Foundational Grounding and Creaturely Freedom

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According to classical theism, the universe depends on God in a way that goes beyond mere (efficient) causation. I have previously argued that this 'deep dependence' of the universe on God is best understood as a type of grounding. In a recent paper in this journal, Aaron Segal argues that this doctrine of deep dependence causes problems for creaturely free will: if our choices are grounded in facts about God, and we have no control over these facts, then we do not control our choices and are therefore not free. This amounts to a grounding analogue of the Consequence Argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism. If successful, it would have application beyond classical theism: similar concerns would apply to any view that takes our choices to be grounded in a deeper reality which is beyond our control. However, I show that the argument is not successful. Segal's Grounding Consequence Argument is so closely analogous to the Causal Consequence Argument that any response to the one provides a response to the other. As a result, if you don't think that prior *causes* (whether deterministic or indeterministic) undermine free will, you shouldn't think that prior *grounds* undermine free will.

The classical theistic doctrine of deep dependence holds that the universe depends on God in a way that goes beyond mere (efficient) causation. In 'Foundational Grounding and the Argument from Contingency' (Pearce 2017), I argued that the best way to make sense of this doctrine in the language of contemporary analytic metaphysics is to say that the universe is *grounded* in God. In a recent paper in this journal, Aaron Segal (forthcoming) has argued that this doctrine of deep dependence—though independently plausible and well-attested in the Abrahamic traditions—cannot simultaneously preserve divine transcendence and creaturely freedom. The source of the problem, according to Segal, is that such a view must hold that facts about creaturely actions obtain wholly in virtue of facts about God. Given divine transcendence, creatures have no control over these facts. This gives rise to a grounding analogue of Peter van Inwagen's (1983, ch. 3) famous Consequence Argument, leading to the conclusion that deep dependence, like determinism, undermines human free will.

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Although this problem arises in the context of philosophical theology, it is of much broader relevance. The key premiss needed for Segal's argument is that our choices and actions are wholly grounded in something over which we have no control. Arguably, this premiss is also entailed by certain grounding-based versions of physicalism, such as Jonathan Schaffer's (2009) spacetime priority monism. I do not appear to have control over, for instance, the values of the electron field in the region of my brain, but on Schaffer's view my choices are grounded in these features of spacetime.

In this paper, I show that Segal's argument does not succeed. To accomplish this, I first develop a Causal Consequence Argument that is closely analogous to Segal's grounding version. I then argue that if you find a libertarian response to the Causal Consequence Argument plausible, you should find a libertarian response to Segal's Grounding Consequence Argument plausible. Similarly, if you find a compatibilist response to the Causal Consequence Argument plausible, you should find a compatibilist response to Segal's Grounding Consequence Argument plausible. I conclude that the doctrine of deep dependence does not generate any new problems about creaturely free will—it just leaves us with the same problems we had all along.

1 A Causal Consequence Argument

We can express the Causal Consequence Argument as follows.

(1c) Every human action is wholly caused by something that (i) is not itself a human action and (ii) is not even partly caused or constituted by any human action.

(2c) No human being has power over anything that (i) is not itself a human action and (ii) is not even partly caused or constituted by a human action.

(3c) If S is powerless over A, and B is wholly caused by A, then S is powerless over B.

Therefore,

(4c) No human being has power over any human action.

(5c) If no human being has power over any human action, then no human being is free.

Therefore,

(6c) No human being is free.

Very few philosophers would want to endorse this argument, but each premiss looks plausible. The first premiss seems to be true because my actions can be explained by my motives, beliefs and desires, which in turn appear to have causal explanations. Those too have causal explanations, ultimately tracing back to a time before there were any humans.

The second premiss appears to be true because we humans exercise control only by means of our actions.

The third premiss appears to be true when we look at examples. For instance, if I have no control over the behaviour of French voters, and the behaviour of French voters wholly causes Macron to be president, then I am powerless over Macron's being president.

(4c) is a logical consequence of (1c)–(3c). (5c) is just part of what we mean by freedom, and (6c) follows from (4c) and (5c).

It looks, then, as if we have a valid argument from plausible premisses to a wholly implausible conclusion. Let the philosophy begin!

2 Causal libertarianism

Causal libertarians hold that, necessarily, if an action is determined by prior causes, then that action is not free. Further, causal libertarians hold, human beings at least sometimes act freely.

Some libertarians may respond to the Causal Consequence Argument by rejecting premiss (1c) and taking free actions to be uncaused. This move, however, comes at a cost. In order for an event to be an action of mine—in order for me to have *ownership of* or *responsibility for* it—the reason the event occurs needs to have something to do with me. The event should occur *because of* me. This 'reason' or 'because' is naturally understood in a causal way. Furthermore, my motives, beliefs and desires should play some kind of role in this explanation. So it looks as though my ownership of or responsibility for my actions should involve some kind of role for me and my beliefs, desires and motives in explaining why the actions occurred, and this explanation should be at least partly causal.[1]

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[1] This is a version of the well-known luck objection to libertarianism. See, for example, Pereboom (2001, pp. 38–54), Mele (2005), Levy (2011, ch. 3), Steward (2012, §§6.2–3), Timpe (2013, ch. 10), and Shabo (2020). On the connection between the luck objection and issues about explanation, see Almeida and Bernstein (2003, §§9–10), Haji (2001), Björnsson and Persson (2012), and Franklin (2018, §5.6).

