DEMOTIVATING SEMI-COMPATIBILISM

Desmotivando el semicompatibilismo

KEVIN TIMPE*
Department of Philosophy
Northwest Nazarene University - U. S. A.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I explore some of the motivations behind John Martin Fischer's semi-compatibilism. Particularly, I look at three reasons Fischer gives for preferring semi-compatibilism to libertarianism. I argue that the first two of these motivations are in tension with each other: the more one is moved by the first motivation, the less one can appeal to the second, and *vice versa*. I then argue that Fischer's third motivation ought not move anyone to prefer Fischer's semi-compatibilist picture to any of the leading contemporary libertarian theories. Finally, I make some methodological comments about the role intuitions play in Fischer's project.

Keywords: John Martin Fischer, semi-compatibilism, motivation, free will, resilience, luck.

RESUMEN

En este artículo exploro algunas de las motivaciones detrás del semicompatibilismo de John Martin Fischer. En particular, examino tres razones que Fischer ofrece para preferir el semicompatibilismo sobre el libertarismo. Defiendo que las dos primeras motivaciones se encuentran en tensión la una con la otra: entre más motivado se encuentre uno por la primera, menos lo estará por la segunda y *viceversa*. Después defiendo que la tercera motivación de Fischer no ha de inclinar a nadie a preferir su visión semicompatibilista sobre ninguna de las teorías libertaristas contemporáneas. Finalizo con unos comentarios metodológicos acerca del papel que las intuiciones juegan en el proyecto de Fischer.

Palabras clave: John Martin Fischer, semicompatibilismo, motivación, libre albedrío, resistencia, suerte.

1. Introduction

John Martin Fischer's particular version of compatibilism is exceedingly influential in the contemporary literature on free will and moral responsibility.[1] According to Fischer's brand of compatibilism, which he calls 'semi-compatibilism', the truth of causal determinism

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* *ktimpe@nnu.edu*

1 A number of the works in which Fischer develops and defends semi-compatibilism are co-authored with Mark Ravizza. In what follows, I will focus primarily on some of Fischer's more recent single-authored work.

is *compatible* with moral responsibility even if causal determinism ends up being *incompatible* with a certain kind of freedom. Fischer differentiates between two kinds of control: guidance control and regulative control. Regulative control involves having control over which of a number of genuinely open possibilities becomes actual. And while semi-compatibilism is officially agnostic about whether regulative control is compatible with the truth of causal determinism, Fischer himself finds it "highly plausible" (Fischer 2007 56) that regulative control is incompatible with causal determinism. (In particular, Fischer is inclined to accept the soundness of the Consequence Argument, which argues that if determinism is true, no one ever has the freedom to choose otherwise (*ibid.*).) But, for reasons related to Frankfurt scenarios, Fischer thinks that regulative control is not required for moral responsibility. The freedom relevant condition necessary for moral responsibility is guidance control, and such control is compatible with determinism.

Fischer's discussion of guidance control is extensive and well-known. Here, let me simply give a brief but hopefully sufficient overview for the task at hand. According to Fischer, "guidance control of one's behaviors has two components: the behavior must issue from one's own mechanism, and this mechanism must be appropriately responsive to reasons" (Fischer 2002 307). The responsiveness that Fischer takes to be required here requires that the agent "act on a mechanism that is regularly receptive to reasons, some of which are moral reasons" (Fischer & Ravizza 82). This means that the volitional structure that results in the agent's choices manifests an understandable pattern of recognizing moral reasons for choosing in various ways. Such an agent "recognizes how reasons fit together, sees why one reason is stronger than another, and understands how the acceptance of one reason as sufficient implies that a stronger reason must also be sufficient" (*id.* 71). Furthermore, the agent's volitional structure must also be reactive to those reasons in the right kind of way:

> In the case of reactivity to reasons, the agent (when acting from the relevant mechanism) must simply display *some* reactivity, in order to render it plausible that his mechanism has the 'executive power' to react to the actual incentive to do otherwise. (Fisher & Ravizza 75)

