A Defence of Agent-Causal Libertarianism

By

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to offer a defence of the agent-causal view of libertarianism. The thesis is structured in three parts where I argue for three distinct claims. In the first part, I claim that the powers-based view of causation allows us to recognize agents as distinct causes that operate in the world. In the second part, I expand the idea of powers and explain how we can understand the human agency by reference to the notion of agent causation and powers agents possess. In the third part, I demonstrate how the idea of human agency I have developed in the second part could be relevant to the libertarian notion of free agency.

Keywords: Agent-causation / Libertarianism / Event-causation / Free agency / Human Agency / Rational Powers

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Introduction

Human beings act in innumerable ways. They run, talk, cook, walk, write, etc. Not only that humans engage in all these activities, but they also – at least some of the time – take a part in them because they want to. For instance, I will go for a run in the morning because I hold that it is beneficial for my mental and physical well-being. When humans act in the way they want and when there is no impediment towards achieving the goal of an action, we are tempted to say that these actions are *up to the agent* who performed them. In addition to this, if humans are *able* to act in the way they find most desirable, we hold that they possess a sufficient level of control that enables them to act in these ways. In the general sense, the control condition which suffices to make it a case that a particular action is *up to the agent* is something philosophical tradition recognized as free will or free agency.[1]

Accounting what free agency is and how can it be undermined by internal or external factors – e.g. determinism, God`s foreknowledge, direct manipulation, psychological compulsion, etc. – became one of the longstanding issues in philosophy. According to a line of philosophers known as agent-causal libertarians (henceforward ACL), the only way to account for free and responsible agency is by introducing the idea of agent-causation (henceforward AC). As proponents of this view content, AC depicts *sui generis* type of causal production where the first relata of the causal relationship is an agent *qua* agent (Chisholm 1983, Clarke 2003, O`Connor 2000, Steward 2012a). The agent, they further argue, should be understood as the persisting substance that plays a *direct* and *irreducible* role in bringing about free action. Understanding what this direct role implies is a matter of dispute among agent-causalists but a shared feature of all offered proposals is that the agent-causal activity cannot be fully comprehended in terms of event-causal ontology. Since AC cannot be accounted for in the terms of event ontology, agents` action cannot be fully understood by reference to previous events or causes which lead to free action. The agent plays an indispensable role in producing free action. So, advocates of this view conclude, AC is the only way to account for free agency.

As I see it, the general idea of ACL is correct. Introducing agents as causes is the way to understand free agency. Nonetheless, a lot of important issues have been raised against this

[1] Of course, historically speaking, freedom of will and freedom of action do not represent the same phenomena. Free will is the direct translation of the term „liberum arbitrium“ which is associated with freedom of choosing or making decisions. On the other hand, freedom of action is a modern concept and is associated with conditions relevant for making free actions. Regardless of this historical divergence, I will use these two concepts interchangeably and my primary focus will be on the freedom of action.

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approach. So, in this thesis, my intention is to offer a line of defence of ACL which I found most tenable. Furthermore, I will not only endorse ACL but also distance my own proposal from the former ACL proposals which I deem unconvincing.

The thesis will be separated into three chapters where I am going to argue for three distinct claims. In the first section, I will argue that there is nothing metaphysically incongruous or dubious about the concept of AC as it has been generally assumed. Also, I am going to argue for an ontological framework where it can be shown how agents can be causes. Then, in the second part of the thesis, I will show in more detail how the agent-causal operation is supposed to work in the context of human agency. This will require that we put aside the intentional concept of agency and adopt a powers-based view of agency. In the end, I will show how specific sort of causal powers agents possess, namely *rational* powers, could be relevant for the libertarian notion of free agency.

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Chapter 1 – A Place for Agents in the World of Causes

As I pointed out, the first task one needs to achieve in order to provide a proper defence of ACL is to show how agents can be causes. To do this, I am going to argue for two claims in this chapter. First, I will content that the reluctance towards AC can be partially traced back to the metaphysical paradigm which takes events as the only proper relata of causal relations. Second, by relying on the powers-based account of causation offered by Harre and Madden (1975), I am going to show why the event-causal orthodoxy might not be fully correct and how one can find a place for agents in the world of causes.

1.1. The Orthodoxy About the Causal Relata and the Ellipticity Thesis

Although there have been proposals that relata might be *facts* (Mellor 1995), *tropes* (Campbell 1990), or *states of affairs* (Armstrong 1997), the view which dominated the landscape of the debate about causation is that relata belong to the category of events (Lewis 1986, Davidson 1980). In the general sense, this means that causation – however we conceive of it – occurs between two mutually independent events. What supports the reign of this paradigm? I believe that at least two reasons can be given.

