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BJHP VOLUME 19 NUMBER 5 SEPTEMBER 2011

# British Journal for the History of Philosophy



ISSN: 0960-8788

THE JOURNAL OF THE  
BRITISH SOCIETY FOR THE  
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



## ARTICLE

# A PUZZLE REGARDING REID'S THEORY OF MOTIVES

Terence Cuneo

In *Essays on the Active Powers*, Thomas Reid offers two different accounts of motives. According to the first, motives are the ends for which we act. According to the second, they are mental states, such as desires, that incite us to action. These two accounts, I claim, do not fit comfortably with Reid's agent causal account of human action. My project in this article is to explain why and then to propose a strategy for reconciling these two accounts with Reid's views about action.

**KEYWORDS:** motive; autonomy; desire; principle of action; active power

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this article, I wish to explore a puzzle regarding Thomas Reid's theory of motives. The puzzle seems important to me to address, for it reveals an apparent tension between Reid's broadly agent causal account of human action, on the one hand, and his commitment, on the other, to a commonsensical psychology of the human person according to which we are motivated by all manner of desires, inclinations and impulses. I am going to begin by highlighting why Reid is driven to say the various things he does about the nature of motives. Having done that, I will state the puzzle with which I am concerned. I am then going to offer a solution to the puzzle that Reid himself does not offer but I hope would find amenable.

## II. THE SYSTEM OF NECESSITY

Anyone who has worked through the *Inquiry* and the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* knows that Reid fashioned his account of perception as a corrective to what he called the Way of Ideas. Reid so emphasizes the point that one could hardly miss it. It is easier, however, to miss the fact that when Reid developed his account of active power in the *Essays on the Active*

*Powers*, he also did so as a corrective to a prominent philosophical view, in this case, a view about human action that he called the System of Necessity. While his opposition to this view is no less adamant than that to the Way of Ideas, Reid tends not to highlight its role in the formulation of his own view. He explicitly introduces the System of Necessity rather late in the *Active Powers*, limiting himself to a fairly brief, but vigorous, engagement with it.<sup>1</sup> Still, when Reid introduces the view, one can see that its influence on his position is unmistakable. Nearly everything that Reid says about both human action and the character of moral reality is framed in opposition to it.

What is the System of Necessity? According to Reid, its core claims are the following three:

- (1) Every human action has a sufficient cause.
- (2) Provided normal background conditions obtain, the sufficient cause of a human action is its motive, which is a mental state of an agent.
- (3) Every human action is subsumable under a law, which specifies that for any agent *S*, set of motives *M* and action *A* at *t*, necessarily, if *S* performs *A*, then there is some member of *M* that is *S*'s strongest motive, which causes *S* to perform *A* at *t*.<sup>2</sup>

Looked at from one angle, these claims appear to be only loosely connected. A person could accept any one of them while rejecting the other two. Looked at from another angle, however, they exhibit more unity than might have first appeared. The unity in question, if Reid is correct, is provided by a commitment to explaining human action as a natural phenomenon, one in which all events are not only caused, but are also subsumable under laws in much the same way that other ordinary natural events are. If one is attracted to this broadly naturalistic position, as Reid claims that figures such as Spinoza, Hume, Priestley and Kames were, then these claims form a natural package. Reid's contemporary Lord Kames provides an instructive case in point. Although in some respect an idiosyncratic proponent of the System of Necessity, Kames accepts each of these claims. Human action is caused. The cause of an agent's action is its motives, which entirely determine that agent's will. The necessary connection between motives and action, moreover, is no different in kind from the connection that we see between events in the natural world. It is a constant conjunction that, while not perhaps exactly uniform in character, allows us to make accurate predictions. Finally, Kames offers a simple

<sup>1</sup>See *Essays on the Active Power of Man* (EAP) IV. I use the version edited by Baruch Brody (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1969). I will also refer to *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation* (AC), edited by Paul Wood (Edinburgh University Press, 1995). Quotations from these works are given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>See, in particular, EAP IV.iv and IV.ix.

explanation of why the will is determined in certain ways: 'it is involved in the very idea of the strongest motive, that it must have the strongest effect in determining the mind. This can no more be doubted of, than that, in a balance, the greatest weight must turn the scale'.<sup>3</sup>

Reid believed that this package of claims provides a deeply distorted picture of human action. Why did Reid believe this? In large part because he could not see how it could account for genuinely autonomous human agency in at least two senses of this multivalent term. In the first place, autonomous actions are ones that can be properly ascribed to an agent. But if the System of Necessity were true, Reid claimed, there is no proper sense in which actions that appear to be performed by an agent could justly be attributed to that agent – the human agent being simply a theatre in which various drives and impulses vie for dominance. Second, autonomous agency is such that an agent can exercise a certain type of control over the various impulses that present themselves when deliberating. Suppose that you find yourself in the early morning with a strong desire to ignore altogether the sound of the alarm clock that is buzzing by your ear. Must you ignore the alarm clock's warning? Not if you are autonomous. For genuinely autonomous agents, according to Reid, are reflective. Any desire is such that an autonomous agent can direct his attention not only to its object but also to the desire itself, asking: Should I act on it? That is, any such agent can ask: Would acting on this desire contribute to my genuine well-being? And is there a sufficient moral reason or an obligation for acting on or ignoring it? Our ability to deliberate on these two principles – what Reid calls the principles regarding our good on the whole and duty – is, in Reid's view, what distinguishes us from the rest of the living natural order. It is what (at least in part) renders us rationally autonomous agents. It is also, according to Reid, an element missing altogether from the System of Necessity.