The second requirement for guidance control is that the agent takes responsibility for the reasons-responsive mechanism that results in her choices; that is, that the mechanism is *her own*, or one for which she has taken responsibility. This feature of Fischer's view marks an important difference from purely structural or hierarchical compatibilist accounts (such as Harry Frankfurt's). For Fischer, "the *mere existence* of [the right kind of volitional] mesh is *not* sufficient for moral responsibility; the *history* behind the mesh

is also relevant" (Fisher & Ravizza 196). So, in order for an agent to be morally responsible, he needs to have taken responsibility for his volitional structure.

> Taking responsibility involves three elements. First, the agent must see that his choices have certain effects in the world —that is, he must see himself as the source of consequences in the world (in certain circumstances). Second, the individual must see that he is a fair target for the reactive attitudes as a result of how he affects the world. Third, the views specified in the first two conditions —that the individual can affect the external world in certain characteristic ways through his choices, and the he can be fairly praised and/or blamed for so exercising his agency— must be based on his evidence in an appropriate way. (Fischer 2006b 224)

There is much in Fischer's semi-compatibilism to admire, and it is not surprising that it has been called both "the most plausible compatibilist account of freedom" (Rowe 298) and "the best case for compatibilism to date" (McKenna 132).

In this paper, I explore some of the motivations behind semi-compatibilism. In particular, I look at three reasons Fischer gives for preferring semi-compatibilism to libertarianism. I argue that the first two of these motivations are in tension with one another: the more one is moved by the first motivation, the less one can appeal to the second, and *vice versa*. I then argue that Fischer's third motivation ought not move anyone to prefer Fischer's semi-compatibilist picture to any of the leading contemporary libertarian theories.[2] Finally, I end with some methodological comments about the role intuitions play in Fischer's project.

2. The Resilience of Semi-compatibilism

The first motivation behind semi-compatibilism I want to explore is what Dan Speak has labeled "the resiliency intuition" (Speak 124).[3] According to this intuition, "our self-conception as morally responsible agents should be understood to possess a certain kind of stability. It should not be too easily undermined or too readily threatened by at least certain possible ways the world could turn out

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2 As Fabio Fang has pointed out in correspondence, there is a sense in which the third motivation for semi-compatibilism can be seen as a specific instance of the second. "Luck has been defined by you as the lack of certain type of control. Now, total control (which we lack), is the lack of certain type of control. [So] what is different in the third reason (or motivation) that is not present in the second?" In a sense, Fang is right. But insofar as Fischer addresses 'total control' in a different context than he does the problem of luck, I think it's worth treating this as a separate motivation even if it is not entirely separate.

3 For an incompatibilist defense of the resiliency intuition, see Helen Steward (2008).

to be. It should, in short, be resilient" (*ibid*). Here is one of Fischer's presentations of the resilience motivation:

> I could certainly imagine waking up some morning to the newspaper headline, "Causal Determinism Is True!" (Most likely this would not be in the *National Enquirer* or even *People* —but perhaps the *New York Times*…) I could imagine reading the article and subsequently (presumably over some time) becoming convinced that causal determinism is true —that the generalizations that describe the relationships between complexes of past events and laws of nature, on the one hand, and subsequent events, on the other, are universal generalizations with 100 percent probabilities associated with them. And I feel confident that this would not, nor should it, change my view of myself and others as (sometimes) free and robustly morally responsible agents […]. The assumption that we human beings —most of us, at least— are morally responsible agents (at least sometimes) is extremely important and pervasive. In fact, it is hard to imagine human life without it […]. A compatibilist need not give up this assumption [that we are at least sometimes free and morally responsible], even if he were to wake up to the headline, "Causal Determinism is True!" (and if he were convinced of its truth)[…]. A compatibilist need not 'flipflop' in this weird and unappealing way. (Fischer 2007 44-47)

