

# **Flickers of Freedom and Frankfurt-Style Cases in the Light of the New Incompatibilism of the *Stit* Theory**

Katarzyna Paprzycka

Frankfurt-style examples aim to undermine the principle that moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise, which in turn requires the availability of alternate possibilities.<sup>1</sup> They are thus considered a reason for refuting incompatibilism. One lesson drawn from Frankfurt-style examples is exemplified by the compatibilist account of Fischer and Ravizza.<sup>2</sup> They accept the impact of Frankfurt-style cases and hold that the incompatibilist requirement of regulative control, which involves the agent's ability to perform the action and her ability to perform the contrary action, must be dropped. In its stead, they propose the weaker requirement of guidance control, which only demands the agent's causal control over the action for which she is to be held responsible.

My purpose in this paper is to bring to attention the availability of a similar weakening move on the part of the incompatibilist. This move has been made by logicians of agency but appears not to have entered the more philosophical discussions surrounding Frankfurt-style cases. I will begin by sketching the basic ideas of Belnap and Perloff's *stit* theory (section 1). They develop an incompatibilist framework which is immune to Frankfurt-style examples (sections 2 and 3). I show that it is also immune to Fischer's recent criticism of the flicker-of-freedom strategies. Section 4 will address some of the limitations of the *stit* response.

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<sup>1</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup> The theory was developed in a number of articles but its most recent statement is in Fischer and Ravizza's *Responsibility and Control. A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

## 1. Belnap and Perloff on *stit*

Belnap and Perloff suggest that all agentive talk can be paraphrased in terms of the *stit* (“see to it that”) operator.<sup>3</sup> A sentence  $Q$  is agentive for  $\alpha$  if, and only if,  $Q$  can be paraphrased as  $[\alpha \textit{stit}: Q]$ . The sentence “Mary walks her dog regularly” is agentive as it can be paraphrased as “Mary sees to it that she walks her dog regularly.” By contrast, the sentence “John’s arm rose of its own accord” cannot be paraphrased as “John saw to it that his arm rose of its own accord.”<sup>4</sup> More complex cases may acquire illuminating paraphrases: “Marigold refrains from visiting her parents” can be paraphrased as “Marigold sees to it that: it is not the case that she sees to it that she visits her parents.”

The *stit* operator has an impressive complex logic build around it.<sup>5</sup> It will suffice for my purposes to lay out its semantics informally. It presupposes a theory of branching time.<sup>6</sup> Moments, on the branching time theory, are ordered in a tree-like structure. From each moment, there is a single path into the past but multiple possible future paths. A history is a set of moments that constitutes a single complete branch of the tree.

Agents introduced in this framework are pictured as being faced with choices, leading to a variety of consequences. Some of their choices result in actions (seeings-to-it-that), others do not. An agent  $\alpha$  sees to it that  $Q$  (abbreviated:  $[\alpha \textit{stit}: Q]$ , where ‘ $Q$ ’ is either an agentive or a non-agentive statement) if  $\alpha$ ’s actual choice guarantees that  $Q$  (positive condition) and if  $\alpha$ ’s alternate choice could have resulted in  $Q$  (negative condition). More precisely, ‘ $[\alpha \textit{stit}: Q]$ ’ is true at a moment  $m_h$  (a moment in history  $h$ ) if

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<sup>3</sup> Nuel Belnap and Michael Perloff, “Seeing to It that: A Canonical Form for Agentives,” in *Knowledge Representation and Defeasible Reasoning*, eds. H.E. Kyburg, Jr., R.P. Loui and G.N. Carlson (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), pp. 175-199; Nuel Belnap, “Before Refraining Concepts for Agency,” *Erkenntnis* 34 (1991): 137-169.

<sup>4</sup> It may be possible for John to see to it that his arm rise of its own accord (by arranging things in such a way that appropriate reflexes take effect, say). Even so, the latter sentence is not a paraphrase of the former.

<sup>5</sup> Many of the papers will appear in a forthcoming book by Nuel Belnap, Michael Perloff and Ming Xu, *Facing the Future: Actual Agents, Real Choices*. The draft of the book is available at <http://www.pitt.edu/~belnap/ff/>.