Earlier I said that nearly everything Reid says about human agency and moral reality is formulated as a reaction against the System of Necessity. Later I will tease out some of the metaethical implications of Reid's rejection. For now, we can bring Reid's own position more sharply into focus by having before us three claims that Reid accepts instead of those that comprise the System of Necessity. They are:

- (1') Every human action has a cause, which in the case of free human action is the agent himself.
- (2') Motives are not mental states but the ends for which an agent acts.
- (3') Human action is nomic only to this extent: if an agent fails to exercise autonomy when deliberating (and he is not in a state of indifference), then his strongest desire to act in a certain way will prevail. If he exercises autonomy (and rationality) when deliberating, however,

<sup>3</sup>Kames (1751), 167, as quoted in Harris (2005), Chapter 4.

then he will act on the motive that seems to him most rationally appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

The first of these statements expresses Reid's commitment to an agent causal account of human-free action. The second states his commitment to a broadly teleological account of human agency, according to which autonomous human action is explained not by the impulses that present themselves to an agent when deliberating but by the ends for which an agent acts. The third claim expresses Reid's two-fold conviction that free human action is not in any interesting sense nomic and that we can assess our motives along two dimensions: first, according to their psychological strength and, second, according to their rational authority. Do these claims exhibit any sort of underlying unity? They do in at least this sense: they express a decidedly nonnaturalist approach to human agency. Someone convinced with both that we are autonomous and that free human action is not governed by the laws of nature, as Reid is, will tend to find them attractive.

A full treatment of Reid's account of human agency would explore in some detail each of these claims. On this occasion, however, I am going to limit my attention to the second claim, as it gives rise to the puzzle that I want to consider.

### III. THE OFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF MOTIVES

The puzzle that I want to explore has its roots in two rather different accounts of the nature of motives that Reid offers in the *Active Powers*. According to what I will call the *official account*, motives are not mental states such as belief/desire pairs that push us to action but the objects of such states. Motives, according to this view, are the ends of actions, that for the sake of which an agent acts. In one of the various ways in which the term 'reason' is used, motives are reasons. About motives thus understood, Reid writes the following in his chapter 'On the Influence of Motives':

I grant that all rational beings are influenced, and ought to be influenced by motives. But the influence of motives is of a very different nature from that of efficient causes. They are neither causes nor agents. They suppose an efficient cause, and can do nothing without it. We cannot, without absurdity, suppose a motive, either to act, or to be acted upon; it is equally incapable of action and of passion; because it is not a thing that exists, but a thing that is conceived . . . Motives, therefore, may *influence* . . . action, but they do not act. They may be compared to advice, or exhortation, which leaves a man still at liberty. For in vain is advice given when there is not a power either to do, or to forbear, what

<sup>4</sup>See, once again, EAP IV.iv.

it recommends. In like manner, motives suppose liberty in the agent, otherwise they have no influence at all.

(EAP IV.iv: 283–4)

There is quite a bit going on in this passage, but I want to draw attention to two general points that Reid is making and draw out an implication for Reid's moral philosophy more broadly conceived.

The first point that Reid makes is that motives are not causes. Reid does not wish to deny that motives influence agents to act, but he insists that their mode of influence is not causal. Now, in one sense, this should not surprise. If we think of motives in a broadly teleological vein, as that for the sake of which we act, then they are (in a wide range of cases at least) plausibly thought of not as things that cause us to act but as states of affairs that we aim to bring about. What is more surprising, however, is the explicit rationale Reid himself offers for believing that motives are not causes. Fundamental to this rationale is a pair of claims.

In the first place, Reid assumes that *all* causation is efficient causation – efficient causation in Reid's vernacular being a synonym of what we today would call agent causation. So, in Reid's view, efficient causes are not events but *agents* endowed with what he calls active power. If this is right, ordinary cases of what Reid calls physical causation – such as a window's shattering upon encountering a gale-force wind – are really instances of an agent's having exercised his agent power (the agent in this case presumably being non-human, such as God; cf. EAP IV.ix: 337). In the second place, Reid claims that motives do not exist. Now, it is a vexed question what exactly Reid means by this, but he means at least the following: motives do not occupy space/time. They are abstracta – what we would call states of affairs or propositions. Assume, then, that all causation is efficient and that motives do not exist in space time. The conclusion that motives are not causes appears to follow twice-over: motives are not causes because they belong to the wrong ontological category; they are not agents with active power. Moreover, it is plausible to assume that causes, whatever they may be, exist as denizens of the space/time manifold. But motives, in Reid's view, do not.

