STEREOSCOPIC VISION: Persons, Freedom, and Two Spaces of Material Inference

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What is a person, as opposed to a non-person? One might begin to address the question by appealing to a second distinction: between agentis, characterized by the ability to act freely and intentionally, and mere patients, caught up in events but in no sense authors of the happenings involving them. An alternative way to address the question appeals to a third distinction: between subjects—bearers of rights and responsibilities, commitments and entitlements, makers of claims, thinkers of thoughts, issuers of orders, and posers of questions—and mere objects, graspable or evaluable by subjects but not themselves graspers or evaluators.

We take it as a methodological point of departure that these three distinctions are largely coextensive, indeed coextensive in conceptually central cases. Granted, these distinctions can come apart. One might think that ‘person’ applies to anything that is worthy of a distinctive sort of moral respect and think this applicable to some fetuses or the deeply infirm elderly. Even if the particular respect due such beings is importantly different from “what we owe each other”, such respect could still be thought to be of the kind distinctively due people, and think this even while holding that such people lack agentive or subjective capacity. Similarly, one might think dogs or various severely impaired humans to be attenuated subjects but not agents.

Without taking any particular stand on such examples, our methodological hypothesis is that such cases, if they exist, are understood as persons (agents, subjects) essentially by reference to paradigm cases and, indeed, to a single paradigm within which person/non-person, subject/object, and agent/patient are conceptually connected.1 Stated

1. For one detailed development of this sort of paradigm-riff structure, and a defense of the possibility of concepts essentially governed by such a structure, see Lance and Little (2004). Discussions with Hilda Lindeman have helped
thus vaguely, our starting point is not so controversial, but when we move beyond this toward some sort of explanation of the tight relationship among these concepts, self-evidence vanishes and ground is anything but common.

Providing a full explanation of the underlying unity among the concepts of person, agent, and subject would be an enormous task. These three concepts alone require discussion of freedom; causation (which in turn requires discussion of counterfactuals and modality); propositional attitudes and their connection to practical and theoretical reasoning; moral responsibility; and any number of other topics. Given the global nature of the problem, a paper (even of this size) allows us only to offer a vision, a vision bolstered at important points by the first moves of argument. Our aim is to lay out such a new and, we think, fruitful perspective, along the way presenting accounts, or rather account-sketches, of the philosophically interesting topics that arise in the course of the discussion.

1. Metaphysics and Stances
It is helpful at the outset to distinguish two broad approaches one might take toward providing an account of concepts like personhood, agency, or subjectivity: the “stance” approach and the “metaphysical” approach. By a metaphysical approach we mean one that begins by asking what a person, or agent, or subject is, perhaps by attempting to supply necessary and sufficient conditions. So, for example, Ayer says persons are those entities bearing both physical and mental predicates, and Frankfurt says persons are those entities possessing second-order desires. Both are metaphysical accounts.

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Stance approaches, on the other hand, begin not with a straightforward account of persons or freedom or subjects, but of what it is to take something to be a person/free agent/subject. In Strawson’s terminology, the stance approach begins by distinguishing the “participant stance” from the “objective stance”. Stance-approach-like moves are commonly deployed in “linguistic turn” philosophy, and have been favored starting points in recent years for Sellars, Strawson, Dennett, Brandom, and McDowell.

Stance approaches are interesting only if what it is to take something to be (say) a person is not simply a matter of having beliefs or uttering assertions about it. For example, suppose that one took a stance approach to accounting for personhood, and claimed that taking something to be a person was believing them to be a member of the species *homo sapiens*. The stance approach, in this instance, is a needless complication: the same account could have been put more simply in the metaphysical mode, by saying that a person is a member of the species *homo sapiens*. Consequently, interesting stance accounts will employ attitudes other than belief or things other than attitudes, such as actions, practices, or institutional arrangements. For example, an interesting stance account of personhood might say that taking something to be a person is a matter of holding them responsible for what they do, where this is given a richer characterization than merely believing them to be responsible for what they do.

Interesting stance accounts, then, are non-cognitive (in the sense of not exclusively belief-involving) accounts. But it does not follow that they are irrealist. *Appropriateness* is the tool used to convert from the stance mode to the metaphysical mode. Thus, suppose our stance account says that taking something to be a person is to hold them

us see the importance of making room for cases in which these distinctions come apart. We would also like to thank Michael Williams, Robert Brandom, Jonathan Dancy, and two anonymous referees at Philosophers’ Imprint for helpful discussions on this paper.

2. Our characterization of this distinction largely follows that of Brandom’s development of the idea as originally discussed by Dennett. There are subtle differences in the way each of us frames the two approaches, but we take no credit for the methodological distinction.

3. A number of philosophers are currently pursuing such an approach. Stephen Darwall argues that moral obligation is always a matter of second-personal holding of someone to something, and that this is essential to the moral notion of personhood. Kukla and Lance (in progress) ground personhood in a broader linguistic notion of second-personal holding. And Coleen Macnamara defends such an approach to the reactive attitudes, again, linking the taking up of these attitudes and the holdings they involve to the concept of personhood.
responsible. The corresponding answer to the metaphysical question (What is a person?) is that a person is something that it is appropriate to hold responsible.\(^4\) Thus, stance accounts, while in general non-cognitive, are not necessarily irrealist, and there is no necessary conflict between stance and metaphysical approaches to accounting for interesting philosophical concepts. There would be a problem if one were irrealist or skeptical about appropriateness, or about normative concepts more generally, but in our view that would be a problem in its own right.

The danger facing metaphysical approaches is that they will miss whatever non-cognitive aspects there are to, say, personhood. This is true even if they give accurate necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood, which make no reference to appropriateness. That might happen if, for instance, taking something to be a person was a matter of holding it responsible, thus personhood was a matter of appropriately being held responsible, and there was some property \(P\) that was a necessary and sufficient condition for appropriately being held responsible. The metaphysician might only say that \(x\) is a person iff \(P(x)\), and this would be true, but it would miss the important conceptual connection between personhood and responsibility.\(^5\)

\(^4\) Appropriate beliefs are true ones, which is why a stance account in terms of belief is a trivial variant on a metaphysical account. But things are not always trivial. Consider the baseball fact that Jones hit a homerun yesterday. A stance approach would first explain what it is to take Jones to have hit a homerun — as implying taking Jones to have been the batter, to have hit the pitch beyond the field of play, to thereby have earned entitlement to run around the bases, score runs for himself and other base runners, etc. But then the issue of whether Jones is appropriately taken to have hit a homerun is a perfectly factual one. It is something that we can all be wrong about, and one which depends on how things went in the world.

\(^5\) Again, compare homeruns. Suppose every stadium in baseball puts its wall at a certain distance and at a certain height. Maybe, in the interest of standardization, the rules of baseball are even amended to require this. Still, one who knows that something is a homerun iff it is a hit that travels past a point \(n\) feet distant, \(m\) feet high, and within bounds nonetheless fails to understand the significance of a homerun. Nothing in this description will tell you that homeruns score runs, for example. (We are not, of course, denying that there are moves the metaphysical approach can make here. Our beating up on a

other hand, the danger facing stance approaches is that they either implicitly advocate an irrealist answer to the metaphysician’s questions, when this at least needs arguing, or they simply fail to address the question of when a certain non-cognitive attitude is appropriate.

This latter failure can take one particularly unhelpful form.\(^6\) There is one sense of “appropriate” in which attitudes are appropriate if having them will make you a lot of money or spare you a lot of pain, but this can’t be the relevant kind of appropriateness. Specifying what’s “really” appropriate, in a non-circular way, may be no easy task. Moreover, if the relevant sort of appropriateness can be identified by appealing only to descriptive facts, then a metaphysical account of the concept being investigated, stated in terms of the facts and bypassing the appropriateness of attitudes, suggests itself. The suggested metaphysical account still runs the danger pointed out above, however, of missing whatever non-cognitive aspects there are to the concept. So the danger facing stance accounts is that of being unable to say clearly what sort of appropriateness must attach to the non-cognitive attitudes that constitute taking something to be (say) a person, in order for it to actually be a person.