<sup>6</sup> Richmond H. Thomason, “Indeterminist time and truth-value gaps,” *Theoria* 36 (1970): 264-281.

there is a witnessing “choice-point,”  $w_0$ , which satisfies two conditions (see Figure 1). First (the positive condition),  $Q$  must be true at  $m_{h'}$  (a moment in history  $h'$  at the same instant as  $m_h$ ) for every history  $h'$  which passes through the same choice as  $h$  at  $w_0$ . Second (the negative condition),  $Q$  must not be true at  $m_{h''}$  (a moment in history  $h''$  at the same instant as  $m_h$ ) for some history  $h''$  which passes through an alternate possible choice at  $w_0$ . The first condition guarantees that given the agent’s choice at  $w_0$ , the truth of  $Q$  is settled at  $m_h$ . The second condition ensures that the agent really did have a choice at  $w_0$  concerning  $Q$ .

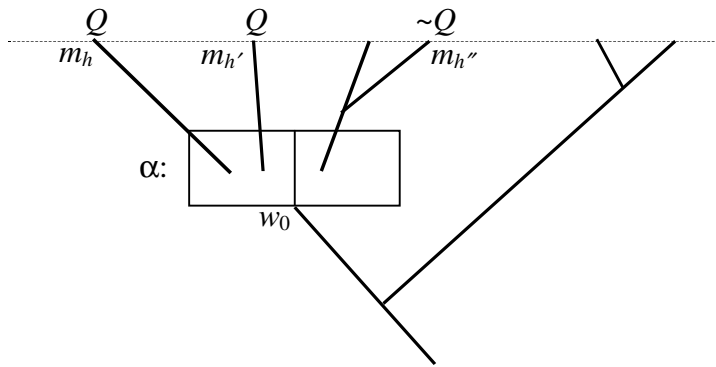


Figure 1. ‘ $\alpha$  sees to it that  $Q$ ’ is true at  $m_h$  with witness at  $w_0$ .

It is important to emphasize that the positive condition is very strong: it has to be true that  $\alpha$ ’s choice at  $w_0$ , which actually resulted in it being the case that  $Q$ , would have resulted in  $Q$  for any choice-equivalent history.<sup>7</sup> In other words, given a certain choice of

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<sup>7</sup> I should note here that the strength of the positive condition is in fact a problem for the *stit* analysis of agentive claims. After all, in most cases we do not think that a person’s choice *guaranteed* what the person saw to. (This point is due to John MacFarlane, personal communication.) Suppose that Jim came to a meeting. The fact that a lot of untoward things *could* have happened on the way, that there could have been a transportation strike which would have made it impossible for him to be at the meeting, does not appear to shake us in the conviction that Jim’s coming to the meeting was something he did. (There is in fact a version of the *stit* operator which is immune to this problem; see John F. Horty and Nuel Belnap,

$\alpha$  it is guaranteed that  $Q$  is true. By contrast, the negative condition is very weak:  $Q$  has to be false at *some* history (not at all histories) going through an alternate choice. Given another choice of  $\alpha$  it is not guaranteed that  $Q$  will be false but only that  $Q$  might be false. In other words, it is not required that  $\alpha$  be able to *do* otherwise (to see to it that not- $Q$ ). Such a requirement would be tantamount to demanding that at all histories going through an alternate choice,  $Q$  must be false. So Belnap and Perloff's semantics for *stit* does not require that the agent have regulative control. However, in demanding the existence of alternate possibilities (the negative condition), it is a form of incompatibilism. In fact, it reaches deeper than ordinary incompatibilism holding that not just free agency but agency itself is incompatible with determinism.

One may reasonably wonder whether such a weaker incompatibilism should still qualify as capturing the original idea of incompatibilism. After all, one may think that the libertarian idea of freedom derives from the thought that free agency requires that the agents be able to act deliberately and that genuine deliberation requires that there be a possibility of performing more than one action (i.e. the action of seeing to it that  $A$  and the action of seeing to it that not- $A$ ).<sup>8</sup> If so, however, then incompatibilism would seem to be firmly wedded to the idea of regulative control. An incompatibilist can respond in at least two ways. First, one may deny that the object of a deliberation must be an action and argue that the choice can be between performing an action (seeing to it that  $A$ ) and not performing an action (not seeing to it that  $A$ ), which is what is minimally required by the *stit* analysis. Second, one may try to undercut the connection between freedom (and so genuine agency) and deliberation.

