

A Partial Defense of the Actual-Sequence Model of Freedom

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Received: 28 May 2016 / Accepted: 1 June 2016 / Published online: 7 June 2016
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Abstract Over the years, two models of freedom have emerged as competitors: the *alternative-possibilities* model (the “classical” approach to freedom, which understands freedom in terms of having access to alternative possibilities of action) and the *actual-sequence* model (the approach inspired by Harry G. Frankfurt’s rejection of the principle of alternative possibilities and the insights provided by the “Frankfurt-style” examples). This paper is a partial defense of the actual-sequence model. My defense relies on two strategies. The first strategy consists in de-emphasizing the role of examples in arguing for (or against) a model of freedom. Imagine that, as some people think, Frankfurt-style cases fail to undermine the alternative-possibilities model. What follows from this? Not much, I argue. In particular, I note that the counterparts of Frankfurt-style cases also fail to undermine the actual-sequence model (in fact, they do that in a more glaring and indisputable way). My second strategy of defense consists in revitalizing the original motivation for the actual-sequence model, by revamping it, isolating it from claims that do not fully capture the same idea, and arguing that it can be developed in a successful way.

Keywords Actual sequences · Alternative possibilities · Causal histories · Fischer and Ravizza · Frankfurt · Frankfurt-style cases · Freedom · Moral responsibility · PAP-style cases · Sensitivity to reasons

1 Introduction

My focus is the metaphysical conditions for responsibility, that is to say, the kind of freedom or control that is required to be morally responsible for things. When we act freely in this sense, what is our freedom grounded in? By virtue of what are we

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free? Over the years, two models have emerged as competing answers to this question: the alternative-possibilities model, which is the classical model of freedom, and, more recently, the actual-sequence model (I shall refer to them as “the AP model” and “the AS model,” respectively). According to the AP model, freedom is grounded, at least partly, in having access to alternative possibilities of action. In other words, acting freely consists, at least partly, in being able to do otherwise (being able to do something other than what one actually did). By contrast, according to the AS model, freedom is exclusively grounded in facts about the actual sequence of events issuing in one’s behavior. On this view, acting freely is just a matter of one’s behavior having the right kinds of actual causes, and thus is not at all a matter of being able to do otherwise or having access to alternative possibilities of action. The AS model was motivated by Frankfurt’s attack on the principle of alternative possibilities (Frankfurt 1969), which threatened to undermine the classical model, and paved the way for a new model focused only on actual causal histories.

Notice that an important structural difference between the two approaches is that, whereas the AP model mainly aims to draw attention to a *necessary* condition for freedom (alternative possibilities), the AS model pinpoints *sufficient* conditions for freedom (the relevant facts about actual sequences). But this is enough to turn them into competitors. For the claim that only facts about actual sequences are relevant to freedom seems to preclude alternative possibilities from also being relevant to freedom.¹

Despite the fact that the two models are competitors, they each have their own share of intuitive plausibility. On the one hand, the AP model seems plausible because it is very natural to understand freedom in terms of having a range of options from which to choose. (see, eg., Ginet 1990; van Inwagen 1983) Plus, the ability to do otherwise seems like a natural requirement to be responsible, especially in the case of blameworthiness, or responsibility for bad things. For it seems quite plausible to believe that we cannot be blameworthy for doing something if it is the only thing that we could have done.

On the other hand, the AS model seems intuitively plausible too. Imagine trying to absolve yourself of responsibility by pointing to factors that do not at all explain why you acted. This seems inappropriate: if a factor is completely irrelevant to why you acted, it seems that it cannot be used to excuse your behavior. Harry G. Frankfurt famously illustrated this point by appeal to an example involving sneaky neuroscientists waiting in the wings. (Frankfurt 1969) Imagine that a neuroscientist is secretly monitoring your brain activity and wants you to make a certain choice: if you do not make it on your own, he will intervene by manipulating your brain in a way that guarantees that you will make that choice. Frankfurt argued that, if the neuroscientist does not have to intervene because you make the choice completely

¹ In Sartorio (2016, Chapter 1) I argue that the two models are not exactly logical contraries, since it is possible to imagine a view that falls under both models (basically, what one would have to imagine is that the ability to do otherwise enters into the identification of actual sequences somehow). Still, if one believes that only actual-sequence facts are relevant to freedom, this is *typically* going to mean that one thinks alternative possibilities are irrelevant. So this is the kind of debate I will focus on here between advocates of the AP model and advocates of the AS model.

on your own, then the fact that the neuroscientist *would* have intervened by forcing you to make the same choice is irrelevant; arguably, you are still responsible for what you did. This suggests that only facts about the *actual sequence* are relevant to freedom, as the AS model claims, and thus facts about alternative possibilities of action are irrelevant.

