

## Defending Direct Source Incompatibilism

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**Abstract** Joseph Keim Campbell has attempted to say “farewell” to a particular version of source incompatibilism, viz. direct source incompatibilism, arguing that direct source incompatibilism is committed to two theses that are in tension, thereby threatening the coherence of the position. He states that direct source incompatibilism is committed to the following claims:

SI-F: there are genuine Frankfurt-style counterexamples.

SI-D: there is a sound version of the Direct Argument.

Campbell argues that both of these theses cannot be simultaneously held since a sound version of the Direct Argument would undermine Frankfurt-style counterexamples, and vice versa. After laying out Campbell’s argument, I will first make some preliminary comments regarding actual direct source incompatibilists and their commitment to SI-F and SI-D. I then object to Campbell’s argument, arguing that one can accept both SI-F and SI-D, thereby vindicating direct source incompatibilism from the charge of incoherence.

**Keywords** Incompatibilism · Moral responsibility · Direct argument

Traditional incompatibilists about moral responsibility and determinism affirm the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP), that an agent *S* is morally responsible for performing an action only if *S* could have done otherwise. Some theorists, however, claim that the agent must be the ultimate source or originator of an action in order to be morally responsible for that action. And some of these source incompatibilists argue that the control relevant for moral responsibility is grounded solely in the source condition and not in what the agent could have done. Such source incompatibilists deny PAP while maintaining that determinism precludes moral responsibility since it would undermine the proper source condition relevant for moral responsibility.

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In a recent article, Joseph Keim Campbell (2006) has attempted to say “farewell” to a particular version of source incompatibilism, viz. direct source incompatibilism (henceforth DSI), arguing that DSI is committed to two theses that are in tension, thereby threatening the coherence of the position. He states that DSI is committed to the following claims:

SI-F: there are genuine Frankfurt-style counterexamples (FSC).

SI-D: there is a sound version of the Direct Argument.

Campbell argues that both of these theses cannot be simultaneously held since a sound version of the Direct Argument would undermine FSCs, and vice versa. After laying out Campbell’s argument, I will first make some preliminary comments regarding actual DSI proponents and their commitment to both SI-F and SI-D. I then object to Campbell’s argument, claiming that one can accept both SI-F and SI-D, and thereby vindicating DSI from the charge of incoherence.

## 1 Direct Source Incompatibilism: FSCs and the Direct Argument

Here is how Campbell states the commitments of DSI:

First, the direct source incompatibilist rejects PAP on the basis of Frankfurt-style examples. Second, she supports [the incompatibility of moral responsibility and determinism] with a version of the direct argument (Campbell 2006, 37).

Consider a traditional *indirect* argument for incompatibilism:

- [i] If determinism is true, then no one could have done otherwise.
- [ii] If no one could have done otherwise, then no one is morally responsible.
- [iii] Thus, if determinism is true, then no one is morally responsible.

Of course, Harry Frankfurt (1969) notoriously offered counterexamples to PAP, thereby denying premise [ii] of the indirect argument. Given the putative lack of precision in Frankfurt’s original examples, various objections have been developed. In light of these objections, FSCs have undergone various revisions in order to provide a genuine counterexample to PAP. Several FSCs have been developed that include an indeterministic causal sequence (such as cases that rely on sequences involving over-determination, blockage, or necessary but insufficient prior signs). Even Derk Pereboom, a DSI proponent, has offered an indeterministic FSC (his tax-evasion case) that appears quite convincing (Pereboom 2003, 193). Instead of objecting to FSCs, DSI theorists concede that FSCs demonstrate the falsity of PAP yet maintain that even if alternative possibilities are irrelevant for moral responsibility, there are certain conditions for moral responsibility that are incompatible with determinism. So the traditional indirect argument is not available to the DSI theorist.

Since the DSI theorist must find some alternative argument, a likely candidate is the so-called Direct Argument originally developed by Peter van Inwagen (1983), which attempts to bypass the debate surrounding PAP by demonstrating that determinism directly precludes moral responsibility. The Direct Argument is

structurally similar to the Consequence Argument; however, the modal operators are different. Whereas the Consequence argument relies on a *powerlessness* operator, the Direct Argument utilizes the notion of non-responsibility. Let 'p' be any proposition, and let '□' stand for broad logical necessity; and let 'NRp' stand for 'p and no one is, or ever has been, even partly responsible for the fact that p'.<sup>1</sup> The Direct Argument then uses two inference principles, similar to Rule α and Rule β of the Consequence Argument:

- [A] □p ⊢ NRp.  
 [B] NR(p → q), NRp ⊢ NRq.