In contrast, if the libertarian were to become convinced that determinism were true, she would have to give up at least one of her beliefs under threat of inconsistency. That is, she would either have to abandon her belief that we are morally responsible beings, or she would have to abandon her incompatibilism. Peter van Inwagen suggests that he would make the latter move if he were convinced of the truth of determinism:

> There is one question I shall very likely be asked by philosophers who think I have overstepped the bounds of philosophy. I think it is a very good question which I am bound to answer. That question might be put like this:
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> Very well. You admit that your theory [*i. e.*, libertarianism] is in principle empirically refutable. If physics were to become once more deterministic, or if the empirical sciences of man were to provide us with really good reason for believing that a human being is a deterministic system, then (you concede) your rejection of determinism would be rendered untenable by science. Well, suppose this *did* happen despite your prediction that it won't. What would you say then?
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> I am not quite sure what I would say, but I believe I would say that (β)[4] [which figures centrally in the argument for incompatibil-

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4 β is the following inference rule: "*p*, and no one has, or ever had, any choice about that. If *p* then *q*, and no one has, or ever had, any choice about that. *Hence*, *q*, and no one has, or ever had, any choice about that" (van Inwagen 2004 223). In this article,

ism] was, after all, invalid […] I have defended (β) entirely on *a priori* grounds. But it would not surprise me too much to find that this proposition, which at present seems to me to be a truth of reason, had been refuted by the progress of science. Such refutations have happened many times. And it does not follow from the fact that they have happened that there is anything wrong with accepting on *a priori* grounds a principle that later turns out to be empirically refutable. One must simply realize that *a priori* convictions are as corrigible as any others. (van Inwagen 1983 219, 221)[5]

As van Inwagen here admits, given the possibility of the empirical discovery of the truth of determinism, libertarian beliefs are not as resilient as their compatibilist cohorts. And this resilience is one of the driving motivations behind Fischer's semi-compatibilism:

One of my main motivations for being a compatibilist is that I don't want our personhood and our moral responsibility, as it were, to hang on a thread, or to be held hostage to the possible scientific discovery that determinism is in fact true" (Fischer 2000 323).[6]

All else being equal, it does seem preferable to have our beliefs —especially such a central belief as that we are morally responsible agents— be resilient in this way.

3. Less Luck

So, according to Fischer, one reason to prefer semi-compatibilism to libertarianism is its resilience. A second motivation is that, on the semi-compatibilist picture, moral responsibility does not depend on things which it shouldn't; more specifically, an agent's responsibility only depends on those things which the agent can reasonably be said to control. To make this point in a negative way, an agent's responsibility cannot simply be a matter of luck.

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van Inwagen goes on to describe how while β is technically invalid, he is "inclined to think that the 'general idea' behind Rule β was sound, and that its invalidity stemmed from the fact that certain features of the English phrase unfit it for the task he assigned it" (*id*. 224).

5 Derk Pereboom is an incompatibilism who later came to reject his belief in free will and moral responsibility —though not because he thinks that determinism is true. Rather, he thinks that whatever indeterminism there may be in the world is not the kind needed to underwrite moral responsibility.

6 See also Fischer (1999 129) and Fischer (2006b 183). For another presentation of this concern, see Manuel Vargas (2007 141f). Fischer grants that there are other empirical discoveries that would threaten our view of ourselves as free and responsible agents; see, for instance, Fischer (2008a 169).

Now, it is no easy task to define just what luck is.[7] A natural way of thinking about the nature of luck is to say that an event (or fact) is lucky for an individual if she had no control over the occurring (or obtaining) of that event (or fact). This idea is at the heart of the Luck Objection to libertarianism. Here is one formulation of that objection which makes clear the contrast between luck and control:

Agents' *control* is the yardstick by which the bearing of chance or luck on their autonomy and moral responsibility is measured. Luck (good or bad) becomes problematic when it seems significantly to impede agents' control over themselves […]. To the extent that it is causally undetermined whether, for example, an agent intends or decides in accordance with a better judgment that she made, the agent may seem to lack control over what she intends or decides. (Mele 2002 535)