Let us take the second point first. In brief, one may argue that although the incompatibilist account of freedom has been traditionally centered around deliberation, there is no obstacle to reconceiving the idea of freedom in a different way. After all, not

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"The Deliberative Stit: A Study of Action, Omission, Ability, and Obligation," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 24, 1995: 583-645).

<sup>8</sup> I owe this thought to an anonymous reviewer for this journal.

only the idea of freedom has been traditionally construed in a way that focuses on deliberation. This is true for most of the conceptual framework dealing with agentic concepts.<sup>9</sup> It may well be true that if one takes the notion of action from deliberation as central then it is natural to require that one have the possibility of performing the action and of performing the contrary (though see below). But one may challenge the idea that the notion of freedom needs to be associated so closely with the idea of acting upon deliberation. The *stit* theory offers an incompatibilist account of agency, which requires genuine alternate possibilities, that does not focus on deliberation and that does not require that the agent have regulative control. There is no reason that this conception should be unacceptable to the incompatibilist especially since it is always open to her to develop a stronger notion of “regulatively free” agency, say, which *would* require regulative control.

But even if one insisted that the idea of genuine libertarian freedom (and so agency) must be firmly connected to the idea of deliberation, one could still hold that the object of deliberation need not be an action and hence that the weaker form of incompatibilism exemplified by the *stit* theory is (at least *prima facie*) acceptable. In *stit* terms, an agent has four kinds of choices available to him. The first two (seeing to it that *P* and seeing to it that not-*P*) result in actions and have been traditionally thought of as possible objects of deliberation. The other two do not result in actions: one kind of choice available to the agent may result in the agent not seeing to it that *P*, another – in the agent not seeing to it that not-*P*. Since these are not actions they have traditionally been thought not to be possible objects of deliberation. The *stit* framework can actually explain why

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<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, actions that do not fit that model are forced into it with lesser or greater violence to our original intuitions about them. For example, many actions performed in response to another person’s commands or requests may appear not to involve the agent’s pro-attitudes but only the pro-attitudes of another person (“I passed the salt because he asked me for it,” “I fell down because I was commanded to do so”). Such actions are unintelligible on the standard model and are forced into it by requiring that there be some pro-attitude of the agent on which she is acting. (I show how to resist the arguments designed to show that we have to construe actions in this way in “Collectivism on the Horizon: A Challenge to Pettit’s Critique of Collectivism,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 76, 1998: 165-181.) And there are other actions that do not fit this model well, among them: many negative actions (especially unintentional omissions), habitual actions, mannerisms, etc.

this intuition is partly valid and suggest that there is some conceptual space for thinking that non-actions may be objects of deliberation under some conditions.

Consider the option of the agent not seeing to it that *P*. In *stit* terms, this will mean *either* (a) that *P* will be false in the history in question but will not be necessarily false in all the choice-equivalent histories *or* (b) that *P* will be settled true in all the histories. Option (b) must indeed be excluded from being an object of deliberation. After all, one cannot deliberate about what will happen anyway. This seems to be the valid core behind the intuition that the object of deliberation must be an action – it cannot be a non-action which will happen independently of the agent’s choice.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, there does not seem to be anything equally objectionable about taking option (a) as the object of deliberation. After all, it *is* up to the agent to make the choice in case (a) the result of which will simply not be the agent’s seeing-to-it-that. Rather the agent may (and may deliberately) make the choice of letting the world take its own course.

In short, although traditionally incompatibilism has been wedded to the idea of regulative control in part because of the focus on deliberation, there is no reason, on the one hand, to try to loosen the focus on deliberation and, on the other, to allow that the *stit* version of incompatibilism may expand our ideas about possible objects of deliberation.

## 2. *Stit* and Frankfurt-Style Cases

Consider a Frankfurt-style case. Ralph decides to offend Martina. He carries out his plan to the letter, sending her a message demeaning her racial heritage. Martina is offended as a result. Unbeknownst to Ralph, White has implanted a device into Ralph’s brain which, were Ralph to decide not to offend Martina (or waver after his decision), would have swayed Ralph to send the offending message anyway. The intuitions about cases of this sort have been almost uniform. Ralph is responsible for offending Martina. At the same time, it has been claimed, Ralph could not have done otherwise: he could not

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<sup>10</sup> “We deliberate about what is up to us, i.e. about the actions we can do” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985], 1112a32).

have not offended her. No matter what happens, Martina will receive Ralph's offending message and be offended by it as a result.<sup>11</sup>

A couple of preliminary points are in order. First, since the *stit* theory is concerned with agency and Frankfurt with moral responsibility, it might appear that one has little bearing on the other. Although, of course, not identical the issues are related. In fact, for the purposes of present discussion, we may accept the tentative principle that one can be responsible only for one's actions. In *stit* terms, the principle reads: one can be responsible only for what one sees to.

