Further Reflections on Lemos's Indeterministic Weightings Model of Libertarian Free Action

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Abstract

John Lemos defends an indeterministic weightings model of libertarian free will that is a variant of event-causal libertarian views. Many argue that these views are susceptible to the luck problem: an agent's directly free choices are too luck infected for the agent to be morally responsible for them. The weightings model supposedly escapes this problem largely because in this model an agent's reasons for choices do not come with pre-established values. Rather, an agent performs intentional acts of weighting that contribute to the value she assigns to her reasons. Decisions that are consequences of weightings are, thus, under the agent's control and not subject to luck. In a recent paper, I argued that despite its weighting component, Lemos's model succumbs to the luck problem. Lemos rejoins that my criticisms are based on misunderstandings and confusions. I deflect the charge of misperception and explain why the weightings model remains susceptible to the luck problem.

Keywords

Indeterministic weightings, John Lemos, Libertarianism, Luck, Ultimate responsibility.

Introduction

In a recent paper, I argued that John Lemos's indeterministic weightings model of libertarian free action fails to circumvent the so-called *luck problem* that many philosophers agree plagues libertarian views of the general sort Lemos defends. Lemos rejoins that my reservations about his model are based on significant misunderstandings of its nature. If I were to rid myself of confusion, I would see the light. In this paper, I question the charge of misapprehension and defend my view that the weightings model is not immune to the luck problem.

Modest libertarianism

The weightings model is a variant of event-causal modest libertarian views. A brief summary of the key features of such views will be instructive. An indirectly free action is a free action whose freedom is inherited from the freedom of other actions to which it is suitably related. A directly (or basically) free action is a free action that is not indirectly free. According to modest libertarianism, the sort of control a directly free action requires consists in apt agent-involving events, such as the agent's germane reason states, nondeviantly and indeterministically causing the action.[1] Modest libertarians allow that an indirectly free action may be determined by its proximal causal precursors but insist that even the immediate causal antecedents of a directly free action do not determine that action. These antecedents and the natural laws do not preclude some chance that action not occur.[2] Typically, libertarians insist on the following.

> *AP*: Your action *A*, which you perform at time *t*, is directly free only if there is another possible world with the same past up to *t*, and the same laws in which, at *t*, you refrain from doing *A*.

AP is manifest in Lemos's weightings model and in Robert Kane's development of modest libertarianism. It is one constituent of the plurality conditions that these two species of libertarianism call for and it largely fuels the luck objection. Regarding these conditions, Kane calls choices by which we may form or reform our existing characters, motives, or purposes *self-*

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1. The control at issue is the sort moral responsibility presupposes. See, e.g., Dennett, 1978; Fischer, 2011, 2014; Mele, 1995; Kane, 1996, 1999; Clarke, 2000, 2003; Franklin, 2011, 2018; Haji, 2016, 2019.

2. See, e.g., Kane, 1996.

forming actions (SFAs) and contends that these choices must satisfy the following *plurality conditions* to be free: "the power to make them and the power to do otherwise (e.g., to make some alternative choice) *either way, voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally*" (Kane, 2021, pp. 18-19).[1]

The luck objection

The following example illustrates the problem of luck for modest libertarian views. Assume that choices or decisions, if free, are directly free. Imagine that Jane is deliberating about whether to vacation in Hawaii or Colorado. She finds Hawaii attractive because of its snorkeling and surfing opportunities. She is drawn to Colorado because of the mountain vistas and prospects of whitewater rafting. After due reflection, she forms an all-things-considered best judgment (from her point of view) that Hawaii is better, and this judgment, perhaps in conjunction with other mental elements, indeterministically gives rise to her decision, at *t*, to vacation in Hawaii. Assuming this decision is a libertarian directly free action, this assumption together with *AP* entails that there is some possible world—a *contrast world*—with exactly the same pre-*t* past as the actual world and the same laws in which, at *t*, Jane refrains from making this decision; in this world, she makes no decision at all or she decides, for instance, to holiday in Colorado. If the contrast world's pre-*t* past mirrors that of the actual world—and this past includes all of Jane's deliberations about whether to vacation in Hawaii or Colorado—Jane's decision seems to be a matter of luck. It appears that there is no adequate causal explanation of why she decides as she does in each world. This violates the event-causal libertarian's dictum that the control directly free action requires is essentially causal.

