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I

Maria Alvarez has recently argued that Reid's account of action gives rise to a sceptical worry concerning one's awareness of one's own actions (Alvarez 2000). This problem, along with a further concern stemming from a particular formulation of the regress objection, leads Alvarez to suggest that, if we wish to maintain a libertarian, broadly Reidian account of human agency, we should jettison the volitionist component of Reid's agent causal account of agency. In the following, I want to argue that Alvarez overstates the sceptical consequences of Reid's admission that there is room for doubt about the actual causes of bodily movements; rather than generating a serious epistemological problem for his theory, it can be given a more plausible reading that serves to defuse the sceptical worry. Furthermore, the reading I propose does justice to a number of Reid's other claims that are set aside or called into question by Alvarez's account.

Alvarez is nevertheless correct in noting that there are tensions in Reid's account originating from the dualist metaphysics to which he is committed. I will conclude by noting a further problem that arises from Reid's theory of action.

II

Reid claims that in order for a subject to be capable of free action, she must have the power to cause the event in question. The possession of such a power entails that one can exercise control over it; one cannot be the true cause of a movement if one could not but bring it about. Liberty therefore involves two-way powers. Reid fleshes this out in terms of the power a person has over his will:

*By the Liberty of a Moral Agent, I understand, a power over the determinations of his own Will.*

If, in any action, he had power to will what he did, or not to will it, in that action he is free. But if, in every voluntary action, the determination of his will be the necessary consequence of something involuntary in the state of his mind, or of something in his external circumstances, he is not free; he has not what I call the Liberty of a Moral Agent, but is subject to Necessity (AP: 599a-b).<sup>1</sup>

Reid notes that our exercise of power can have immediate effects in one of two directions; we are capable of both physical and mental action:

The immediate effects ... are reducible to two heads. We can give certain motions to our own bodies; and we can give a certain direction to our own thoughts (AP: 527b).

The worry that Alvarez raises concerns Reid's comments about one's epistemological access to the means by which one's actions are performed. In Chapter 7 of the first Essay on the Active Powers, Reid notes that the mechanism by which a volition brings about a bodily movement is unknown to us:

We know not even how those immediate effects of our power are produced by our willing them. We perceive not any necessary connection between the volition and exertion on our part, and the motion of our body that follows them (AP: 528a).

This is despite the fact that anatomists can provide us with an account of the workings of the body – which muscles contract or expand when an arm is moved, how the nerves operate to produce the movement, and so on. An anatomical story does not fill the explanatory gap:

That there is an established harmony between our willing certain motions of our bodies, and the operation of the nerves and muscles that produces these motions, is a fact known by experience. This volition is an act of the mind. But whether this act of the mind have any physical effect upon the nerves and muscles; or whether it be only an occasion of their being acted upon by some other efficient, according to the established laws of nature, is hid from us. So dark is our conception of our own power when we trace it to its origins (AP: 528a-b).<sup>2</sup>

Reid, then, holds that we are agents, in possession of a two-way active power by which we can either bring about or refrain from bringing about certain bodily movements. In acting we cause a volition, which in turn brings about the desired "internal" movement that is the "immediate effect" of our power. Reid admits that he cannot provide a complete account of the mechanisms involved in human

action. Just how the volition effects such a change is unknown; anatomical stories are not adequate for providing the kind of explanation required here.

There is a gap in our knowledge of the workings of human agency. One can know whether one has sought to bring some change about and, setting any sceptical worries about perceptual experience aside, one can know whether the desired event occurred. There remains room for some doubt about the relation between volition and motion, though, in that there is no "necessary connection" between them. Either can occur in the absence of the other; given this, the fact that both took place does not entail that one was the cause of the other. I might will that a certain event happen, but I cannot know whether I was the true cause of that event's occurrence.

It is this lacuna that is seen as an invitation to scepticism by Alvarez.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of any clear account of what takes place in paradigm cases of human action, we are left at a loss when trying to determine whether any particular willed bodily movement constitutes an action of the subject. The worry is exacerbated by Reid's further comment that the volition might "be only an occasion of their being acted upon by some other efficient, according to the established laws of nature" (AP: 528a-b). So not only does Reid admit to ignorance concerning the effect of the will on the body, he appears to admit to the possibility that the true cause might be something other than the subject herself. A subject can know what the content of her volition is and she can know whether the bodily movement occurred, but she cannot know whether the former was the true cause of the latter.