Second, there are many ways in which a *stit* analysis could be relevant. The most immediate response on the part of the *stit* theorist would be to suggest that the situation as described is incoherent. To the extent that Ralph performs an *action* of sending the offending message, i.e. that Ralph *sees to it* that he sends the message, there must be an alternate history on which it is not the case that Ralph sends the message. For in order for him to see to it that he sends the message (never mind the question of moral responsibility), the negative condition must be satisfied, i.e. there must be an alternate possibility on which Ralph does not send the message. A proper understanding of the agentive claim (which is part and parcel of the description of a Frankfurt-style case) requires that we add an alternate possibility to the picture. If we refuse to do so, we cannot claim that Ralph performed an *action* of sending the message, that he *saw to it* that he sends the message. The reason why the incoherence of the situation escapes the participants in the debate on Frankfurt-style cases is that they do not go deeply enough into the analysis of agency.

It should be noted that this is a perfectly plausible position for the *stit* theorist to take on Frankfurt-style cases. Indeed, this position might be all such a theorist needs to say on this issue. One might, however, wonder whether the *stit* analysis could engage in Frankfurt's thought experiment a little more charitably (by accepting that all the

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<sup>11</sup> For the sake of clarity, it should be pointed out that Martina's taking offense at the message is to be construed as a reaction not as an action of hers.

possibilities are drawn into the picture) and still find fault with it.<sup>12</sup> I shall suggest that this is indeed so (though, as we shall see, there will be some limitations depending on exactly how one construes what Ralph is seeing to).

This brings us to the third preliminary point concerning exactly what Ralph is supposed to have seen to. There are two candidate *stit*-sentences that can be evaluated:

(1) Ralph sees to it that he offends Martina

(2) Ralph sees to it that Martina receives his offending message,

and consequently, given Martina's attitude toward such messages,

(2') Ralph sees to it that Martina is offended.

I shall use (2) rather than (2') in the evaluations below because our intuitions concerning what it takes for Martina to get offended tend to go beyond ones that would be relevant to the considerations pertinent to the example.

I should also make clear that I am using 'Ralph offends Martina' in an agentive sense as picking out the *action* of Ralph's offending Martina. In Frankfurt-style examples, this sentence will be true in the actual course of events but not in the alternate sequence of events. Had Ralph not chosen to offend Martina, Martina would receive his offending message anyway but it would have been sent by White (using Ralph's body, as it were) not by Ralph. By contrast, for the sentence 'Martina receives Ralph's offending message' to be true Ralph may but need not have performed an action of sending the message to Martina and so of offending her. That Martina receives Ralph's offending message is thus true in both the actual and the alternate sequence of events.

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<sup>12</sup> After all, one could respond to this line of reasoning that we appear to have no problems at all in conceiving of Frankfurt-style cases. And the cases do not deny the existence of alternate possibilities which *ceteris paribus* would have resulted in the agent performing a contrary action. It is just that there is a systematic obstacle which prevents the agent from performing the contrary action. And it seems that the presence of such an obstacle does not affect our intuitions whether or not the agent acted. (This point is analogous to the one mentioned in note 7.) The *stit* theorist could always claim that our intuitions are simply confused at this point. Although, they have been confused many times in the past, in this paper, I choose to err on the side of charity toward them.

In other words, (1) is a non-reductive *stit* interpretation of what Ralph did. It is non-reductive since the *stit* operator takes as its complement a “*stit*-unreduced” agentive sentence. By contrast, (2) is a reductive *stit* interpretation of what Ralph did since its complement is non-agentive. The *stit* theory itself is not committed to (1) being equivalent to (2) nor does it prescribe the use of either in situations of this sort. I shall therefore consider both possibilities.

