

An Action Can Be Both Uncaused and Up to the Agent

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I am an incompatibilist. I hold that it is not metaphysically possible for there to be free and morally responsible action in a deterministic world. I also believe that it is metaphysically possible for there to be free and responsible action in a world that is not deterministic -- specifically, I believe it is possible for there to be free and responsible actions that are uncaused. Moreover I see no good reason to doubt that this is possible, but here I seem to be at odds with some other incompatibilists who think they see reason to deny that breaches of determinism can permit free and responsible action any better than determinism can.¹ So they think there is reason to deny that it is metaphysically possible for there to be free and responsible action at all. Of course some compatibilists have also seen reason to deny that breaches of determinism would make possible free and responsible action; and some of these have even held that responsible action must be deterministically caused.² I wish here to consider some attempts to persuade us that no sort of breach of determinism would permit the occurrence of free and responsible action and to explain why, with me at any rate, they do not succeed. Specifically, I want to respond to the claim that an uncaused action cannot be an action that was up to the agent, an action about which the agent had a choice.

¹. For example: G. Strawson 1994; G. Strawson 2000, van Inwagen 2000, Smilansky 2000.

². For example: Hobart 1934, Nowell-Smith 1948.

I.

But first some preliminaries concerning my assumptions about action, about causation, deterministic and indeterministic, and about the notion of an event's being up to someone.

About the nature of action I will here assume without argument a number of things:

- (1) Actions can occur in a deterministic world: it is not in the very nature of an action that it must be free and responsible.
- (2) What makes an event of which a person is the subject an action of that person is something intrinsic to it and not how that event was caused.
- (3) The causally simplest events that count as actions are mental events, like decisions and volitions.
- (4) The causally simplest events that count as actions -- or the events in the brain that realize such actions -- may turn out to have internal causal structure but this is not required by the concept of an action.

With respect to the causation of an event by other events I take there to be three mutually exclusive and exhaustive possibilities: an event is (1) deterministically caused, (2) indeterministically caused, or (3) uncaused.

- (1) An event e was *deterministically caused* just in case there was some antecedent (and perhaps very complex) event³ c such that c caused e , and c instantiates an event-type C and e instantiates an event-type E such that it is a causal law that an event of type C always causally produces an event of type E .

³. I take the notion of an event to cover, not only changes, but also states or conditions of things at times.

(2) An event e was *indeterministically caused* just in case there was some antecedent event c such that c caused e and it was nomically possible (that is, in accordance with all causal laws) for c not to have caused e .

(3) An event was *uncaused* just in case it was neither deterministically nor indeterministically caused.

To suppose it is possible for there to be indeterministic causation is to suppose that causation does not reduce, Humean fashion, to universal regularity but is rather a brute relation among particular events, a relation of *production*, a relation that may be impossible to specify in non-synonymous terms. Of course, this realist view of causation can allow that there can be deterministic causal laws, laws that say that whenever an event of a certain kind occurs it always causally produces a certain kind of event. It just denies that the very notion of causation requires that all causal laws must be exceptionless generalizations, must be deterministic.

I suppose that when experts in quantum mechanics speak of an indeterminate state “resolving itself” into, or becoming, one or another determinate state they mean to imply that the indeterminate state causally produced the ensuing determinate state, but, being very far from an expert on quantum mechanics, I could be wrong about that. Such a statement is susceptible of a reading on which it implies no causal relation but means merely that the indeterminate state was followed by the determinate state of affairs.

Suppose that an event of some type E (an E -event) occurred. What is it for it to have been up to someone whether that event occurred (or, what I take to be the same, for someone to have had a choice as to whether that event occurred)? We can distinguish a weak and a strong sense of this.

In the *weak sense*,

it was up to S whether the E-event occurred if and only if

it was open to S to make it the case that the E-event did not occur.