The weightings model's response to the luck objection

The driving force of the weightings model is that there is no reason to suppose that reasons for choices come with pre-established values or weights. Rather, an agent may contribute to the value she assigns to her pertinent reasons. Lemos writes:

> According to the indeterministic weightings view ... in basic free-willed actions, the agent's choice is the result of a temporally

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1. See also, Kane, 1996, pp. 107-115.

extended indeterministic deliberative process in which the agent assigns in an undetermined way evaluative weights to the reasons she has for each of the options she is considering, and her choice is a result of this indeterministic process ... [T]he assigning of weights to reasons during deliberation is something the agent actively does during deliberation which causally influences the choice made. And, typically, the decision made will be a consequence of the way in which the reasons for the different options are weighted during deliberation.[1] The assigning of weight to the reasons during deliberation may be a causally undetermined process, but since this is something the agent does and ***not*** something that merely happens to the agent and since the choice made will typically be a result of how the reasons are weighted, the agent will then typically be in control over the choice made, as it will be a result of how he or she weighted the reasons. (2023, pp. 102-103, note added)

The assignment of weights or *weightings* are intentional actions, and hence, can be under the control of agents. Regarding this sort of control, Lemos explains:

What gives me control over … [some] choice is my having control over the assigning of weights to the reasons, and I will have control over this if in making the assignment of weights to the reasons I am not subject to force or coercion or covert neural controllers or overwhelming desires that I would rather not act on, etc. In other words, if I meet a plausible set of compatibilist control conditions in the process of assigning weights to the reasons, then I will be in control over this process and consequently, I will be in control of the choice I make. (2023, p. 105)

Reverting to the vacation case, suppose Jane assigns greater weight to her Hawaii-favoring reasons than she does to her Colorado-favoring reasons. She makes the former reasons prevail by this sort of weighting. Provided her acts of weighting satisfy suitable compatibilist constraints, the compatibilist-free weightings at the onset of deliberation and perhaps during deliberation prior to any decision that Jane makes can seemingly explain why Jane and Jane* decide as they do in their worlds. Briefly, each weights their pertinent reasons contrarily. Hence, there should be no mystery regarding why the two make different decisions.

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1. Lemos says "typically" because he allows for the weakness of will (Lemos, 2023, p. 5).

A Supposedly confused criticism

Part of a criticism I raised against the weightings model is that the luck problem can recur with intentional acts of weighting. If so, why concede that a decision like Jane's to holiday in Hawaii that is a consequence of weighting reasons as she does for her different options during her deliberations is not subject to responsibility-undermining luck? Suppose Jane begins to deliberate at *t1* about where to vacation. Imagine that her first assignment of weights to her germane reasons occurs at *t2*, and she indeterministically weights the reasons that favor holidaying in Hawaii more heavily than those that favor going to Colorado. In a contrast world with the same past up to *t2*, and the same laws, Jane* reverses this assignment of weights. It appears that Jane's act of weighting that she performs at *t2* is luck-infected to the extent that its freedom is undermined. Hence, there is no reason to suppose that the subsequent (or concurrent) choice Jane makes, whatever it is, is free (Haji, 2022, p. 129).

Lemos responds in this way:

> Haji's argument here is based on confusion. Again, my view is that the two agents in different possible worlds, Jane and Jane*, may be exactly the same up until the ***beginning*** of their indeterministic deliberation. Due to the indeterminacy of the deliberative process, they may make different choices, depending on what ideas and reasons come to mind and how they weight them during deliberation. ***But***, as quoted above, Haji says, "In a contrast world with the same past up to *t2*, and the same laws, Jane* reverses this assignment of weights." Haji believes that on my view Jane* in a different world can, like Jane, begin deliberation at time t1 and be just like Jane ***all the way through deliberation up to time t2*** and weight the options differently at time t2. However, this is a misreading of my view. For on my view, if the options are weighted differently whether at the final stage of deliberation just prior to choice or at some intermediate stage of deliberation, then there must have been some differences in the paths that the indeterministic deliberative processes of Jane and Jane* went during deliberation – different ideas or reasons for the options must have come to mind and/or how they get weighted must have been different, etc. Jane and Jane* may be exactly the same up to and at the start of their indeterministic deliberations, but deliberation occurs over time and what happens during their deliberations will differ if they weight the options differently and make different choices. Thus, their different weightings and choices will not be