First, one of the most natural ideas we associate with the concept of causality is the temporal asymmetry of causes and effects. Causes, we firmly hold, must always precede their effects. Not only that we find the possibility of effects preceding its causes utterly counterintuitive, it is also questionable can such a thing even exist in the physical world. Regardless of the possibility of backward causation, the widely accepted fact happens to be that causation is endowed with the temporal aspect or *time-arrow.* Because of this, the natural idea is to find a suitable ontological category with temporal properties. This is where events come into the game.

Second, the idea of temporal asymmetry is bolstered with the intuition that truthmakers of causal relations are events. Consider, for instance, the infamous billiard-ball example. To assert that the statement 'the white billiard ball caused the blue ball to go into a whole' is true, we generally assume that there must be a particular event occurring at t1 – e.g. pushing, touching, or hitting of the white and blue ball – and another event which occurs at t2 – e.g. the blue ball entering the hole.

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Of course, several more reasons can be given why the event-causal paradigm has been so influential in contemporary discussions but going into further details about this might not be of great importance here. The crucial point is to ask the following question. What is about this paradigm that happens to be so detrimental to the doctrine of AC? As I see it, the inimical effect of the paradigm is intertwined with something which can be called the *ellipticity thesis*. What I have in mind here is succinctly represented by Menzies in the following paragraph:

> A sentence such as 'The building caused the shadow', in which the noun phrases in the cause and effect positions refer to physical objects, is grammatically well-formed. So, ordinary language clearly recognizes *physical objects* as causal relata. But this sentence is most naturally interpreted as elliptical for a more complex sentence such 'The building` obstructing the light caused the shadow to form', in which the noun phrases denoting cause and effect are both quasi-sentential in form. Given that causal sentences relating physical objects are properly seen as elliptical in this way, I shall not treat physical objects as genuine causal relata. (1989: 59-60)

Menzies suggests that any reference to substances or particular objects in order to provide a proper causal explanation is ultimately elliptical or reducible to the explanation where only events stand in the cause-effect relation. Since every instance of the statement 'The building caused the shadow' is, in the end, reducible to the statement 'The building obstructing the light caused the shadow to form', there is no point in referring to physical objects as the relevant relata.

In the quoted paragraph, Menzies discusses the case with physical objects but the same line of reasoning is applicable to the discussion about the human agency. Consider the statement 'Jones caused the death of Smith'. This statement supports, at least superficially, the idea of AC. But, as with the Menzies` example, to provide a proper explanation of Smith`s death, we usually cite Jones`s action – his pulling the trigger of a gun at t1 – as the actual cause of Smith`s death. So, following Menzies` recipe, we would assert that the statement 'Jones caused the death of Smith' is elliptical for the statement 'Jones action at t1 – his pulling the trigger of the gun at t1– caused the death of Smith at t2'. Therefore, a statement with the AC form is nothing more than a shorthand for the more appropriate event-causal form of explanation.

At this point someone could raise two questions. First, what is the actual problem behind the ellipticity thesis? Isn`t it the case that when we assert that Jones caused the death of Smith what we mean is that some action of Jones caused the death of Smith? Second, if agent-causalists oppose the reduction the ellipticity thesis implies – as they do – how would the agent-

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causal exploranation actually work? Are proponents of this view committed to the thesis that agents cause something without acting?

To briefly respond to the second question first, the clear answer is no. It is not the case that agents cause something without acting. Agents` causal activity has to be *identified* with their actions.[2] Concerning the first question, it is certainly the case that Jones`s action at t1 is relevant for our explanation of why Smith died. Nevertheless, there are at least three reasons why the ellipticity thesis is ultimately mistaken.

First, Menzies – like many others (e.g. Moore 2009: 333) – suggests that it happens to be a part of our ordinary language that we reduce instances of AC statements to statements with the event-causal form. But is this really the case? Does our ordinary language actually operate in this way? I am not completely convinced that it does. Most of the time, explanations like 'Mark pulled me out of the car' seem to be completely appropriate. It is not the case that we try to reduce it to the statement like 'Mark`s action – his pulling me out of the car at t1 – caused another event – me being out of the car at t2'. Trying to reduce every AC statement and claiming that it is the *natural thing we do* appears to be a whim of philosophers unsatisfied with the fact that our ordinary language does support instances of agent-causality.