Hence both models seem to have some initial plausibility; yet they cannot both be true. How are we to find out, then, which one is the true model of freedom?

This is a difficult question. A full answer to this question would require a much more extended analysis than the one I can offer here. Thus, my aim is not to give a full answer to it, but to draw attention to some important considerations that bear on it, and that have been mostly overlooked in the recent literature. Given that these considerations are both in support of the AS model, my arguments in this paper can be seen as a partial defense, but *only* as a partial defense, of the AS model.

I will focus on two main issues: the role of examples in supporting or undermining a model of freedom, and the importance of respecting the central motivation for a model. In what follows, I take them up in turn.

2 The Role of Examples

A large part of the recent literature on the debate between the AP model and the AS model has focused on Frankfurt's attack on the principle of alternative possibilities. In particular, much has been argued about whether any *Frankfurt-style examples* can establish, once and for all, that the classical AP model is defunct and that we should instead embrace the AS model. Frankfurt-style examples, originally presented by Frankfurt himself in Frankfurt (1969), are scenarios of the kind briefly described above, where an agent seems to be morally responsible for a choice despite the fact that, given the unsuspected presence of some purely counterfactual intervener (typically, a neuroscientist with the power to predict and manipulate people's choices by tinkering with their brains), the agent could not have done otherwise. Given that he made the choice completely on his own, and the neuroscientist never had to intervene, the agent seems responsible for his choice despite the lack of alternative possibilities. Different versions of Frankfurt-style cases have been offered and evaluated; however, unsurprisingly enough, many think that the jury is still out on the question whether any examples of that kind are successful in refuting the principle of alternative possibilities, and thus the AP model.²

Now, even if there was a time when the AP model was mostly uncontested, I think it is fair to say that, thanks to Frankfurt's pioneering work and the more recent contributions of actual-sequence theorists like Fischer and Ravizza (1998), the plausibility of the AS model has now been expounded, and nowadays the AS model is widely regarded as a reasonable alternative to the AP model. As a result, the whole debate about Frankfurt-style cases should be put in perspective. In particular, it would be a mistake to think that the success of the AS model hinges on the success of Frankfurt-style cases. Imagine that no Frankfurt-style cases could

² See Widerker and McKenna (2003) for a collection of works on this topic.

successfully show that the AP model is false. So what? This by itself does not mean that the AP model is true, or that the AS model is false.

In particular, note that, although much has been said about Frankfurt-style cases, very little has been said about the prospects of their *counterparts*. By the “counterparts” of Frankfurt-style cases I mean examples that could be used to show, not that the AP model is false and the AS model is true, but the *opposite* of this, i.e., that the AS model is false and the AP model is true. In other words, the counterparts of Frankfurt-style cases would have to be examples that show that freedom is not just a function of the actual sequence, but it requires access to alternative possibilities. Are there any such cases? In what could they consist, and are they successful? These questions are typically overlooked in the literature. However, if the question about Frankfurt-style cases deserves attention, then so does the question about their counterparts. Again, perhaps this would not be the case if the AP model were much more initially plausible than the AS model; however, this is far from the majority view, at least nowadays.

Elsewhere I have called the counterparts of Frankfurt-style cases “PAP-style cases” (Sartorio forthcoming(b)). There I argued that there are no (actual or possible) successful examples of that kind. I do not intend to rehash the whole argument here, but only to give a brief sketch of it, and explain how it bears on the question that is the main focus of this paper.