It seems, then, that the libertarian would be in better shape if she were able to accept premiss (1c). There are (at least) two strategies for doing this. According to event-causal libertarianism, our actions result from indeterministic causal chains involving our beliefs, desires, and so on (see Kane 1996; Franklin 2018; Ekstrom 2019).[2] It might be thought that this still involves a denial of premiss (1c) because indeterministic causes are not total causes. But the event-causal libertarian should not concede this point. According to event-causal libertarianism, the psychological state of the agent prior to the action is *all it takes* (causally) to produce the action. True, the very same psychological state could have led to a contrary action in precisely the same circumstances. Nevertheless, no additional causal *oomph* beyond the agent's psychological state was needed to produce the effect. In this sense, according to event-causal libertarianism, the agent's psychological state is a total cause of the action (cf. Clarke 2003, §5.1; Franklin 2018, pp. 25–8).

The agent's psychological state prior to the action is not itself an action, but will typically be partly caused by human actions. Nevertheless, this state will itself have a (possibly indeterminstic) prior total cause, which will in turn have a prior total cause, which can be traced back to a time before any humans or their actions. Hence, on this view, premiss (1c) will be true.

The second strategy is agent-causal libertarianism. According to this view, free actions are caused by the agent herself. At some stage, according to the agent-causal libertarian, there is an event—possibly the action itself (Clarke 2003, §8.4) or possibly some internal mental event such as a choice, volition or intention (O'Connor 2000, §4.3; Pereboom 2001, pp. 56–9)—that is not caused by any earlier event. Nevertheless, it has a prior cause: the agent herself.[3] The agent is not a human action; nor is she caused or constituted by a human action.[4] So, again, it seems that the agent-causal libertarian should accept premiss (1c).

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[2] For event-causal libertarian answers to the luck objection, see Kane (1999), Ekstrom (2003), Buchak (2013), and Franklin (2018, ch. 5).

[3] For agent-causal answers to the luck objection, see Pereboom (2004), O'Connor and Churchill (2004), Clarke (2005), Griffith (2010), and Buchak (2013). Note, however, that Clarke's (2003, chs. 8–9) version of agent-causal libertarianism allows that free actions *also* have event-causes.

[4] Of course, the agent's *existence* will typically be caused by a human action, but agent-causalists will typically not allow this to be part of a continuous causal chain leading up to the action, and in any event, since there was a time when there were no humans, this cannot have been the case for every agent ever.

The key idea here is that a *total* cause need not be a *deterministic* cause (Pruss 2006, §§7.4, 8.3; Franklin 2018, pp. 142–50). The agent, or the agent's psychological state, has all the causal *oomph* needed to produce the action, despite the fact that the very same agent in the very same internal and external circumstances could have produced a contrary action.

This general strategy—in both the event-causal version and the agent-causal version—amounts to a rejection of premiss (3c). This might be surprising because van Inwagen's (1983, ch. 3) original Consequence Argument was meant to be an argument for libertarianism, and it relied explicitly on a power transmission principle like this one. The key issue here, however, is the difference between *wholly caused* and *causally determined*. A causally determines B only if, given A, B had to occur. That is, if A causally determines B, then A does not leave open any alternatives to B. The causal libertarian, by definition, holds that an event causally determined by factors beyond my control is not a free action of mine. Nevertheless, the libertarian should reject premiss (3c) as written. She can reject it by drawing a distinction between what is wholly caused and what is causally determined.

3 Causal compatibilism

Causal compatibilists hold that an event may be a free action even if it is causally determined by prior factors outside the agent's control. As a result, the causal compatibilist will reject (3c) *without* the need for any distinction between 'wholly caused' and 'causally determined'.

How can the compatiblist argue against (3c)? One traditional line of thought—often known as 'classical compatibilism'—analyses 'power over' in terms of subjunctive conditionals (see, for example, Hobart 1934, pp. 8–13; McKenna and Coates 2020, §2).[5] According to the conditional analysis:

S has power over $A =_{df} ((S \text{ chooses that } A) \Box \rightarrow A) \wedge$

$((S \text{ chooses that } \neg A) \Box \rightarrow \neg A)$

This analysis has the virtue of blocking transmission principles precisely where the compatibilist wants them blocked: on this view, it

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[5] The sources cited use 'can' or 'able to' rather than 'power over'. Here I adapt the analysis to Segal's language.

doesn't matter what happened prior to the agent's choice, and it doesn't matter whether something is preventing the agent from making a different choice. All that matters is that the state of affairs *would* obtain *if* the agent so chose. Unfortunately, despite this undeniable virtue, the conditional analysis exhibits an unpardonable fault: it is certainly false.