Our response to this general problem for stance accounts holds that the kind of appropriateness at issue is to be individuated in terms of the reasons that tell for or against an attitude’s being appropriate, or in other words, by specifying which reasons are of the “right” kind and which are of the “wrong” kind for determining appropriateness. The reasons of the right kind are to be determined by the point and purpose of the concept. Our pragmatist approach holds that concept use is a practice, and the practice of using any particular concept can

\(^6\) We thank an anonymous referee for bringing this point to our attention. Astute readers will recognize it as a version of the “wrong kind of reasons problem” raised for “fitting-attitude” analyses of ethical terms. For the full argument justifying the general approach we take here, presented in the ethical context, see White’s forthcoming “Fitting Attitudes, Wrong Kinds of Reasons, and Mind-Independent Goodness”.

simplistic version of the metaphysical approach is meant to do no more than motivate the stance idea.)
be understood in terms of what it aims to achieve. The right kind of reasons for an attitude’s appropriateness are those which contribute to the aim of using the associated concept, as one individual’s getting richer and avoiding pain ordinarily do not. A non-cognitive attitude, (partially) constituting one’s taking something to be a person, is appropriate in the relevant sense when the attitude is held for reasons which contribute something to the point of thinking of anything at all as a person.

We take a stance approach toward our topic. That is, in pursuing an explanation of the connection between persons, agents, and subjects, our paper asks (and answers) the question, “What is it to take something to be a person/agent/subject?” An answer to this question, of course, also answers the complementary question of what it is to take something to be a non-person/mere patient/mere object, and furthermore, it lets us understand the difference between the participant stance and the objective stance.

Secondly, we aim to clarify the point of the distinction (and we are arguing that it is, at root, a single distinction). Why, in other words, do we find ourselves dividing the world into, on the one hand, a class of entities that have beliefs, desires, and other mental states, utter meaningful claims and other sorts of speech acts, respond to arguments, deliberate, make free choices and are subject to praise and blame for them; and, on the other hand, a class of entities to which none of this applies? What difference would it make if we did not divide the world this way, and is that even conceivable? The answer to these questions fills out our account of what makes it appropriate, in the relevant sense, to take something as a person/agent/subject.

Third, we inquire why it seems so obvious that we (we first-personal authors, that is) are among the entities toward which a participant stance is apt. What is the connection between holding a first-person perspective on the world, and personhood, freedom, and thought? (Put differently, why is the participant stance a participant stance?)

Finally, putting together the results of our inquiries, we shall be asking the metaphysical question: what is a person/free agent/subject, and are there any?

The guiding insight we shall follow is that the ur-distinction, accounting for all the others, is between two practices of reasoning: indicative reasoning, which functions in the first instance to update our doxastic state in the face of new evidence, and subjunctive reasoning, the root context of which is deliberation about what to do and about the propriety of actual or potential actions. These different practices of reasoning are expressed in the differences between indicative and subjunctive conditionals, but in our view it is the conditionals that are to be understood in terms of the practices of reasoning rather than the other way around.

2. Updating I: diachronic revision and indicative updating

For creatures bound by bodies, time, and space, with mental capacities and a natural history remotely like ours, beliefs are not worth much if they are static. Whatever story one wants to tell about the genesis, nature, and point of our mental states, by the time there are critters running around who deserve to be treated as full-on believers, these same critters deserve to be treated as learners, believers whose beliefs change with experience. There is no point in being the sort of critter who forms beliefs if you can’t form them in light of the way the world is disclosed to you, and change them in light of new disclosures. Similarly, there can be no justification for treating someone as a believer if you don’t do so in a way that amounts to treating them as responsive to evidence, an empirical investigator and learner.

To make things concrete, imagine a simple primate sitting high up in the safety of a tree because she thinks that there is a jaguar hiding in the bushes. She may feel quite confident in this judgment, but after throwing a coconut at the bush, and seeing a capibara run out in such a way that the edge of the bush parts, allowing her a clear view of the (now empty) space previously concealed, then she will decide she was wrong, come to believe that there was merely a capibara, and no jaguar in the bush. We tell this mundane story to draw an equally mundane moral: speaking of our tree-dwelling critter as “coming to believe that there was only a capibara, not a jaguar” conceals a great deal of complexity, for “coming to believe” is anything but a mere re-
placing of one sentence for another. Indeed, one cannot coherently imagine any such change without imagining a vast array of further changes. We may, without too much confusion, picture the change as adding a new belief and erasing an old one from the critter’s internal scorecard, but in doing so, we must picture her also revising her belief that it is not safe on the ground, that it is necessary to climb the tree, that there is little chance of capibara stew tonight, etc. In short, perceptions lead to doxastic changes that ramify out through the entire web of pre-existing belief.

Continuing with this line of thought, we note as well that these doxastic ripples propagate in ways constrained by logical and epistemic norms. Updating in response to new evidence, that is, can be reasonable or unreasonable. It is reasonable now to be less scared rather than more. It is reasonable to think that there won’t be cat tracks in the bush, unreasonable to think that the capibara left jaguar prints. However logical and epistemic norms work—whatever the inferential structure of updating in the face of evidence—they do work and there is a structure to it. Confident that there is an object of our ostension, let us simply apply the label “indicative updating” to the normative structure of revision that ramifies through a rational critter’s web of belief in light of a new piece of evidence. Hard as it is to produce anything like a complete theory of indicative updating, every believer knows how to do it; or, if “knows how” seems too purposive for something so automatic and unconscious, let us say more cautiously that every believer is such that this sort of revision goes on. If you found someone who did not update beliefs in the face of new perceptions in a way recognizably rational—recognizably appropriate according to something like logical and epistemic norms—you would not see them as a believer at all.

If we add social arrangements and language ability to our hypothetical critters, further points emerge. Social and linguistic believers can argue about the revisions they make to their structures of belief. Imagine two believers in a rudimentary linguistic community, who in most cases and in most ways evidentially update in the same way but differ on occasion. On those occasions, we might suppose that they argue—one explicitly says \( p \), while another asserts some \( q \) incompatible with \( p \) or simply fails to accept \( p \). Then they proceed to give reasons for and against their respective positions. To fix ideas, suppose our critters both see a bush wiggling, but one draws the inference that an animal is in the bush wiggling it, while the other is convinced that the bush can wiggle itself. Each asserts his opinion and argument ensues.

Now if our believers have the bush-wiggling dispute regularly, they’ll be happy language users indeed if they come, in the fullness of time, to evolve what Brandom calls “explicitating vocabulary.” In the effort to settle their dispute once and for all, rather than repeat the same argument every time a bush wiggles, they will need a way to talk about the sort of updating that normally goes on automatically and under the surface. Paradigmatically, they will use various sorts of conditionals or other two-place connectives—an animal is in the bush if the bush is wiggling; a wiggling bush is a reason to think there is an animal in it; wiggles are evidence for animals; etc.—to express the propriety of updating, or as Sellars would put it, to express the goodness of material inferences. These connectives make explicit, in language, what formerly had been a non-verbal practice of evidential updating.

But in order to argue for the sort of propriety made explicit by a conditional conclusion, another basic linguistic resource is needed. Our speakers will need to deploy, in the hypothetical mode, the very same contents that they mobilize in (non-hypothetical) assertion and judgment. So one will say, “suppose \( p \). Then \( q \) and \( r \), and thus \( s \). So if \( p \), then \( s \)” How do we understand hypothesizing, the speech act expressed by “suppose \( p \)? Presumably, the story is something like this: hypothesis is not belief. Nevertheless, in hypothesizing \( p \), one puts \( p \) forward as a sort of pseudo-belief, so as to run it through one’s updating machinery. One figures out what to conclude from \( p \) by pretend-
ing that \( p \) is the case and then seeing what updating one is inclined to make.\(^{10}\) If one is inclined to update to \( q \), one concludes — now non-hypothetically — if \( p \), then \( q \). We will call any updating that follows this pattern of norms “indicative updating”, for reasons which will become (or already are) obvious. Call the present sort of thinking, where the updating machinery is indicative but the inputs are hypotheses, “hypothetical indicative updating”.