Alvarez argues that this leads immediately to an unacceptable form of scepticism.

On Reid's view, when we will a particular motion of our body, we *know* without evidence (past or present) what movement will occur, we *believe*, from experience, that the motion will occur, and we *assume*, though we cannot be sure, that the motion, when it occurs, is the effect of our volition. We can only *believe* the second and *assume* the third because the connection between our volitions and the motions is causal ... and hence unperceived ... It is precisely that view that opens the door to scepticism about agency (Alvarez 2000: 80).

I can decide to pick up a pen. I can know in advance what bodily movements will have to occur if this is to be achieved in the most efficient, reliable way. I can have good grounds for believing that the bodily movement will take place (at the time expected, at the speed expected, etc.), and I will assume that, should the motion occur, it was as a result of my decision.

If a theory entails that one cannot know whether one is the author of one's apparent actions, then, Alvarez claims, "this is sufficient ground for rejecting a theory of action" (Alvarez 2000: 80). The key issue, though, is not whether Alvarez's response to the perceived scepticism is appropriate; instead, it is whether the sceptical thesis is to be found in Reid's work in the first place. Her claim might

appear too strong: one initial response might be that Alvarez is too quick to ascribe such a serious sceptical consequence to Reid's account of action. We can distinguish, after all, between at least two relevant sceptical claims, only one of which is obviously fatal to any theory of action. Firstly, it might be suggested that one could be mistaken about whether any *particular* bodily movement was an action; alternatively, there is the stronger sceptical claim that one could be mistaken in *all* cases of apparent action. These are crucially different, and it is important to be clear on which, if any, Reid is committed to. The weaker claim need not amount to much more than the suggestion that one's knowledge of one's own actions is defeasible; that is, one can be wrong on the matter of whether one performed a particular action (or was the cause of a particular bodily movement).

The weaker claim, as I have described it here, does not look overly problematic. It should be accepted that one *can be* mistaken in ascribing actions to oneself – we can find examples from both the philosophical and psychological literature to support this claim. If Reid is only committed to the weaker claim, which, of course, does not entail the stronger, there seems little reason to call this aspect of his theory into question.

One example of such an error comes from Brian O'Shaughnessy. He attempts to provide a thought experiment in which a subject is systematically misled about the source of a bodily movement believed to be an action:

Suppose that a psychological subject is performing regular trained actions. For example, at  $t_1$  exactly, and with his elbow anchored at a fixed point on a table, he moves his hand at a specified rate along a graduated path traced out on that table. We shall suppose that this has been laboriously practised and that he can perform it to perfection. Furthermore, we have constructed and installed a fantastic machine which can get his arm to make precisely this movement. Then at  $t_1$  when he is to begin moving his arm a bell rings to inform him of the fact; and a mere miniscule instant later the machine swings into action. We see his arm move in exactly the required way! (O'Shaughnessy 1980: 116).

This example provides a scenario in which the subject falsely believes he was the cause of the movement. If all Reid is doing in this passage is signalling that such cases are possible, then this is unproblematic. It certainly seems that the possibility of error will be always present if one admits the degree of uncertainty about the causal forces in play that Reid does (AP: 528a-b); it might be that this is inevitable given the dualist aspect of Reid's theory, leaving as it does an explanatory gap at the mind–body border.

To this extent at least, this is a positive feature of Reid's theory. Any theory of agency should admit the possibility of certain limited forms of scepticism about agency, as O'Shaughnessy's example suggests. Whether an agent succeeds in causing a perceived bodily movement is a matter for empirical investigation and open to question; we should not assume that we can tell a priori whether an

attempted action was successfully performed. Nor should we be quick to conclude, on the possibility of such cases, that all apparent actions could be brought about by external causes – this would be to conflate the two forms of scepticism and call into question our conception of ourselves as embodied agents capable of acting in a public world.