### 3. *Stit* and Frankfurt-Style Cases: Non-Reductive Version

The crucial fact about our intuitions is that when White (via the chip implanted in Ralph’s brain) sends the signal causing Ralph to offend Martina, Ralph’s performance is not really an action but a mere happening. It is not something that Ralph *does* (not even unintentionally) but something that happens to him. In other words, when Martina receives Ralph’s offending message as a result of the counterfactual intervener’s intervention it would be false to say that it is Ralph who offended her even though Martina received the offending message from him.<sup>13</sup> This suffices to establish the negative condition for the non-reductive *stit* claim (1). The positive condition, we may suppose, is satisfied by the way in which the example is set up. Given that Ralph chooses to offend Martina, it will be settled true that he does so. In other words, the moment at which Ralph chooses to offend Martina is witness to the truth of (1) at *m* (Figure 2). The non-reductive *stit* interpretation is thus compatible with the claim that Ralph is to be held morally responsible for what he does (what he sees to) and with the claim that there is an alternate possibility to his doing what he does.

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<sup>13</sup> Here is a way of seeing the point more clearly. The following equivalence holds in the *stit* semantics:  $[\alpha \textit{ stit}: Q] \equiv [\alpha \textit{ stit}: [\alpha \textit{ stit}: Q]]$ . So (1) is equivalent to ‘[Ralph *stit*: [Ralph *stit*: Ralph offends Martina]]’. When Martina receives Ralph’s offending message as a result of the counterfactual intervener’s intervention it would be false to say that Ralph *saw to it* that he offended her.

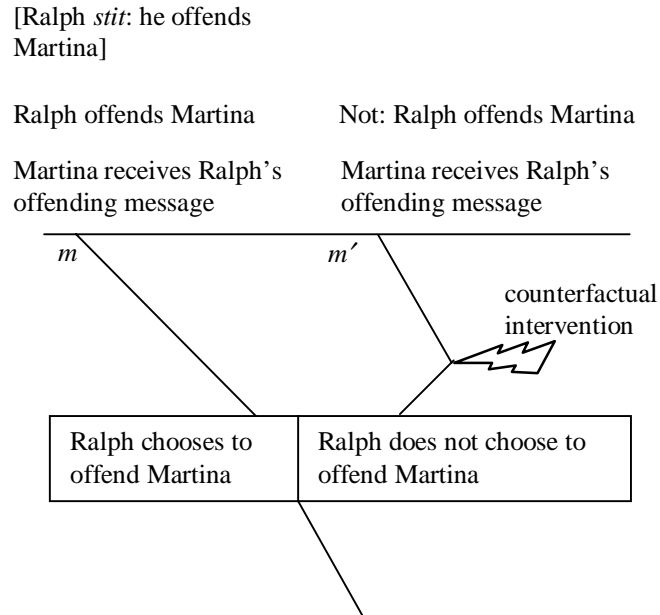


Figure 2. *Stit* interpretation of the truth of '[Ralph *stit*: Ralph offends Martina]' at *m*.

I should forestall one worry immediately. It might appear that not much is accomplished by means of the non-reductive interpretation of what Ralph did at *m*. The *stit* analysis shows that it is true that Ralph saw to it that he offended Martina. One way of putting the point is to say that the analysis shows that what Ralph did is an action (and so subject to the ascription of moral responsibility to which we intuitively incline in Frankfurt-style cases). But as I have characterized the non-reductive interpretation, this alleged result is already assumed prior to analyzing the case in *stit* terms.

We should note first of all that this objection simply expresses what it means for the interpretation to be non-reductive. At the same time, however, it would be erroneous to think that nothing has been accomplished. Three points deserve special mention. First, the *stit* analysis makes it very clear *that* there is an alternate possibility to what Ralph does as well as *what* the alternate possibility is. (I shall further argue that the objections put forward by J.M. Fischer against similar strategies of challenging Frankfurt-style cases fail against the *stit* account.) Second, from the point of view of the *stit* theory whose task is to elucidate logical relations between agitive statements, casting an agitive

statement in *stip* terms is only the beginning not the end of the theoretical work. The third and final point concerns what the invocation of the *stip* theory is ultimately meant to illustrate. It is designed to show that an incompatibilist may abandon the requirement of regulative control in favor of a weaker requirement such as the negative condition of the *stip* theory. The above objection leaves this last point in tact: it allows conceptual room for an incompatibilist account of moral responsibility to accept a weaker requirement than that of regulative control.