As this quotation from Mele suggests, luck (in the relevant sense) can be understood as a kind of lack of control. But trying to define precisely what kind of control is required in the present context is likely to be just as difficult as defining luck. It cannot be, for example, that agents must have control over all those factors which are logically necessary for our moral responsibility. This kind of control is what Fischer calls 'total control': "an agent has total control over X only if for any factor f which is a causal contributor to X and which is such that if f were not to occur, then X would (or might) not occur, then X has control over f" (Fischer 2007 67, see also Fischer 2006a 125). But there are innumerable factors, that are causal contributors to an agent's moral agency, over which the agent has no control, let alone total control:

The sun is shining (through the smog), and its continuing to shine is a contributing causal factor to my continuing to exist, continuing to be an agent, and so forth. If the sun were to flicker out, I would not continue to exist, continue to be an agent, or engage in any behavior. So the sun's continuing to shine is a contributing cause to my behavior, is completely out of my control, and is such that, if it were not to occur, I would not even exist […]. Obviously, the sun's continuing to shine is just one of an indefinitely large number of such factors: a huge meteorite's not hitting the United States, my not being hit by a lightning bold, and so forth […]. Consider now the fact that my parents did not seriously injure me when I was young and helpless […]. That they took good care of me was a contributing cause of my developing into an agent at all. Had they significantly abused and injured me, I would or at least might not have developed into an agent at all. And of course how my parents treated me when I was an infant was entirely out of my control. (Fischer 2007 67f)

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7 For two helpful discussions about the metaphysical nature of luck, see Jennifer Lackey (2008) and E. J. Coffman (2007).

As these comments make clear, it is necessarily true that no contingent agent has total control. (I say more on total control in section 5 below). As a result, luck understood as lack of total control is necessarily everywhere —and thus infects both incompatibilist and compatibilist views alike.

So in order to function as motivation for the semi-compatibilist project, the lack of control involved in the Luck Objection must mean something other than lack of total control. Compatibilists like Fischer argue that, on the libertarian picture, agents lack the relevant control precisely where it matters for moral responsibility —in the choices that lead to their (presumably responsible) behavior. Given that the agent's values, beliefs, and motivational states are compossible with her making multiple choices:

> In a context of indeterminism, we do not have an explanation for why the agent made the particular choice he made rather than another. The [Luck Objection][8] points to the fact that the antecedent conditions —say my standing desires, values, intentions, and plans— cannot in themselves explain why I actually choose *C* rather than something else (given indeterminism) [...] Given this, it can seem that I do not actually control my behavior in the sense relevant to ascriptions of moral responsibility. (Fischer 1999 102, see also Fischer 2006a 127 f)

According to Fischer, the presence of this kind of luck in the causal origin of a volition is "menacing" (Fischer 2008b 197) and a "major challenge to libertarianism" (Fischer 1999 102, see also Fischer 2008b 196).

4. The Tension

I do not deny the motivational force of these features of semi-compatibilism (or of other versions of compatibilism more broadly); nor is it my intent to argue against the truth of semi-compatibilism here. Rather, what I want to do is to suggest that there is a tension between these two motivations in the following sense: the more motivational strength the compatibilist assigns to one of these two reasons for compatibilism, the less motivational strength she can assign to the other.[9] Imagine a linear spectrum in motivational space. (Such a picture is an oversimplification, as there very well may be further motivations for semi-compatibilism, which would make the spectrum a multi-dimensional matrix. I am setting aside these other motivations for present purposes.) Those at one end of the spectrum are motivated solely by the resilience intuition; those at this pole have as their goal making moral responsibility as impervious to scientific discoveries as possible. In order to have the existence

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8 He calls it the 'rollback argument'. See Fischer (1999 102).

