

O'Connor, Timothy. *Persons and Causes: the Metaphysics of Free Will*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. xv + 135 pp. Cloth, \$39.95; paper, \$19.95—This excellent book contributes to the debate about freedom in analytic philosophy. While O'Connor does not make matters easy for the reader, often sacrificing clarity for conciseness, he presents an ingenious defense of agent causation.

On O'Connor's model, free actions are caused by intentions, which are themselves produced not by other states or events but instead by the agent herself. The agent stands at the beginning of this causal chain in the sense that she is not caused to cause her intentions.

As O'Connor acknowledges, his model of agent causation is less metaphysically simple than rival deterministic and indeterministic accounts of agency. However, he believes that it alone can accommodate free, responsible agency. His argument for this conclusion is shaped by two "basic requirements" of responsible agency (p. 23). One requirement is that alternative courses of action must be open to the agent (p. 24). Chapter One is devoted to establishing that compatibilist models of agency run afoul of this requirement. After a close, technical scrutiny of the modal principles involved, O'Connor concludes that if determinism is true, then the current unavoidability both of some past state of the world and the laws of nature entails the unavoidability of one's next action, so that no alternative course of action would ever be open to an agent.

According to the other requirement (p. 23), I should only be held accountable for my behavior if it was under my control in such a way as to have been an expression of my will. Chapter Two is devoted to showing that most incompatibilist approaches fail this test: if my action is a result of chance, then its occurrence was not really up to me,

since there was no causal mechanism through which I could determine its (non-) occurrence. O'Connor is particularly convincing in his criticism of "causal indeterminists" (e.g. Robert Kane). Causal indeterminists hold that the agent's reasons are indeterministic causes of her actions; since they are causes, they allow the agent to exert a controlling influence over her behavior, but since they are indeterministic, the agent could still have acted differently. O'Connor objects that indeterministic causes fail to provide the sort of control that is required for responsibility; for if the agent's reasons do not necessitate her action, then her action is 'chancy' in the sense that it was not up to the agent whether that action would result from her reasons (pp. 27-30). He returns to this objection several times (p. 40, p. 78, p. 89, p. 98), but it is unclear how we avoid a similar difficulty if we make the agent herself the cause, since she, existing at other times without that same effect, seems equally insufficient for it.

In chapter 3, O'Connor assesses the models of agent-causation that were developed by Thomas Reid, Richard Taylor, and Roderick Chisholm. He takes the latter two to task for treating the agent's production of an effect as an event that itself requires a cause if it is not to be random and therefore uncontrollable. The agent's production of an effect simply is an exercise of control over behavior, and it is "senseless" to require some means whereby one can control one's exercise of control (p. 59).

O'Connor sets out his positive conception of agent causation in chapters 4 and 5. On his model, an agent's causal powers are conditioned by her circumstances, which thus enable the agent to make certain choices; but none of these enabling conditions cause the agent to produce an intention. Nor do her reasons. For O'Connor, reasons contribute causally to the shaping of the agent's propensities to cause one intention or another. In

doing so, reasons can increase the probability of the agent's producing the intention to perform a given action, and thereby increase the probability of that action. However, refusing to equate causality with probability-raising, O'Connor denies that this makes reasons causes, even indeterministic causes, of free actions (p. 97). (For clarification of this crucial point, see O'Connor's "The Efficacy of Reasons: A Reply to Hendrickson", *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 40 [2002]: 135-7.) For O'Connor's, then, many factors help to confer upon the agent certain causal powers and strengthen or weaken her propensities to act in various ways, but, when the agent is free, these factors fall short of determining the agent's action, so it is ultimately up to the agent to determine which capacity to exercise.

In developing his view, O'Connor has many insightful things to say about causation, explanation, Frankfurt examples, and the emergence of free agents from microphysical processes. Anyone who is interested in the metaphysical requirements of freedom should read this book.—Paul Raymont Carleton University