(S *made it the case* that the E-event occurred if and only if an action of S's either entailed or, together with accompanying conditions, causally necessitated the occurrence of the E-event. It was *open to S* to make something the case if nothing prevented, stood in the way of, S's doing so.) Suppose I have a setup such that, if I fire a photon into it, that event (plus other conditions at the time of the firing) causally necessitates that the photon will travel through either slit A or slit B, but nothing in the situation causally necessitates that it will go through slit A and nothing causally necessitates that it will go through slit B. And suppose I fire a photon and it goes through slit A. Then it is only in this weak sense that it was up to me whether there would occur that event of a photon's being fired by me and its going through slit A. Since it was open to me not to fire the photon it was open to me to make it the case that this event did not occur, and thus up to me in the weak sense whether it occurred. But there is a stronger sense in which it was not up to me whether this event occurred.

In the *strong sense*,

it was up to S whether the E-event occurred if and only if

it was open to S to make it the case that the E-event did not occur and S made it the case that the E-event occurred.

Since I did not make it the case that the photon went through slit A -- my action of firing the photon neither entailed nor, together with accompanying conditions, causally necessitated its doing so -- it was not up to me in this strong sense whether there occurred that event of a photon's being fired by me and going through slit A. In the claim I am here defending, that it

can have been up to the agent whether a particular uncaused action of his occurred, “up to the agent whether” should be understood in the strong sense. That is, it means that it was open to the agent to make it the case that that action did not occur and the agent made it the case that it did occur.

Of course, it may be that at one time it was open to S to prevent the occurrence of a particular event but at some time before the event occurred it ceased to be open to S to do this. Hereafter, unless I specify otherwise, when I speak of its having been up to an agent whether a particular action of hers occurred -- leaving out any mention of a time at which was open to her to make it the case that the particular action in question would not occur -- I should be taken to mean that it was open to her to do this up until the time of the action.

Finally, there is another unargued assumption I am making, having to do with the possibility of agent-causation. Should it turn out that the causally simplest actions have internal causal structure and, moreover, the causal relation involved cannot be understood as a causal relation between events but must be understood as a brute causal relation between the agent qua substance as cause and some event as effect -- and it is not clear to me that this is even a conceptual possibility -- this would make no difference to the issue I’m addressing in this paper. The question would still arise: Can an event that is an action, whatever its internal structure may be, both be itself uncaused and be up to the agent? And the reasons some have suggested for answering no to this question would still be just as good or bad.

II.

My claim, then, is this:

(U) It is possible for there to be an action that was uncaused and also such that it was up to the agent at the time of the action whether it would occur.

This claim may strike some as implausible on its face. But I don't see that it should. In fact, I find a prima facie case for accepting (U) in the fact that in my experience of acting it is typically the case that as I act I have the impression that it is up to me which way I act but I lack any impression of something causing me to act as I do. For example, as I gesture with my hand it seems to me to be up to me in what direction I move my hand and with what force, but it does not seem to me that something causes me to move it in the direction and with the force I move it. It would be odd if the content of this impression that I have entailed something of which I have no impression. I admit, of course, that this is not impossible. I have here a merely prima facie case against the entailment, but it is enough, I think, to make it reasonable for me to accept (U) until I become aware of good reason to doubt it. And I haven't as yet.

But I am aware of some bad reasons that do, or may, tempt some to doubt (U). Let me discuss four of these.

1. Some may hastily generalize from what is true of events other than actions to what is true of all events, including actions. It does seem very plausible to suppose, and I am not inclined to dispute, that if an event that was not an action of mine was uncaused, then it could not have been up to me (in the strong sense) whether that event occurred, because it could not have been that I made it the case that the event occurred, given that it was uncaused. For me to make it the case an event that is not an action of mine occurs is for me to cause that event by means of my action.

But it does not follow that the same holds of all uncaused events, even those that are actions of mine.

The reasoning I am claiming to be unsound can be spelled out this way:

- (1) For any event *e* that has actually occurred, it was (in the strong sense) up to an agent *S* whether *e* occurred only if *S* made it the case that *e* occurred.
- (2) For any event *e*, *S* made it the case that *e* occurred only if *S* caused *e* to occur.
- (3) If *S* caused *e* to occur, then *e* was not uncaused.
- (4) Therefore, an uncaused action cannot have been one such that it was (in the strong sense) up to the agent whether it would occur.