Finally, we note that the public process of dispute resolution via argumentation can be internalized. A critter with the ability to engage in argument with another critter can also, with little extra development, engage in argument with herself. When evidence is conflicting or unclear, and incompatible conclusions each seem attractive, the same process of reason-giving, including the use of explicitating vocabulary (or rather explicitating concepts, since the process need not be verbal), can help a single critter come to a reasoned conclusion. This first-personal activity can be understood as the internalized use of conceptual tools designed to solve interpersonal disputes.

To sum up: in this section we have drawn out the implications of the core notion of a subject, a possessor of beliefs. The argument appeals to certain features of, and hence applies most centrally to, critters like us—critters in space and time, embodied, needy in various ways, social, possessed of limited knowledge, and who improve their knowledge by interaction with the world and with each other. We will call them finite natural critters, and we intend the arguments in this section and in what follows to be limited to them. We have nothing to say about pre-programmed robots, omniscient gurus, purely passive ideal observers, or deities existing outside of time, for instance, though it seems to us that if we can conceive of such creatures at all, it is only with the conceptual tools we develop for dealing with our fellow finite natural critters. Necessarily, for finite natural critters (it will be tedious to keep repeating that phrase, so from here on out we will mostly take it as understood), belief-possessors are belief-revisers, which means they are makers of indicative material inferences, which means they are guided by norms of material inference. One can further expect them to employ hypothetical modes of thought and speech, to reason with themselves and others on the basis of such hypothetical assertions, and to employ conditional locutions to make explicit the results of such hypothetical reasoning.

3. Updating 2: belief-action inferences and subjunctive updating

We said above that beliefs, for finite natural critters, are not worth much if they are static. Beliefs are worth similarly little to such critters if they are unconnected to action. It is hard to see any practical value to a stock of beliefs — no matter how correct or systematic — and equally hard to see how a practice of belief formation and updating could evolve, if these beliefs did not guide action. With reference to our earlier story about simple primates, an essential part of learning to form beliefs and make claims about jungle predators is that the belief in the presence of one led our critters to climb up a tree and stay there; belief in the absence of predators made it reasonable to come down from the tree. Indeed, we believe Davidson is quite right to say that it is not possible to intelligibly interpret someone as holding beliefs unless one interprets her also as performing actions on the basis of those beliefs. Putting these two points together, we conclude that when beliefs get updated, behavioral inclinations get updated as well: critters see a jaguar and therefore run up a tree. Note that this is eminently reasonable behavior; there are rational norms governing practical inference just as there are for theoretical.

All of that argues that finite natural subjects, \textit{i.e.}, belief-possessors and theoretical reasoners, must also be finite natural agents, which is to say doers and practical reasoners. The converse is also true. If we found an entity which had behavior but to which we could not attribute any beliefs — for clear cases, think of any creature along the

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Quantification, and Conceptual Content” and by White in ‘Making ‘Ought’ Explicit’.

10. The astute reader will be thinking of conditional probabilities at this point. Nothing we say depends on whether we are thinking of doxastic states as beliefs or assignments of subjective probability.
continuum from protozoa to insects—we would not think of it as acting intentionally or freely, or reasoning practically. It would be a blind flailer, driven by environment and perhaps instinct. Free intentional action requires a background of beliefs more or less well integrated with the world. Necessarily, agents—at least paradigmatic, finite natural agents—are subjects.

Just as in the case of updating of beliefs, updating to actions can result in argument. Occasions for argument over actions will arise, in particular, in cases that call for coordinated action. For example, we can imagine two critters encountering a young jaguar, which is dangerous, but not as formidable as an adult. Suppose the first critter is inclined to run up a tree, while the second is inclined to attack the jaguar with a stick. Attacking the jaguar removes a future threat and supplies the clan with a tasty meal; however, an attack against even a young jaguar is likely to succeed only if more than one critter participates. If the adventurous critter, counting on help, attacks the jaguar while the timid critter heads for the trees, we could expect (assuming the adventurous critter survives the encounter) a dispute. The dispute might be retrospective, perhaps so as to assign blame, or it might be prospective, so as to coordinate action for future encounters. In either case, similar conceptual tools will be required.

The critters will find conditional locutions handy for updating to actions—practical reasoning—just as they did when updating beliefs in the face of new evidence. They will need to be able to frame sentences like ‘If there is a moderately dangerous young jaguar, you should help attack it with sticks, not run away.’ Just as in the case of indicative updating, they will need the hypothetical mode of speech and thought, which provides the ability to settle on tactics beforehand, from the safety of the tree rather than in front of the jaguar. From the security of leafy boughs they can ask for, and give each other, reasons for action: ‘Those young ones can kill you if they bite you, but they can’t kill you with their claws. So suppose that several of us attack with sticks from all sides. Then whenever it tries to bite, someone else can attack from behind. Then it won’t be able to get any of us, and we can kill it.’ They may make this chain of reasoning explicit in a conditional: ‘So if we attack a young jaguar together, we will kill it.’ At any rate, they continue: ‘Killing a jaguar is, on balance, a good thing, so we should attack.’ Our critters begin with a hypothetical claim, and run it through a process of updating which is both theoretical (‘suppose that several of us attack … then it won’t be able to get any of us’) and, crucially, practical (‘killing a jaguar is a good thing, so we should attack’). For reasons which are or will shortly be obvious, we will call any process of updating that follows these norms ‘subjunctive updating’, and the version of it which begins with hypothetical inputs “hypothetical subjunctive updating.”

A third linguistic resource made use of in the above story is some sort of marker of act appropriateness. This is evaluative language, and two sorts are necessary. First, actions, unlike the contents of assertions, cannot be embedded in conditionals or other explicating vocabulary, nor can one perform an action in the hypothetical mode. In order for practical reasoning to include conditionals or to be hypothetical, a way to express actions in language is required. ‘Should’ and similar locutions fill this role. Second, outcomes have to be evaluated in a general way; aims and ends cannot be embedded in conditionals either, and so a linguistic stand-in has to be used. ‘Good’ and similar locutions fill this role. 11 Since such normative locutions make explicit the practical inferential purport of processes of agentive reasoning, we

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11. A little elaboration may be in order. (Actually a good deal more elaboration than we can provide here is in order.) These locutions, given their purpose, have to guide action normatively. The practical inference from “I should attack” to attacking has to be trivial, which is to say there can be no further question about what to do, while the practical inference from “Killing a jaguar is a good thing” to “Let’s kill a jaguar” has to be good but defeasible. Also, in a properly functioning critter, these evaluative commitments will guide actions descriptively, which is to say, a belief that one should attack will motivate one to attack; a belief that it is good to kill jaguars will dispose one toward jaguar-slaying. Our view thus explains two puzzling aspects of normative language. We think that metaethical theorizing ought to be pursued along the lines suggested here, though a full-scale metaethic is beyond the scope of this paper and there are obviously a huge range of complexities and details we do not pursue.
see why the concept of a person—as that entity subject to normative appraisal—also goes together with the concepts of agent and subject.

Finally, just as in the case of indicative argument, practical argument may be either public or private, either interpersonal dispute or, once the relevant conceptual tools have been internalized, intrapersonal deliberation.