To run the argument, let 'P<sub>o</sub>' be a proposition about the state of the world at some time in the remote past, and let 'L' stand for the conjunction of the laws of nature. Then for some true proposition P (say, I am typing this paper):

- |                                  |                       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| [1] □((P <sub>o</sub> & L) → P)  | (def. of determinism) |
| [2] □(P <sub>o</sub> → (L → P))  | (1, exportation)      |
| [3] NR(P <sub>o</sub> → (L → P)) | (2, rule A)           |
| [4] NR P <sub>o</sub>            | (premise)             |
| [5] NR(L → P)                    | (3,4, rule B)         |
| [6] NRL                          | (premise)             |
| [7] NRP                          | (5,6, rule B)         |

Thus, I am not responsible for typing this paper. And the argument generalizes such that no one is ever responsible for any action given determinism.

If such an argument is successful, then incompatibilism can be demonstrated without recourse to contentious principles such as PAP and rule β. Nevertheless, the Direct Argument has been the subject of much criticism, and without much surprise, most of the objections are directed at the transfer of non-responsibility principle employed in the argument, viz. rule B. Similar to the debate over rule β of the Consequence Argument, various emendations to rule B have been developed to accommodate the different counterexamples against it. Without rehashing some of these counterexamples, I will avoid the debate as to which transfer principle is the correct one. But if the Direct Argument works, then there must be some valid transfer principle. So a DSI theorist's purported commitment to SI-D also commits her to the existence of a valid transfer of non-responsibility principle, and I will simply use 'Transfer NR' to refer to whichever transfer principle is a suitable one for the Direct Argument.

DSI, then, is committed to SI-D, the soundness of the Direct Argument (which requires a valid formulation of Transfer NR), and to SI-F, the legitimacy of FSCs. But Campbell argues that these two theses are at odds with each other. First, he offers an agent-relative formulation of Transfer NR, which is fairly innocuous:

- [B\*] From NR<sub>s</sub>(p) and NR<sub>s</sub>(p → q) deduce NR<sub>s</sub>(q).

<sup>1</sup> Campbell uses Widerker's formulation of 'NRp', which stands for 'p and no one is (now), or ever has been, morally responsible for the fact that p' in Widerker (2002), 317. I use van Inwagen's formulation since I will make use of the notion of partial responsibility later.

Now consider a FSC (such as the one proposed by Pereboom) where an agent S is morally responsible for evading his taxes. Let 'A' stand for the action of S evading his taxes. In that FSC, there is an actual (and indeterministic) causal sequence  $c$  that results in A, and let  $C_1$  be the proposition that sequence  $c$  obtains and results in S evading his taxes. As described in the case, there is also a counterfactual sequence  $c^*$  such that if  $c^*$  were to obtain, then it would also result in S evading his taxes; and let  $C_2$  be the proposition that sequence  $c^*$  obtains and results in S evading his taxes. Campbell then offers the following argument

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| [8] $\Box((C_1 \vee C_2) \rightarrow A)$ | (tautology)     |
| [9] $NR_s((C_1 \vee C_2) \rightarrow A)$ | (8, rule A)     |
| [10] $NR_s(C_1 \vee C_2)$                | (premise)       |
| [11] $NR_sA$                             | (9,10, rule B*) |

Campbell justifies [8] since A just is part of the content of both  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ ; and by rule A, [9] follows. He then states that [10] is true since “this fact was ensured by the intervener, for he made it the case that  $C_1 \vee C_2$  well before S made it the case that  $C_1$ ” (Campbell 2006, 44). Thus, we get [11] from the application of rule B\*. But [11] contradicts the conclusion of FSCs, that the agent is morally responsible for performing action A. Campbell concludes that anyone who upholds a valid principle of Transfer NR is committed to the denial that the agent is morally responsible in a FSC, and hence that there are no genuine FSCs. This is no problem for traditional incompatibilists since they deny the legitimacy of FSCs, and so they can maintain Transfer NR. On the other hand, anyone who endorses the genuineness of FSCs is committed to the invalidity of Transfer NR, and hence denies the soundness of the Direct Argument. So given that SI-F and SI-D cannot both be coherently maintained, Campbell claims that DSI is an inherently unstable position.