Interestingly, it is hard to even *think* about the form that a PAP-style case would have to take. In particular, notice that PAP-style cases could not be single examples, like Frankfurt-style cases. This is due to the structural difference between the AP model and the AS model that I pointed out above: basically, whereas the AP model mainly focuses on a necessary condition for freedom, the AS model identifies allegedly sufficient conditions for freedom. In order to show that alternative possibilities are not necessary for acting freely, it is enough to provide a single example where the agent acts freely despite lacking alternative possibilities. This is, again, what Frankfurt-style examples attempt to do. But, how could one show, by appeal to examples, that alternative possibilities *are* necessary for freedom, or that the relevant actual-sequence facts are not enough? Clearly, a single example will not do. In particular, an example where an agent acts freely and has alternative possibilities is not enough to show that, and neither is an example where an agent does not act freely and lacks alternative possibilities. For, in each case, the correlations could be merely accidental: it need not be the case that the having or lacking alternatives is what *accounts for* the fact that the agent acts freely or does not act freely.

Arguably, the best one could hope to do would be to provide a pair of “contrast” scenarios. The pair would consist of one scenario where the agent acts freely and has alternative possibilities, and another scenario where the agent does not act freely and lacks alternative possibilities, *but is otherwise just like the first scenario*. If there were pairs of scenarios of that kind, they could, at least in principle, be used to support the AP model and undermine the AS model. For then one could argue, on the basis of those cases, that the difference between having and not having alternative possibilities is precisely what accounts for the difference between acting freely and not acting freely in the two scenarios.

The problem is that it is hard to think of scenarios of that kind. Again, the two scenarios have to be otherwise exactly the same, or the same with respect to all potentially relevant factors, in that there should not be any other differences between them that could account for the difference in freedom and responsibility. In particular, given that PAP-style cases are designed to undermine the AS model in favor of the AP model, there should be no differences between the two scenarios that a proponent of the *AS model* would count as clearly relevant to an agent's freedom and responsibility. According to the AS model, all that matters to freedom is the actual-sequence facts. Hence the two contrast scenarios in a PAP-style case could not differ with respect to the actual sequence (or the relevant elements of the actual sequence); otherwise a proponent of that model would rightly complain that there is another potentially relevant difference between the two scenarios: the difference in the actual sequence. In sum, then, it seems that a PAP-style case would have to consist of two scenarios *that are the same with respect to the actual sequence*, and that differ with respect to the agent's freedom/responsibility and the existence of alternative possibilities.

There are no clear examples of that kind. If the two scenarios (call them "Scenario 1" and "Scenario 2") are the same with respect to the actual sequence, and if in one of them (say, Scenario 1) the agent acts freely, then this means that the actual sequence (which is common to both scenarios) would have to have the relevant freedom-making features—for example, it would have to involve something like a reasons-based process of deliberation on the part of the agent, and it would not have to involve freedom-undermining mechanisms such as coercion, compulsion, etc. As a result, the agent will likely appear to act freely in Scenario 2 as well, even if Scenario 2 is one where he lacks alternative possibilities. At the very least, it would be *highly controversial*, in this context, to claim that the agent *does not* act freely in Scenario 2. For note that Scenario 2 would have to have the general structure of a Frankfurt-style case: it would have to be a case where an agent acts completely on his own, but the presence of a purely counterfactual mechanism (one that is not actually active, so it is not part of the actual sequence) guarantees that he could not have made any other choice and thus, as a result, the agent lacks alternative possibilities. But it is, to say the least, highly controversial to claim that the choices of agents in Frankfurt-style cases are not free.

In other words, it seems that, whereas the success of Frankfurt-style cases hinges on the truth of the claim that the agents in those cases act freely, the success of PAP-style cases would have to hinge on the truth of the opposite claim. This is bad news for a strategy based on PAP-style cases. Perhaps advocates of the AS model will never be able to produce a dialectically successful Frankfurt-style case, and thus the strategy based on Frankfurt-style cases will never be made to succeed. Still, the failure of the PAP-style case strategy seems even more catastrophic, for, as we have seen, PAP-style cases cannot even get off the ground as part of an argument against the AS model. As a result, the whole project of arguing for the AP model and against the AS model on the basis of PAP-style cases seems hopeless.³

³ In (Sartorio forthcoming(b)) I discuss other potential PAP-style cases that are less obvious failures. I will not address this here. But let me note, first, that they are cases that involve derivative instead of basic

What conclusions should we draw from this about the truth of the AP model and the AS model? Again, perhaps we should not put that much weight on the prospects of a strategy based on examples. Perhaps the idea of arguing from examples is a dead end in this case, and we should instead aim to assess the views on other grounds. In that case the failure of PAP-style cases would not be a big deal, even if PAP-style cases are complete non-starters.