The second main point that Reid makes in this passage is that paradigmatic-free human actions are not best thought of as cases in which an agent is indifferent to acting in one or another way. Free actions are not motiveless or arbitrary. Rather, they ordinarily proceed on the basis of motives.<sup>5</sup> Reid is keen to emphasize that his teleological account of the nature of motives is perfectly consistent with this and, indeed, an agent causal theory of human action according to which we sometimes act freely in the libertarian sense. While this claim is interesting in its own right, I would like to highlight a way in which it generates a further reason to believe that motives, in Reid's view, are not causes.

<sup>5</sup>'[I]n all determinations of the mind that are of any importance, there must be something in the preceding state of the mind that disposes or inclines us to that determination' (EAP II.i: 63).

Throughout the *Active Powers*, Reid defends the claim that an agent's actions are all and only those events of which that agent is the efficient cause. Now suppose, for argument's sake, that an agent's motives were to cause her to act. On the assumption that all causation is efficient in character, these motives would themselves either be identical with or the result of the exercise of the active power of some other agent. From this, it follows that paradigmatic actions have multiple agent causes. This implication is problematic for Reid if only because he appears to be committed to a pair of principles that would rule it out.

The two principles I have in mind are identified by Gideon Yaffe in his fine book on Reid's theory of action entitled *Manifest Activity*.<sup>6</sup> The first principle we can call:

*Power to do Otherwise:* If an agent has the power to act in a certain way, then he also has the power not to act in that way.

As Yaffe points out, his principle, which is a relative to what contemporary philosophers call the Principle of Alternate Possibilities, is highly contentious because of cases such as Locke's famous 'man in the locked room' scenario. In Locke's presentation of the case, an agent is locked in a room. The agent presumably has the power to stay in the room, since he decides to stay, but unbeknownst to him lacks the power to leave because the door is locked. This case looks to be inconsistent with Reid's claim that powers are always 'two-way' in character, as the agent has the power to stay but not to leave. But notice that in Locke's case, the man is physically caused to stay in the room; were he to try to open the door, he could not. Given Reid's account of causation according to which every physical cause is the upshot of some agent exercising active power, however, it follows that there is an efficient cause of the man's staying in the room. Might there be a principled way to contend that this other agent and not the man in the room is the cause of his staying? There is if we accept a second principle also identified by Yaffe, namely:

*Efficient-Causal Exclusivity:* Every event that has an efficient cause has one, and only one, efficient cause.

If Efficient-Causal Exclusivity is true, Reid can say that we have a reason to believe that the man is not the cause of his staying in the room. Rather, the cause is whatever agent that guarantees that the man will stay in the room no matter what. The presence of another competing efficient cause precludes the man from being the cause of his staying and, thus, allows Reid to hold onto the principle of the Power to do Otherwise. But, most importantly for our purposes, accepting this principle precludes motives

<sup>6</sup>See Yaffe (2004), 39, 44.

from being causes. For if they were, we would have a violation of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity, as there would be more than one cause of an agent's action: the agent himself and his motives.

Thus far I have pointed to two main lines of argument that support Reid's contention that motives are not causes. The first appeals to Reid's conviction that motives are not the right type of thing to be causes. The second appeals to Reid's commitment to Power to do Otherwise, which appears to rule out the possibility of an event's having several agent causes. Several paragraphs ago, however, I said that I would also draw out an implication of Reid's official account of motives that bears upon his broadly metaethical position. Let me now turn to this matter.

Were one to examine much of what transpires in contemporary metaethical discussions, it would become apparent that many of the positions defended by philosophers make relatively little direct contact with substantive views about human agency. In discussions of moral nonnaturalism, for example, issues about agency tend to spin freely from issues about moral ontology. Reid's position is very different in this respect, however. Like Kant's, Reid's metaethical views more or less fall out directly from his views on agency.

Consider, in this regard, the second component of Reid's broadly nonnaturalist account of agency, which says that motives are not mental states of an agent but the ends for which agents act. This claim commits Reid to a recognizably nonnaturalist metaethical view in ethics. For central to such a view is the conviction that moral reasons are not causes or the sort of things investigated by the natural sciences. When we couple this with Reid's further insistence that agents are autonomous in the sense of being capable of rationally evaluating their motives along broadly prudential and ethical dimensions, Reid's nonnaturalism comes into even clearer focus. For nonnaturalists also accept a rather strong view with respect to the autonomy of morality. Broadly naturalist approaches to ethics, such as those defended by Hobbes and Hume, maintain that ethical inquiry is continuous with that of the natural sciences, as it employs similar methods and evidential standards as natural scientific inquiry. In contrast to this, nonnaturalists hold that ethics is an autonomous discipline distinct from other forms of inquiry such as physics or biology. According to this view, ethics asks its own questions and offers its own types of answers to these questions, appealing to its own canons of explanation and justification. In a passage that brings Kant to mind, Reid states his commitment to the autonomy of morality in terms of the concept of self-government by law:

The brutes are stimulated by various actions by their instincts, by their appetites, by their passions: but they seem to be necessarily determined by the strongest impulse, without any capacity of self-government . . . They may be trained up by discipline, but cannot be governed by law. There is no evidence that they have the conception of a law, or of its obligation.

Man is capable of acting from motives of a higher nature. He perceives a dignity and worth in one course of conduct, a demerit and turpitude in another, which brutes have not the capacity to discern . . .