## 2 In Defense of DSI

Prior to addressing Campbell's argument, some preliminary remarks are in order regarding actual DSI theorists' commitment to SI-F and SI-D. Campbell cites Eleonore Stump and Derk Pereboom as proponents of DSI. Now Campbell should be cautious in citing Stump as an example of a DSI theorist since she has explicitly argued against the validity of Transfer NR principles, claiming that direct arguments do not succeed in demonstrating the incompatibility between moral responsibility and determinism (Stump & Fischer 2000).

Moreover, even though the DSI theorist cannot rely on the traditional indirect argument for incompatibilism, she does not need to rely her case solely on the Direct Argument. So far it may seem that Pereboom is a good candidate of a DSI theorist since he has offered the indeterministic FSC mentioned earlier and has briefly defended the Direct Argument (Pereboom 2001, 33–35). However, Pereboom has also offered a version of a non-direct argument for

incompatibilism—his well-known Manipulation Argument.<sup>2</sup> So even Pereboom's primary case for DSI does not need to depend on the Direct Argument (though he should still be considered as a DSI theorist since he does accept SI-D, even though the Direct Argument is not his primary argument for incompatibilism).

Nevertheless, it is an interesting thesis that SI-F and SI-D cannot be simultaneously endorsed on pains of incoherence. And if Campbell's argument is right, then any DSI proponent that endorses the conclusion of FSCs cannot be tempted to use the Direct Argument, thereby restricting the arguments at the DSI theorist's disposal. However, there are several objections that can be mounted against Campbell's argument; and I will argue that one can consistently espouse both SI-F and SI-D.

Let me restate Campbell's argument:

- [8]  $\Box((C_1 \vee C_2) \rightarrow A)$
- [9]  $NR_s((C_1 \vee C_2) \rightarrow A)$
- [10]  $NR_s(C_1 \vee C_2)$
- [11]  $NR_s A$

Premise [8] and [9] seem correct as set up. However, premise [10] is questionable. Campbell defends [10], that S is not (nor ever has been even partly) responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ , by claiming that such a fact was "ensured" by the counterfactual intervener (henceforth, CIN). Now one may suppose that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  in virtue of the fact that S is responsible for  $C_1$  (in the FSC) and  $C_1 \vee C_2$  logically follows from  $C_1$ , and so S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . Campbell however objects to such a move, for  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$  also logically follows from  $C_1$ ; but given that  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$  is a necessary truth, then by rule A, we get  $NR_s(C_1 \vee \sim C_1)$ . Nevertheless, one might still be able to claim that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  but not on the basis of logical entailment.

The problem with Campbell's defense of [10] is that it is not clear what he means when he states that the CIN "ensures" the fact that  $C_1 \vee C_2$ .<sup>3</sup> Now I agree that responsibility is not closed under entailment. After all, my being responsible for a person's operation and a person having an operation entails that a person exists does not yield my being responsible for that person's existence. But why exactly can't S be responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ ? Granting that responsibility does not transfer over entailment, it still seems possible that S's being responsible for  $C_1$  and S's being responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  can be true without S being responsible for  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$ . For  $C_1 \vee C_2$  and  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$  are not logically equivalent even if  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are mutually

<sup>2</sup> Pereboom's Manipulation Argument (2001, 110–119) is drastically different in form than the arguments mentioned so far, especially in that it amounts to an inductive argument for incompatibilism, arguing that there is no difference between various manipulation cases and a causally deterministic case.