Indeed, perhaps all of this is true. Still, the failure of the PAP-style case strategy is good news for the AS model, in that it can help us divorce the project of developing a successful AS model from the project of providing successful *Frankfurt-style cases*. If the existence of dialectically effective PAP-style cases is not a requisite for the success of the AP model, then it seems that, by the same token, the existence of dialectically effective Frankfurt-style cases should not be a requisite for the success of the AS model. Those two projects (the projects of developing a successful AS model and the project of providing successful Frankfurt-style cases) have unreasonably been tied together for too long, and it is important to disentangle them.⁴

3 The Importance of Respecting the Main Motivating Idea

As I mentioned in the Introduction, both models of freedom, the AP model and the AS model, have quite a bit of initial plausibility. The AP model is plausible, among other things, because it is natural to think of freedom in terms of alternatives, and the AS model is plausible because it is natural to think that only factors that actually explain why an agent acted can be relevant to the agent's freedom. Now, in order for a model of freedom to be fully successful, it should be possible to develop these intuitive but rough ideas in a systematic way, into full-blown theories, while remaining faithful to the central motivation behind them. Otherwise, if the initial motivation were lost in the process of formulating the theory, or if the theory failed to fully capture what made it intuitively plausible in the first place, this would be a serious problem for the theory, and for the model more generally.

How do the AP model and the AS model fare in this respect? In the case of the AP model, different formulations have been offered that, while differing in the details in important ways, tried to stay close to the main idea behind the model, the idea that freedom requires access to alternatives (although whether they are in fact successful accounts of freedom is, of course, a different matter). Some of them are compatibilist analyses of the ability to do otherwise, as in the case of "classical" compatibilism, which was an attempt to account for the freedom to do otherwise in

Footnote 3 continued

responsibility, and it would be odd if the only counterexamples one could produce against the AS model involved derivative responsibility. Also, as I argue in that paper, there is a powerful argument that those cases also fail as PAP-style examples. The only reason their failure is less obvious is that in those cases it is easier to be misled about the composition of the actual sequences.

⁴ Recently Frankfurt himself has argued for the idea that the fate of the AS model should not rest on the dialectical success of Frankfurt-style cases against the principle of alternative possibilities [see Frankfurt 2003; see also McKenna 2008 and Sartorio (forthcoming(a))].

conditional terms (roughly, in terms of the agent's doing otherwise under certain counterfactual conditions, which is compatible with the truth of determinism; see, eg., Ayer 1954). Other analyses of the ability to do otherwise are incompatibilist views; for example, van Inwagen (1983) claims that the freedom to do otherwise is a two-way power, the power to act in a certain way and the power not to act in that way, where this is a power that agents can only have when their acts are not causally determined by the antecedent conditions and the laws. And there are other accounts, notably, the "new dispositionalism," a more recent attempt to analyze the relevant powers in terms that are compatible with determinism, by appeal to the contemporary literature on the metaphysics of dispositions. [see Fara (2008), Smith (2003), and Vihvelin (2004, 2013)]

When it comes to the AS model, by contrast, things are much less clear. As it turns out, some of the main attempts that have been made in the literature to crystallize the central motivating idea end up, quite surprisingly, diverging from that initial motivation in subtle but important ways.

Again, I take the main motivation for the AS model to be the thought that only those factors that pertain to the actual explanation of action are relevant to an agent's freedom; all other factors are irrelevant and cannot be brought to bear on the agent's freedom. Crucially, note that this is not just the claim that only *actual* facts are relevant to an agent's freedom; rather, it is the stronger claim that only actual facts of a certain kind, namely, facts about the *actual explanation* or the *causal history* of our behavior, are relevant to our freedom. This is what I believe is suggested by, in particular, Frankfurt's reasoning about the role of the neuroscientist in Frankfurt-style scenarios. In those scenarios, it is an actual fact that a neuroscientist exists in the background and that he has certain intentions, so those scenarios do differ from ordinary scenarios (scenarios without neuroscientists or counterfactual interveners) at least with respect to some actual facts. Still, Frankfurt's insight was that the neuroscientist's presence and intentions are not relevant to the agent's freedom because they are not relevant to the actual explanation or the actual causal history of the agent's choice. Given that they do not explain the agent's choice, a Frankfurt-style case is *just like* an ordinary case with respect to all that matters to freedom: the actual sequence of events.