Even so, I do not think that it is plausible to suggest that this is all that Reid is doing in the key passage. Reid's claim is of an altogether more general nature. He does not appear to be concerned with the odd erroneous belief about one's actions, but instead seems to be making a point about the possible causal precursors of willed bodily movements in general. If we are to offer a defence against Alvarez's charge, we will have to look elsewhere; we cannot do so by suggesting that Reid is simply noting human fallibility. In any case, I will argue that we can avoid the sceptical charge even if we reject this reading. Ideally, any response should be able to accommodate such atypical cases as O'Shaughnessy's above. Alvarez is right to draw our attention to the potentially worrying section of the text. I do not, however, think that she is correct in concluding that it entails the strong form of scepticism mentioned above.

In the following I will argue that Reid does not advocate a sceptical stance towards knowledge of one's actions; nor should he, as his theory as presented does not commit him to such a position.

### III

The remarkable thing is that Reid seems completely at ease with this gap in our knowledge. There is even an explicit rejection of any such sceptical worry at the end of Chapter Six of the First Essay:

It is only in human actions, that may be imputed for praise or blame, that it is necessary for us to know who is the agent; and in this, nature has given us all the light that is necessary for our conduct (AP: 527b).

Nor, as Roger Gallie notes (Gallie 1989: 139), does he recognise any conflict with the passage in Chapter Five, where he states that

in certain motions of my body and directions of my thought, I know, not only that there must be a cause that has power to produce these effects, but that I am that cause; and I am conscious of what I do in order to the production of them (AP: 523b).

Notice also the tension between the last clause, in which Reid states that we know what we do to bring about a bodily movement, and his later admission that our grasp of the workings of agency is far from complete.<sup>4</sup>

Nor again does he note the conflict with any of his First Principles of Contingent Truths, even though it appears at first glance to clash with the sixth, ninth and eleventh. The sixth is the clearest:

6. Another first principle, I think, is, *That we have some degree of power over our actions, and the determinations of our will* (IP: 446b).

At the heart of the problem is the fact that Reid seems to want to hold all of three apparently mutually inconsistent propositions: (i) that to possess active power is to be capable of being the efficient cause of the relevant kinds of event (bodily movements in the present case); (ii) that we have it in our power to cause bodily movements; and (iii) that the volitions we have when we intend to perform a bodily action might just be the occasion for some other efficient cause. It appears that the first two rule out the third, in that if one is capable of truly causing bodily actions, then nothing other than oneself can be the cause of the movement in standard cases – yet this is exactly what seems to be allowed by (iii), on the wider reading. Either Reid commits a serious slip by asserting (iii), or we have overlooked some means of reconciling (i)–(iii). One way would be to read (iii) as only applicable to a limited range of non-standard cases, irrespective of whether we are in a position to detect these. Taking Reid as committed to the defeasibility of beliefs about one's own agency would be one way of taking this line. We have already set aside this option.

The key question is, why does he not simply reject the idea that our volitions might just be the occasion for another efficient cause to act? Given the fact that it appears to give rise to a serious problem, there is little reason for Reid to assert (iii); he does have to grant that we do not know the full details of the causal processes involved in bodily actions (particularly given the dualist background), but this falls far short of (iii). Furthermore, he has the means for dismissing the worry. That we are agents is a first principle, and there is nothing to prevent Reid applying his “same shop” argument to the belief (IHM: 183b). Another reason for rejecting the sceptical challenge is that we could not even possess the concept of agency were this not so:

From the consciousness of our own activity, seems to be derived not only the clearest, but the only conception we can form of activity, or the exertion of active power (AP: 523b).<sup>5</sup>

Reid even goes further than this. In a letter to James Gregory, he writes:

In the strict and philosophical sense, I take a cause to be that which has the relation to the effect which I have to my voluntary and deliberate actions; for I take this notion of a cause to be derived from the power I feel in myself to produce certain effects (Reid 1863, 1994: 77a).

This provides us with a straightforward rebuttal of any suggestion to the effect that we are not the agents of our bodily movements. An agent's voluntary and deliberate actions are paradigm instances of causes; if we do not cause our actions, then there are no such things as causes.