The false premise here is (2); and my conjecture as to why it may nevertheless seem evident to some is that they fail to distinguish it from the claim that, for any event *e* that was not an action of *S*'s, *S* made it the case that *e* occurred only if *S* caused *e* to occur. This latter is extremely plausible. And it may well be that virtually all of the events concerning which we have occasion in ordinary life to ask whether a particular agent made them occur, or whether it was up to a particular agent whether they would occur, are events other than the actions of that agent. If so, that might explain a pre-reflective disposition to (mistakenly) infer from 'S made it happen' to 'S caused it to happen' even where the 'it' in question is an action of *S*'s.

But, on reflection, we should see, I think, that we have no good reason to extend the extremely plausible generalization in the way that premise (2) does, to cover the agent's own actions. For it seems evident to me that, given that an action was uncaused, all its agent had to do to make it the case that she performed that action was to perform it. If my deciding to vote for the motion, for example, was uncaused, then it follows that nothing other than me made it the case that I decided to vote for the motion, and it also follows that I made it the case that I so decided: I did so simply by so deciding. If my raising my hand was uncaused (that is, nothing

other than me determined or made it the case that I raised my hand), then I made it the case that I raised my hand simply by raising my hand. (But the distinct event of my hand's rising, which is a proper part of my raising my hand, is an event I did cause, by means of a mental activity of volition.⁴)

2. Another thing that appears to lead many philosophers to deny (U) is the thought that 'uncaused' implies 'random', or 'by chance', or 'a matter of luck', which in turn implies 'not made the case by anyone' and 'not up to anyone'. Let me cite a few examples of this sort of thinking.

Hume wrote that "... liberty, when opposed to necessity, is the same thing as chance ..." (Hume 1902, Sec., 8, Part 1). By "necessity" Hume here means causal determination, so he is saying that an event that was not causally determined would be one that happens by chance (and he does not restrict this generalization to events that are not actions).

A.J. Ayer, in Ayer 1959, commits himself to the proposition that if my acting as I do is not causally determined then it is an accident and a matter of chance that I act as I do.⁵ J.J.C. Smart, in Smart 1968, suggests (pp. 300-301) that "acting from reasons is not merely random precisely because [and, presumably, only because] it is also acting from causes."⁶ And in Smart

4. See Ginet 1990, Ch. 2.

5. The relevant passage reads as follows:
 Either it is an accident that I choose to act as I do or it is not. If it is an accident, then it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise; and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism. (Ayer 1959, p. 275)

6. The only argument Smart suggests for this is the observation that a computer programmed to select items from a set according to certain criteria can be said to have been "programmed to act in accordance with what we would call 'good reasons'." But the proposition that there can be phenomena acceptably described as "acting for reasons" in which the reasons cause the action does not entail that everything properly called acting for reasons must be a case where the reasons caused the action, much less that an uncaused action must be a merely random event.

1961, 291-306, Smart claims, without real argument, that any acceptable definitions of “unbroken causal continuity” and “pure chance” must yield the result that the propositions ‘This event happened as a result of unbroken causal continuity’ and ‘This event happened by pure chance’ must be contradictories, i.e., they cannot both be false.

Bruce Waller, in Waller 1988 as quoted and paraphrased by Kane 1996, p. 171, says:

Suppose two persons had exactly the same pasts and made exactly the same efforts of will, but one does the moral or prudential thing while the other does not. Given that their pasts were exactly the same up to the moment of choice, as indeterminism [or the action’s being uncaused] requires, wouldn’t that mean that the outcome was a matter of luck? ... Would there then be any grounds for distinguishing between [them], for saying that one deserves censure for a selfish decision and the other deserves praise for generosity? If they are really identical, and the difference in their acts results from chance, then it seems irrational to consider one more praiseworthy (or more blameworthy) than the other should be.

Galen Strawson, in G. Strawson 1994, repeatedly equates being undetermined with being random, as in, e.g., his remark (p. 7) that “...it is absurd to suppose that indeterministic or random factors, for which one is ex hypothesi in no way responsible, can in themselves contribute in any way to one’s being truly morally responsible for how one is.”

