways – but I don't think the specific version of this challenge which Sean levels at my view meets its mark. I'll begin by explaining why, in my view, it does not do so – before going on to consider the interesting case of Rufus that he presents towards the end of his paper.

As Sean notes, I believe that one matter on which he takes issue with me is not in fact a real point of disagreement between us. I offered the so-called 'weak' conception of settling in Chapter 2 merely to concede the possibility that one might reasonably use the word 'settle' in a rather different and less metaphysically committed way than the way in which I wanted to use it. I did not in fact mean to offer it, as Sean supposed, as the account of agential settling which compatibilists would be likely to endorse. Like Sean, I think the natural account of agential settling for a compatibilist to embrace is bound to involve some reference to the agent's mental states. Nevertheless, I do not think the Strong Compatibilist Account of Settling, as Sean characterises it, will do (even for the compatibilist, as it were). The main difficulty is that it is not the notion of *agential* settling (settling that is done by an agent) that Sean wants to characterise by reference to counterfactual dependence on the agent's mental states, but the very notions of settledness and unsettledness themselves. Thus, for example, Sean claims that "The question of whether-p is unsettled iff whether-p is counterfactually responsive to the mental states of some agent" (p.?). But this cannot be right as a general account of unsettledness. Intuitively, things can be unsettled even though they are not counterfactually dependent on the states of any agent – they might be unsettled, for instance, because they are dependent on the outcome of some indeterministic process which has nothing to do with agency at all – e.g. on the emission of some particle from a radioactive atom. The notions of settledness and unsettledness are general ideas in terms of which we might hope to characterise our ideas about the fixity or unfixity of things– they have, in and of themselves, nothing to do with agency. It is only the notion of *agential settling*

which might conceivably be characterised by appeal to the idea of counterfactual dependence on an agent's mental states.

Suppose, though, that we prescind from the details of Sean's particular version of the Strong Compatibilist Account and consider simply the idea that *agential* settling, at any rate, might be definable in terms of the notion of counterfactual dependence on an agent's mental states. S agentially settles at *t* whether-p, one might try suggesting, if and only if whether-p is (i) counterfactually responsive to S's mental states at *t* and (ii) not counterfactually responsive to anyone's mental states at any time subsequent to *t*; and (iii) metaphysically settled at all times subsequent to *t* (where 'metaphysically settled' would have to be defined in a different way from the way in which Sean himself defines it). If determinism is true, since all matters will be metaphysically settled at all times, the third clause will always be satisfied; if it is not, this clause will be required to prevent S from being able to settle matters that depend on the outcome of indeterministic events occurring subsequently to any point of counterfactual responsiveness to S's mental states. This definition would have the consequence that agents could settle matters by omitting to do things they could have done, as well as by acting – but I see no reason for thinking that is necessarily problematic. Surely agents *do* often settle certain matters when they omit to do certain things they could have done. One would also need to decide what to say about cases in which there are 'ties' between agents for the role of settler of a given matter. But otherwise, this looks to me as though it would be a serviceable-looking version of an account that would meet the desiderata that seem to me important to Sean's argument. In particular, the account would retain its reliance on the notion of *counterfactual dependence*, rather than the notion of causation, and this is important. For Sean's main claim is that Strong Compatibilist Settling can occur even if the Causal Theory of Action is false, and hence can escape the criticisms which I levelled at the CTA in *A Metaphysics*, even if those criticisms are effective. Let us turn, then, to look at the argument by means of which he tries to establish that this is so. In order to try to show that the compatibilist who wishes to embrace the notion of settling need not also embrace the CTA, Sean offers a description of an agent, Rufus, whose propositional attitudes are not, he says, the simple causes of his actions – for there is also Rufus-the-agent in the picture. Here is what he says:

" ... Rufus is composed of more than one part. One part is Rufus-the-agent, and another part consists of Rufus's attitudes. Rufus's actions are produced by Rufus-the-agent, rather than by Rufus's attitudes. Nevertheless, it seems that Rufus's attitudes will often make a difference to what Rufus-the-agent does. Rufus might want to save money on gasoline – this may be a reason for him to take the bus. Rufus may also want to avoid riding with other people – this may be a reason for him *not* to take the bus. Since the universe is deterministic, there is only one physically possible future, determined by Rufus's attitudes and mental states, as well as whatever internal conditions Rufus-the-agent has. Suppose that Rufus is, in fact, determined to board the bus. Suppose also that counterfactually, *if* Rufus had different mental states, he would not board the bus ...Because the question of whether-Rufus-boards-the-bus is counterfactually responsive to Rufus's mental states, it is unsettled in the strong compatibilist sense".

I take it that the point of this example is to show that strong compatibilist settling is compatible with the falsity of the Causal Theory of Action – and also, of course, with determinism (that is what makes it compatibilist, after all!). But I am doubtful that it presents us with a coherent possibility. Quite apart from the general worries surrounding any version of agent causationism according to which agents cause their actions which I discuss and endorse in *A Metaphysics*, what I fail to see is what *content* there is in the claim that Rufus's actions are produced by 'Rufus- the-agent', given that in Sean's imagined scenario, the 'part' of Rufus that consists of his attitudes appears to determine everything. Perhaps Sean would object that this is not so – that there are also the 'internal conditions' which Rufus-the-agent has, to be considered. So be it – then we merely have determination by a slightly wider set of properties of the whole, composite entity which is Rufus. And what I fail to see is how, given that this is the set-up, there is any causal role at all for Rufus-the-agent to play. What settles the outcome is not Rufus, but his properties (some of which are attitudinal properties, such as wanting to save money on gasoline, and some of which are these unspecified 'internal conditions').

In discussion, Sean indicated, I think, that he believed the burden of explanation and elucidation here lay with me. I think he would say that it is not he, but I, who am inclined to insist that sense can be given to the idea of an *agent's* determining something (e.g that he

will board the bus at *t*), as opposed to the agent's states or properties determining that same thing – and hence that whatever account I am inclined to give of the relevant 'agent causation' that is involved when an agent settles something can simply be plugged into his account of what happens when Rufus produces his actions, to serve as a description of what is going on in the relevant 'part' of Rufus. But this misses the point that it is utterly crucial to my view that agent causation of the type I endorse can only exist at all in an indeterministic universe; since settlings of outcomes by agents (i.e. actions) are only possible if actions are non-necessitated. By my lights, Rufus *cannot* be producing his actions (or even, as I would insist we should say, his movements) while at the same time various properties of his simply determine that they will occur. The necessitation simply rules out any agent-causal role for Rufus. So my account of agent causation cannot simply be plugged in to supply Sean's model of Rufus with the metaphysical underpinnings it needs. To think it could be is simply to beg the question against Agency Incompatibilism.

Of course, the compatibilist will want to dispute the suggestion that actions *can* only exist in an indeterministic universe, as I claim. But that is to return us to the original point of dispute. Sean has not given us an argument for thinking that strong compatibilist settling is consistent with the existence of actions whose status *as* actions is independent of the idea – central to the CTA - that actions are produced by the agent's mental states; for he has neither supplied an alternative account of what an action is supposed to be, nor is it dialectically legitimate here to demand that I supply it.