a matter of control robbing luck; rather, it will be a result of a process they controlled by having compatibilist control over the weightings. Further, their weightings and choices will be rendered intelligible in relation to the ideas and reasons considered and how much weight was given to them during their deliberations. (2003, pp. 11-12)

Supplementing these remarks, Lemos says:

If there is a difference in the way Jane and Jane* weight the reasons at some intermediate point in their deliberations, then there must be some difference in the mental events leading up to that weighting, for instance, different reasons must be coming to mind or, even without different reasons coming to mind, one of them must be adding more and more weight, mentally valuing one of them more and more, up to time t2 to give it the greater weight at t2. (2003, pp. 14-15. Call this passage the *Supplement Passage*.)

Summarily, here's my supposed confusion: I claim that Jane and Jane* weight their pertinent reasons differently even with exactly the same pasts prior to their weightings. But this is confused because if they assigned *different* weights to their apt reasons, the pasts prior to their weightings could *not* have been precisely the same; something must have had to have been different. For example, "different reasons must be coming to mind or, even without different reasons coming to mind, one of them must be adding more and more weight" to one set of reasons.

Am I confused? Let's see. In the example I sketch, Jane and Jane* weight reasons for subsequent decisions concerning where to holiday differently. To simplify, assume something (clearly possible) that on this occasion of decision formation, a single act of weighting, *w1*, that occurs at *t2*, precedes the decision that each eventually makes. Now focus on the first disjunct of the sentence in the *Supplement Passage*: If *"there is a difference in the way Jane and Jane* weight the reasons at some intermediate point in their deliberations, then there must be some difference in the mental events leading up to that weighting, for instance, different reasons must be coming to mind."* (I ignore the sentence's second disjunct because the objective is to understand what leads to differential weightings in the first place in the holiday case.). I argue that a sort of libertarianism—*non-action-centered libertarianism*—can accommodate Lemos's view that if agents weight reasons differently, there must be something about their pasts that is different. However, this sort of libertarianism is unfriendly to Lemos's further contention that the agent can be ultimately responsible for decisions that are consequences of her weightings.

A more robust form of libertarianism—*action-centered libertarianism*—seemingly allows for ultimate responsibility but opens the doors to the luck problem with weightings themselves.

The proposition the italicized sentence expresses suggests this sort of non-action-centered libertarianism: indeterminism occurs relatively early in the causal pathway leading to some intentional action, intentional acts of weighting followed by intentional acts that are decisions, in the case of interest. According to non-action centered libertarianism, what is indeterministically caused are events, such as the coming to mind of beliefs (or, as Lemos says, "ideas") that are *not* actions.[1] I readily grant that events over which an agent has little or no control, such as the coming to mind of certain beliefs or, more generally, the coming to mind of reasons, may influence deliberation. Imagine that some belief or reason indeterministically comes to Jane's mind as she ponders how to weight other competing reasons she has about where to holiday. In the actual world, the indeterministic coming to Jane's mind of this reason results in her assigning more weight to her Hawaii-favoring reasons than to her Colorado-favoring reasons. In the contrast world, the indeterministic coming to Jane*s mind of a different reason results in Jane*'s assigning greater weight to her Colorado-favoring reasons. The introduction of such indeterminacy appears to satisfy, first, a central libertarian requirement for free action: Jane's decision—*d1*—to vacation in Hawaii is not causally determined because there is a possible world just like the actual world in every way right up to some time prior to Jane's intentional act of weighting and her subsequent decision, *d1*, it has the same natural laws as the actual world, and in it Jane refrains from making *d1*. Jane may have considerable control over how carefully she deliberates in the wake of the reasons that indeterministically come to her mind, whether she deliberates in ways that violate her deliberative principles, and so on. Second, this sort of non-action-centered libertarianism is consonant with what the *Supplement Passage* expresses: if Jane and Jane* weight their reasons differently, then something in the etiologies of their weightings must have been different.