Again, to sum up: we have further elaborated what being a subject requires. Among finite natural critters, subjects are agents, and agents are subjects; necessarily, they will possess and revise intentions, according to norms of practical inference. One can further expect them to employ hypothetical modes of thought and speech, to engage in inference from such hypotheses, including inference to conclusions that mark the appropriateness of practical inference by employing normative statuses, and to make the results of those hypothetical inferences explicit as conditionals (with normative consequents). The coincidence of person, agent, and subject is coming into focus.

4. Two kinds of updating

The next point to make is that the norms that guide changes of commitments in the context of subjunctive updating differ from the norms appropriate in indicative updating. To see this, let’s turn to marginally less primitive primates and reflect on:

*Benny’s last argument.* Benny is a con man. He has arranged a big night at the local boxing arena in which there are several fixed fights. He figures to make quite a bit of money off the large, boisterous, freely-betting crowd. As a sort of bonus on the night, Benny is trying to set up a really huge payday. He has sent his long-time and trusted co-conspirator Lenny to talk to Mike Tyson’s agent. Lenny is offering to split the betting take with Tyson, if he (Tyson) will agree to a bout with Benny, and throw the fight. Benny figures lots of people don’t like him, so they’ll welcome watching him get killed by Tyson. (Benny is no boxer and has no chance whatsoever against a fighter like Tyson.)

But Benny has spent decades perfecting a reputation as an egomaniac, just so that people will believe him stupid enough to actually try to beat Tyson. Thus, Benny hopes that people will not suspect a fix and bet huge amounts on Tyson to win, bets Benny will match, and that he will thereby reap millions when Tyson throws the fight.

Now despite this whole set-up, Benny does not think there is any real chance that Tyson will agree. Tyson is, after all, a famous professional fighter, former heavyweight champion of the world, and despite recent bad publicity, declining skills, and financial difficulty, Benny doubts he has fallen so low as to agree to such a tawdry scheme. Still, there is a chance, and Benny is waiting for the signal from Lenny as to whether the fix is in. He has scheduled the bout as the final one of the night. One more thing: Benny is not at all egomaniacal in the way people think he is. In fact he is quite cautious when it comes to physical injury. Thus it is true, and Benny knows it to be true, that he would never go into the ring with Tyson without being assured by his trusted confidant that the fix was in. If he gets no such signal, Benny will simply scratch the fight and return all the bets.

Now suppose the time for the signal comes and goes. On the way out to scratch the fight, the lure of all that money makes Benny decide to think things through one last time just to make sure he’s doing the right thing. At the moment, he has the following beliefs. (We’ve put them a little pedantically to make the logic clear.)

1. If fighting Tyson would endanger my life, I won’t fight.
2. If the fix isn’t in, then fighting Tyson would endanger my life.
3. The fix isn’t in.

Note that Benny is less sure of (3) than of (1) and (2). Lenny could have
been held up in the crowd, whereas (1) is tied to deeply held principles of self-preservation and (2) is as certain as anything Benny knows. He also believes

(4) If the fix is in and I fight, then I will win a lot of money.
(5) Winning money is good.
(6) Endangering my life is bad.

Let’s say Benny considers hypothetically that he goes ahead with the fight, and updates his beliefs in light of that hypothesis. That is, he imagines learning that he will fight and reasons about what follows. The collection of (1)–(3), plus the new hypothesis that he is fighting, is inconsistent; since (3) is the least certain of these beliefs, he revises that one. The fix must be in. But then by (4), he concludes that he will win a lot of money. As (5) reports, that would be good, so he determines that he should fight after all.

Benny is a moron. Natural selection is about to take its course with him.

But why? He reasoned perfectly correctly. There was nothing wrong with this pattern of updating. Indeed, if one were to somehow see the future—if one were to look into a crystal ball and see Benny fighting Mike Tyson an hour hence—one would be quite right to infer that the fix must have come in sometime between the time of looking and the time seen. The problem, obviously, lies in choosing to use this kind of updating to license a practical inference in this way. One cannot treat a hypothetical action description like a hypothetical news item. Different reasoning is appropriate in the two cases. What Benny engaged in was the following pattern of inference:

Suppose I make it the case that $p$.
\[ \ldots \]
\[ q \]
$q$ is a good thing.

So I should make it the case that $p$.

We have seen this pattern before: it is the same pattern used by our critics in deliberating whether to attack the young jaguar. As a general pattern for hypothetical practical reasoning, it is flawless. So the problem must lie in the three dots, in the way Benny moved from $p$ to $q$. How should Benny infer? Clearly, he should suppose that he fights Tyson, but not in the sense of imagining that he learns that he will. Rather, he should imagine that he fights Tyson in the manner of deciding to do so.12 But what is that? We suggest that the mental act of hypothetically deciding to do something is simply another way of considering as a hypothesis the claim that you do the thing, but one given concrete content by a different—a non-indicative—pattern of material inferential updating. Had Benny been more sensible, he might have reasoned as follows (again, somewhat pedantically, and giving Benny more credit for philosophical acuity than he deserves):

Suppose I fight Tyson. The collection of (1)–(3) plus this supposition is inconsistent, so something has to change. But the only one of these beliefs that lies in my power to change [or: whose truth is caused by, or up to, me] is (1). In particular, (2) and (3) still stand, so fighting Tyson would endanger my life. By (6), that’s bad. So I shouldn’t fight.

From the outside, we can describe what Benny ought to do as leaving all his beliefs about the world outside himself fixed and imagining that he somehow magically manages to decide to fight anyway. Such would be magic because Benny already knows that he won’t fight in his current doxastic state. He knows as well as he knows anything that he is not going to get into the ring with Mike Tyson without a fix. (That’s how he has come to be, given genetics and environment. It is, as it were, a belief of Benny’s that he is causally determined not to...

12. This distinction between decisions and news-items will remind our astute readers of some discussions of Newcomb’s Paradox. Essentially, David Lewis’s argument for causal decision theory over subjective probability relies on the inappropriateness of evidential/news-item updating—that which underlies subjective probability—in the context of practical decisionmaking.
Booth has employed indicative updating perfectly well up to the last. The sophistry, of course, comes from obtaining "Lincoln is dead anyway" from a hypothetically considered "I didn’t shoot Lincoln." This is simply the wrong inference pattern to use — one should not imagine this hypothesis as if it were extra evidence we discover — and so the moral evaluation of the hypothesized action goes haywire. For purposes of this sort of evaluation, obviously, one should reason as follows:

Suppose I didn’t shoot Lincoln. Then (hypothetically speaking) Lincoln didn’t die. So my action made the difference between the president living and dying, and its moral significance is a function of this.

Indicative updating leads to absurdity when it is deployed in the context of this sort of practical reasoning. (Which is not to say that it leads to absurdity in all sorts of practical reasoning.) Similarly, if subjunctive updating is used in situations calling for indicative updating, a comparable absurdity results. Supposing Booth hadn’t shot Lincoln, Lincoln wouldn’t have been killed: that is the proper subjunctive pattern of reasoning, employable in evaluating Booth’s behavior. But now imagine that we actually uncover evidence that Booth didn’t, in fact, shoot Lincoln. If we use the subjunctive pattern of reasoning to process our evidence, we would conclude that Lincoln wasn’t shot after all!

5. Two "spaces of reasons"

Now imagine a finite natural critter, functionally designed to engage in the two sorts of hypothetical updating and to apply them in the "right" circumstances. That is, imagine that the critter uses indicative updating when it actually gets evidence and also when trying to carry on debates about what to conclude in the face of new data. In these debates it engages in hypothetical indicative updating. Given a facility with explicating vocabulary, this may result in a conditional \( p \rightarrow q \), ready to engage immediately with any future observing that \( p \), to produce \( q \) straightaway. More carefully, the critter is bound by a canonical indicative inference procedure (CIP):
Suppose $p$ is true (i.e., suppose $p$ in the way one does when one learns it).

Run $p$ through a simulation of indicative updating.

Simulation produces $q$.