9 For a related discussion see Mele (2006 205f).

of moral responsibility be consistent with as much empirical, scientific discovery as possible, the resilience intuition would lead one to develop one's account of responsibility in such a way that it is compatible with both determinism and with indeterminism —and, in fact, compatible with as many different kinds of indeterminism as possible, given the other constraints one's theory already contains. As a result of holding that such a range of indeterminism would not undermine moral responsibility, considerations of luck will have less motivational pull. To put it a different way, if one thinks that free will is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism at a wide range of places causally relevant to a particular action, the less dialectical force the Luck Objection will carry —for if indeterminism *per se* doesn't undermine free will, then the driving intuition behind the Luck Objection will be undercut.

On the other hand, the closer one is to the other pole of the motivational spectrum —the more one is motivated by worries about luck— the less one's view of ourselves as responsible agents will be resilient to scientific discovery. That is, the greater the worries about luck undermining control motivate compatibilism, the more one's view is 'held hostage to science' insofar as the discovery of indeterminism in various spots in the causal history of an action or choice would undermine the agent's responsibility for that action or choice. The extreme on this side of the spectrum is illustrated by the title of a paper from the 1930s by R. E. Hobart: "Free Will as Involving Determinism and Inconceivable Without It." Hobart's title suggests that any amount of indeterminism, at least as related to choice and action, is detrimental to moral agency. Hobart writes:

> [S]uch absence of determination, if and so far as it exists, is no gain to freedom, but sheer loss of it; no advantage to the moral life, but blank subtraction from it […]. Freedom is something that we can attribute only to a continuing being, and he can have it only so far as the particular transient volitions within him are determined. (Hobart 2 and 13)

To be fair to Hobart, it is doubtful that he intended his title to be taken as literally true.[10] He is willing to grant, for instance, that the presence of indeterminism wouldn't necessarily undermine freedom and responsibility if that indeterminism were causally irrelevant to the action (or volition) in question (see, for instance, Hobart 17).

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10 A recent interdisciplinary collection on free will does contain an essay defending this literal Hobartian position: "So we do have free will in a deterministic universe. Indeterminism, on the other hand, makes free will impossible […]. To the extent that determinism is true, we humans do indeed have something that we all innately feel and believe that we have: free will. In this most important sense, determinism makes free will possible" (Baer 309).

Furthermore, he also suggests that he would not have been willing to give up his belief in free will even were he to be convinced of the falsity of causal determinism: "That we are free in willing is, broadly speaking, a fact of experience. That broad fact is more assured than any philosophical analysis. It is therefore surer than the deterministic analysis of it, entirely adequate as that in the end appears to be" (*id*. 2). But it should nevertheless be obvious that Hobart's view, based as it is on "a deterministic basis and constitution" (*id*. 1) of free will, is not as resilient as those compatibilist views which are neutral with respect to the compatibility of free will and indeterminism. The more one affirms the adage that luck undermines control the less resilient the resulting theory of moral responsibility to potential scientific falsification.[11]

Returning then to Fischer's influential semi-compatibilism. Fischer is clearly no Hobartian,[12] for the former's account differs significantly from the latter's with respect to the resilience intuition. Given the tension noted between the concern for resiliency and worries about luck, semi-compatibilism can make less of the luck objection. And this is precisely what one finds in Fischer's corpus. While he does raise the possibility that the indeterminism required by libertarian accounts could undermine rather than support agential control, he presses this objection less forcefully than other compatibilists (e. g., Haji). Fischer here, as he does elsewhere, strikes a fine balance. And while this tension doesn't show that semi-compatibilism, or any version of compatibilism for that matter, is false, it does show a dialectical delicacy that I think has previously gone underappreciated by many compatibilists. At the end of the day, it looks like these two compatibilist 'lures' are pulling in opposite directions.[13]

5. Total Control and Metaphysical Megalomania

In the discussion of luck in section 3 above, we encountered a notion of control that Fischer calls 'total control'. Largely because of

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11 This implication is noted by Manuel Vargas. "Consider that many compatibilists argue against libertarianism on the grounds that indeterminism disrupts responsibility. For these compatibilists, if it turned out that the world had indeterminacies of just the right sort (or perhaps more accurately the 'wrong sort'), then we would lack responsibility under even compatibilist understandings of responsibility" (Vargas 2005 426 note 16).