However, this sort of modest libertarianism is not congenial to Lemos because it fails to satisfy his libertarian precept that free will is the power of agents to be the ultimate, buck-stopping originators of their actions; this non-action-centered libertarianism does not leave room for the libertarian requirement that agents be the ultimate originators of, or ultimately

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1. For further critical discussion of this sort of libertarianism, see Mele, 1995, ch. 1 and Mele, 1996.

responsible for, their actions. Kane explains the notion of ultimate responsibility in this way:

> (UR) An agent is *ultimately responsible* for some (event or state) E's occurring only if (R) the agent is personally responsible for E's occurring in a sense that entails that something the agent voluntarily (or willingly) did or omitted, and for which the agent could have voluntarily done otherwise, either was, or causally contributed to, E's occurrence and made a difference to whether or not E occurred; and (U) for every X and Y (where X and Y represent occurrences of events and/or states) if the agent is personally responsible for X, and if Y is an *arche* (or sufficient ground or cause or explanation) for X, then the agent must also be personally responsible for Y. (Kane 1996, p. 35, notes omitted)

With the sort of indeterminacy involved in the non-action-centered variety of libertarianism under scrutiny, which beliefs or reasons indeterministically come to an agent's mind is not under the control of the agent, while the agent's—Jane's in our case—intentional act of weighting and subsequent decision *d1* is, thereafter, determined by these kinds of beliefs and reasons together with other background conditions. Hence, the agent is not responsible for which beliefs or reasons come to mind, and is only responsible, in a compatibilist sense of *responsible*, for what occurs, such as intentional acts of weighting and causal consequences of these weightings, after the beliefs or reasons do come to mind.

One might attempt to improve one's libertarianism to allow for the robust control that ultimate responsibility of the sort that Lemos and Kane favor for directly free actions by transitioning to an action-centered view. On these views, it's not events that are not actions over which agents have no control that are indeterministically caused but pertinent intentional acts, such as weightings, themselves. The fundamental idea is that if one has buck-stopping control with respect to intentional weightings, then decisions that are causal consequences of these weightings will inherit this sort of robust control. Lemos proposes that "typically, the decision made will be a consequence of the way in which the reasons for the different options are weighted during deliberation" (2023, p. 3), and typically the agent will "be in control over the choice made, as it will be a result of how he or she weighted the reasons" (2023, p. 3). These remarks strongly suggest that in the weightings model, what is directly free are not choices or decisions but weightings from which these choices issue. When would Jane have this more robust variety of control

that ultimate responsibility requires when it comes to her assumed single weighting, *w1*? The straightforward answer is this: in the actual world, her prior deliberations indeterministically give rise to her assigning greater weight to her Hawaii-favoring reasons; recall, in my example, this assumed sole act of weighting, occurs at *t2*, a time preceding the time at which she decides to holiday in Hawaii. In the contrast world, given exactly the same pre-*t2* past, her prior deliberations indeterministically result in her assigning greater weight to her Colorado-favoring reasons. If this is how the Jane/Jane* scenario unfolds hasn't the luck problem simply resurfaced with weightings as I previously claimed in one of my criticisms of the weightings model? If so, why does Lemos think that I am confused?