Alfred Mele, in Mele 1999, claims that if nothing about an agent’s powers, capacities, states of mind, moral character, and the like causally determines whether she will act in one way rather than another then her acting as she does rather than in an alternative way is “just a matter of luck”.⁷

What does “random” or “by chance” or “a matter of luck” mean in claims like these? If it means only that the event was not predictable from antecedent causes, then it is evident that an

⁷ Mele considers an agent who fails to resist temptation in one possible world but who, in an alternative possible world where the laws of nature are the same and where she is in exactly the same situation, succeeds in resisting temptation. Referring to this agent in the first world as “Ann” and in the second world as “Ann*”, he says: If Ann’s effort to resist temptation fails where Ann*’s effort succeeds, and there is nothing about the agents’ powers, capacities, states of mind, moral character, and the like that explains [by which Mele

uncaused action is a “random” event; but then it is also very far from evident, and in need of argument these authors do not supply, that it cannot have been up to the agent whether a “random” action occurred and cannot have been the case that the agent made a “random” action occur. Let us grant, however, that there is a sense of “random” or “by chance” in which to say that an event was random or happened by chance is to imply, not only that it was not predictable from causes, but also that no one made it happen and it was not up to anyone to make it happen, and that, therefore, for anyone who cared whether the event happened it was a matter of good or bad luck that it did. Then, using this sense of “random”, what is very far from evident and what these authors fail to argue for is that an uncaused action must be random. (Their thought here may be an instance of the first error described above, generalizing from what is true of events that are not actions to all events, including actions; i.e., they do not see that actions must be the unique exception to the principle that undetermined means random.)

One author I know of who has tried to argue for the thesis that an uncaused action must be random is Peter van Inwagen. In van Inwagen 2000 he writes:

Suppose...that...Alice was faced with a choice between lying and telling the truth and that she freely chose to tell the truth... And let us assume that...Alice’s telling the truth...was...undetermined [i.e., not deterministically caused]. Now suppose that immediately after Alice told the truth, God caused the universe to revert to precisely its state one minute before Alice told the truth... What would have happened the second time? ... One can say only that she *might* have lied and she *might* have told the truth.

...suppose that God *a thousand times* caused the universe to revert to exactly the state it was in [one minute before Alice told the truth]. Suppose that [after a thousand replays] Alice has told the truth four hundred and ninety-three times and has lied five hundred and eight times. Is it not true that as we watch the number of replays increase, we shall become convinced that what will happen in the *next* replay is a matter of chance? (pp. 14-15)

means “causally determines”] this difference in outcome, then the difference really is just a matter of luck. (Mele 1999, p. 99)

He clearly thinks this is a rhetorical question to which the answer is “yes”.⁸ But I don’t see why he thinks this. If I contemplate just one Alice making an uncaused choice, I fail to see how the proposition that the choice was causally undetermined entails that it was random and not up to Alice which choice she made; and I quite fail to see how supposing there to be a great many duplicates of Alice in duplicate situations, sometimes making the same choice as Alice and sometimes making a different one, should make me any more inclined to think with regard to any one of these choices that its being undetermined entails that it is random and not up to its subject.

A bit later in the same essay van Inwagen writes:

You are a candidate for public office, and I, your best friend, know some discreditable fact about your past that, if made public, would -- and should -- cost you the election. ... You beg me not to tell. ... I know that...the objective, “ground floor” probability of my “telling” is 0.43 and that the objective “ground floor” probability of my keeping silent is 0.57. Am I in a position to promise you that I will keep silent? --knowing, as I do, that if there were a million perfect duplicates of me, each placed in a perfect duplicate of my present situation, forty three percent of them would tell all and fifty seven percent of them would hold their tongues? I do not see how, in good conscience, I could make this promise. I do not see how I could be in a position to make it. But if I believe that I am able to keep silent, I should, it would seem, regard myself as being in a position to make this promise. What more do I need to regard myself as being in a position to promise to do X than a belief that I am able to do X? Therefore, in this position, I should not regard myself as being able to keep silent.

(p. 17)

It is not clear to me what van Inwagen means here by “objective ‘ground floor’ probability”.