In addition to a variety of technical counterexamples (Austin 1961; Martin 1994; Vihvelin 2013, §6.3) to the conditional analysis of powers (and dispositions, etc.), there is a deeper problem which cannot be solved by any merely technical fix: it *does* matter how the choice came about! The most compelling arguments for this claim in the recent literature focus on psychological disorders. The most famous of these examples is Harry Frankfurt's (1971) 'unwilling addict', who is powerless to refrain from taking his drug. Frankfurt argues that this is not a case of being unable to do as one wills, but of being unable to will as one wants. Gary Watson (2004, pp. 93–100) argues that similar considerations apply to severe cases of (for instance) depression or agoraphobia. A severely depressed person may be powerless to get out of bed. The problem is not that, having decided to get out of bed, she cannot move her limbs in the appropriate way. The problem is that she can't decide to get out of bed. Watson calls this phenomenon 'volitional disability'.[6]

Traditionally, most compatibilists have either rejected the distinction between freedom of will and freedom of action[7] or else defended compatibilism about freedom of action while rejecting freedom of will as incoherent.[8] However, more recently, consideration of volitional disability and related phenomena has convinced many compatibilists that an account of freedom of will, as distinct from freedom of action, is needed (see Watson 2004, pp. 184–9).[9] The general strategy employed

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[6] For a detailed account of the kind of volitional disability involved in melancholic depression, and an argument that this case provides evidence for certain kinds of hierarchical theories of self-governance, see Gorman (2020).

[7] Thus, for instance, Locke ([1690] 1975, §2.21.21): '*the Question is not proper, whether the Will be free, but whether a Man be free.*'

[8] Thus, for instance, Hobbes ([1656] 1999, p. 72): 'there be two questions: one, whether a man be free in such things as are within his power to do what he will; another, whether he be free to will ... In the former ... I agree with the Bishop [Bramhall]. In the latter ... I dissent from him.'

[9] This move finds a historical antecedent in Leibniz ([1704] 1996, §§2.21.8–31), who also uses addiction (specifically, alcoholism) as an example (§2.21.31).

by most such compatibilists has been to require some kind of well-functioning of one's psychological capacities in the course of arriving at the decision. Such well-functioning, they claim, is inconsistent with certain kinds of external interference (for example, post-hypnotic suggestions), but consistent with determinism.[10] It is often said that actions brought about in this way express the agent's 'deep self' (Sripada 2016). The most popular versions of this strategy require some form of 'reflective endorsement'. For instance, it may be required that the agent have a higher-order desire that this particular first-order volition be effective (Frankfurt 1971). Alternatively, Susan Wolf (1990) argues that no value-neutral account of this kind of well-functioning can be given, so we must understand an agent as (fully) free and responsible only when she is able to respond to the objective reasons.

This strategy has the benefit of neatly explaining how and why free choices follow from our character, values, beliefs, desires, and so on. On this account, following from these psychological traits in the right way is precisely what it takes for a choice of mine to be free. If, however, we accept that this is *all* it takes, then it doesn't matter where these psychological traits came from and, in particular, it doesn't matter whether they were wholly caused by factors beyond my control (see Frankfurt 1971, p. 20). These psychological traits in turn wholly cause my choice which wholly causes my action. On this view, if factors beyond my control cause my actions *by* causing me to have these psychological traits, this does not interfere with freedom. Thus (3c) is false: I may have power over my actions even if they have antecedent total causes over which I am powerless.

Segal specifically says that the problem with which he is concerned arises for 'robust creaturely freedom', which he defines as the view that 'at least some creature, at least at some time, performs some act such that he could have done something other than what he in fact did' (Segal forthcoming, p. 5). According to Segal, 'one can't simply take for *granted* that [determinism] entails the denial of creaturely freedom, or even the denial of robust creaturely freedom' (forthcoming, p. 21 n. 39, emphasis in original). Hence we must understand

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[10] Freedom, on such a view, *will* be compatible with sufficiently subtle forms of manipulation ('brainwashing') (see Kane 1996, 64–72). At some point, the compatibilist will have to bite the bullet here. This is particularly true of *theological* compatibilists, since they hold that freedom is compatible with the determination of our choices and actions *by another agent* (God), provided that such determination runs through our psychology in the right way.

Segal's formulation in a way that is neutral on the question of compatibilism. On this interpretation of the compatibilism/incompatibilism debate, both sides hold that free agents have the ability to do otherwise, but they disagree on the nature of ability (see Vihvelin 2013).