Conclude: if $p$ is the case, then $q$ is the case, where this conditional functions as an inference license to conclude $q$ upon coming to learn that $p$.

As well, the critter is inclined to engage in hypothetical subjunctive updating, a different process of revising beliefs. The implicit material inferential process of practical updating is also governed by a canonical type of inference, the canonical subjunctive inference procedure (csip), with roughly the following form:

Suppose $p$ were true (e.g., suppose $p$ in the way one does when one sees to it that $p$).

Run $p$ through a process of subjunctive updating.

Simulation produces $q$.

Evaluate $q$.

Determine whether $p$ is desirable (or to be done) on the basis of this evaluation.

(A word about the evaluation step. There are, of course, many specific versions of what it amounts to, whether claims about overall utility, about the breaking of deontic rules, or about fulfillments of virtuous character. All that matters for present circumstances is that one needs to update in the way that, intuitively, tells one what happens if one were to make it the case that $p$; such is clearly necessary on any view of action evaluation.)

Each system of updating requires the other. Neither updating system is of any value—indeed even intelligible—alone. A critter which lacked the indicative updating system would not routinely integrate new information, and hence would have no timely empirical knowledge (or even belief) on which to base its decisions about what to do. Nothing that could be called rational action could be produced by such a critter. On the other side, a critter that lacked the subjunctive updating system would either not be able to deploy its new information in action at all or would do so in insanely wrong ways—concluding that it is a good thing to fight Mike Tyson, since doing so is evidence that one must have succeeded in fixing the fight. Such a creature would, as Quine says, have the pathetic but laudable tendency to die before reproducing, and an attempt to understand such a creature as a rational agent would fail miserably.

Thus it seems to be transcendentally necessary—“transcendentally” in a modest sense that applies to the finite natural creatures we have been focusing on—that the diachronic space of reason and belief have a dual topography. Any believer, that is, who can count as having empirical knowledge deployable in practical inference will update in both indicative and subjunctive ways. Understanding of the world essentially involves stereoscopic vision.

Before proceeding, one caution: our claim is not that all legitimate uses of subjunctive reason result in practical inference, or that no legitimate uses of indicative reason support practical inference. One can reason subjunctively toward an empirical conclusion, as in:

If that observation were veridical, then we would have seen such-and-so other phenomena. We didn’t. So it isn’t.

Similarly, as we emphasized, updating in the face of new evidence often has practical effects. The claim is merely that the patterns of material inferential propriety that we label “indicative” and “subjunctive” are instituted around particular overarching norms—csip and csip, respectively. These two procedures constitute the distinct, albeit intimately related, practical skeletons upon which grow the detailed sinew of material inferential moves. Correct indicative (subjunctive) material inferential practice is to make moves that are rational in the context of csip (csip) inferring, and a skillful practice of such indicative
(subjunctive) material inference evolves in response to the demands of \( \text{csip} \) (\( \text{csip} \)) contexts. Once these are up and running, there will be many more complex, albeit essentially derivative, uses of each sort of inference, indeed, uses that stand in support of the other practice. Our claim is emphatically not that \( \text{csip} \) and \( \text{csip} \) remain unrelated practices running in parallel. Rather, they function together to afford a sort of stereoscopic vision of our place in the world. And as with any good stereoscopic vision, the trick is both to recognize that there are two distinct images involved and to understand how the integration of those images yields overall understanding.

6. Agents and subjects

We are now in a position to begin to answer the question we began the paper with: what is a person? And how are persons related to subjects and agents? Our stance approach instructs us first to transform these questions into questions about what it is to take a critter to be a person, subject, or agent. Answers to those questions are now at hand.

Taking a critter to be an agent is evaluating their performances by applying the \( \text{csip} \): considering hypothetically what happened in virtue of their performance, and what else might have happened had they performed differently, and to evaluate those performances vis-à-vis the subjunctive hypothetical alternatives. Taking an act to be free is to take this procedure to be appropriately applicable in a particular case. For the critter to be an agent, or for the act to be free, is for it to be appropriate to treat their performances (in general, or in a particular case) as subject to the \( \text{csip} \).

Likewise, taking a critter to be a subject—a believer, a locus of linguistic commitment—is treating their linguistic performances as subject to the canonical indicative inference procedure. That is, one reasons with them about what is the case, taking their productions to be fodder for inference according to the rational structure applicable to new beliefs of one’s own.\(^{15}\) In this way, one is open to the possibilities both of changing their mind and of having one’s own mind changed by reasoning procedures common to both the other and oneself. For the critter to be a subject, again, means that it is appropriate to engage them this way.

Since, as we have argued, subjection and agency go together for finite natural creatures, taking someone to be a person is just treating them in this complex indicative and subjunctive fashion. If it is appropriate to treat them this way, they are a person indeed.

These “takings”—to be an agent and to be a subject, and thus to be a person—obviously are not merely matters of having beliefs about something. Rather, they are practical stances toward something, stances of evaluation and reasoning together. Thus, our stance approach, as opposed to a metaphysical approach, is justified, and would be justified even if what made these practical stances toward objects appropriate were simply a matter of facts about them. But what does make these stances appropriate, in the relevant sense?

Back in section 1 we said that it is appropriate to take someone to be a person when the taking is for reasons that contribute something to the point of using the concept person, that is, thinking of anything at all as a person. The paradigm case of personhood, as we have seen, is a subject/agent: someone we can reason theoretically and practically with, whose actions can be evaluated hypothetically and who can evaluate ours in turn. In short, a person is a member of a rational community, “one of us”. And the reasons to take someone to be a person, which make it appropriate to do so, will be reasons to treat someone as a member of such a community, as one of us. As a kind of negative example, when the Roman Senate was forced to treat Caligula’s horse as a senator (and hence a person), their reasons for doing so had nothing to do with the horse’s ability to contribute to a rational community. Hence, though it was “appropriate” in a brutally pragmatic sense for the senators to adopt certain stances toward Caligula’s horse, it was not appropriate in the relevant, hence-the-horse-is-a-person sense.

And here lies the point of the distinction between persons and non-persons: it is the distinction between those who are members of

\(^{15}\) The practical structure of this attitude we take toward one another in speech is the subject of Kukla and Lance (in progress).
the rational community, those who are “one of us”, with whom we can interact mind-to-mind, and those which are not. The necessity for drawing a distinction between persons and objects lies in the fact that, for most of the entities we encounter, we do not judge it appropriate to treat their performances in the manner constitutive of taking them to be subjects and agents. We do not judge it appropriate because, however flexible and generous one wants to be, there is no practical way to take a tree or a rock to be a member of a rational community, engaged in a complex pattern of assertion, evaluation, and hypothetical reasoning. Perhaps it is conceivable that we might have lived in a world full of persons but no mere objects. But it is clear now why it is not conceivable that we might have lived in a world of objects but no persons.

For we, we first-person thinkers, are undeniably persons. In acting, we consider multiple options and evaluate them against one another; that is, we use the CSIP in its prospective form. In thinking, we reason out our beliefs, both within ourselves and with each other. Engaging in these activities is just what it is to have a mind with intentional states; we could not conceive of ourselves in the first person without engaging in these activities. Of course, we are not really persons, or free, unless it is appropriate to engage ourselves in these practices. But there is obviously a kind of practical necessity to them—we could only fail to take them to be appropriate at the price of excluding ourselves from any rational community—and we must therefore regard ourselves as free persons. Claims that we are not free have a kind of performative incoherence: the very conditions of making a claim at all militate against the truth of this claim, and the self-conception of the claim-maker as a claim-maker also militates against it. So, if the alterna-

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tive is genuinely incoherent, it is hard to see how any view short of generic skepticism about appropriateness could deny that taking this stance toward ourselves is appropriate.