In general, then, the central motivation for the AS model is the thought that nothing but the *actual-sequence facts* is relevant to freedom, where the actual-sequence facts are the facts concerning the actual explanation or the actual causal history of the agent's behavior. In other words, freedom is *exclusively* a function of the actual-sequence facts (more precisely, it is a function of the relevant subset of actual-sequence facts: those facts that pertain to the agent's freedom).⁵

Call this central motivating thought behind the AS model *the Exclusiveness thought*. Again, I take the Exclusiveness thought to be the "driving force" behind the AS model. If it turned out that no plausible account of freedom can respect the Exclusiveness thought, then this would be a serious blow for the AS model. Note

⁵ The reason for the parenthetical remark is that complete causal histories are typically very rich, so actual sequences are also likely to contain elements that are not relevant to the agent's freedom (for discussion of this point, see Sartorio 2016, Chapter 1).

that this means, in particular, that developing an account that pries freedom apart from alternative possibilities is not enough to offer a successful AS model of freedom; in addition, and more fundamentally, one has to capture the Exclusiveness thought. In other words, a successful actual-sequence view of freedom is not just one that understands freedom in terms other than alternative possibilities; rather, it is one that understands freedom only in terms of actual-sequence facts.

It is easy to lose sight of this important fact, given that the AS model originated as a reaction to the classical AP model and the principle of alternative possibilities. But, even though this is how the AS model originated, it is not what the model is all about. The AS model is not *just* a rejection of the alternative-possibilities condition on freedom. Instead, it is an independently motivated and substantial view of freedom, one that is allegedly supported by certain kinds of theoretical considerations, including those brought out by reflection about Frankfurt-style cases. As a result, again, developing a view that does not rest on the idea that freedom requires alternative possibilities is not enough. To build a successful theory in that tradition, one must also offer a theory that fully respects the motivating idea, and, as we have seen, that is the Exclusiveness thought.

Now, a potential threat for the AS model is that in trying to formulate the best actual-sequence theory one may find that actual sequences are *too thin* to capture everything we want about freedom. And, in fact, what we see is that, when actual-sequence theorists develop their views in more detail, the result tends to be an account that does not fully respect that initial motivation. (Again, this is the case even though those theories do make an explicit point of not cashing out freedom in terms of alternative possibilities; as I have explained, this is not enough to capture the full motivation for the model).

Consider, as one main example, Frankfurt's own "hierarchical" view of freedom, developed in Frankfurt (1971). Frankfurt argues that acting freely requires a certain match between the desires that move us to act and our higher-order desires: roughly, we act freely to the extent that we act with the will that we want to have, or to the extent that the desires that move us are the desires that we want to be moved by. Thus, on Frankfurt's view, higher-order desires play a significant role in grounding our freedom. But it is not clear that, in order to play that kind of role, they need to be part of the actual sequence of events that result in our behavior, or they need to help determine those actual-sequence facts in any way. To be sure, it is clear that, according to Frankfurt's view, we need to have those higher-order desires in order to act freely; thus the desires have to be *actual* if we are to act freely. However, recall that this is different from claiming that they have to be *actually explanatory*; as pointed out above, this is a considerably stronger claim. And there seems to be nothing in Frankfurt's view that suggests that those desires *need* to be actually explanatory in order for the act to be free.⁶ Hence, the view ends up coming apart from the original motivation for the AS model, the Exclusiveness thought (the

⁶ Frankfurt sometimes suggests that, when an agent acts freely, the higher-order desire is part of the actual causal sequence in that it plays some kind of overdetermining role (it causally overdetermines the choice, together with the first-order desire; see Frankfurt 1971; Watson 2003: 335–336). But it is not clear that this is what happens in every possible scenario of this kind. The higher-order desire may just be remaining inactive, overseeing the situation without intervening, simply because it does not "see" the

thought that only the explanatorily relevant factors are relevant to freedom), in a significant way.