Let us turn now to Fischer's objection to what he calls "flicker of freedom" strategies, whose common denominator is that they find some room for claiming that the agent in Frankfurt-style cases could do otherwise after all, that there was an alternate possibility. His overarching worry is that the alternate possibilities are just not "robust" enough. He explains this concern by suggesting that:

it would be very puzzling and unnatural to suppose that it is the existence of various alternative pathways along which one does *not* act freely that shows that one has control of the kind in question.<sup>14</sup>

Although Fischer's target here is an incompatibilist who insists on the requirement of regulative control, it may appear plausible at first sight that his point should hold for the weaker version of the incompatibilist requirement too. This impression is mistaken, however.

Fischer's objection lends itself easily to the following misunderstanding. It could be directed either against the view that the freedom of Ralph's action depends on there being a possibility of Ralph's *not* doing something *freely* or against the view that it depends on there being a possibility of Ralph's doing something *unfreely*. Although Fischer's formulations are unambiguous in pointing to the first possibility, the apparent power of the objection comes from the close ties to the second.

Let us agree that *prima facie* at least it would be awkward to think that the freedom of an action depends on the possibility of an *unfree* action.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, however,

this is not the case in Frankfurt-style examples. The alternate possibility does not include an unfree action of Ralph's — it does not include *any* action of Ralph's at all. When Ralph is steered by White to offend Martina, Ralph is not acting at all — just as one's falling down the staircase is not an action.

So, Fischer's objection has to be that it is awkward that our judgement that an agent does something freely is to depend on there being an alternate possibility where the agent does *not act freely* (where this is not taken to imply that the agent acts unfreely). But this does not seem so counterintuitive any more. After all, the idea that the agent does not act freely may include the idea that the agent does not act at all. Why should not the fact that there is a possibility that the agent just fails to act altogether support our assessment that the agent actually acts freely? — He has a choice, just one that does not result in his acting.

Despite the fact that Fischer considers a wide array of possible versions of the “flicker-of-freedom” strategy of responding to Frankfurt-style cases,<sup>16</sup> he does not envisage the possibility that the incompatibilist might simply weaken the requirement of regulative control. His discussion is firmly wedded to the assumption that the alternate possibility must be one where the agent sees to it that he performs the contrary action to the one that he actually performs. Given this assumption, his objection is well taken: it might be not only awkward but unintelligible to rest the claim that the agent has regulative control on the alternate possibility of the agent not doing something freely. After all regulative control involves the agent's ability to *do* otherwise. To acknowledge

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<sup>14</sup> John Martin Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will. An Essay on Control* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), p.141.

<sup>15</sup> Note, however, that this intuition (and so the force of the objection) depends on the adherence to the requirement of regulative control. It is not at all clear what underlies such an intuition from a *stip* point of view.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, two of the “flicker-of-freedom” responses Fischer considers resemble Belnap and Perloff's response: the third response associated with a libertarian picture of agency (see, e.g., William L. Rowe, “Responsibility, Agent-Causation, and Freedom: An Eighteenth Century View,” in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, eds. John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993], pp. 263-285) and the fourth response to the effect that what we hold Ralph responsible for is not so much

this point, however, is not to advance the compatibilist cause. For it only underscores the possibility that incompatibilism is compatible with Frankfurt-style cases as long as it eschews the requirement of regulative control, for example on the model of the *stit* theory. This is after all also the strategy pursued by Fischer and Ravizza in their theory of moral responsibility. They also abandon the requirement of regulative control in favor of the requirement of guidance control. There is no reason at all why the incompatibilist should not resort to a similar strategy.

It may be worth recalling at this point the underlying reason why Frankfurt believes that his counterexamples can indeed show what they are supposed to. The crucial point they illustrate is that there is a difference between circumstances that make it impossible for the agent to act other than she did and circumstances that in addition *bring it about* that the agent acts as she does. In other words, the point is that the mere presence of an alternate possibility is irrelevant to the question whether the agent acted freely or indeed whether she acted at all unless that alternate possibility were somehow involved in *bringing it about* that the agent acts as she does.<sup>17</sup>

We can thus see why the *stit* framework is immune to Frankfurt-style examples. On an account like Belnap and Perloff's, the alternate possibilities are not appropriately construed as being just idle — they do quite a bit of theoretical work. They are integral to the very set-up of the case on which the agent performs an action normally. The availability of an alternate possibility is a condition of the agent acting at all.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say, however, that it is not possible for there to be idle alternate possibilities. An alternate possibility is relevant only when it shares the choice-point with the actual history. But there will usually be very many alternate possibilities that are idle, viz. those

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offending Martina but rather offending Martina on his own (see J.M. Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, *op. cit.*, pp. 138ff).