The only reason I can see for Reid allowing (iii) is that he regards it as a genuine empirical possibility; but what, then, explains his lack of concern about its consequences? Setting aside the possibility that Reid was blind to the problem, the only plausible answer is that he takes it to be consistent with the truth of his account of human agency as well as with the rejection of the strong sceptical worry. I want to suggest that the way forward is to take seriously Reid's comments about what the "immediate effects" of one's active power can consist in. Alvarez's argument is helpful here in that it makes explicit one alternative reading, which attempts to reconcile all of Reid's other claims about human agency but ends up leaving Reid open to the sceptical charge. By limiting the immediate effects of one's action to the generation of volitions, Alvarez accommodates Reid's positive claim that humans do possess active power, even if we cannot be certain whether we are the true causes of our bodily movements. On the matter of the *immediate* consequences of one's actions. She writes that

the power we tentatively credit ourselves with is only the power to move our bodies *indirectly*, because we move our bodies, if it is indeed we who move them, by willing them to move. We will our bodies to move, that is we cause volitions that they move, and *these volitions* caused the willed movements: volitions are the means we have for effecting changes in our bodies (Alvarez 2000: 73).

The crux of the matter concerns the point at which one's power ends: where is the border between the direct and indirect consequences of one's actions? To ask this question is to ask about the boundaries of the agent.

If one thinks that giving rise to volitions is all that we can, in the strictest sense, do, then one is leaving the door open for scepticism by admitting that what happens thereafter is an open question, even if one is allowing that humans possess active power. Once there is a volition, one's input into events has ended – anything that comes afterward is more correctly described as a remote consequence of one's action. As soon as one's bodily movements are seen as external to the limits of the will – as soon, that is, as it is claimed that we can only act upon the body indirectly – any claim that one was the cause of a bodily event is open to sceptical challenge in light of Reid's comment that "between the will to produce the effect and the production of it, there may be agents or instruments of which we are ignorant" (AP: 528b).

It may be the case, on such a picture, that one's act of will has some causal role to play; it might be the sole cause of the bodily action, or it might be one link in a

chain of causation, where this might include actions by other sentient agents at later stages in the process. In such a case the other agent might have a claim to be solely or primarily responsible for the consequent events. Worse still, although it is not addressed directly by Reid in the relevant passage, one's act of will might have had no role in the event whatsoever. It looks on this version of the Reidian story that one's volitions could be causally impotent, and never succeed in bringing about any movement whatsoever. The conflict with the rest of Reid's theory is clear.

Alvarez's characterisation of bodily movements as external to the will is made explicit in the following passage, worth quoting at length, in which she disputes Reid's claim that bodily movements can be immediate effects of active power.

It should be noted that Reid's account of how we exercise our active power to move our bodies has the following consequences for his theory of agency. First, contrary to what he says, "human active power" has only *one* kind of immediate effect, namely, determinations of the will, i.e. "volitions", whose objects may be either changes in our bodies or in our thoughts. Second, even assuming that changes in our bodies or thoughts "are produced by our willing them", i.e. are the effects of our volitions, these changes are not "immediate effects of our power". They are at best *remote* effects (Alvarez 2000: 73).

The willed movements of my body appear to be on a par with the effects of my throwing a stone at a greenhouse, even in the best case in which my volitions are causally efficacious in bringing about the relevant changes in the nerves and muscles. Both are distant, external or remote effects; they all lie outwith the immediate effects of my exercise of power. Given such a picture, it is difficult to identify oneself qua agent with one's body, even in part – it is an external object, with which one can only interact remotely.