Another supposedly confused criticism

You can be morally responsible for your deliberations. Pondering about where to holiday, you may culpably fail to take into account important information that bears on your decision, akratically form a best from-your-point-of-view judgment about where to holiday, and be blameworthy for your akratic reasoning, allow various biases to influence what decision you will make when you are aware of being prone to these biases and can minimize or deflect their effects on your reasoning, and so forth. So, presumably, you can be morally responsible for some of your intentional acts of weighting. If there is some argument for the opposed view that one *cannot* be responsible for any of one's weightings, I'll be happy to attempt to assess it when I see it. Imagine that Jane is blameworthy for *w1*, her intentional act of assigning greater weight to her Hawaii-favoring reasons than to her Colorado-favoring reasons that she performs at *t2*. If she is blameworthy for *w1*, then Lemos himself is committed to the view that *w1* cannot be free merely in that it satisfies suitable compatibilist constraints. Rather, Jane must be ultimately responsible for *w1*. If she's ultimately responsible for *w1*, it seems that *w1* must be the product of prior weightings or *w1* must be aptly indeterministically caused. As I previously explained regarding the latter, something of this sort must be true: in the actual world, Jane's prior deliberations indeterministically give rise to her assigning greater weight to her Hawaii-favoring reasons; in the contrast world, given exactly the same pre-*t2* past, her prior deliberations indeterministically result in her assigning greater weight to her Colorado-favoring reasons. Having to invoke more and more prior acts of weighting to account for Jane's being blameworthy for a particular act of weighting, such as *w1*, generates an unacceptable regress. Having to suppose that *w1* is itself

indeterministically caused in the fashion I've described to ground Jane's being blameworthy for *w1* resurrects the luck objection with respect to intentional acts of weighting for which Jane is blameworthy.

With this stage setting, Lemos calls attention to the following remarks of mine that he takes to reveal further confusions on my part.

> If weightings are actions that can be intentional and free, then, presumably, we can be morally responsible… for them. Suppose John weights his reasons to steal far more heavily than he weights his reasons to refrain from stealing, and he weights on the basis of the non-culpable belief that he is doing moral wrong in performing this intentional act of weighting. In addition, assume that all other conditions of blameworthiness are in place regarding his weighting. Then John may well be blameworthy for his act of weighting… However, if responsibility for an intentional action, such as a decision, requires that one be ultimately responsible for that decision and, furthermore, as libertarians such as Lemos insist, one cannot be ultimately responsible for an intentional action unless this action is aptly indeterministically produced, then one cannot be responsible for an intentional and free weighting if the freedom of weightings is not to be accounted for by any appeal to indeterminism but solely on the basis of some compatibilist expedient. (Haji 2022, pp. 130-131)

Addressing this passage, Lemos says:

> Here I take Haji to be suggesting that my position is incoherent. His point seems to be that if compatibilist standards are met in the performance of the weightings made during deliberation, then I should be morally responsible for those weightings. And if morally responsible for those weightings, then I should be rightly blamed for such weightings if they support an immoral course of action. But, says Haji, as a libertarian I must think moral responsibility and deserved blame require that my actions be causally undetermined free acts or, at least, the result of prior causally undetermined free acts. Thus, my alleged appeal to compatibilist standards to ground the freedom of intentional acts of weighting conflicts with my libertarian beliefs about the grounds of responsibility and deserved blame for immoral actions ... Haji's argument is based on confusion about the role compatibilist standards play in views like mine and Robert Kane's … On … my view, meeting such standards in the weighting of reasons does ***not*** establish that such efforts or weightings are freely made or that we are responsible for

them. Rather, the meeting of such standards is just meant to establish that the weightings or efforts are under our control by establishing that they are an expression of our authentic will as opposed to something produced through external force, coercion, manipulation, or produced by unruly desires that we'd rather not act on, as in addictive behavior or obsessive-compulsive disorders. Kane and I ***don't*** see meeting compatibilist standards as sufficing for freedom and responsibility, but we ***do*** see meeting such standards as sufficient for an important kind of control that is essential to understanding how agents can have control over undetermined choices. (2023, p. 113)

Am I confused? Lemos proposes that I endorse the view that "if compatibilist standards are met in the performance of the weightings made during deliberation, then I should be morally responsible for those weightings." He also suggests that I mistakenly believe that a weighting that meets apt compatibilist standards suffices for freedom and responsibility. Lemos is mistaken on both counts. I re-read carefully my prior paper that Lemos says contains confusions. I never make either of these claims in that paper. To generate the relevant problem regarding the freedom of weightings, as I've explained, I simply assume what is unproblematic: one can be morally responsible for at least some of one's intentional acts of weighting.

In conclusion, I don't grasp why Lemos thinks that I'm guilty of the confusions he attributes to me. Set aside these claims about confusion. I hope I've shown that there are plausible reasons to believe that the weightings model does not escape the luck objection.

Ethics declarations
Conflict of interests

Acknowledgment

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