It should also be clear that it is treatment of an individual, rather than treatment of a performance (whether a speech act or some other act), that is primary in our view. The attitudes we invoke to elucidate personhood constitute practices in which we finite natural critters participate, practices which constitute a community of individuals. A performance may be exempt from a canonical inference procedure for any of a number of reasons, but once we begin treating individuals as subject to the canonical inference procedures, a performance of theirs will have to be exempted for a reason. The default treatment of a performance is that it is subject to canonical inference procedures. Therefore there will be no doers of very occasional free acts, or critters with one or two beliefs in their heads. We will not begin to incorporate an individual into these practices, and hence into our community, without the confidence that most of their behavior can be so incorporated.

7. Sidestepping some metaphysical worries

We suggest that this way of thinking about things neatly sidesteps traditional disputes about the apparent conflict of free will and determinism. On this view, taking someone to be free is not taking them to fall under a description but adopting a practical stance, taking up a strategy of interaction with them. Since what it is to take up that interactive strategy is understood simply in terms of a propensity to deliberate about and with the other in a particular manner, there is no incompatibility with determinism. One can imagine as brutally mechanistic a picture of the world as one likes, say, that all the critters are rule-governed automatons. But so long as the “wiring diagram” of the critters causes their behavior to follow, to a reasonably close approximation, the stereoscopic normative structure of evidential and subjunctive updating, and so long as they update in more or less proper ways via CSIP and CSIP, we will be able to take them, and they will be taking each

16. Sellars’s little discussed “original image” is one in which everything is taken to be an agent. It is as a revision and development of this image, according to Sellars, that the manifest and scientific images emerge. (See “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man.”)

17. It is not just what it is to have a mind in the sense of a phenomenal consciousness, but there are presumably many phenomenally conscious critters that are not persons.
other, to be free. (“Approximation” and “more or less” allow for some divergence from the ideal, but not so much that interpretation fails.) And if it is appropriate to take such creatures to be subjects — believers and thinkers — then, since this is inconceivable in abstraction from an assumption of agency, it will as well be appropriate to take them to be free, which, according to our stance approach, is what it is to be free.

Our approach offers dissolution of another metaphysical worry. For pedagogical purposes, we have been characterizing subjunctive updating as beginning with an assumption that a small miracle occurs. But we needn’t take this as suggesting that the agent needs to consider the idea of a miracle. What the agent does is hypothetically entertain a new belief and change certain others according to the subjunctive updating pattern rather than the indicative updating pattern, whenever they act. That is, they deliberate according to the cs ir. In the case of Benny, the crucial point in this subjunctive process is that he rejects belief (1) rather than (3), despite the fact that (1) is initially more strongly held. This is just a pattern of hypothetical diachronic updating, nothing more, certainly not any belief that miracles are possible.

But does the employment of such a hypothetical updating strategy involve an implicit commitment to the possibility of miracles? This depends on how seriously, more precisely how descriptively, one takes mental or linguistic acts within the process of hypothetical updating. One could suppose that what one is doing is running through what one supposes to be the history of a possible world — a situation that could exist. If so, then such a commitment would be implicit. But one could also take this whole linguistically articulated process to involve no objective purport whatsoever. What one is committed to, in employing a hypothetical subjunctive updating strategy, is merely the process of deliberation, that is, the appropriateness of basing action evaluations on the outcome. And the initial step of hypothesizing that an act occurs in the course of world history need not imply that it is possible that such an act would happen. This is not, of course, to say that there is no connection to commitments about possibility and necessity implicit in our judgments of hypothetical reason; we return to this point below. But it is to say that reasoning of the form “If I were to do A, then B would follow” need not commit one to the possibility of a history exactly like ours, with laws exactly like ours, followed by my doing A. In the end, there is another reversal of explanatory order. The notions of possibility and necessity will turn out to be conceptually dependent upon those of appropriate deliberation rather than the other way around.

Sidestepping these metaphysical worries surrounding the notion of freedom, however, raises a different worry about our overall approach in this paper. For what prevents us from simply saying that a person is a critic whose behavior follows (closely enough) the normative structures of evidential and subjunctive updating, that is, who updates in accord with the cs ir and s ir? Such a metaphysical characterization of personhood would avoid the complications of the stance approach.

Those complications are avoided, however, only at the price of losing the core insights behind the present account. Equating personhood with the ability to make a complex set of state transitions loses the idea that, in taking someone to be a person, we take their assertions to have import for us, and ours for them; we take our reasoning to be reasoning they can grasp and follow, and vice versa; we take their actions to be subject to our evaluations, and our actions to be evaluable by them. In taking someone to be a person we not only entertain beliefs about them but we include them in a set of practices constitutive of the community of minds.

More than that, however, the metaphysical approach to personhood requires us to specify the person-making pattern of state transitions, and this is impossible. For our best take on the normative structures of evidential and subjunctive updating, by which we judge others and (attempt to) interpret them as believers and agents, is simply our own set of structures. But our normative structures are subject to revision and correction by other persons. We could not identify per-

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18. Though of course such a supposition is consistent with the thought that a modeling of such reasoning in terms of possible worlds is useful for purposes of making explicit logical and structural features of the discourse.
sonhood with the ability to make our pattern of transitions, since those may change. We might have identified personhood with the ability to make the right pattern of state transitions, but that is a fundamentally normative characterization. It has no advantages over the view we actually advocate, and it abandons the insights into the communal aspects of subjectivity, agency, and personhood we have outlined.

8. Updating and conditionals

It is by now hardly a secret that the two inference procedures we are talking about are precisely those procedures associated with indicative and subjunctive conditionals. The procedure of evidential updating, where we imagine that \( p \) is true (in the way one would if one learned \( p \))\(^9\) and see how this ramifies throughout our indicative updating system, is precisely the Ramsey test for an indicative conditional. It is, said Ramsey, how one goes about determining whether to believe the conditional \( \text{If } p \text{ is the case, then } q \text{ is the case.} \) (Of course this is usually presented in a probabilistic framework, but nothing hangs on that here, and it would be easy to restate the whole story in those terms.) The procedure of imagining a small miracle (in our parable, an action against character), and then letting that event ramify out through one’s beliefs via the workings of one’s subjunctive updating system, is the (David) Lewis test for the truth of a subjunctive. This is how Lewis said that one should determine the truth of \( \text{If } p \text{ were the case, then } q \text{ would be the case.} \)

But the current story has things almost exactly the other way around from the standard one. On the account being developed here, indicative and subjunctive conditionals are a form of “explicitating vocabulary”,\(^{20}\) used to put into language the results of different patterns of inference. Ramsey’s and Lewis’s tests are after-the-fact heuristics we use to produce explicit accounts of these inferential patterns. Whereas standard discussions of conditionals began with conditional sentences, supposed they must be given semantic accounts, and then offered procedures to define truth (or warrant) conditions for them, we put things the other way around. We need the habits of updating quite independently of any need to evaluate the truth (or probability) of conditionals. The concept of conditionality, and the associated practice of hypothetical assumption, arise at a more complex level of language use, within the context of social dispute about how to update beliefs or actions. And it is as an explicit recording of the argumentative results of such hypothetical reasoning and dispute that the two sorts of conditionals arise. In Brandomian terms, indicatives make explicit underlying updating proprieties apt for the \( \text{CSIP} \) context, while subjunctives make explicit underlying updating proprieties apt for the \( \text{CSIP} \) context.

9. Further remarks on subjunctives and modality

Suppose we accept the general idea that conditionals are ways of making explicit various sorts of inferential propriety implicit in a practice of updating, and that subjunctive conditionals, in particular, make explicit the proprieties of the practice of what we have been calling subjunctive updating. As we know, however, subjunctive conditionals may have nothing to do with action, and moreover they can be formulated in terms of possible worlds. We need to be clear how our account accommodates these facts.