The phrase suggests that he is thinking of the situation as one where the action in question will fail to be causally determined through being indeterministically caused rather than being just uncaused. If the action is uncaused then I don’t see how a notion of objective probability could apply to it, if, as I suppose, objective probability implies more than just long run frequency. If

⁸. In van Inwagen 1983, p. 128, however, he declared doubtful the assertion that if our acts are undetermined

my action of keeping the promise, supposing that's what I did, was uncaused then, in the frequency sense of probability, it would have meaning to say that the action had a 47% chance of occurring, if and only if, for example, there were or will be many twin situations and in 47% of them I or my counterpart keep the promise. To suppose that van Inwagen's keeping silent will be uncaused and it is only in the frequency sense that it is just 57% probable that he will do so is to suppose nothing that should make him think that it will not be up to him whether he does so, nothing that should give him any qualms about promising to do so.

But it's another story if his keeping silent (or telling) is always indeterministically caused. An instance of indeterministic causation may be supposed to be governed by a law of nature which says that a certain kind of circumstance is such that in a certain percentage of cases of its occurrence it will cause one kind of effect, in another percentage of cases a different kind of effect, and so on (where all the percentages add up to 100 percent). And it's plausible to think of such a law as attributing to the circumstance in question, to its very nature, a degree of propensity to produce each of the effects the law mentions, the measure of which is an objective probability.

If this is what indeterministic causation involves, then I think that there is a plausible argument from the premise that the promised action was indeterministically caused to the conclusion that it was not up to the agent whether she would so act if it was not up to her whether she would be in the circumstance that caused the action. Interestingly enough, the argument I have in mind, which I will explain later, seems to be suggested by van Inwagen in his discussion in van Inwagen 1983 of "the third strand of the Mind argument." So it is perhaps not excessively wild to conjecture, on the basis of van Inwagen's talk of objective probability, that this argument was at work in his thinking in this later passage I have just quoted (from van

they are mere "random" or "chance" events.

Inwagen 2000). However that may be, it is important to note that the conclusion of that argument -- that an indeterministically caused action cannot have been up to the agent -- does not entail the claim van Inwagen makes in this later passage -- that an undetermined action cannot have been up to the agent -- because being undetermined does not entail being indeterministically caused: an undetermined event may be so because it is uncaused altogether.

I should mention that there is one point that van Inwagen 2000 makes with which I strongly agree, namely, that the question of whether free and responsible action involves agent-causation is irrelevant to this issue of whether (U) holds. The supposition that an action was agent-caused, or consisted in an agent-causing, does not support either accepting or denying the possibility of the agent-causing event's being uncaused and also up to the agent. Those whose intuitions lead them to deny (U) will of course say that if an agent-causing event is uncaused then it cannot have been up to the agent whether it occurred. And those, like me, whose intuitions lead them to accept (U) will say that it can be up to the agent whether his uncaused agent-causings occur. Bringing agent-causation into the picture does not resolve the issue but just transfers it to agent-causing events.

3. Another argument for the denial of (U)⁹ takes as its premises that

(a) an action could have been up to the agent only if it has an explanation in terms of the agent's motives or reasons

and

(b) its being uncaused would preclude such an explanation.

⁹. Found in Hobart 1934; Nowell-Smith 1948; Ayer 1959; Smart 1961.

I doubt (a) but will not pursue that issue here. It is near to being a moot point, because I certainly grant that most of our actions that we ordinarily regard (or would like to regard) as free and responsible actions that were up to the agent are ones that have explanations in terms of the agent's reasons for performing them. I deny (b). I can here only briefly explain why.

I have argued¹⁰, and continue to believe, that reasons explanations of actions need not be causal explanations, that, for example, the reasons explanation expressed in (1) below does not entail the causal claim expressed in (2).

- (1) My reason for doing A was that I wanted to obtain B and believed that by doing A I would obtain B.
- (2) My desire to obtain B, together with my belief that by doing A I would obtain B, caused my doing A.

There is a condition that, as it seems to me, is clearly sufficient for the truth of (1) but that does not entail the truth of (2) and that is compatible with its being the case that my doing A was uncaused, namely, the following:

- (3) Concurrently with my doing A, I intended of that doing of A that by it (and in virtue of its being a doing of A) I would satisfy (or contribute to satisfying) my desire to obtain B.