The brand of compatibilism I have outlined is a version of source compatibilism, and therefore does not mention the ability to do otherwise as part of the definition or analysis of freedom. Nevertheless, it agrees with source libertarianism in holding that *in the absence of certain external circumstances* (such as Frankfurt interveners; see Frankfurt 1969), freedom *implies* the ability to do otherwise (see Watson 2004, p. 165).[11] According to this kind of view, free actions are fully explained by the agent's psychological processes, which are assumed to be well-functioning and therefore autonomous, self-regulating, free from improper interference, and so on. In the absence of the aforementioned external circumstances, all that's needed to produce a different action is a difference in the agent's deliberation. We should therefore regard the alternative action as within the agent's power. As a result, this kind of compatibilism is 'robust' in Segal's sense.

4 Segal's Grounding Consequence Argument

Here is a slightly simplified version of Segal's (forthcoming, pp. 10–11) argument:

(1g) Every fact about the universe holds wholly in virtue of some fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't in turn hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe.

(2g) No creature has power over any fact that (i) isn't itself about the universe, and (ii) doesn't in turn hold even partly in virtue of any fact about the universe.

(3g) If S is powerless over A, and B obtains wholly in virtue of A, then S is powerless over B.

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[11] The matter is rather more complicated on Wolf's account. Wolf is concerned primarily with responsibility rather than freedom and, on her view, responsibility requires the ability to act according to Reason. The ability to act contrary to Reason is neither here nor there. (Nelkin 2011 also defends an 'asymmetric' view of this sort.) However, Wolf does argue that ordinary humans in ordinary circumstances generally have the ability to do otherwise (Wolf 1990, ch. 5).

Therefore,

> (4g) No creature has power over any fact about the universe.

> (5g) If no creature has power over any fact about the universe, then no creature is free.

Therefore,

> (6g) No creature is free.

As Segal shows, premiss (1g) follows from a historically popular picture of the universe's dependence on God. The general idea is that the universe's dependence on God is not merely a matter of God's causing the origination of the universe. Rather, God somehow *sustains* or *upholds* the universe. Segal calls this 'deep dependence'. I have suggested that the best way to understand deep dependence is as the claim that the universe is ultimately *grounded* in God (Pearce 2017).

If (2c) was plausible, (2g) is even more plausible. Again, we exercise power by performing actions, but the fact that a creature performs an action is a fact about the universe. Furthermore, everything caused by our actions is in the universe. So (2g) looks true.

Premiss (3g) is, again, a plausible-looking transmission principle.

As in the Causal Consequence Argument, (4g) follows from (1g)–(3g), (5g) is a partial definition of freedom, and (4g) and (5g) together entail (6g).

The first premiss of the Grounding Consequence Argument is *much* more controversial than the first premiss of the Causal Consequence Argument. It is therefore not surprising that Segal thinks we ought to respond to the argument by figuring out a way to reject (1g).[12] However, this is not necessary. I argued above that both libertarians and compatibilists have reason to reject premiss (3c). I will now argue that if you reject premiss (3c) on *either* libertarian or compatibilist grounds, then you have analogous reasons for rejecting (3g). Since (3g) is already suspect, the Grounding Consequence Argument does not succeed in calling (1g) into question.

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[12] Interestingly, Segal does not suggest that we do this by dropping deep dependence. Instead, he suggests, we can compromise on divine transcendence by taking each fact about the world to be identical with some fact about God, a strategy he finds in the early twentieth-century Absolute Idealist Mary Calkins (Segal forthcoming, §4).

5 Grounding libertarianism

Segal presents three arguments in favour of premiss (3g) (premiss 4 in Segal's version). The first two of these arguments (Segal forthcoming, pp. 15–18) rely on the following principle:

> *Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment*: If *S* is powerless over *A*, and *A* entails *B*, then *S* is powerless over *B*. (Segal forthcoming, p. 15)

Entailment is here understood modally: to say that *A* entails *B* is just to say that $\Box(A\rightarrow B)$. The causal libertarian, by definition, accepts the principle that powerlessness is transmitted by causal necessitation, so it's hard to see how any libertarian could deny that powerlessness is transmitted by metaphysical necessitation.

Most theorists of grounding hold that the total grounds metaphysically necessitate what is grounded. This principle, known as *Grounding Necessitarianism*, together with the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment, entails premiss (3g).

This will, I suspect, be enough to convince many libertarians that (1g) must be rejected. I concede that those libertarians who respond to the Causal Consequence Argument by rejecting (1c) would be correct to reject (1g). However, I argued above that libertarians would be better served by the rejection of (3c) rather than (1c). I now argue that those libertarians who reject (3c) should likewise reject (3g). They should do this by rejecting Grounding Necessitarianism.

As Segal (forthcoming, pp. 15–17) notes, the principle of Grounding Necessitarianism has been questioned by some metaphysicians. However, these metaphysicians generally admit the *global supervenience* of the derived facts on the fundamental facts (Leuenberger 2014; Skiles 2015; Cohen 2020).[13] For instance, one might hold that the existence of a statue is wholly grounded in the existence and properties of a certain lump of clay, while also holding that the clay would not amount to a statue were it not for certain external enabling conditions, such as its having been shaped with certain intentions and being regarded in a certain way by the art world.