<sup>17</sup> H.G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> A somewhat similar point is made by Michael Della Rocca, "Frankfurt, Fischer and Flickers," *Nous* 32 (1998): 99-105. He argues that it is open to the incompatibilist to search for alternative possibilities by investigating what happens in the actual case. Since the agent was not externally determined to do what he actually did, the incompatibilist might argue that this means that the agent could have decided to do otherwise, though he did not.

that do not go through the choice-point in question (see the unmarked subtree branching off prior to  $w_0$  in Figure 1, for example).

Another way of putting the point is this. Frankfurt-style examples in effect assume that we can make sense of the concept of agency without appealing to alternate possibilities. The agent is pictured as performing an *action* in the actual sequence of events and that in itself is not seen as in any way requiring the availability of an alternate possibility. Clearly, however, this assumption is rejected on an account such as the *stit* theory. The assumption might also be rejected by an incompatibilist version of a causal theory of action, for example, as long as it required, as seems natural, an appropriate incompatibilist reading of the counterfactuals underlying causal claims.

#### 4. *Stit* and Frankfurt-Style Cases: Reductive Version

This suffices to establish my main point, viz. that Frankfurt-style cases do not present a problem for an incompatibilist account like that of Belnap and Perloff. To reject the requirement of regulative control is not necessarily to reject incompatibilism.

It might be of some interest, however, to consider a reductive *stit* interpretation (2) of what it is that Ralph does. We need to ask what would have to be true for the claim '[Ralph *stit*: Martina receives his offending message]' to be true at  $m$ . There would have to be a witness-moment which satisfied the positive and the negative condition. There would have to be a choice of Ralph's given which it would be settled that Martina receives his offending message. And there would have to be an alternate choice given which it would not be settled that Martina receives his offending message. Apparently, the way in which the Frankfurt-style case is set up precludes the negative condition from being satisfied. In the actual and in the alternate sequence of events, Martina receives Ralph's offending message.

What guarantees that the negative condition is not satisfied is the special feature of Frankfurt-style cases, viz. the presence of the counterfactual intervener. For the goal of the counterfactual intervener is to make sure that even when Ralph does not decide to offend Martina, it will be true that Martina receives the offending message from Ralph anyway.

The addition of the counterfactual intervener makes the picture a little more complicated from a *stit* point of view. The counterfactual intervener is usually understood as an agent herself: White *sees to it* that Martina receives Ralph's offending message by manipulating Ralph's brain appropriately and causing him to send the message. This means that we have to change the picture a little bit to accommodate this addition. At  $m'$ , it is true not just that Martina receives Ralph's offending message but also that White sees to it that Martina receives Ralph's offending message. For this *stit* statement to be true at  $m'$ , there must be a witness satisfying the positive condition and the negative condition. Frankfurt-style cases are constructed in such a way that there is no problem with the satisfaction of the positive condition. The satisfaction of the negative condition, however, requires that the proposition "Martina receives Ralph's offending message" be false at some moment  $m''$  instantaneous with  $m$ .

On the assumption that the counterfactual intervener is an agent, then, there is an alternate possibility ( $m''$ ) on which the proposition "Martina receives Ralph's offending message" is false, contrary to the claims made in Frankfurt-style examples. This also shows, of course, that there is no problem in seeing that (2) is true at  $m$ . The negative condition for its truth is satisfied at  $m''$ . Once again, the *stit* theory appears not to have a problem with Frankfurt-style examples.