[Men] judge what ends are most worthy to be pursued, how far every appetite and passion may be indulged, and when it ought to be resisted.

(EAP Introduction: 2 and II.ii: 72)

Reid was in no sense hostile to natural science. In fact, he was among the most scientifically accomplished of all the modern philosophers. Still, his nonnaturalism is thoroughgoing. He holds that the 'actions of men, or of other rational beings, are not phenomena of nature, nor do they come within the sphere of physicks' (C: 255). But he also holds that the objects of such actions, namely, moral reasons, also do not come within the sphere of natural science. In his words:

There are many important branches of human knowledge, to which Sir Isaac Newton's rules of Philosophizing have no relation, and to which they can with no propriety be applied. Such are Morals, Jurisprudence, Natural Theology, and the abstract Sciences of Mathematicks and Metaphysicks; because in none of those Sciences do we investigate the physical laws of Nature. There is therefore no reason to regret that these branches of knowledge have been pursued without regard to them.

(AC: 186)

#### IV. THE UNOFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF MOTIVES

To this point, I have presented Reid's official account of motives, according to which motives are the ends for the sake of which we act. Along the way, I have noted Reid's reasons for defending this view and highlighted ways in which it connects with Reid's broader ethical nonnaturalism. Reid's official account of motives, however, is not the only position regarding the character of motives that he defends. According to what I will call the *unofficial account*, motives are a varied lot. In some cases, they are the objects of mental states. In other cases, though, they are not the objects of mental states but the states themselves – that which incite us to act. To forestall confusion, let us use Reid's term and call motives of this latter sort 'incitements'. Do incitements have any role to play in the production of action?

They do. They are 'principles of action', Reid says (EAP III.i.i: 95). In fact, Reid spends the majority of Book III of the *Active Powers* distinguishing different types of incitements, describing in some detail their various characteristics. According to Reid's typology, incitements fall into two broad categories. In the first place, there are the mechanical principles

of action, among which are instincts for self-preservation, food, procreation and the propensity to imitate (cf. EAP III.ii–iii). In the second place, there are the animal principles of action. These are a collection of principles that include what Reid calls the benevolent affections, such as gratitude and esteem; the malevolent affections, such as resentment and the desire to better someone else in some matter; as well as a multitude of other incitements, such as the desires for power and knowledge.

Reid says that both the mechanical and animal principles of action are ones that we share with the rest of the animal kingdom. But here, Reid's typology must have misled him. For when Reid explicates the various types of animal principles, it is fairly clear that their propositional contents are such that no animal, in Reid's view, could entertain them. Consider the malevolent affection of resentment, for example. In an insightful discussion regarding this affection that is directed at Hume, Reid distinguishes harm and injury, claiming that resentment is properly directed only towards people who have injured one. But one can have the concept *being such as to have caused injury* only if one already has the concept of justice, according to which injuries are harms that a person did not deserve (cf. EAP III.ii.v: 173 and V.v: 410). But to have these concepts and to form judgments in which they form the conceptual content is to be a rational agent with a moral sense. And, as indicated earlier, it is precisely our ability to evaluate various features of the world using moral concepts such as *being just* that, in Reid's view, distinguishes us from the animal kingdom.

The point I want to emphasize here, however, is not that Reid has committed a mistake of categorization. It is rather that, for Reid, incitements of various kinds are the bedfellows of moral judgments. In his treatment of the topic, Reid writes that moral judgments 'are not, like those we form in speculative matters, dry and unaffecting, but from their nature, are necessarily accompanied with affections and feelings . . .' (EAP III.iii.vii: 238). Reid calls this type of complex mental state moral approbation, maintaining that it includes both cognitive and desiderative elements. Moral approbation, Reid writes, includes 'not only a moral judgment of . . . [an] action, but some affection, favourable . . . toward the agent, and some feeling in ourselves' (ibid.). The affection to which Reid refers is benevolent, an incitement that belongs to the animal principles of action. The fact that moral approbation includes such affections is, Reid stresses, practically important. While Reid believes that there are cases where the thought that something is one's duty is more likely to move one to action than, say, the thought that something is one's interest, there are other cases in which such a thought leaves one motivationally cold.<sup>7</sup> 'Sympathy with the distressed', Reid writes, 'may bring them a charitable relief, when a calm sense of duty would be too weak to produce the effect' (EAP III.ii.vi: 183).

<sup>7</sup>For Reid's arguments concerning the superiority of moral motives, see EAP III.iii.iv: 217.

Suppose, then, that moral approbation includes an affective component. The implication of this for Reid's account of motives is clear: the incitements are not mere conceptual add-ons in Reid's overall theory of motivation. They are woven into the very texture of moral judgment. Reid could not offer an account of moral and, hence, rational agency and fail to recognize the explanatory role they play in moving us to action.