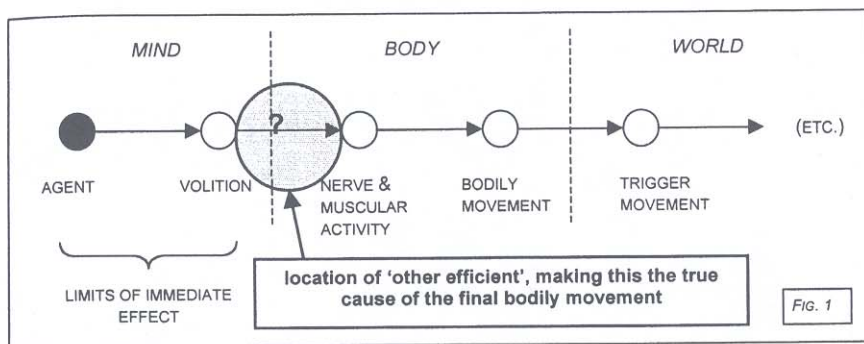
As Alvarez notes, this is clearly not Reid's conception of the relation between agent and bodily action. This can be seen in his use of the example of the man who voluntarily and intentionally shoots his neighbour dead: *he* "draws the trigger of the gun", and all else is a remote effect (AP: 528b). Alvarez denies that Reid is entitled to make such claims, given his theory of action; the agent does not directly cause bodily movements.

So they are not immediate effects of our power, regardless of whether they are, as we assume, caused by our volitions rather than by some "agents or instruments of which we are ignorant" (Alvarez 2000: 73).

Alvarez's interpretation of Reid's theory of action can be represented by Figure 1.

I suggest that we can do more to reconcile Reid's various claims than Alvarez is willing to admit. There are two main strands to Alvarez's argument: firstly, she





argues that on Reid’s theory, when correctly construed, a volition alone can be a direct or immediate effect of the exercise of power; secondly, there is the claim that a serious sceptical worry follows from Reid’s admission that we do not know the mechanisms by which volitions effect change in the body. I want to reject both claims. As will be discussed in more detail below, accepting the claim that volitions have a key role to play in the causing of physical events does not entail that only a volition can be the direct upshot of an act of will. Reid’s lack of concern about the particular means by which volitions effect bodily changes can be justified by interpreting Reid’s theory of action in a way consistent with this claim.

IV

There are two related questions that have to be addressed if a satisfactory response to Alvarez’s argument is to be found. Firstly, what relation does Reid conceive as holding between the various stages in the above causal account of action? An answer is needed if Reid is to avoid getting snagged on the contradiction concerning the immediate effects of the will of which he stands accused. Secondly, why is Reid not concerned about the explanatory gap between volitions and muscular operations? It is implausible to suggest that this is an oversight on his part – his discussion of the matter is brief, but does suggest that he both recognises that there is an issue here and holds that the lack of explanation is not troublesome for his theory.

Reid’s main concern is with such issues as the role of active power, the difference between agent and event causation, the role of volitions, and so on. Contemporary discussion of Reid’s theory of action has also tended to reflect this. The fact that he does not labour over the details of the means by which one’s bodily actions are performed indicates that he does not see this as an area in which his account of bodily action might face serious challenge. Possibly this is due to the predominantly dualistic background against which he proposes his theory; I suspect, though, that it is because he does not think that, irrespective of which detailed

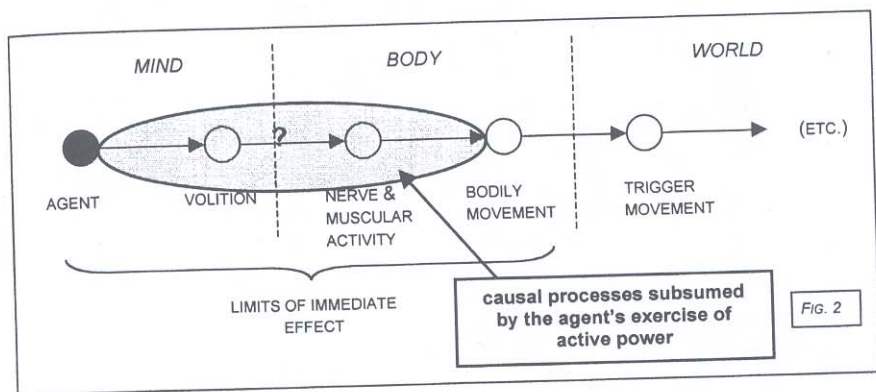
story is slotted in, there will be any serious problems for the rest of his account. To put it somewhat bluntly, he is simply not concerned with that issue, interesting as we might find it, and thinks that the details do not matter.<sup>6</sup>