12 Fischer acknowledges that on his view "the falsity of causal determinism in itself would not rule out control and moral responsibility" (1999 130).

13 Fischer could avoid this tension altogether by abandoning one or other of these motivations, so the argument above in no way counts as a refutation of semi-compatibilism. Nevertheless, both motivations play a significant role in various compatibilist accounts that the tension is worth pointing out. See also footnote 19 below.

issues related to Frankfurt-style examples and the apparently sound-ness of the Consequence Argument[14], Fischer's semi-compatibilism rejects the requirement than an agent be able to do otherwise than perform a particular in order to be morally responsible for that action. Instead, his account of the kind of control required for moral responsibility (what he calls 'guidance control') is based upon an agent's having an appropriately reasons-responsive mechanism and having taken responsibility for that mechanism.[15] Taken together, these two aspects clearly mark semi-compatibilism as a sourcehood approach —or as Fischer often puts it, an "actual-sequence" approach to free will and moral responsibility.[16]

Fischer brings up total control in his discussion of the sourcehood requirement for moral responsibility, and why one ought to prefer a compatibilist approach to sourcehood over an incompatibilist approach:

> I wish to explore some of the reasons why philosophers have contended that causal determinism rules out sourcehood in the sense required by moral responsibility, and I wish to offer some plausibility-arguments against this contention […] I do not suppose that I have exhausted the possible motivations for an incompatibilistic sourcehood requirement, or that I will have offered knockdown arguments against such a requirement. My goal is to lay down some of the salient motivations for the worry that causal determinism would threaten sourcehood, and to suggest that the worry may issue from a mistaken picture —an inflated conception of the sort of control we must possess in order to be morally responsible. (Fischer 2007 67)[17]

According to Fischer, "it is as if the proponent of the incompatibilistic sourcehood constraint thinks of agents who are morally responsible as having 'total control'" (2007 67). Such control is "a total fantasy —metaphysical megalomania, if anything is" (*ibid.*). "A chimera. It is manifestly ludicrous to aspire to it or to regret its absence" (*id.* 68). As such, wanting it is "unreasonable" (Fischer 2006a 117).

I agree with Fischer that one ought to reject total control as a condition for moral responsibility; where I depart from Fischer, however, is in thinking that doing so gives any reason, in and of itself, to favor semi-compatibilism (or some other version of source compatibilism) over source incompatibilism. So far as I can tell, no source incompatibilist is motivated by total control. Anything resembling

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14 See, for instance, Fischer (2007 56). For a very useful discussion of these issues, see Moya (2006 chap. 1).

15 See, for instance, Fischer & Ravizza (1998) and Fischer (2006b).

16 See, for instance, Fischer (2006b chap. 3, 12).

17 For a further discussion of Fischer's treatment of sourcehood, see chapter 5 of Timpe (2008).

total control is conspicuously absent from the work of Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, Timothy O'Connor, etc…[18] One might think that an exception to this claim is the impossibilist (and hence, incompatibilist) Galen Strawson. According to Strawson, true moral responsibility requires that the agent act with "true self-determination" (Strawson 7) and is "*causa sui*" (*id*. 15). But it is unclear if even Strawson's Basic Argument requires total control, for Strawson nowhere suggests that one must have control over every factor which causally contributes in any way to her agency in order to be a true self-determiner.