<sup>3</sup> An anonymous reviewer suggests that what Campbell means by the CIN ensuring the fact that  $C_1 \vee C_2$  is just that the CIN does something to render it true that  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . Now Campbell does say something along these lines since he states that the CIN "made it the case that  $C_1 \vee C_2$  well before S made it the case that  $C_1$ " (Campbell 2006, 44). However, it is not clear what this means since Campbell does not explain in what way the CIN renders true  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . Moreover, I later argue that such a claim is not true, and that there is reason to believe that S is the one responsible for rendering true  $C_1 \vee C_2$  given my proposed logic of responsibility over disjunctives below.

incompatible propositions. It is possible that  $\sim(C_1 \vee C_2)$  be true given the possibility of a volcano erupting and killing both the agent and the counterfactual intervener prior to the act. However, it is necessary that  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$ . To be clear, I am not yet arguing that S is (at least partly) responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . I am merely claiming that Campbell has not given us a clear reason why it is not possible that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ ; and simply claiming that responsibility does not transfer over entailment is not an adequate reply.

Now there is a more worrisome objection to Campbell's argument. Let me restate a portion of Pereboom's FSC:

But to ensure that [S] chooses to evade taxes, a neuroscientist now implants a device which, were it to sense a moral reason occurring with the specified force, *would* electronically stimulate his brain so that he *would* choose to evade taxes (Pereboom 2003, 193). [*italics mine*]

Campbell claims that  $NR_s(C_1 \vee C_2)$  because the CIN ensures the fact  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . But this seems to give the wrong description of what's going on. Rather, the CIN ensures that S evades his taxes, and so ensures the truth of A and not the disjunction. In fact, it's not at all clear that the CIN is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  since he doesn't actually do anything at all to ensure that either the causal sequence  $c$  or  $c^*$  obtain; and hence, he is not responsible for either the truth of  $C_1$  or the truth of  $C_2$ . Rather, the CIN is responsible for the following subjunctive conditionals<sup>4</sup> (for what *would have* caused the agent to perform the action):  $\sim C_1 > C_2$  and  $C_1 > \sim C_2$ . Other than implanting the device, which ensures that action A occurs, the CIN is not responsible for anything else in the actual sequence, which is why agent S is normally attributed responsibility for A in FSCs.<sup>5</sup> It would seem that if the CIN were to be responsible for ensuring  $C_1 \vee C_2$ , then he would have to be responsible for bringing about  $c$  or bringing about  $c^*$ ; but in the actual causal sequence, the CIN doesn't bring about anything at all (aside from implanting some device that ensures that A will be true). However, given what is indicated in an FSC, S is responsible for bringing about  $c$ , and thus S is responsible for rendering true  $C_1$ . And since S is not responsible for the pair of subjunctives, instead of [10], the following premise is what we get from FSCs:

[10\*]  $NR_s([\sim C_1 > C_2] \ \& \ [C_1 > \sim C_2])$ .

And [11] does not follow from [10\*]; hence, Campbell's argument does not lead to the result that S is not responsible for A. So premise [10] is the wrong premise to use based on the FSC scenario; and if [10\*] is what follows from FSCs, then there is no obvious incompatibility between Transfer NR (in this case, rule B\*) and FSCs.

Let me take stock. I claim that nothing in Campbell's argument gives us any reason not to concede the possibility of S's responsibility for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . Moreover, I have argued that premise [10] is not the right premise from FSCs, but rather that FSCs license another premise [10\*] such that [11] (the anti-FSC conclusion) does

<sup>4</sup> I will use '>' to stand for the subjunctive conditional.

<sup>5</sup> Even though the CIN ensures the truth of A, that claim is consistent with the claim that S is responsible for A since one of the ways in which A becomes true is through the agency of S in causal sequence  $c$  (which is the actual sequence in the FSC).

not follow. However, these arguments do not show that it is the case that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . I suspect that S really is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  in the FSC; and so even if [10] could be derived from FSCs, it would nevertheless be a false premise. But if S is responsible for  $C_1$ , then how can we get the claim that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  if not by logical entailment?

It is difficult to grasp what it means to be responsible for a disjunction. Still, I will attempt to provide an account of the logic of responsibility with respect to a disjunctive proposition. Consider the following contingent proposition:

[D] I am stealing from the bank or Obama is kicking Bo.<sup>6</sup>

If I am responsible for stealing from the bank and if Obama is responsible for kicking Bo, then it seems that we are both partially responsible for D by being responsible for our respective disjunct. However, if I am responsible for stealing from the bank and Obama is not responsible for kicking Bo, then I am solely responsible for D. This seems to be the correct result since I would be responsible for rendering D true by rendering true one of its disjuncts. Obama is not responsible for kicking Bo since he does not render true the proposition that he is kicking Bo (and no one is responsible since that state of affairs doesn't obtain). So it seems right to claim that I am responsible for D by arranging or modifying the objects in my environment which is sufficient for the truth of the proposition that I steal from the bank.<sup>7</sup> And if I am responsible for one of the disjuncts and no one is responsible for the other disjunct, then I am responsible for the disjunction.