It is compatible with the truth of this condition that my doing A was neither deterministically caused nor indeterministically caused. That is unlikely to be controversial. My more controversial claim is that this condition is sufficient for the truth of the reasons-explanation expressed in (1), namely, that my reason for doing A was that I wanted to obtain B and believed that by doing A I would obtain B. Some do not find this claim intuitively compelling, but I haven't seen any argument against it that does not boil down to endorsing the

¹⁰. See Ginet 1990, Ch. 6 and Ginet 2002.

contradictory intuition. In favor of my claim let me put forward the following consideration (which, I realize, falls short of being a compelling argument): I know with certainty that a condition of the form of (3) holds for many of my actions and that the corresponding reasons-explanation of the form of (1) is true. I think, for example, of the countless times where I know that my reason for pressing a certain button on my computer was in order to satisfy my desire to turn the computer on, and I also know that while I was pressing the button I intended of that action that it would satisfy that desire. I do not know with like certainty that those button-pressing actions were caused by a desire or intention of mine or even that they were caused at all (though there is no doubt some evidence suggesting that they were). Were we to somehow discover (perhaps to our surprise) that those actions were not caused, I would not feel in the least obliged to doubt the truth of the explanations that I performed those button-pressings for the reason that I wanted to turn on the computer.

So I conclude that one should not take as a ground for denying that an uncaused action can be up to the agent the claim that an uncaused action cannot be one that the agent does for a reason. For there is no good reason to accept this latter claim.

4. I turn now to the last way I will consider in which someone may be led to deny (U). They may be led to do this by a failure to adequately appreciate the difference between (U) and the following somewhat similar claim:

(I) It is possible for there to be an action that was indeterministically caused by an antecedent event and also such that it was up to the agent at the time of the action whether that action would be caused by that antecedent event.

They uncritically assume that (U) and (I) must stand or fall together. This may be because the longstanding focus in philosophical discussion of free will on whether determinism is compatible with free and responsible action has led them to overlook the possibility that, with respect to the issue of whether an undetermined action can be up to the agent, there may be a significant difference between the two ways in which an action could be undetermined, i.e., could fail to be deterministically caused: by being indeterministically caused and by being uncaused. In any case, some who think (U) and (I) stand or fall together also think there is reason to reject (I), and they therefore also reject (U).

I have to confess that I too have been guilty of the same unthinking assumption. In my case, since I thought one should accept (U), I thought one should also accept (I). I committed myself to (I) in Ginet 1990 in commenting on an example discussed in van Inwagen 1983, Sec. 4.4. van Inwagen imagines a thief who, on the point of robbing the poor box, decides not to rob it; and he imagines that this decision was caused, but not deterministically, by a certain desire and belief of the agent. About this example he says (pp. 149-50)

...I wish I knew *how it could be* that...our thief had a choice about whether to repent, given that his repenting was caused, but not determined, by his prior inner states, and given that no other prior state “had anything to do with” -- save negatively, in virtue of its noninterference with -- his act.

And he considers the suggestion that

the thief may have had a choice about whether to repent owing to his having had a choice about whether, on the one hand, DB [a certain complex of desire and belief in the thief] caused R [the thief's repenting], or, on the other, his desire for money and his belief that the poor-box contained money (DB*) jointly caused the event *robbing the poor-box* (R*). ...DB and DB* both actually obtained. [According to the suggestion under consideration], what the thief had a choice about was which of these two potential causes became the actual cause of an effect appropriate to it. . . . If this account is correct then there are two events *its coming to pass that DB causes R* and *its coming to pass that DB* causes R** such that, though one of them must happen, it's causally undetermined which will happen, and it will have to be the case that the thief has a choice about which

of them will happen. If this were so, I should find it very puzzling and I should be at a loss to give an account of it. (p. 239, n. 34)

I responded to this by saying that the proper account is that the thief “determines which of the antecedent motives he acts out of simply by acting in the way recommended by one of them while concurrently remembering the motive and intending his action to satisfy it” (Ginet 1990, p. 147, n. 22).