To hold, as Reid does, that the generation of volitions has a central role in free action is not to admit that one's active power extends only that far. To assume so, as Alvarez does, involves an implicit rejection of the idea that an agent might perform a movement by utilising her internal machinery and still truly claim that *she* brought about the movement directly. Any plausible account of action, whether materialist or dualist, will leave room for the contraction of muscles, the workings of the nervous system, the neurological events that precede both, and so on. Despite this, few would claim that the agent is only truly responsible for the first stage in the complex chain of internal causes that constitutes a voluntary movement, whether this be a volition or a certain type of neural activity. The only motivation for holding such a belief appears to be the assumption that action has to be immediate and basic, with no mechanism 'intervening' between agent and act. This, however, is an implausible position; not only does it render the agent/act relation simple in an entirely mysterious way, it tends to lead towards an identification of the agent with that which is more correctly regarded as a part of the agent. We have to take seriously Reid's assertion that the bodily effects of an exercise of power are "immediate" and the causally relevant mechanisms "internal".<sup>7</sup>

We should also note in this context that volitions are not the only intermediaries standing between the agent's active power and the bodily movement. To suggest with Alvarez that Reid ignores the fact that volitions are the true immediate effects of the will is to claim that he also ignores all of the other causal processes that stand between act of will and bodily movement, for it could only be by doing so that he might mistakenly identify the bodily action with the immediate effect. But it is clear from the text that Reid does not do so; instead, he fully acknowledges the role of the nervous system and musculature, as well as those other processes of which we remain ignorant. This is made explicit in a nearby passage where, after noting the anatomical story, Reid writes:

But, without thinking in the least, either of the muscles or nerves, we will only the external effect, and the *internal machinery*, without our call, *immediately produces that effect* (AP: 528a, my italics).

There is a parallel to be drawn here with Reid's account of perception. If we hold to the view that Reid advocates a form of direct realism, we do so while recognising that sensations have a central role to play as natural signs in allowing the mind access to the external world. The fact that sensations play this role does not compromise Reid's rejection of the indirect realism of Locke *et al.*: one perceives the external world directly in virtue of having sensations, and one immediately causes one's body to move through the generation of the appropriate volition.<sup>8</sup>



Arguing that the immediate effects of one's active power be identified with the first stage in the causal process is like arguing that one can only perceive the last thing with any causal role in perception.

Rather than Alvarez's picture, illustrated in Figure 1 above, Reid's account of action is more correctly represented by Figure 2.

On this account, the problematic area is relocated within the agent's means of effecting bodily actions – within the agent *herself*, we might say. The border that defines the limits between the immediate and remote effects of action on this picture is the body–world boundary, and not that between mind and body, as was the case on Alvarez's picture. This does not address the sceptical worry head-on; it might even be regarded as more troublesome, on the grounds that it might seem to challenge the very possibility of any form of action, in contrast to Alvarez's picture, which leaves a small area for active power. Nevertheless, the relocation of the problem area to within the boundaries of the subject allows Reid access to a line of defence unavailable to anyone accepting the theory represented in Figure 1.

On the assumption that Reid intends the wider reading of the comment about other efficient causes, wherein this is taken to apply to all causes of action, we can now turn to the matter of why Reid does not seem overly concerned by the uncertainty at the heart of agency. His lack of concern can be explained by the fact that all the possibilities he mentions allow for the agent's volitions having a role to play in the generation of bodily movements via internal mechanisms. In all the scenarios outlined, had the agent not exercised her power, there would have been no bodily movement. On those occasions when she does, the movement reliably occurs.<sup>9</sup> This is true even if the mechanism with which the movement is brought about involves an agent other than the subject herself. The active power of the other efficient is subsumed within our power in such cases.

We should note in passing that *no* physical event is solely dependent upon our will. Any action will also involve bodily processes that are governed by the laws of nature – and therefore another efficient cause – and thus are partially outwith

our control (AP: 523b-524a), but this is not seen to challenge our claim to the status of agent.<sup>10</sup> Our actions can contain causal elements that we are unaware of – and not in total control of – while still being our actions. Given this, the possibility of another efficient cause playing a role in our actions should not trouble us.