Fischer uses the obvious problems with total control to provide a further motivation for preferring semi-compatibilism (or perhaps some other form of compatibilism) to libertarianism, despite the fact that he's aware that no source incompatibilist appeals to total control to motivate her position:

> Now of course one might seek to motivate an incompatibilist source requirement in various different ways. But my suggestion is that, once one sees that the picture that favors total control is inflated and illusory, one might have considerably less inclination to accept such a requirement for *any* reason […] My suggestion (and it is merely a suggestion) is that, once one recognizes the pervasiveness of a certain sort of luck, one will find an incompatibilistic source condition less attractive. (Fischer 2007 68f)

In the absence of any explicit mention of total control on behalf of source incompatibilists, and without an argument which links source incompatibilism and total control, it is hard to see why the rejection of the latter gives us reason to reject the former. There very well may be other reasons to prefer compatibilist accounts of source-hood over incompatibilist accounts, but the rejection of total control isn't among them.

6. A Push Towards More Substantial Revision

In the previous sections, I've canvassed three of the recent motivations John Fischer presents in favor of preferring semi-compatibilism to versions of source incompatibilism. With respect to worries regarding total control, I argued that we have no reason to think that worries about our failing to have total control should lead us to prefer semi-compatibilism over source incompatibilism. So far as I can tell, no extant theory of responsibility is motivated by such an account of control, and any view which was would have, as Fischer argues, a significant strike against it. Regarding the first two motivations Fischer raises, I argued that they are in tension with

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18 See, for instance, Robert Kane (1996), Derk Pereboom (2001), and Timothy O'Connor (2005). For my own arguments for source incompatibilism, see Timpe (2008), particularly chapters 5-6.

each other; while this tension doesn't show that semi-compatibilism (or any version of compatibilism for that matter) is false, it does show a dialectical delicacy that I think has previously gone under-appreciated by many compatibilists.[19] Furthermore, I think that this tension raises a related methodological issue that Fischer, as well as a number of like-minded compatibilists, must address. Of course, nothing that I've argued here shows that semi-compatibilism is false or *un*motivated, for there well might be reasons that favor semi-compatibilism over competing views. And regardless of the truth of semi-compatibilism, Fischer's development and defense of this posi-tion has greatly contributed to current debates about free will and moral responsibility.

In the remainder of this article, I want to consider a methodolog-ical point related to Fischer's attempt to navigate between conflicting intuitions, such as the resilience intuition and the worry that luck un-dermines free will. The present point, however, is not limited to these two intuitions, but is related to the more general relationship between Fischer's semi-compatibilist view and intuitive support on the whole.

Reacting to comments by Manuel Vargas, Fischer grants that "semicompatibilism is a significant revision of ordinary, com-monsense thinking —as well as standard philosophical reflection on freedom and moral responsibility" (Fischer 2007b 188). Shortly thereafter, he elaborates as follows:

> To be a bit more explicit. I distinguish between the concept of moral responsibility and the conditions of its application. With re-gard to the concept, I do not consider myself a revisionist; I attempt to understand a robust ordinary notion of moral responsibility. But my account of the conditions of its application are significantly revision-ary (perhaps even revolutionary), insofar as I think it can apply even in contexts in which an agent has never had genuine access to meta-physical alternative possibilities. (2007b 188)

Before addressing the import of this quotation, let me make an explicative comment first. While Fischer is directly addressing mor-al responsibility in the quotation; as we saw earlier, he thinks there is a kind of free will (*i. e.*, guidance control) that is required for moral responsibility. Thus, I think we can plausibly interpret him as also saying that he does not consider himself a revisionist about the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility without distortion.

Commenting on Fischer's revisionist tendencies, Manuel Vargas ar-gues that Fischer's view is a form of what Vargas calls weak revisionism.

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19 Commenting on a previous version of this paper, Carlos Patarroyo suggested that the objections I raise to Fischer's semicompatibilism here may apply to all compatibilism in general. If this is indeed the case, then I take that to be a further reason why it is important to note the objections raised here.