## V. THE PUZZLE STATED

Having described the two ways in which Reid thinks of motives, I can now state the puzzle with which I am concerned. The puzzle is not simply that Reid has almost nothing to say about how these two accounts of motives fit together, although this is true. Rather, it is that there appears to be a genuine tension between the two accounts of motives. On the one hand, Reid's official view regarding motives tells us that motives are not mental states that push us to action but the intentional objects of such states. We have seen that there are reasons that lead Reid to this conclusion. After all, if motives were to push us to action, as the incitements presumably do, then human actions would have more than one efficient cause, which violates the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity. On the other hand, Reid's unofficial view regarding motives tells us that some motives are incitements – mental states that push us to action. In particular, some such incitements are ingredients in that mental state that Reid calls moral approbation. But given Reid's stipulations about what must be the case for an action to be free – namely, be the exercise of a two-way active power – it is difficult to see how actions performed on the basis of moral judgments could be free. They would have too many causes. But it is clear that, for Reid, actions performed on the basis of moral judgments are, in the paradigmatic case, free. Hence, the problem.

We can state the dilemma that Reid's position faces more compactly as follows:

- (1\*) If the official account of motives is true, then incitements have no motivational role to play in the production of human action. For if they did, then acts performed on their basis would not be free.
- (2\*) If the unofficial account of motives is true, then items of human behaviour that Reid maintains are paradigmatic human actions are not human actions at all, as they would have too many causes.
- (3\*) So, if either the official or unofficial account of motives is true, then incitements have no motivational role to play in the production of human action, or items of human behaviour that appear to be paradigmatic human actions are not human actions at all.

Reid would be very unhappy with both options.

How best to address this puzzle? Reid himself, as I have already indicated, does not address it at all. He has nothing to say about how these different accounts of motives fit together. Any attempt to address the puzzle, then, will have to be one that draws upon things that Reid does not explicitly say about their interrelations. Is there a way, then, to resolve this puzzle that, while not Reid's own stated solution, would fit well enough with his overall view of human action?

## VI. A SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE

In principle, there are several ways to do so. In the interest of economy, however, let me head directly for what appears to be the most promising resolution within the framework about human action that Reid provides. As we shall see, this proposal is not wholly satisfactory and will require amendment. But it is a good place to start.

Suppose we assume that a decent solution to Reid's puzzle will maintain that both ends and incitements are motives. Neither is simply to be eliminated from contention. Suppose, also, we assume that the puzzle we have identified is generated in large measure because incitements causally generate action – the difficulty being, once again, that this offends against the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity. If so, then a plausible solution to our puzzle will want to identify a type of relation that incitements bear to the will that has two features: first, it is not causal and, second, it is compatible with a teleological account of action explanation according to which we explain an agent's actions by citing the ends towards which they are directed. Is there such a relation?

Arguably, yes. Reid's contemporaries sometimes speak of motives as *occasioning* action – where a motive's occasioning action is not to be identified with its causing that action.<sup>8</sup> A natural candidate, then, for the relation that we wish to identify, which holds between incitements and actions, is: *being such as to occasion* (or, somewhat differently, *being such as to suggest*). If this is correct, incitements bear the relation to actions of not causing but occasioning (or suggesting) them.

In a moment, I shall have more to say about what it is for something to occasion an action. In the meanwhile, let me note that this approach has at least two things to recommend it. In the first place, it is clear that incitements are not causes in the strict sense of being agent causes, as only substances in Reid's view are agent causes. Moreover, incitements appear not to be causes in what Reid calls 'the lax and popular' sense either, as there is, in Reid's eyes, no constant conjunction between an agent's desiring to act in a certain way and his acting in that way. The obvious worry about the view, however, is that it introduces a new, *sui generis* type of relation,

<sup>8</sup>See Harris (2005), 6–7 and, in particular, the discussion of John Bramhall.

namely, *being such as to occasion* (or *being such as to suggest*), which we would rather do without. But – and this is the second feature of the approach that recommends it – Reid is already committed to there being such a relation. In both the *Inquiry* and the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid claims that sensations bear the relation of suggesting conceptions of external objects, and that this relation is not causal in character. If this is right, maintaining that the incitements occasion or suggest to an agent that it would be good to act in a certain way is not to burden Reid's view with additional theoretical commitments. The commitment to such a non-causal relation is already there.

What would the proposal we are considering look like when spelled out in greater detail? Well, suppose we assume that for Reid, in the ordinary case of action, there are two systems at work. The first, which we can call the *volitional system*, is simply an agent's active power. On its own, says Reid, this system is inert; it can operate only when information is presented to it in a certain light. The second system, which we can term *the motivational system*, provides the relevant sort of information. It does so by presenting various ends as attractive, good or otherwise worthy of pursuit. There are various ways by which the motivational system can do this. One way is simply to present the thought that acting to bring about a particular end is one's duty. Reid maintains that this can be sufficient to motivate an agent to action, as she can choose to exercise her active power simply on the basis of this thought (cf. EAP III.iii.viii: 254). Another way is to present to the volitional system an incitement such as a desire, where this incitement itself presents its intentional object as being attractive or worthy of pursuit in some respect. In this case, too, the agent can then choose to exercise her active power to pursue an end, which is the intentional object of the desire.

Consider, for example, a case in which an agent has the desire to open the window in her room for the purpose of breathing some fresh air. Suppose, for illustration's sake, that she acts on the basis of this desire, opening the window by exercising her agent power. According to the present suggestion, to say that this agent opened the window because she wanted to breathe fresh air is to claim that she opened the window for the purpose of breathing fresh air. By specifying the intentional object of the desire, we thereby specify the goal of this agent's action. And by noting that she wanted to bring about this goal, we thereby specify what we might call its *practical mode of presentation*. The end or object of her desire presents itself not necessarily as being obligatory, but as being desirable or attractive.