Our approach will again be to reverse the usual order of explanation. Rather than explicating the semantics of subjunctive conditionals in terms of worlds (and miracles), we will understand subjunctives as

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9. This awkward way of putting things is necessary to avoid the fallacy of equating “Suppose \( p \)” with “Suppose you learned that \( p \)” (“If Reagan was a \( \text{KB} \) agent, I will never know” is not the claim “If I learned that Reagan was a \( \text{KB} \) agent, I will never know.”) Likewise, “Suppose \( p \)” and “Suppose someone made it the case that \( p \)” are not equivalent. Both the “made it the case that” operator and the “learned that” operator have to be treated as flags for methods of updating, not part of what is updated on.

20. Not, we think, the same explicating conditional locations of most central interest to Brandom in Making It Explicit, but to argue for this would require untangling the complicated things Brandom says about conditionals. At any rate, he does not develop this way of characterizing the underlying practical ground of the indicative/subjunctive distinction.
expressing proprieties of subjunctive updating and then understand modal talk in terms of subjunctives and the logical framework within which they function. Claims about possibility, then, play a special role within the practice of subjunctive updating and are to be understood in terms of that role, which is itself derivative of the role played by subjunctives.

Given our claim that subjunctive conditionals, and their distinction from indicative conditionals, arise in contexts of practical reasoning, one might expect that ur-subjunctives would be agential, that is, of the form "If Joe were to do X, then y would be the case." Yet once the structure of updating is in place—once one has a general set of norms governing subjunctive updating, which together with conditional locutions and the act of supposition give rise to subjunctive conditionals—one can apply the procedure in a way that abstracts from the individual agent. For any claim $p$, one can turn $p$ into an agential claim by way of the "sees to it that" operator. Given the claim 'There is a pot roast in the living room,' that is, one can construct the agential sentence 'Joe sees to it that there is a pot roast in the living room.' And from this one can abstract away from Joe and consider merely 'It is seen to that there is a pot roast in the living room.'

This last sentence expresses a claim usable as input to the subjunctive updating process. The "it is seen to" locution, at this point, does nothing but flag the fact that it is the subjunctive (rather than indicative) updating process that is being employed, making explicit that the

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21. Nuel Belnap and his various colleagues and students have developed an elaborate account of agency and much else based on this operator. See Facing the Future: Agents and Choices in Our Indeterminist World, ed. Nuel Belnap, Michael Perloff, Ming Xu, with contributions by Paul Bartha, Mitchell Green, and John Hory. Note here that we make a weaker claim than Belnap et al. They say that a sentence is agential iff it is equivalent to a sttr claim. We assert merely that all sttr claims are agential. Indeed, we emphatically deny the converse and also make no commitment to any of the rest of the Belnap et al. analysis of sttr claims or agentives. (A student of one of us, Chauncey Maher, is currently writing a dissertation which develops detailed objections to the Belnap et al. framework on very general grounds, especially the underlying idea that acts are to be individuated in terms of their causal or deterministic consequences.)

22. And perhaps more, depending on how one characterizes the notion of a declarative. Kukla and Lance (in progress) argues for a revisionary conception of the space of speech acts in which declaratives are just one sort of speech act the content of which can occur in the antecedent of a conditional.
hypothesised updating is to allow us to consider claims that aren’t true, the inferential context will still have some constraints governing intel-
ligible input. One cannot reason intelligently about what would be the case if \( p \), in the face of a \( p \) that already violates the relevant inferential norms. Our underlying inferential practice can rule out various claims by failing to provide any intelligible updating potential to them.

We suggest that the function of modal language is to mark, or make explicit, this sort of intelligibility constraint. Claims that stymie subjunctive updating, proximately or ultimately, are impossible. By familiar equivalences, we can derive the notions of possibility and necessity. To claim that \( p \) is possible is to say that \( p \) is admissible to the subjunctive updating process, that is, to endorse subjunctive updating via “it is seen to that \( p \.” Similarly, \( p \) is necessary just in case its nega-
tion is impossible.\(^\text{23}\)

The same sort of story should make sense for weaker modalities. To say that a claim is physically impossible is to deny that it is appro-
 priate fodder for even hypothetical inference within the limits of phys-
ical theory. Weaker modalities will also figure in the next section.

10. On not confusing freedom and possibility

We have just claimed that metaphysical possibility is a matter of admis-
sibility to a process of subjunctive updating; earlier we argued that free acts were those that are appropriate to subject to the canonical sub-
 junctive inference procedure. And yet not everything possible is free.

There are many reasons to deny, of a given performance, that it is appropriate to deploy the \( \text{cs} \) on it. These are traceable to two different sources: either a performance is not suitable for subjunctive up-
dating, or it is not suitable for evaluation in the relevant sense. (Here we make direct contact with Strawson’s discussion.)

Being metaphysically impossible is an extreme case in which the subjunctive updating aspect of the \( \text{cs} \) is inappropriate, but it is far

from the only case. Less drastic notions of impossibility may also make it unreasonable to deploy the \( \text{cs} \) with respect to an act of an agent. If Joe is tied to a chair — or indeed even under strong enough psychological pressure, subject to depression, paralyzed by fear, etc. — it may be practically impossible, though not metaphysically impossible, that he get up and dance a waltz. That lesser sort of impossibility is suf-


\(^\text{23}\) Compare the accounts of universal and existential quantification as licenses or prohibitions regarding material contexts in “Quantification, Substitution, and Conceptual Content.”

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tion. This is not to say, however, that once the subjunctive updating norms are up and running, one must use them only for the purpose of decisionmaking and action evaluation. One can put subjunctive thoughts to other uses, ones that don’t apply the full inferential structure that founds the logical space in the first place. Something can be inappropriate as input to the csir and yet not be inappropriate as fodder for the subjunctive inferential process abstracted from its founding normative point.

11. Causation
What is striking about our characterization of persons and freedom so far is the absence of any discussion of causation. We have characterized our stances purely in terms of two forms of updating—made explicit as indicative and subjunctive conditionals—and two canonical inferential procedures making use of those forms of updating. That is, we have characterized the stances without using the notion of causation at all. But this is not to say that the notion of causation is entirely absent. On the contrary, we suggest that causal talk is a final important form of explicitating vocabulary, used, perhaps surprisingly, to make explicit the propriety of moves within the process of updating that begins with practical deliberation.

Some evidential updating can be seen as implicitly causal: beliefs about the future often follow this pattern, because in such cases the evidential updating procedure typically follows the subjunctive updating procedure. However, when one discovers a new fact, one sometimes revises various present-tense and past-tense beliefs that were held antecedently. This process is in no sense a matter of following out the causal consequences of one’s new information. Suppose for instance that you discover some new DNA evidence and conclude that Booth didn’t shoot Lincoln. Then you go on to conclude that the trial was mistaken, that a great miscarriage of justice took place, that someone else shot Lincoln, etc. But whether any of this is true hardly depends causally on the discovery of the DNA. (Though the resulting view will be structured temporally according to some coherent sense of causal regularity, of course. Stereoscopic vision must integrate the two perspectives.)

By contrast, subjunctive updating always seems to be a process that accords with what we believe will happen upon following out the causal consequences of a particular act. More important, however, is the point that mere updating in accord with some (causal) pattern does not amount to even a tacit commitment to a notion of causation. One is not, even implicitly, using a notion of causation just because one expects certain regularities to occur. Rather, a concept of causation requires a sense of the modally robust nature of the regularity. One must be committed to the claim that the later event had to happen, given the earlier event.

A subject’s inferential behavior achieves a point of complexity such that the postulation of genuine, if implicit, conceptions of causality are demanded of the interpreter precisely when the subject begins to engage in explicit hypothetical subjunctive reasoning. Consider the critter who reasons as follows: “If I were to try to hit the jaguar with the stick, it would turn to attack me, whereupon its back side would be open to you to stab it.” This critter is committed to an inference license, one that she takes to express appropriateness across some more or less wide, more or less precise range of circumstances. Thus, it is at just this point that our critter is committed to a modally robust sense of what would happen, hence of the difference that things have to make (given the background circumstances). This kind of critter has a folk conception of causation, for they are capable of clearly marking a distinction between evidential and causal relations. Whatever else is involved, causal claims involve subjunctives. If A causes B, then seeing to it that A would lead to B.