A theory of action can hold that an event counts as one's action if it reliably follows an appropriate exercise of the agent's power. The nature of the mechanism connecting volition and movement is not the key issue in determining whether some motion counts as an action for which the subject can be held responsible; rather, the question is whether the subject can reliably bring about such a bodily movement. If it is in the subject's power to do so – and to withhold from doing so – then on Reid's account the subject is a free agent. *Even if* the subject was not the sole conscious intermediary in the causal chain that resulted in the desired outcome, the bodily movement counts as an action by the subject if the above condition is met.

The key feature of the apparently troublesome case mentioned by Reid is that it supports the relevant counterfactuals. If one's volitions are reliably followed by the desired event, and if one's attempts to withhold from performing the movement are systematically followed by an absence of the movement, and this is true in all of the relevant counterfactuals, then there appears little reason not to ascribe the relevant power to the subject. Worries about the role of the other efficient cause are lessened, given that its power is not exercised except on those occasions when the subject's volitions require it.

The fact that Reid does not pay a great deal of attention to the role of the other agent is not an oversight on Reid's part. Instead, the crucial fact is that we find our bodies regularly and reliably responding to our will. One can know what one intends to do (what one wills); one can know in advance what action should follow any particular volition; when one regularly and consistently finds the movement occurring after the volition, this is enough to ground the belief that one was the source of the movement.

In support of this reading, we should note that the sceptical worry was never that one's volitions had *no* role to play – for example, that we could mistakenly believe ourselves to have acted in the minimal sense of giving rise to volitions, or that the movement of our bodies only coheres accidentally with our volitions – it was only that some other active power might be *also* involved in the causal process. Reid never suggests that our volitions have no role to play in our bodily movements; given this, what he really has to do is find a way to reconcile the possibility of another's involvement with his wider theory of action. This is achieved by treating the other as playing the role of a part of the agent's internal mechanism.

Any individual belief can still be wrong on such a picture, it should be noted. Reid does not say much on this matter, but given his discussion of perceptual error it seems reasonable to hold that he would admit the possibility of error here. It seems probable that an account could be constructed of the possible sources of

error here that mirrored (to a lesser or greater extent) Reid's discussion of the possible sources of error in cases of perceptual experience. We can accept that one might be mistaken in at least some cases – O'Shaughnessy's hypothetical experimental set-up provides one artificial example – but it does not follow that one might be mistaken in the majority of cases, and this is what matters for Reid.

v

Those who claim that Reid is committed to an unpalatable form of scepticism may look for support to his admission that his account of human action

may leave some doubt, whether we be, in the strictest sense, the efficient cause of the voluntary motions of our own body (AP: 528b)

and

How far we are properly efficient causes, how far occasional causes, I cannot pretend to determine (AP: 530a-b).

It may look as if Reid is willing to admit here the sceptical conclusion that we may not be the authors of our apparent actions. When given the stronger of the two interpretations, this gets us to the devastating form of scepticism discussed by Alvarez. Before commenting on this further, though, we should note that the first passage above is immediately followed by the further claim that

The man who knows that such an event depends upon his will, and who deliberately wills to produce it, is, in the strictest moral sense, the cause of the event; and it is justly imputed to him, whatever physical causes may have concurred in its production (AP: 528b).

It is hard to reconcile the two passages above with the present interpretation – but it is equally difficult to reconcile them with any interpretation that takes seriously the rest of Reid's theory. As Gallie notes, it is hard even to reconcile two of the passages above, despite the fact that one follows the other in the text (AP: 528b). If one is not the efficient cause of an event, to what extent can one be the cause in any sense, never mind in the "strictest moral sense"?

The present interpretation allows that one is the cause in the latter sense; one has freely and deliberately employed reliable "internal machinery" to bring about a certain bodily event, with all the consequences that followed from it, and is thus morally responsible. If there is doubt left over about whether one is the efficient cause "properly" or "in the strictest sense", it is only because there *is* room for debate here, given the role of the "other efficient" that might have "concurred in its production" (See Figure 2). But the doubt does not relate to whether oneself or

some other was the efficient cause, where a clear and correct answer would be available when all the facts were in, but rather signals the need for clarification on the relationship between agent and other. This is the point of the “strictest sense” clause; if read differently, there is no sense, strict or otherwise, in which one could be the efficient cause. One can be the efficient cause of the volition, but nothing more (see Figure 1).