Segal (forthcoming, pp. 17–18) correctly observes that, in order to reject (3g), a more radical rejection of Grounding Necessitarianism is

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[13] Nina Emery's (2019) account of how natural laws ground their instances and Kevin Richardson's (forthcoming) account of what he calls 'why-grounding' both appear to be exceptions to this generalization, though neither author is fully explicit on this point.

required. Segal calls this strategy 'vertical randomness', but for reasons that will emerge, I find this label tendentious.[14] I will call this view *Grounding Indeterminism*, and I will now argue that if you endorse causal libertarianism and reject premiss (3c) of the Causal Consequence Argument, you should find Grounding Indeterminism plausible.

The general strategy for rejecting (3c) was to insist that an indeterministic cause—that is, something that, in the very same circumstances, might not have produced the effect—can be a total cause. The reason for this was that, although the cause is indeterministic, this cause is nevertheless *all it takes* (causally speaking) to produce the effect. The cause has, as it were, adequate causal *oomph* for the effect.

Grounding is often explained as a kind of metaphysical analogue of causation (Schaffer 2016; Wilson 2018). While there is room for dispute about the closeness of this analogy (Bernstein 2016; Koslicki 2016), there must be some degree of similarity here because of the way both grounding and causation are tied to *explanation*. To cite a cause is to give an explanation (of one kind), and to cite a ground is to give an explanation (of another kind). Similarly, to cite the total cause is to give a *complete* explanation (of one kind), and to cite the total ground is to give a complete explanation (of another kind). A causal explanation explains a thing by saying how it came about. A grounding explanation explains a thing by saying in what that thing consists. Yet, I contend, the same logic of explanation applies to both.

Let us use the term *indeterministic explanation* for an explanation in which the explanans, even together with the totality of the explanatorily relevant circumstances, does not necessitate the explanandum.[15] The central motive for libertarians to reject premiss (3c) was to maintain that our choices and actions have complete explanations that are agent-involving in the right way to give us ownership over them. This kind of libertarian is therefore committed to the idea that indeterministic

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[14] In a footnote, Segal (forthcoming, p. 18 n. 35) writes, 'If I understand Pearce (2017) correctly, this [i.e. vertical randomness] is his view'. Segal's uncertainty about my view is no fault of his—*I'm* not certain what my view is! In the passage Segal presumably has in mind (Pearce, 2017, pp. 255–6), I was arguing that my model of deep dependence could be endorsed by a libertarian, if she was willing to take on some additional metaphysical baggage. The present section is intended as a further development of that thought, and an argument that if you've already taken on libertarianism's *other* metaphysical baggage, you shouldn't find this addition troubling. I was and remain neutral on the question of whether libertarianism is in fact correct.

[15] Fatema Amijee (2021) argues, by a very different route from that taken here, that metaphysical explanation is indeterministic in this sense.

explanations may sometimes be complete explanations. However, the key motivation for Grounding Necessitarianism is the assumption that indeterministic explanations are incomplete or otherwise defective (Trogdon 2013, pp. 479–80 n. 3; Richardson forthcoming, pp. 4–6).[16] The libertarian is already committed to a logic of explanation that rejects this assumption, and should therefore allow that grounding explanations may be indeterministic.

Does indeterministic grounding explanation amount to 'vertical randomness'? Does it involve objective chance? In light of their analogous view of the role of indeterministic causation, many event-causal libertarians will likely concede that it does.[17] In their view, the fact that there is objective chance in the causal chain leading from my prior psychological state to my action contributes to the action's being free. The event-causal libertarian can say the same thing about grounding.

Agent-causal libertarians, on the other hand, generally hold that free actions must be neither determined nor random, and that the introduction of primitive agent-causation makes this possible (see Pereboom 2001, pp. 55–6; Clarke 2005; Griffith 2010).[18] Agent-causal libertarians should endorse an analogous view about grounding: the grounding of the universe in the facts about God involves neither determination nor randomness, but rather freedom.

Segal offers a third argument in favour of (3g) that does not depend on the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment,[19] but rather on the idea that '*global* powerlessness is transmitted by grounding' (Segal forthcoming, p. 18, emphasis in original). The general idea here is that if you have no power over the non-*F* facts, but all the *F* facts are wholly grounded in non-*F* facts, then you have no power at all.

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[16] Trogdon mentions the rejection of indeterministic explanation only in an endnote, and does not present his argument as relying on it. However, the crux of his argument is that if there were not a certain kind of necessitation relation between the grounding facts and the grounded facts, then there would be a 'why' question left over, that is, the explanation would be incomplete.

[17] For instance, Franklin (2018, pp. 133–4) explicitly concedes that libertarian free actions are governed by objective chance. However, Buchak (2013) has argued that libertarians (whether event-causal or agent-causal) need not and should not concede this point.