But this, while true, did not really address van Inwagen’s question; for it is true only if “acting out of such-and-such a motive” has a noncausal sense, i.e., it does not imply that the motive caused the action but only that the motive was the agent’s reason for the action. But van Inwagen’s question was: How can it be that the agent has a choice about which of the two competing motives causes his action? If we take him to be using “cause” strictly, then to point out, as I do, that the agent has a choice about which motive becomes his reason for acting as he does is not to say that he has a choice as to which motive causes his action. His acting out of one motive rather than the other -- as I here understood this: the one motive rather than the other was his reason for acting as he did -- is compatible with neither motive’s having caused his action, if I am right in my claim that there is a sufficient condition for the truth of the statement that a certain motive was the agent’s reason for acting that does not entail that the motive caused the action. My supposing that I was addressing van Inwagen’s question can be explained, I think, only on the hypothesis that I was unthinkingly assuming that (U) and (I) stand or fall together.¹¹

But I’ve recently come to think that this assumption is an error. There now seems to me to be reason to doubt (I) that does not apply to (U). For there certainly is intuitive appeal in the

¹¹ This assumption is at work again, much more recently, in Ginet 2003a, when I say: “If it is plausible to think that [a] when an action is uncaused, nothing, not even the agent, determines or controls whether that action occurs, it should be plausible to think similarly that [b] when one of a conflicting pair of motives indeterministically causes an action, nothing, not even the agent, determines which motive causes the action” (p. 608). This remark was

following proposition: it cannot be open to me at any given time to determine whether the state of the world already obtaining at that time will or will not causally produce a certain action of mine immediately after that time, i.e., it cannot be open to me then to make it the case that it will and open to me then to make it the case that it won't. Though the laws of nature and the state of the world at t may leave it open at t whether or not the state of the world at t will cause the action in question, it is far from clear that it follows that they leave it open to me to determine whether or not it will.

These thoughts bring me to a new understanding of the puzzlement expressed by van Inwagen. Though he does not put it this way, van Inwagen could have been puzzled as to how it could be open to the thief, at the time of his acting, to determine what a state of the world already in being at that time would causally produce. Whether or not this is what actually puzzled van Inwagen, it does now puzzle me. I have no difficulty in seeing how I can make it the case that I act in a certain way, rather in some alternative way, in the absence of anything causing me to act in that way -- I do it simply by acting in that way. But I do fail to see how I can make it the case that the state I am in will cause me to perform one rather than another of the alternative actions that the laws of nature permit that state to cause.

The problem with its having been up to me at the time of the action whether or not an indeterministically caused action would occur is not the chance involved in its coming about by indeterministic causation, but rather the causation involved. It's the same problem as with deterministic causation of an action. If the state of the world up to t causes my action at t , whether deterministically or indeterministically, then it was (as it were) "up to" that state of the world, and not up to me, what action it caused at t . I did not make it the case that the state of the

motivated by the thought that it can't be plausible to affirm or deny one of [a] or [b] without doing the same to the other.

world at t caused that action; and it was not open to me to make it the case that it caused some other action, nor was it open to me to make it the case that it did not cause any action. If the causation was indeterministic then the state of the world “decided”, but either way at t it was “in the hands of” that state of the world, not mine, what it would produce.

The upshot of these reflections is this: The title of my paper is too weak. Not only is it possible for an uncaused action to have been up to the agent (at the time of the action), if the action was up to the agent then it must have been uncaused. If this is right, then there is a disturbing consequence. Though the popularity of indeterministic theory in fundamental physics does not give justification for claiming to know that typically our actions are indeterministically caused, it does give us some reason to think that this may be so. But the acceptance of indeterminism in physics does not give us even that much reason to think that typically our actions are uncaused. (It’s also true that what we know does not justify our being sure that typically our actions are not uncaused.) So, though it is possible as far as we know that typically our actions are up to us, we perhaps have less reason than we might have thought for believing that this is actually the case, and certainly less reason than we would like to have.¹²

¹². I wish to thank Sally McConnell-Ginet and David Widerker for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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