There is no doubt that this is still something of an uncomfortable claim for Reid, resulting from the dualist aspects of his theory. Were there no mysterious gap between volition and physiological activity, there would be no such ambiguity about the causal structure of action. The problem, though, is hardly the sceptical conclusion with which Alvarez charges him.

## VI

In closing, I want to very quickly sketch a further problem for Reid. Even if Reid’s account avoids the sceptical worry about the authorship of one’s own apparent actions, a worry arises as to whether his theory faces a problem concerning one’s awareness of the actions of others. Given that he is willing to admit the possibility of more than one active power playing a role in any actions we perceive, there may be problems in identifying *which* power is the dominant one, to whom praise or blame should be ascribed.

Such a problem does not arise in the first-person case, as we are aware of the free and deliberate exercise of our power, and the consistent relationship between volition and action. In other words, one has access to both mental and physical aspects of action in one’s own case; but the possibility of such access is ruled out in the third-person case. This might give rise to some doubt about the identity of the agent, despite his claim to the contrary (AP: 527b). It also raises a concern for his ninth Principle of Contingent Truth, “*that certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of the mind*” (IP: 449–a). The worry does not concern *whether* there is a mind behind the motions, but rather whether we can ever be in a position to determine *which* mind authorship – and therefore praise or blame – should be ascribed to. This becomes a genuine problem as soon as the possibility of more than one agent playing a role in the causal process, as understood by Reid, is admitted and it is acknowledged that both have some control over the same body. In effect, a version of the Kantian ‘many minds’ argument against Cartesian dualism seems to apply here.

The problem is that once Reid grants that any agency involved in an action is truly an efficient cause, it appears that the intermediate causes discussed above, even when subsumed within the agent’s mechanisms, must be in possession of a power to bring about the relevant bodily movements. Were this not so, they could not be correctly described as efficient causes. Once this is admitted, there is a

question about the actual cause – the real agent – behind any perceived bodily action. Given that it is admitted that this is “hid from us”, coming as it does at the border between the mental and physical (construed in a broadly dualist way), the sceptical worry appears genuine – on Reid’s account, we may not be able, even in principle, to determine the identity of the agent of any perceived bodily action.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that, however serious we take such problems to be, they are not the result of Reid’s volitionism, as Alvarez claims, but his dualism. Reid’s theory of action can withstand the sceptical charge made by Alvarez and noted by Gallie, and provides us with a credible account of the relation between an agent and her internal workings. I suspect that most theories of action would struggle to give a clear account of cases in which another sentient agent plays a role within one’s internal machinery, whether we take this to be of a material or immaterial sort.

#### REFERENCES

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> References to the *Essays on the Active Powers* are indicated by the abbreviation ‘AP’, those to the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* by ‘IP’, and those to the *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ‘IHM’.
- <sup>2</sup> See also AP: 530a.
- <sup>3</sup> Gallie also considers this a problem for Reid (Gallie 1989: 139–41).
- <sup>4</sup> This passage might be thought to provide some support for the defeasibility reading, outlined above.
- <sup>5</sup> Although he goes on to admit that he is uncertain whether the idea of power could be formed in any other way (AP: 524b).
- <sup>6</sup> O’Shaughnessy, incidentally, thinks they do (O’Shaughnessy 1980: 113–9).
- <sup>7</sup> This is a criticism with which Cartesian dualism might be charged; if the self is the mind, then one does act on the body as one would act upon something external to oneself. Descartes’ own view is notoriously complicated by his comments about the relationship between pilot and ship.
- <sup>8</sup> The connection is closer in other ways as well (Stalley 1998).
- <sup>9</sup> Reid’s comments about trying cover those cases in which the bodily movement does not reliably follow the volition (AP: 532b).
- <sup>10</sup> It could be argued that such mechanisms are in fact necessary, such that no action could occur in the absence of the existence of physical laws.
- <sup>11</sup> This worry only arises in its strongest form for the dualist. The actual cause of a bodily action on a materialist account would be empirically investigable.