[18] Elsewhere, Clarke (2003, §§9.3, 10.3.5) appears to concede that, even on agent-causal theories, libertarian free choices are governed by objective probabilities. This also appears to be conceded by O'Connor and Churchill (2004, pp. 251–2), and is clearly endorsed by O'Connor (2009, pp. 197–8, 207–13). However, these philosophers deny that the admission of objective probabilities amounts to the introduction of randomness.

[19] I thank Segal for clarifying this point in correspondence.

However, once again there is a parallel principle about causation that libertarians already have excellent reason to reject. I have power only over my actions and their consequences. But the versions of causal libertarianism outlined in §2 hold that my actions and their consequences all have prior total causes that are neither actions of mine nor consequences thereof. (On event-causal libertarianism, these causes will be events that occurred before I was born; on agent-causal libertarianism, the cause will be *me*.) However, the libertarian holds that I may still have power over my actions provided they are not causally *determined* by factors beyond my control. The same will be true on the grounding version: my choices are wholly grounded in something over which I am powerless (God), but this does not render me powerless because the grounding is indeterministic.

It will no doubt be objected that on any version of this view, our choices don't *really* have complete explanations because a contrary choice could have occurred in precisely the same circumstances. This, however, is a general objection to libertarianism. It has its force independently of the doctrine of deep dependence. If the libertarian responds to the Causal Consequence Argument by rejecting (3c) and holding that indeterministic explanations may be complete explanations, then she can use precisely the same strategy to reject (3g) of the Grounding Consequence Argument. Since (3g) should already look questionable to this kind of libertarian, she shouldn't regard the Grounding Consequence Argument as a reason for rejecting (1g).

6 Grounding compatibilism

Compatibilists will start from a position of general scepticism about power transmission principles, and the rejection of (3g) will therefore seem natural to them. Segal does offer some defence of (3g), but I will now argue that compatibilists should not find this defence convincing.

Segal's central arguments in defence of (3g) depend, as we have seen, on the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment. Segal says that this principle is 'uncontentious, and, even more importantly, it's obviously true' (Segal forthcoming, p. 15). In a footnote in support of this claim, Segal first directs us to the work of Finch and Warfield (1998). However, Finch and Warfield employ this principle in an argument for incompatibilism, and the other premises of their argument are even *less* contentious and *more* obviously true than the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment. The argument has

just one contestable premiss: human beings are powerless over the past and the laws of nature.[20] By definition, if determinism is true, then the past and the laws of nature entail our future actions.[21] Hence, if determinism is true, we are powerless over our own future actions, and therefore unfree.

The compatibilist, then, has two options: argue that we *do* have power over the past and the laws of nature or argue that the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment is not a valid principle of the logic of powerlessness.[22] It is, then, not too surprising that many compatibilists have chosen the latter course (for example, Mackie 2003, §4; Kapitan 2011). So Segal is incorrect in claiming that the principle is 'uncontentious'.

In the same footnote, Segal offers the following supplementary argument:

> [T]he logic of counterfactuals licenses the inference $p \;\square\!\!\rightarrow q, \square(q \rightarrow r) \vdash p \;\square\!\!\rightarrow r$. So if there is something X that S can do such that if S were to do X then B wouldn't obtain, and necessarily, if B fails to obtain then A fails to obtain (equivalent to: A entails B), then if S were to do X (which is something S can do), then A would fail to obtain. (Segal forthcoming, p. 15 n. 30)

The 'so' at the beginning of the second sentence of this quotation is hiding an assumption about the relationship between counterfactuals and 'can' claims. Further, in order for this to be relevant to the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment, we need an assumption about how 'can' claims and counterfactuals are related to powerlessness. Segal

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[20] My formulation in the main text is a little sloppy, but is, I hope, intuitive. Finch and Warfield are more careful. Let P be a proposition describing the total state of the universe at some time before there were any humans. Let L be a proposition that conjoins all the laws of nature. The premiss that is needed is that humans are powerless over the conjunction $P \wedge L$. Interestingly, Finch and Warfield (1998, pp. 523–4) argue that it is *not* sufficient to show that humans are powerless over P and powerless over L.

[21] More precisely, if (Laplacian) determinism is true, then $P \wedge L$ entails *any* fact about the physical world at *any* time.

[22] Perhaps there are other options. David Lewis (1981) argues that we are able to do something such that, if we did it, the actual laws of nature would not obtain. Dana Nelkin (2001, pp. 114–15) suggests that once 'powerlessness' (or, in her language, 'having no choice') is spelled out in a way that makes both the transmission principle and the premiss true, the conclusion of the argument may be no threat to the kind of free will we care about. However, neither Lewis nor Nelkin would deny that free will involves some kind of exercise of power or control or influence over our own actions. I strongly suspect that both would deny that their preferred notion obeys the transmission principle.

never spells out these relationships. The particular principle Segal needs appears to be the following:

> *Counterfactual Power*: If there is something X that S can do such that $(S \text{ does } X) \ \square \!\!\rightarrow \neg A$, then S is not powerless over A.