I have claimed that one way to address the puzzle raised earlier is to claim that incitements such as desires do not cause but occasion (or suggest) to an agent that it would be attractive in some respect to act in a particular way. As this approach has it, we can appeal to incitements as motives when explaining action. But we do so by working within a teleological framework of action–explanation. Strictly speaking, according to this view, incitements are motives only in a secondary sense. It is their ends or objects that are the

genuine motives. Still, appealing to incitements allows us to specify both motives strictly so-called and their practical mode of presentation – this mode of presentation, once again, consisting in presenting an end to an agent as attractive or worthy of pursuit. Perhaps it is worth noting that, if we think of incitements as suggesting actions, we can link this approach more explicitly with what Reid says elsewhere about the nature of the suggestion relation.

As Reid thinks of it, the suggestion relation is semiotic. In the *Inquiry*, Reid says that sensations suggest conceptions of external objects and thereby function as signs of them. Furthermore, they are signs that draw attention not to themselves but to the objects they signify.<sup>9</sup> Suppose, for argument's sake, that incitements are like sensations inasmuch as they suggest conceptions of certain kinds. That is, suppose that incitements suggest of certain courses of action that they are attractive or pursuit-worthy. If so, then they, too, can function as signs – in this case, fallible ones of what is attractive or pursuit-worthy. Moreover, like sensations, they tend not to draw attention to themselves. They direct the agent's attention to their objects, which in certain cases may include the pleasure taken in bringing about one or another end.

Much more could be said about this approach. Without doing so on this occasion, let me at least stress that it addresses the puzzle articulated in the last section. It implies, in the first place, that incitements are not causes. Thus, it does not violate Efficient-Causal Exclusivity, which says that every event that has an efficient cause has one, and only one, efficient cause. Moreover, it does so in a principled fashion: it appears not to introduce a new, *sui generis* relation into Reid's ontology. Finally, it specifies how Reid's unofficial account of motivation can be wedded to his official account by offering a general teleological account of action that Reid himself would find congenial.

Is this attempted resolution of the puzzle satisfactory? There is reason to believe not, as a pair of worries presents itself. For one thing, the suggestion relation is for Reid governed by natural laws. It is in virtue of a 'law of our constitution', as Reid puts it, that sensations suggest conceptions of external objects. But, if Reid is correct, the occasioning or suggestion relation that incitements bear to the will of an autonomous agent is not nomic. And since it is not, there is the worry that we have in fact burdened Reid's ontology with a new type of *sui generis* relation.

More importantly, in his chapter 'Of the Influence of Incitements and Motives Upon the Will', Reid clearly indicates that there is a sense in which some human behaviour is explained by the influence of incitements, which is different from the way in which motives explain action:

<sup>9</sup> *An Inquiry Into The Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (IHM), edited by Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh University Press, 1997) II.vii, V.



The reason of explaining this distinction [that between appetite and reason] here is, that these two principles influence the will in different ways. Their influence differs, not in degree only, but in kind. This difference we feel, though it may be difficult to find words to express it. We may perhaps more easily form a notion of it by similitude.

It is one thing to push a man from one part of the room to another; it is a thing of a very different nature to use arguments to persuade him to leave his place, and to another. He may yield to the force which pushes him, without any exercise of his rational faculties; nay, he must yield to it, if he do[es] not oppose an equal or a greater force. His liberty is impaired in some degree; and, if he has not power sufficient to oppose, his liberty is quite taken away, and the motion cannot be imputed to him at all. The influence of appetite or passion seems to me to be very like this. If the passion be supposed irresistible, we impute the action to it solely, and not the man. If he had the power to resist, but yields, after a struggle, we impute the action, partly to the man, and partly to the passion.

[A]ppetite and passion give an impulse to act and impair liberty, in proportion to their strength.

(EAP II.ii: 74–5)

Reid says here that motives and incitements influence action in ways that are different in kind. Arguably, however, if we were to offer a teleological account of the motivational influence of incitements, according to which they simply present an end in a positive light, we would fail to take Reid at his word. Indeed, if we were to accept this teleological approach to action, much of what Reid says in this passage would look very strange. There does not seem to be any sense in which the end of a desire *pushes* us to action. Moreover, it would be odd to attribute an action to an incitement – as Reid says in the passage just quoted that we sometimes do – if that incitement were simply to present to an agent an end in a positive light. Finally, Reid maintains that we do some things ‘without any exercise either of judgment or will’ (EAP II.ii: 65). It is presumably the case, however, that actions that an agent performs on the basis of some desire but without exercising his will are caused. (Here I follow Reid in using the term ‘action’ in a somewhat extended, loose sense.) But then there must be some cause of such actions other than the agent himself. And what else would it be except that to which we attribute the action, namely, the incitement itself? Or to speak more accurately, what else could it be but another agent (God?), who instigated a causal process in which the incitement to which we attribute the action is an essential ingredient?

