Mark Balaguer
Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem.
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Genuinely novel contributions to the free will debate are few and far between. Genuinely novel contributions that are also powerful and persuasive are much rarer still. Mark Balaguer's new book is all these things and more besides. Though I was not convinced by the picture he presents, that does not detract in the least from my admiration for his book.

Balaguer argues that the only (or almost the only) metaphysically interesting open question in the free will debate is the question whether some of our decisions are undetermined, and undetermined in the right kind of way. This is an empirical question, Balaguer claims, and it is an empirical question that he convincingly argues is open right now. Right now, we have no reason either to endorse or to reject the claim that some of our decisions are undetermined, in the kind of way that Balaguer claims is required for libertarian free will. Since this is an empirical question, the only metaphysically interesting issue in the free will debate reduces to an entirely empirical question.

The view that the only metaphysically interesting question in the free will debate is an empirical question follows directly from Balaguer's definition of metaphysics. For him, metaphysics is about what the world is like. He contrasts metaphysics with conceptual analysis, which concerns the elucidation of the structure of our concepts. It follows that conceptual analysis is not about the world. I think that this way of dividing up the territory is too sharp; there are many ways of thinking about the world which are not narrowly empirical—because they involve the construction of theories by reference to considerations of simplicity, coherence, and so on. Not even scientists investigate the world in the kind of atheoretical way that qualifies as metaphysics for Balaguer. For this reason, I don't think the only metaphysically interesting issues in the free will debate are empirical. Arguments as well as facts are needed to make progress here. But I don't think this disagreement is very significant, so far as this book is concerned, since Balaguer does in fact offer arguments for his view.

The view for which he argues is an event-causal libertarianism. He does not argue for it in the sense of asserting it is true. Rather, he argues that if some of our decisions are undetermined in the right kind of way—once again, an issue which is wide open right now—then we have libertarian freedom. The view defended has some acknowledged similarities to, as well as some important differences from, Robert Kane's well-known event-causal libertarianism. Balaguer focuses on what he calls 'torn decisions'. Ignoring some complications, an agent confronts a torn decision when they must decide between

(at least) two options, for both of which they have compelling reasons and between which they must decide. Balaguer argues that if the actual probabilities of the agent choosing either option match the degree to which the agent takes herself to have reasons for each, and her decision is undetermined, then the decision is an exercise of libertarian freedom.

The standard objection to Robert Kane's related event-causal libertarianism is that if it is undetermined whether the agent chooses one option or the other, and the agent does not control which option she selects, then it is a matter of luck whether she chooses one or the other. But if it is a matter of luck whether she chooses one or the other, then her decision cannot really be an exercise of free will. One way to make this objection intuitive is by considering what would happen were the agent to make the same decision, in exactly the same circumstances, again, i.e. were the relevant stretch of the history of the world to be replayed. On some replays the agent would choose one way and on others the other way, but nothing about her—her reasons, her deliberations, her efforts, and so on—would differ across replays. Since nothing about her settles whether she decides one way or the other, proponents of the luck objection argue, she cannot control which option she chooses, and therefore the decision is a merely a matter of luck.

Balaguer denies that the agent lacks control over the decision. In fact, he claims, the agent exercises *more* control over the decision if it is undetermined, in the right kind of way, than she would were the decision determined. He is right, I think, to claim that there is no less control in the indeterministic scenario than in the deterministic: given that in a torn decision, by definition, things are pretty evenly poised, chance will play a decisive role in settling how the agent decides no matter the causal structure of the mechanisms of decision-making. But it does not follow from the fact that indeterminism does not reduce the agent's control that the decision is not lucky: it might be lucky on the determinist scenario too. Balaguer's argument for the claim that in the indeterministic scenario the agent exercises *more* control than in the deterministic is unconvincing. He claims that if (and only if) the indeterminism is internal to the agent's decision-making process, then there is something about the agent—the way her decision-making goes—that does differ across replays, and therefore the decision is not just a matter of luck. However, even if Balaguer can develop criteria by reference to which it makes sense to say that the indeterminism is or isn't internal to the decision-making process—and about that I am sceptical—I can't see how the fact that the indeterminism is internal is supposed to help with the luck objection. Internal or external, it will remain the case that the agent fails to exercise any control over how the decision goes. Since the point of the replay argument was merely to illustrate how the agent's failure to control the decision made it a matter of luck for her, blocking the argument won't help unless it is accompanied by a positive reason to believe that the agent does exercise control over how the decision goes.

Even given the cogency of these criticisms—and I am sure that there will be readers who are more persuaded by Balaguer's arguments than by my criticisms—this

book represents a real advance in the free will debate. First, it shows how libertarianism can be deeply naturalistic; whereas Kane's view depends on a very speculative picture of how the brain might work, the view presented here is compatible with what we know of the brain right now. Second, it helps to advance the luck argument: by showing that the libertarian agent is no more subject to luck than the compatibilist agent in a similar situation, the book will force compatibilists to rethink their opposition to the view. One consequence of this book (ironically, given Balaguer's claims about metaphysics) might therefore be to reopen a largely conceptual debate about what kind of control is needed for an agent to exercise free will.

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