On a plain language notion of 'powerlessness', Counterfactual Power is subject to devastating counterexamples. For instance, suppose I am unimpeded in an air plane cockpit at 20,000 feet. The pilot is unconscious, the radio has malfunctioned, and there is no one else on the plane. Fortunately, the rest of the systems are working and I can see a deserted airstrip out of the window. In these circumstances, there is a series of actions I can perform that will result in the plane landing safely. Unfortunately, I am nevertheless powerless over the fact that the plane crashes because *I don't know how to land it!*[23] Similarly, if I don't know the combination to the safe, then (despite the fact that I can turn the dial any way I choose) I am powerless over the fact that it remains closed,[24] and I'm (hopefully) powerless to read your email if I don't know your password (despite the fact that I can press whatever keys I choose), and so on.

Segal informs me[25] that he in fact had in mind a stipulative notion of powerlessness, based on a biconditional form of Counterfactual Power. Let's call this notion 'powerlessness*' to distinguish it from the plain language notion:

> *Powerlessness**: S is powerless* over $A =_{df}$ there is no action X that S can do such that $(S \text{ does } X) \ \square \!\!\rightarrow \neg A$.[26]

That powerlessness* is transmitted by entailment follows from the standard logic of counterfactuals in precisely the way Segal suggests. The particular principle of the standard logic on which Segal relies $(p \ \square \!\!\rightarrow q, \square(q \!\rightarrow\! r) \vdash p \ \square \!\!\rightarrow r)$ has been questioned. However, these doubts are related to counterpossible conditionals.[27] If we confine

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[23] A similar example is discussed by Kapitan (2011, p. 138).

[24] This example is mentioned by O'Connor (2000, p. 13).

[25] Personal correspondence, 2 June 2020.

[26] The notion of powerlessness* is closely related to van Inwagen's (1983, pp. 93–4) operator 'N'. Notions belonging to this general family have played a major role in philosophical debate about the Consequence Argument.

[27] The trouble is that if q is impossible then $\square(q \!\rightarrow\! r)$ is true for every proposition r. As a result, this principle entails that if any subjunctive conditional with an impossible consequent is true, then all counterpossible conditionals are true. This aligns with the standard view that

the principle to cases in which *p*, *q* and *r* are possible, then I see no basis for questioning it. Furthermore, although Powerlessness* employs the tricky word 'can', the argument for the Transfer of Powerlessness* by Entailment does not rely on any assumptions about the logic of 'can' claims. So far, so good.

The problem with this strategy is that, read in terms of powerlessness*, the theist has no reason to endorse (2g). On this interpretation, (2g) will be false if there is any fact about God that would be different if I acted differently. Even the weakest versions of the doctrine of divine providence imply that there are at least some cases in which if I acted differently then some parts of God's plan for the universe would be different in some way. Further, these facts about God's providential plan, or God's creative decision, are not about the universe itself. These are facts about God,[28] the deeper reality in which the universe is grounded.[29]

Segal's argument for the Transfer of Powerlessness* by Entailment is successful, but this is of no help to the Grounding Consequence Argument because, read in terms of powerlessness*, (2g) is false. Let's stick, then, to an intuitive notion of powerlessness on which (2g) is

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all counterpossibles are trivially true (see Lewis 1973, §1.6). However, that view has recently become quite controversial; see, for example, Nolan (1997, 2013, 2014), Brogaard and Salerno (2013), Bjerring (2013), and Pearce (2016).

[28] Classical theists will of course want to deny that these are facts about what God is like intrinsically, since they hold that what God is like intrinsically is necessary and unchanging. Furthermore, the doctrine of simplicity may lead some classical theists to deny that there are any facts about what God is like intrinsically. For instance, if a fact about what God is like intrinsically would have to be a true proposition affirming some positive predicate of the divine nature, then Maimonides (1995, chs. 1.50–2) not only denies that humans can know such facts, he denies that there are any such facts to be known. Nevertheless, facts about God's providential plan or God's choice will presumably still exist and be among the grounds of the universe on such a view.

[29] In fact, there might be an even easier route to undermining (2g), interpreted in terms of powerlessness*: if I acted differently, then God would know that I acted differently. I do not rely on this conditional for two reasons. In the first place, someone might think that the fact that God knows that I perform an action holds partly in virtue of the fact that I perform that action, so that this case does not fall under condition (ii) of premiss (2g). Second, it's not clear that this secures the kind of influence on the subsequent course of events that we actually need. On the other hand, the fact that God's providential plan is to some extent counterfactually responsive to my actions does give me a way of influencing the course of events.