Taking this back to the FSC, S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  on the basis that no one is responsible for  $C_2$  (since no one is responsible for bringing about  $c^*$  since  $c^*$  doesn't obtain), and S is responsible for  $C_1$ . The rule of inference I am suggesting is:

[RD1] If  $\phi \vee \psi$  is a contingent proposition, then if S is responsible for rendering true  $\phi$  and no one is responsible for rendering true  $\psi$ , then S is responsible for rendering true  $(\phi \vee \psi)$ .

Thus, using RD1, we get

[15] S is responsible for  $C_1$

[16]  $\neg C_2$

[17] Thus, S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  (by 15,16, RD1)

If this is a plausible account of the logic of responsibility for disjunctive propositions, then we can deny premise [10] of Campbell's argument.

Although I think RD1 is correct, perhaps this logic of responsibility can be grasped more easily if we consider the equivalence  $(C_1 \vee C_2) \leftrightarrow (\sim C_1 \rightarrow C_2)$ . When considering the (contingent) proposition as a conditional, it would seem that S is responsible for  $\sim C_1 \rightarrow C_2$  since S is responsible for the falsity of the antecedent, and thereby responsible for rendering the conditional true. That is, the agent is responsible for bringing about  $c$  and therefore is responsible for  $C_1$ . So S is

<sup>6</sup> Obviously, an agent can only be responsible for rendering true (or false) a contingent proposition given that Rule A prevents the agent from being responsible for any necessary proposition.

<sup>7</sup> van Inwagen provides an account of the notion of rendering a proposition true (or false) in (1983), 67–68.

responsible for the truth of the conditional since the agent is responsible for rendering  $\sim C_1$  false. This line of reasoning seems to require the following principle:

[RD2] If  $\phi \rightarrow \psi$  is a contingent proposition, then if S is responsible for rendering false  $\phi$  or S is responsible for rendering true  $\psi$ , then S is (at least partly) responsible for rendering true  $\phi \rightarrow \psi$ .

If RD2 is correct, then clearly the CIN is not responsible for  $\sim C_1 \rightarrow C_2$ . No one is responsible for rendering true  $C_2$  (since  $c^*$  never obtains), and S is responsible for rendering false  $\sim C_1$ , whereas the CIN is not responsible for  $\sim C_1$  since the CIN doesn't do anything at all (other than implanting the device, which does not render false or true  $C_1$ ). It is implausible to suggest that the CIN is responsible for rendering false  $C_1$  given the description of FSCs, and there seems to be no non-question-begging way to espouse CIN's responsibility for rendering false  $C_1$ . Hence, the CIN is not responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ , contrary to what Campbell suggests in [10]. And as I have argued earlier, the CIN is instead responsible for the subjunctive conditionals in [10\*]. But from RD2, S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  in virtue of being responsible for rendering false the antecedent of the conditional  $\sim C_1 \rightarrow C_2$ .

If this logic of responsibility over disjunctives (and conditionals) is correct, then it seems plausible to say that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . So even granting that [10] is a premise that may follow from the set up of a FSC (which I doubt), the premise is nevertheless false, and this is so without S being responsible for  $C_1 \vee \sim C_1$ . Thus, we do not get the conclusion that S is not responsible for A, and so Campbell's argument fails to show any incoherence in espousing SI-F and SI-D.

### 3 Conclusion

In evaluating Campbell's argument, the primary problem is due to Campbell's insistence that the CIN *ensures* that  $C_1 \vee C_2$ . However, I have argued that the CIN is not responsible for that proposition but for the pair of subjunctives in [10\*]. Moreover, I've argued that S is responsible for  $C_1 \vee C_2$  given the proposed logic of responsibility over disjunctives. Hence, Campbell's argument does not threaten the coherence of DSI since one can consistently hold SI-F and SI-D.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I should note that I am not a DSI proponent since I don't accept SI-D; however, I think DSI is at least a coherent position.

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