Suppose we relax Reid’s terminology, stipulating that if an agent by exercising his agent power instigates a chain of events *C* that eventuates in the occurrence of some event *E*, then any state or event in *C* is a cause of *E*, albeit in only an extended sense. According to this account of causality,

some cases of human behaviour – indeed, some cases of free human behaviour – are caused by incitements. Would this manoeuvre help us to reconcile Reid’s official account of motives with his unofficial view? No, it would not. For behind every incitement, there lies an agent who has exercised agent power. If so, then the central puzzle with which we have been wrestling has not been genuinely resolved. There still remains the project of reconciling Reid’s official and unofficial accounts of the character of motives with the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity.

But I think we know enough about Reid’s position by this point to see our way forward. Two conceptual manoeuvres can help reconcile the various things that Reid says about the character of motives. I begin with the first.

Some years ago, J. L. Mackie suggested that we think of causes as satisfying what he called an INUS condition – an insufficient but nonredundant part of an unnecessary but sufficient condition of some effect.<sup>10</sup> One promising approach to our puzzle, which is suggested by Reid’s talk of incitements as being partially responsible for action, is to think of incitements as also satisfying something akin to an INUS condition. The basic idea is that a mental state such as a desire plays a partial, contributory causal role in human action. In cases where the action is free, an incitement’s causing an action is contingent upon the exercise of active power. In cases where an action is not free, it is not. Let us focus on free actions for the moment. If we understand the term ‘inclines’ to denote a species of causation in the extended sense specified above, we could formulate the present proposal as follows.

Suppose ‘A’ stands for a voluntary action of an agent and ‘M’ stands for an incitement of one or another sort. We can then formulate the principle of:

*Shared Causal Influence:* A mental state *M* inclines an agent *S* to *A* just in case *S* is in *M* and were *S* to exercise his active power, then *M* and *S* (and perhaps some other conditions) would jointly cause *A*.

This principle tells us that incitements causally contribute to action, albeit only in a partial, extended sense. Is this principle something that Reid would accept? Well, it does not appear to introduce anything objectionable into Reid’s position or distort it in any significant sense.<sup>11</sup> After all, Reid himself appears to allow for the possibility of there being multiple shared causal influences in action. Return once again to the case in which an agent opens a window to breathe fresh air. Reid claims that in a case in which an agent

<sup>10</sup>See Mackie (1974).

<sup>11</sup>It does, however, introduce what is arguably a novel element into Reid’s position. Incitements are not agents. So, they are not efficient or agent causes. Neither are they governed by strict laws, at least when they contribute to free action. So, they are not what Reid calls physical causes or causes in the ‘lax and popular sense’. Were Reid to admit that incitements are causes in the way specified here, Reid would have to make room in his view for non-nomic causes that are not themselves efficient causes.

voluntarily moves her arm to open a window, the exercise of her active power is sufficient for her to will her arm to move. Still, the moving of the arm itself requires the cooperation of other causes, such as those involved in the movement of muscles, and Reid does not rule out the possibility that these causes are other than the agent herself (cf. EAP I.vi: 50–1). So, upon closer inspection, it appears that Reid believes that his view is compatible with the claim that many cases of action involve multiple causes. Indeed, if God is the efficient cause of an agent's muscles moving in certain ways when she wills to open a window, then a wide array of human actions are such that they involve a synergy of our willings with God's.

Still, this proposal faces a problem, which is that it contravenes the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity. This latter principle says, once again, that every event that has an efficient cause has one, and only one, efficient cause. But if the principle of Shared Causal Influence were correct, then some human actions would have at least two causes: the agent himself and his motives. Is there a solution to this problem? Yes. Surrender the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity. Although we attributed the principle to Reid earlier, on reflection, there are several reasons to believe that he would not accept it. This is the second conceptual manoeuvre in which we must engage to solve our puzzle.

The principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity implies that no event that is caused by an agent can have more than one cause. This, however, implies that no event could have multiple partial causes. But we have just seen that this is not something that Reid appears to want to rule out. Reid seems to countenance the possibility that when an agent wills to raise her arm, multiple causes are responsible for the occurrence of this event. Furthermore, the principle implies that causal overdetermination is impossible. Let us suppose that you and I simultaneously flick on two different light switches that are wired to a single light bulb. As a result of our actions, the light turns on. The event of the light's turning on, however, is causally overdetermined, as it has two sufficient causes. Were the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity true, such cases could not occur. But they obviously do occur. And that is good reason to believe that Reid does not embrace the principle.

So the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity seems too strong. That said, we did appear to have good reason to attribute it to Reid. Recall the argument in its favour: Reid holds that all powers have a dual character. To have, for example, the power to open the window is also to have the power not to open the window. But cases such as Locke's man in the locked room cast serious doubt on this claim about powers, as it seems that in this case, the agent has the power to stay in the room but not the power to leave. The principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity allowed us to preserve Reid's claim about the dual nature of powers while avoiding Locke's counterexample. It implies that the man in the locked room does not have the power to stay, since there would be too many causes of his staying. But we have seen that

while the principle yields the right result in this case, it is untenable for other reasons. Something, then, must be wrong with this line of argument. What is it?