I suggested in the introduction that Segal's argument might also apply to Schaffer's (2009) spacetime priority monism. But there the response is even easier. Although I can't exercise intentional control over the values of the electron field in the region of my brain, there are nevertheless things I can do such that if I did them then the values would be different. Indeed, on the kind of view Schaffer endorses, this will be true of *any* action I might take.

true. Neither Segal nor Finch and Warfield have provided an argument in favour of the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment (where 'powerlessness', with no '*', expresses the ordinary notion). Nevertheless, the principle looks plausible. We saw in the previous section that a grounding libertarian could accept the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment and nevertheless deny Segal's premiss (3g) by endorsing grounding indeterminism. The grounding compatibilist strategy does not take this route. Just as the causal compatibilist aims to argue that determination by prior causes is compatible with free will, the grounding compatibilist aims to argue that determination by prior grounds is compatible with free will. The determination of the grounded facts by the grounding facts is typically understood as metaphysical necessitation. However, as Segal notes, the conjunction of this view with the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment leads directly to premiss (3g). Thus, for the grounding compatibilist, the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment has got to go.

Given that we are working with the plain language notion of powerlessness, we can easily adapt the counterexamples above to our needs here. For instance, a beginning algebra student might be powerless to think of the x such that $\sqrt{x} = 4$, although he is *not* powerless to think of the number 16, and necessarily, whoever is thinking of the number 16 is thinking of the x such that $\sqrt{x} = 4$.

Perhaps it might be thought that powerlessness is transmitted under *known* entailment. This principle would not, however, be strong enough to support (3g).

Alternatively, perhaps we could introduce a stipulative notion of powerlessness such that the inability to do something due to lack of knowledge does not count as powerlessness. Indeed, none of the premisses of the argument turn on this kind of case. We can say, then, that you are powerless over some fact if there's nothing you can do about that fact *and* no amount of additional knowledge would enable you to do anything about that fact. This modification to our notion of powerlessness leaves (2g) just as plausible as before, and in fact makes (5g) even *more* plausible than before. Is *this* property transmitted by entailment?

Here, I think, is where the libertarian and the compatibilist should part ways. The libertarian, by definition, holds that if my action were entailed by the past and the laws of nature I wouldn't be free. A plausible reason for this is that I am powerless over the past and the laws of nature. This is the crux of van Inwagen's original Consequence Argument. The compatiblist, by definition, denies that

this entailment would take away my freedom. But the compatibilist shouldn't say that I have power over the past or the laws of nature. So the compatibilist must deny the validity of the libertarian's inference, that is, reject the libertarian's transmission principle. As I indicated above, a number of compatibilists have already made this move in connection with Finch and Warfield's (1998) version of the Consequence Argument. How can this rejection be rendered plausible?

The best strategy is simply to outline a compatibilist account of powerlessness (intended to capture the relevant intuitive notion) and show that this account invalidates the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment principle.

I said above (§3) that the basic intuition behind the version of compatibilism I find most plausible is that I am most free when my deliberative process functions properly, without interference, and my action follows from the outcome of my deliberative process, shaped by my character, values, beliefs, desires, and so on. A compatibilist of this general stripe should hold that I am powerless over a fact if and only if the obtaining of that fact is not appropriately dependent on my well-functioning deliberative processes. However, such a notion of powerlessness does not obey the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment principle. If (as the compatibilist holds) the well-functioning of my deliberative processes can occur under determinism, then an action may be entailed by the past and the laws of nature *and also* depend on the outcome of my (deterministic) deliberative process. Therefore, under determinism, I am not (necessarily) powerless over my actions, but I am powerless over certain facts which entail those actions.

This reason for rejecting the Transmission of Powerlessness by Entailment was already implicit in the compatibilist response to the Causal Consequence Argument. Given that the compatibilist rejects the Transfer of Powerlessness by Entailment, she need not worry about Segal's third argument for (3g): if global *entailment* doesn't render one powerless, then global grounding certainly doesn't. Furthermore, not only does this line of thought undermine Segal's arguments in favour of (3g), it also provides good reason for rejecting (3g) itself. According to the doctrine of deep dependence, all of my psychological states, deliberative processes, and external actions are ultimately grounded in God. However, the fact that my psychological states are grounded in God in no way interferes with the proper functioning of my deliberative processes; nor does it prevent my actions from depending causally on the outcome of my deliberation.

Indeed, according to the doctrine of deep dependence, the well-functioning of my deliberative processes and the dependence of my actions on those processes are themselves all grounded in God. As a result, the compatibilist should see the Grounding Consequence Argument as failing in precisely the same way as the Causal Consequence Argument.

7 Conclusion

Segal's central claim is that there is a tension between the doctrines of deep dependence, true transcendence, and creaturely freedom. Nothing I have done in this paper tends to show that he is wrong about that. What I've argued instead is that the tension Segal identifies is precisely analogous to another tension: the tension between creaturely freedom and the fact that creaturely actions have prior causes. The analogy between these two tensions is sufficiently precise that a solution to one will, in general, provide an analogous solution to the other. As a result, if you don't think that the existence of prior causes takes away creaturely freedom, you shouldn't think that deep dependence takes away creaturely freedom.[30]

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