Consider, as another main example, Fischer and Ravizza's view, developed in Fischer and Ravizza (1998). Fischer and Ravizza also seem to want to count certain factors that have no bearing on the actual-sequence facts as relevant to freedom. According to their view, acting freely is partly a matter of the actual "mechanism" of action being sensitive to reasons, where the mechanism's reasons-sensitivity is something that is reflected in some of its purely modal properties. These are properties that are not *actually* explanatory, but that instead concern the mechanism's responses to circumstances in other possible worlds.⁷ Thus, on Fischer and Ravizza's view, some purely modal or dispositional properties of actual mechanisms, ones that are not actually explanatory, are relevant to the agent's freedom. Again, this feature of their view seems to be in tension with the Exclusiveness thought.⁸

Fortunately for the AS model, I think it is possible to develop the central thesis in a way that fully respects the Exclusiveness thought. Of course, the aim of this paper is not to offer a full defense of this claim. Instead, I will limit myself to a discussion of some features of the type of actual-sequence account that I favor that I think are key to understanding how it is possible for an actual-sequence view to fully respect the Exclusiveness thought, and thus, how it is possible to develop the AS model in a way that fully respects the original motivation, while still providing a plausible account of freedom. (For a more detailed description and defense of the view sketched here, see Sartorio 2016. I should note that, like Frankfurt's view and Fischer and Ravizza's view, my own view is a compatibilist account of freedom, i.e., one according to which it is possible to act freely in a deterministic world.)

Again, the challenge that the AS model faces is that the set of the relevant actual-sequence facts may appear to be too narrow to capture everything that is involved in acting freely (as suggested by the fact that the accounts briefly reviewed above end up looking outside that set of facts, into other types of actual facts: facts that also do not concern alternative possibilities but that cast a wider net than the actual-sequence facts themselves). Briefly, my proposal is that the challenge can be met by engaging in a more in-depth investigation of what it means to say that freedom is exclusively a function of the relevant actual-sequence facts. There are two main points I want to make here: one concerns the *nature* of the actual-sequence facts themselves, and the other concerns the interpretation of the claim that freedom is *exclusively a function of* those facts. Let me take these up in turn.

First, when one is thinking about actual sequences of events, it is easy to lose track of the fact that complete actual sequences typically include more than the most obvious or salient causes. Complete actual sequences include all the elements that play a role in accounting for the agent's behavior, in particular, they include other

Footnote 6 continued

need to step up, in essentially the same way that the neuroscientist in a Frankfurt case does not intervene because he does not see the need to. I discuss this in more detail in Sartorio (2016: Chapter 1).

⁷ See Fischer and Ravizza (1998: Chapters 2–5).

⁸ I discuss this in more detail in Sartorio (2016: Chapters 2 and 4).

events that are usually regarded as mere “background conditions” as well as many absences.⁹ The role of absences is particularly significant, I think, in that it is plausible to argue that our sensitivity to reasons is not only reflected by the reasons to which we are responsive, but also by the *absences* of reasons to which we are responsive.

Elsewhere I have argued that the best actual-sequence account of freedom in terms of sensitivity to reasons is one that appeals to the role played by absences of reasons. (Sartorio 2015, 2016: Chapter 4) For example, if on an occasion I decide to go out for a walk to get some fresh air, the actual sequence will typically include not just the actual reasons, such as the desire to get some fresh air, but also the absence of several reasons, namely, reasons to refrain from going out (for example, the absence of a sudden urge to stay and clean the house, the absence of an important telephone call, the absence of a request for help from a neighbor, etc.). Arguably, those absences reflect my sensitivity to reasons at least just as much as the actual reasons that drive me to act, and thus they are part of what can ground my freedom, according to an account of freedom in terms of sensitivity to reasons.