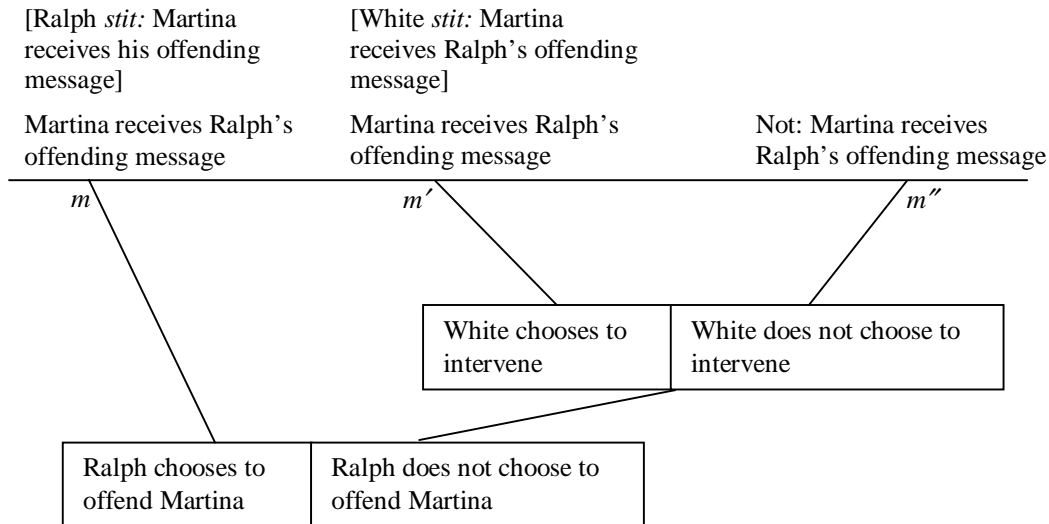


Figure 3. The *stit* interpretation of the truth of ‘[Ralph *stit*: Martina receives his offending message]’ at  $m$ , where the counterfactual intervener is an agent.

However, this response is available to the *stit* theorist only if the counterfactual intervention is due to an agent. Frankfurt himself points out that it is possible to construct similar cases where this is not so.<sup>19</sup> The counterfactual intervener could simply be a machine that can tell what the agent decides to do and responds appropriately, or it could even be a suitably complex natural mechanism.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear that the *stit* theory can offer a comparably powerful response to such cases. In fairness, it should be pointed out that a principled response to such cases would depend on the development of a theory of causation (it could turn out after all that even the non-agentive causal intervention would necessitate there being a properly situated alternate possibility).<sup>21</sup> The same is true for a pending account of counterfactuals.

<sup>19</sup> H.G. Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Frankfurt gives an example of a psychological mechanism in “What We Are Morally Responsible for,” in *The Importance of What We Care About*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>21</sup> Some work on causation within the *stit* framework is being done by Ming Xu (“Causation in Branching Time,” unpublished manuscript; *An Investigation in the Logics of seeing-to-it-that*. University of Pittsburgh: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1996). While Xu’s account does indeed require the existence of alternate

Overall, however, the reductive *stit* interpretation of what Ralph did is less successful. It works very well in the case where the counterfactual intervener is an agent. It is less clear how one could claim that Ralph saw to it that Martina receives his offending message if the counterfactual intervention is not due to an agent. Yet, the nature of the counterfactual intervener does not appear to affect our intuitions about the cases. In other words, if the *stit* theorist were to accept the intuitions surrounding Frankfurt-style cases, he would be committed to the non-reductive interpretation of what Ralph saw to. More generally, he would be committed to non-reductionism, i.e. to the claim that an agentive sentence cannot always be paraphrased in terms of a *stit*-sentence whose complement is non-agentive.

## 5. Conclusion

I have claimed that even if Frankfurt-style cases provide a reason to reject the requirement of regulative control, this does not in itself constitute a reason to reject incompatibilism. Just as the compatibilist can place a weaker requirement such as Fischer and Ravizza's requirement of guidance control, so the incompatibilist can abandon the requirement of regulative control in favor of a weaker condition such as Belnap and Perloff's negative condition. I have further shown how the *stit* account can handle Frankfurt-style cases.

We have also seen that there is a disparity between the *stit* interpretation of the non-reductive claim (Ralph sees to it that he offends Martina) and the *stit* interpretation of the reductive claim (Ralph sees to it that Martina receives his offending message). If this gap were indeed to be unbridgeable (as suggested by the present state of the *stit* theory) this would be an important fact for the *stit* account. For it would show that that there is more to our intuitions about what is agentive than the *stit* account finds room for.

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possibilities, it is not clear that they would be situated in the right way to render the correct verdict in the Frankfurt-style cases under consideration.