Since it is the explicitation of subjunctive updating proprieties as subjunctive conditionals that gives us a bit of language semantically regimentable in terms of possible worlds, it is not surprising that we should identify hypothetical subjunctive updating as the site of modal

24. Again, within a different overall explanatory structure, this is the point of David Lewis’s causal decision theory.
commitment. One cannot, that is, begin so much as to consider whether the ball has to move when hit — whether there is a mere following of one thing on another, or genuine causation — unless one can consider what would happen if something else were to happen. But one can do that only if one can make explicit the practice of subjunctive updating. Hence, we are in a position to see that it is within the practices of practical deliberation — the logical space of freedom — that the concept of causation arises.

Our aim in this section has not been to give an account of causation — our discussion doesn’t amount to that. Our point rather is this: the concept of causation is a complex one arising in many distinct forms within both the manifest and the scientific image. All conceptions of causation, however, involve counterfactual connections to what would happen if one were to intervene in the world. Counterfactualness arises within the practical (i.e., subjunctive) inferential space, and so it is fundamentally on this space that any notion of causation depends.25

12. Are we free?

Let us take stock. We have identified two interlocked topographies of the space of reasons, not in the sense of giving some sort of detailed logical mapping, but by assimilating them to the familiar distinction between indicative and subjunctive conditionals. We have seen that the distinction between these spaces arises necessarily out of the dual diachronic requirements on the process of belief: that systems of belief be updatable in the face of new evidence, and that they allow for practical deliberation on the basis of that evidence. Because of this, we cannot so much as coherently imagine a paradigmatic, finite natural subject who is not an agent, or agent who is not a subject, and there would be no use for either substructure of the space of reasons without the other.26 Further, we have given at least a superficial gloss on the explicitying role that talk of freedom, possibility, necessity, and causation play within such a structure, and we have seen why we have no choice but to adopt the participant stance towards ourselves. This leaves only the metaphysical question — the one those not so taken with the stance approach have been waiting patiently for us to answer.

We have said that for an act to be free is for it to be appropriate to deploy a certain pattern of counterfactual reasoning and evaluation in coping with it. Thus to claim in general that there are free acts is to claim that there are instances in which this procedure is appropriate. This is a normative commitment, and we claim there is no reducing this commitment to anything else. It’s not as if there are any conditions storable without normative vocabulary that will allow us to provide a reduction of the notion of freedom, because freedom simply is being such that counterfactual evaluations are appropriately applied in deliberating about one. (Recall the discussion in section 7.) Freedom, then, if it exists, is a fundamental element of the world, just as much as objects, causation, and so on.

We have argued that we are committed to the existence of freedom already, simply by involvement not only in practices of deliberation but in the practice of making empirical claims. Empirical claiming and subjunctive deliberating essentially require one another, though neither is the other. Anyone who conceives of themselves as a believer and an agent is committed to their own freedom, and also committed to the freedom of anyone else whom they take to be a believer and agent.

That is what we have claimed, but are we right? What can we say to the skeptic who admits that deliberation is a thing we do but who denies that there is any real freedom? The objection might be that

25. Note that here, too, the point seems quite independent of whether one is a libertarian, soft determinist, or hard determinist. A libertarian, we think, ought to be able to take the point that the concept of causation arises out of the logical space of freedom. This strikes us as interesting, though we don’t know exactly what it implies.

26. Again, the adjectives ‘finite natural’ and ‘paradigmatic’ are crucial. Once we have on board the idea of a being to whom we appropriately attribute the essentially linked capacities of agency and subjectivity, we can — if it proves useful for some purpose — identify various non-paradigmatic agents as “relevantly similar” to this paradigm. And such non-standard persons might well lack, say, agency, while retaining subjectivity.
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what we have provided an account of is not freedom but something else, perhaps intentional action, perhaps mere deliberation.27 To that, there is and can be no definitive answer. Central concepts, like that of freedom and personhood, stand or fall with the attractiveness of a holistic philosophical vision. We have done what we could, within present limits, to provide enough of a holistic picture and to motivate it.

Alternatively, the skeptic might admit that deliberation is a thing we do, and that it involves a commitment to the freedom of ourselves and of those we evaluate, but deny that this commitment is realized: we are just mistaken about being free, because our practice is incoherent. We take it, though, that a sufficiently clear account of what it is to take an act to be free — and we aim to have provided a sufficiently clear account — insulates us from this kind of challenge. We do claim to have shown — granted only in outline, but not unconvincingly for all that — that there is intelligible sense to be made of what is going on when we say that an act is free: it is a normative endorsement of treating that act as appropriately belonging in a particular logical space. So there can be no serious worry about the coherence of the commitment to freedom, whether by mental act or speech act, or of the practice from which such commitments arise.

What other possibilities for objection are there? The skeptic could of course raise motivated, serious doubts about the freedom of this or that act from within the participant stance. These are the sorts of things Strawson talked about — conditions under which we genuinely shouldn’t take up the csir (the participant stance) toward acts — and we have no problem with this. There are many sorts of things that make it, in a particular case, inappropriate to treat a given act as free. But none of this challenges the existence of freedom per se.

So the skeptical claim will have to be that though it is coherent to treat acts as free, as it happens, all acts fall short of the conditions of freedom. What can we say to this?

Consider again the question: Are there any free acts? This interrogative is an invitation to assert either “Some acts are free” or “No acts are free.” We have argued so far that the former answer is an endorsement of subjunctive updating and evaluation, and the latter a rejection of it in all cases. But given the interconnections between subjunctive and indicative updating, to reject the practice of subjunctive updating across the board is to reject the practice of reasoning altogether, including the conceptual space within which the skeptic has tried to make it rationally incumbent upon us to assert either “Some acts are free” or “No acts are free.” Not only, that is, do we feel not the slightest inclination to reject conceptual space, but the skeptic is herself betraying a commitment to concepts, thus to conceptual norms, thus to practices of empirical evaluation, thus to practices of subjunctive evaluation, thus to the notion of freedom we have advocated, in the very asking of the question. By asking, that is, the skeptic is participating in a practice an essential part of which is the undertaking of implicit commitment to the existence of freedom. The skeptic is left in the position of committing herself to the existence of freedom — i.e., engaging in a practice essentially involving the participant stance — while at the same time offering up a bare unmotivated demand that others justify doing so. And if failure to take up this demand was tantamount to failure to be entitled to believe in freedom, it would also be failure to be entitled to believe or do anything at all. Beyond even global skepticism, this is abandoning the project of being a person altogether. That, we take it, is paradigmatic of the sort of demand for justification that rationality allows us to ignore.

27. Someone might think this because our notion of evaluating acts includes no notion of holding an agent responsible, or holding failures against them. Praiseworthiness, blameworthiness, and moral responsibility for acts strike us as (narrowly) separate issues from whether acts are free. However, our position includes the resources for an argument to the effect that most actions of agents are not only free but actions for which the agent is responsible. We have suggested that the concept of agent is one which we order in order to identify the members of a rational community. However, no genuine community can exist without accountability among its members, at least among finite natural critters, and we will not begin to incorporate someone into our community unless we consider it appropriate, by and large, to hold them responsible for their actions. So whenever it is appropriate to treat someone as an agent, there will be (many) appropriate instances of holding that agent responsible for her actions.
So what is freedom—just the thing, with no pragmatism about the concept? Freedom, and nothing else. Are there free acts? Of course; our writing this paper is one example.

References
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Heath White, “Fitting Attitudes, Wrong Kinds of Reasons, and Mind-Independent Goodness” (manuscript under review).
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