An account of this kind has many advantages, but among the most significant ones, I think, is the fact that it is an account that remains faithful to the original motivation for the view, the Exclusiveness thought. For it cashes out freedom *just* in terms of the actual-sequence facts, and nothing else. As mentioned before, it does that by drawing attention to the fact that actual sequences are richer or more substantial than it might seem at first sight, in particular, because they include absences of many (counterfactual) reasons in addition to the actual reasons that motivate the agent to act. Once the set of the actual-sequence facts is extended to allow for those absences of reasons, the claim that acting freely is just a function of the actual sequence becomes a lot more plausible.

Note, in particular, that a view that understands the concept of sensitivity to reasons in this way, in terms of the actual sequence containing the relevant reasons and absences of reasons, accommodates the Exclusiveness thought in a way that one that merely understands that concept in terms of the purely dispositional or modal properties of the actual sequence (such as Fischer and Ravizza’s view) does not. As explained above, Fischer and Ravizza’s view assigns relevance to modal properties of actual sequences that play absolutely no role in the actual causal history of the agent’s behavior (they are not relevant to what the agent does in the actual world, but only to what the agent does in other, merely possible worlds). The view I am describing, in contrast, claims that, when an agent is sensitive to reasons, the absence of the relevant reasons *actually* explains his behavior, or is part of the actual causal history of the behavior. For example, when I go out to get some fresh air, I am sensitive to reasons because my act of going out is the actual result of, among other things, the fact that no one requested my urgent assistance at home. This is a

⁹ Note that if actual sequences are just causal histories, this would seem to commit the actual-sequence theorist to the possibility of absence causation. Strictly speaking, I do not think this is a necessary commitment for an actual-sequence view, since actual sequences could in principle be understood more broadly than as causal histories, as encompassing other kinds of responsibility-grounding metaphysical relations. Having said this, the assumption that absences can be causes certainly makes for a simpler actual-sequence view. I discuss this issue in Sartorio (2016: Chapter 2).

claim about the explanation or causal etiology of the actual behavior, not about the explanation or causal etiology of purely counterfactual behavior. Hence a view of this kind is perfectly suited to accommodate the Exclusiveness thought.

So far I have suggested that reflecting on the nature of the actual-sequence facts, or what “the actual sequence” involves in each case, can help us address one of the main challenges faced by the AS model. In particular, I have argued that we do not need to look beyond the actual sequence itself to make sense of the claim that, when agents act freely, they are sensitive to reasons (in a way that includes not just actual but also counterfactual reasons). This allows us to remain faithful to the Exclusiveness thought while embracing a view of that kind. As I anticipated above, there is a second important source of hope for the AS model and the prospects of developing an actual-sequence view of freedom that is clearly compatible with the Exclusiveness thought. It has to do with the content of the Exclusiveness thought itself.

What exactly is meant by the claim that freedom is exclusively a function of actual sequences? In Sartorio (2016: Chapter 1) I argue that one natural way to interpret it is as a claim about *grounding*: freedom is exclusively a function of actual sequences in the sense that facts about freedom are exclusively grounded in facts about actual sequences. This amounts to the claim that, when agents act freely, the fact that they act freely obtains in virtue of the fact that the actual sequence is a certain way, and whatever other facts may ground *that* fact, if any. So, unless one believes that facts about the composition of the actual sequence are basic or ungrounded in other facts, this will typically mean that the freedom fact is grounded in a series of facts, from less basic to more basic, where all of those facts are “actual-sequence facts,” or facts pertaining to the actual sequence, in the relevant sense.

Note that this opens the door to facts of different kinds as potentially relevant to an agent’s freedom. In some cases, for example, it could turn out that some “external” facts (facts concerning elements that are external to the actual sequence) are relevant to the composition of the actual sequence itself. In that case, those facts would be relevant to the agent’s freedom, despite not entering the actual sequence itself: they would be relevant to the agent’s freedom insofar as they help ground the relevant facts about the composition of the actual sequence.¹⁰

As an illustration, consider Fischer and Ravizza’s famous “Sharks” case.¹¹ A man notices a child who is drowning in the ocean, but is unmoved by the child’s plight and decides not to attempt a rescue. The man is an expert swimmer; so he had every reason to believe that he could have easily saved the child. Unbeknownst to him, however, he could not have saved the child, for a patrol of hungry sharks would have attacked him the second he jumped in. As Fischer and Ravizza note, in these circumstances the man does not seem responsible for the child’s death, or for not saving the child (although of course he may be responsible for the decision not to attempt a rescue).