The following, I believe: it fails to account for the fact that Reid uses the term 'power' in two different ways, one more strict than the other.<sup>12</sup> According to the strict and narrow use of the term:

All that is necessary to the production of any effect, is power in an efficient cause to produce that effect, and the exertion of that power; for it is a contradiction to say, that the cause has power to produce the effect, and exerts that power, and yet the effect is not produced. The effect cannot be in his power unless all the means necessary to its production be in his power.

(EAP IV.ii: 268; cf. IV.ix: 335)

In this sense of the term, an agent has the power to will to open a nearby window, but she does not have the power to actually open it. This is the sense of the term Reid introduces in his chapter 'Of the Words Cause and Effect, Action and Active Power' (EAP IV.ii). According to the loose and broad use of the term, by contrast, we have the power not merely to will to bring about certain ends, but also actually to perform such actions as opening windows, walking and fulfilling our promises. This is the sense of the term that pervades Reid's discussion of power in the early chapter 'Of the Extent of Human Power' (EAP I.vii).

A moment ago, I said that we attributed the principle of Efficient-Causal Exclusivity to Reid as a response to Locke's case of the man in the locked room. This case, we said, seems problematic because it presents a situation in which the Power to do Otherwise principle is violated. Now, however, we can see that there are two ways to interpret this principle: one in which the term 'power' refers to power in its narrow sense, the other in which it refers to power in its broad sense. Call the first way of reading the principle the *narrow interpretation*, and the second way, the *broad interpretation*. The question, then, is whether Reid accepts the narrow or the broad interpretation.

It seems to me best to interpret Reid as accepting the narrow interpretation for the following three reasons. First, while it should be admitted that Reid slides between a narrow and broad use of the term 'power', when Reid specifies the strict sense of the term, it is the narrow sense. This gives us some reason to believe that when Reid talks about power in the broad sense, he is using the word loosely, much in the way that he uses the term 'action' loosely when speaking of human actions that involve neither judgment nor will.

Second, by accepting the narrow interpretation of the Power to do Otherwise principle, Reid easily sidesteps the objection raised by Locke's

<sup>12</sup>Tuggy (2000) 20, notes this as well.

case of the man in the locked room. According to the narrow interpretation, the man in the locked room does not have the power to stay in the room. He has only the power to *will* to stay in the room. Since attributing to Reid the narrow interpretation allows him to avoid this counterexample and does not commit him to the impossibility of causal overdetermination, we have further reason to accept it.

Third, by accepting the narrow interpretation, Reid avoids Locke's counterexample in a principled way. After all, what libertarians, such as Reid, worry about are not cases in which an agent wills to act in a certain way but lacks the power not to act in that way. As Locke pointed out long before Frankfurt, it is easy to construct cases in which this occurs. Rather, what worries libertarians are either cases in which an agent wills to act in a certain way but lacks the power to will not to act in that way or, more radically, cases in which he simply lacks the power to will to perform one course of action as opposed to another because, say, determinism is true.<sup>13</sup> These are the cases in which freedom of the will is clearly contravened. This is not to suggest that the narrow interpretation of the Power to do Otherwise principle does not raise questions of its own – questions about how to ascribe moral responsibility, for example. It does. But Reid was aware of such difficulties and was willing to talk of both liberty and responsibility as being degreed properties about whose extent we are often ignorant.<sup>14</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

The puzzle to which I have addressed myself in this essay is one that concerns how to fit together two rather different accounts of motives with which Reid works. The solution I have offered has two parts. In the first place, I have suggested that Reid's account of causation is supple enough to allow for cases in which events have multiple partial causes. This allows motives to be causes in an extended sense. Second, I have claimed that we should not attribute to Reid the view that every event has one, and only one, efficient cause. Rather, we should settle instead for the weaker principle that an agent's *willing* has one, and only one, sufficient efficient cause. If this is right, the present interpretation of Reid has at least this virtue: it can account for three principles – Power to do Otherwise, Efficient-Causal Exclusivity and Shared Causal Influence – that, when properly understood, find support from Reid's texts. (A proper understanding of the first two principles, I have argued, requires us to modify them in their original formulation; they shall have to be understood as claims about 'power' in the

<sup>13</sup>Helen Steward (2009) makes a similar point.

<sup>14</sup>See EAP IV.v, for example. Here I am responding to Yaffe (2004), Chapter 2, who attributes to Reid the broad interpretation of Power to do Otherwise. Yaffe contends that there are insufficient reasons to attribute the narrow interpretation to Reid.

narrow sense and its exercise.) The resulting position is one according to which Reid's theory of motives is genuinely pluralistic. Human agents act on the basis of different types of motives, which influence action in very different ways. Motives in the strict and proper sense are the ends for which we act. They are in no interesting sense causes. Incitements, by contrast, are not ends. They push us to action and are, in an extended sense, causes. This pluralistic approach is perhaps not as elegant as some philosophers would like. And this may be a strike against it. But it may be worth reminding ourselves that Reid was often willing to sacrifice theoretical elegance when he thought that doing so more nearly captured the commonsensical appearances.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>An audience at the conference 'Hume and His Critics' at Baylor University in 2005. Rebecca Copenhaver and Luke Reinsma gave me helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.