The difference between *weak* revisionism, like Fischer's, and Vargas's own preferred *moderate* revisionism, is as follows:

> *Weak* revisionism is revisionism about what the folk think they think: it is the idea that the folk have in some way failed to appreciate the nature of their own conceptual or metaphysical commitments. While the folk really believe X, the folk mistakenly understand themselves to believe Y. In contrast, *moderate* revisionism is revisionism about what the folk think. (Vargas 2007b 217)

Insofar as Fischer writes, as seen above, that he does not consider himself a revisionist about the concept of moral responsibility, Vargas's claim that Fischer isn't a moderate revisionist is correct. But this is where Fischer's attempt to respect our pre-philosophical intuitions becomes potentially problematic. As mentioned earlier, Fischer is willing to grant the soundness of the Consequence Argument, which he thinks "employs highly plausible ingredients" (Fischer 2007 71).[20] He elaborates as follows:

> It is natural to think of oneself as possessing regulative control, and that it is plausible to analyze this in terms of the power to add to the actual past (the entirety of the temporally nonrelational past), holding fixed the laws of nature. A semi-compatibilist need not dismiss out of hand, or profess puzzlement, about what is surely an intuitive natural set of views.

Such terminology strongly suggests that if he doesn't find the Consequence Argument to be specifically intuitive, it's something in the neighborhood. So, as with the resilience intuition and the intuition that free will cannot depend upon luck, a key feature that differentiates Fischer's *semi*-compatibilism from other extant compatibilist accounts is that he can respect the intuitiveness (or something near to it) of the Consequence Argument.

It is here that Fischer's attempt to 'save the intuitions' becomes problematic, particularly in light in his preference to avoid revising the *concept* of moral responsibility rather than the *conditions of its application*. For according to the Consequence Argument, there is a kind of freedom that the truth of determinism would rule out; but this kind of freedom is supposed to be the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility.[21] If this is correct, then there is a significant part of the concept of moral responsibility that *cannot* be had on the

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20 However, for the record "semicompatibilism in itself does not take a stand on whether the Consequence Argument is sound; it is consistent with acceptance or rejection of the Consequence Argument" (Fischer 207 56).

21 So says van Inwagen: "the existence of moral responsibility entails the existence of free will, and, therefore, if free will does not exist, moral responsibility does not exist either" (forthcoming).

truth of determinism if one grants, as Fischer does, the soundness of the Consequence Argument. Related to what Fischer says about the plausibility of the Consequence Argument is the intuitive pull that the Principle of Alternative Possibilities has:[22]

> Because the Principle of Alternative Possibilities expresses such a plausible and attractive idea, and because we typically think of ourselves as selecting a path into the future (where there is more than one such path available), semi-compatibilism is a significant revision of ordinary, commonsense thinking —as well as standard philosophical reflection on freedom and moral responsibility. I do not deny that alternative possibilities are a presupposition of commonsense as well as philosophical analysis; rather, I seek to explain how we can offer a subtler, more refined analysis which dispenses with the requirement of metaphysical access to alternative possibilities, but also preserved and explains the connection between freedom (of an appropriate sort —guidance control) and moral responsibility. (Fischer 2007b 188)

Here, Fischer seems more willing to grant that semi-compatibilism may involve 'a significant revision of ordinary thinking' about the concept of what moral responsibility requires. While the above comments about the Consequence Argument perhaps indirectly support viewing semi-compatibilism as a form of moderate revisionism, these comments on PAP provide more direct support that semi-compatibilism is, or should be, more a form of *moderate* revisionism than a form of weak revisionism. That is, perhaps on the worked out semi-compatibilist picture moral responsibility was not what we initially thought it was.

Fischer could resist this push towards moderate revisionism by changing what he says about the intuitive plausibility of the Consequence Argument and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities. Yet it seems more consistent with his overall semi-compatibilism, in particular the role played by the various intuitions that motivate the various parts of the project, perhaps to embrace moderate revisionism instead. But regardless of the amount of revision involved, Fischer's semi-compatibilism will certainly continue to be an influential account in debates about free will and moral responsibility. [23]

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22 While the Consequence Argument doesn't explicitly involve the Principle of Alternative Possibilities, as Robert Kane argues the two are connected; see Kane (2005 23f).

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