¹⁰ See Sartorio (2011, 2016: Chapter 2).

¹¹ Fischer and Ravizza (1998: Chapter 5).

Fischer and Ravizza discuss this case in detail because it seems to present a problem for the actual-sequence view, and, in particular, for the idea that alternative possibilities do not matter to freedom (since what seems to account for the agent's lack of responsibility in this case is the lack of alternative possibilities: the fact that he could not have saved the child). Fischer and Ravizza offer a different explanation in terms of the modal properties of the actual mechanism.¹² As I pointed out before, however, I think this is problematic, insofar as those properties are not relevant to the actual explanation of the agent's behavior but only to what the agent does in other possible worlds; as a result, their proposal clashes with the Exclusiveness thought.

What I am proposing is something different. Namely, although the sharks are not themselves part of the actual sequence resulting in the child's death, they are still relevant to determining what the actual sequence *is* in this case. In particular, they make it the case that the agent's decision is not connected to the child's death by means of a causal chain. The sharks' presence breaks the causal connection that would otherwise have existed between the agent and the child's death (and that would have made him responsible for the death). As a result, the relevant facts about the sharks are part of the *grounding* facts.

Recall that I argued that the claim that freedom is exclusively a function of the actual-sequence facts should be interpreted in the following way: when an agent acts freely, the fact that he acts freely obtains in virtue of the fact that the actual sequence is a certain way, and whatever other facts may ground *that* fact. So, if the sharks are relevant to the composition of the actual sequence (as they seem to be in this case), then the facts about the sharks are part of the grounding facts.

In contrast, there are other scenarios in which "extrinsic" factors—factors that are external to the actual sequence—do not seem to be at all relevant to the composition of the actual sequence itself. That is the case with the role of the neuroscientist in Frankfurt-style scenarios. The neuroscientist (who would have ensured that the agent made the same choice, and thus is responsible for the agent's lacking the ability to do otherwise) is intuitively not relevant to the composition of the actual sequence in any way, when the agent makes the choice on his own. The agent still makes the choice as a result of his reasons-based process of deliberation, and the neuroscientist's presence is not a threat to that causal connection. According to the AS model, then, this would naturally explain the difference that we see between the agent in *Sharks* and the agent in a Frankfurt-style case: the agent is responsible for the outcome in a Frankfurt-style case, but not in *Sharks*.

In conclusion, the concern that the set of actual-sequence facts is too narrow to ground the freedom of agents can be addressed, or at least significantly alleviated, by emphasizing these two important points. First, actual sequences are richer than they appear to be at first sight in that they contain different kinds of elements, including some absences that can play a substantial role in grounding the agent's sensitivity to reasons. And, second, the relevant "actual-sequence facts" include more than just facts about the composition of actual sequences: they also include the grounds of those facts. For these reasons, the relevant set of actual-sequence facts

¹² Fischer and Ravizza (1998: Chapter 5).

ends up being quite substantial. As a result, the prospects of developing a view of freedom that respects the Exclusiveness thought seem promising.

4 Conclusions

I have offered a partial defense of the AS model of freedom. The defense relied on two main strategies. The first strategy consisted in de-emphasizing the role of examples in arguing for (or against) a model of freedom. Imagine that, as some people think, Frankfurt-style cases fail to undermine the classical model of freedom based on alternative possibilities. What follows from this? Not much, I argued, since the counterparts of Frankfurt-style cases also fail to undermine the AS model—if anything, in a more glaring and indisputable way. So the putative failure of Frankfurt-style cases as counterexamples to the AP model should not be seen as a problem for the AS model, which is motivated by independent considerations that render it initially plausible. Now, what *would* be a problem for the AS model is if it were not possible to develop a credible account of freedom that preserved the original motivation for the model. As we have seen, this is a serious concern for some of the main representative examples of theories in that tradition. Thus my second strategy of defense consisted in revitalizing the original motivation for the AS model, by revamping it, isolating it from claims that do not fully capture the same idea, and arguing that it *can* be developed in a successful way.

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