Second, when we move away from the ordinary language and consider types of explanations scientists provide, one can find an abundance of descriptions of physical activities that support AC but are not in need of any reduction. Even more, it is not only that finding an elliptical description is not needed, it might be completely superfluous to offer one. For instance, the statement like 'The Sun, by exercising gravity, causes planets to orbit in a particular way' appears to be more than the relevant explanation.

Third, and most importantly, it is one thing to assert that we need to cite a specific event if we want to have a precise causal explanation. It is completely another thing to claim that events stand as the proper ontological category we need to ascribe ability or potency to cause another event. And this is something a proponent of the ellipticity thesis is committed to. Events, as I see it, are in no position to cause anything because they are lacking causal powers. So, the fundamental problem with the ellipticity thesis is that it confuses what is epistemologically and what is ontologically relevant. It is certainly the case that proper

[2] The problem here is much more complex and I will deal with it in the second part of the thesis. In a nutshell, I will argue that the standard agent-causalist picture presented by Chisholm (1983), Clarke (2003), and O`Connor (2000) that agents cause their action is not correct. Agents cannot cause their actions. Agents cause events in the world *by* acting. So, in my view, actions are exertions of agent-causal powers.

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explanation invites us to identify the relevant event in the question. However, this does not give us a license to claim that events are the only metaphysical category necessary for understanding causal phenomena. Agents, or individual substances, are real possessors of causal powers and they *must* be understood as causes. To make the idea of agents as causes more precise, it would be beneficial to consider powers-based account of causality which was meticulously developed by Harre and Madden (1975).

1.2. Causation, Powers, and Place for Agents in the World of Causes

In (1975), Harre and Madden propose an account of causation that they build around the idea of *powerful particulars*. As they argue, we should abandon the conception of causation based on the inert billiard-ball view of interaction and adopt the model where causality is equated with activities and operations of powerful particulars. These particulars, or *natural agents* as they sometimes call them, are physical objects like stones, metals, and magnets (1973: 117). Powerful particulars, contrary to objects in the billiard-ball configuration, are not passive recipients of motion or energy of particulars they got in interaction with. Rather, they happen to be more *active* because of dispositional properties they possess. These dispositional properties or *powers* are real and intrinsic qualities particulars have in virtue of their nature and which they will manifest when the appropriate stimulus conditions occur (1975: 86). For instance, a stone has the power to break a window because (i) it`s surface is hard and solid and this is ultimately grounded on the chemical structure of a stone (*intrinsic nature*), and (ii) it is thrown at the window with the high speed (*stimulus conditions*).

The important conclusion one can draw from the Harre and Madden is the following. The casual efficacy is exhausted by possession and exertion of causal powers and these are qualities possessed by physical objects. So, for them, powerful particulars are the main agents of causal operations in the world. Events, lacking these dispositional qualities, cannot be considered as causes. Only objects or natural agents can be causes.

I believe that Harre and Madden are on the right track by emphasising the role of agents and their dispositional powers in understanding causal phenomena. More to the point, they are absolutely right about the insufficiency of the event-causal ontology. To further strengthen the argument they made, consider the following causal statement ‘Smoking cigarettes causes cancer’. Can we explain this statement without taking into an account the ontological

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prerequisite that cigarettes have distinct causal powers to cause cancer? I think we cannot. Citing the event 'smoking cigarettes' as a relevant cause of another event 'falling ill of cancer' appears to be deficient, incomplete, and partial. As I see it, to have the proper ontological picture, we need to assume that there is certain intermediate or *cement* that can *hook up* two events. These intermediates are substances or agents.

Notice one interesting consequence of adopting the powers-based account of causation. In (2004), Hall points out that we generally operate with two concepts of causality. The first one, which he calls the 'production' view, equates causation with the idea of *bringing about* or *producing* an effect. The second one, which he dubs the 'dependence' view, is simply the idea of counterfactual dependence between causes and effects. Although Hall is not interested in the discussion about the ontology of causation, he does mention that both of these views relate distinct events (2004: 225). But after adopting the theory Harre and Madden developed, I believe we can see these two views of causality from a slightly different perspective. Take the production view first. Can we say that event 'smoking cigarettes' *produces* another event? We can say that. But isn`t it, as Harre and Madden point out, more appropriate to claim that particular object produces an event or change in the world? It appears that it is.

With the dependence view, things might be more difficult because it seems that we are more inclined to associate this conception of causality with events. Still, I believe it is almost impossible to have a proper counterfactual explanation without the acknowledgment of agents and their powers. Consider the smoking example again. To assert that, if the event 'smoking cigarettes' did not happen, the event 'falling ill of cancer' would not happen, don`t we need to assume that cigarettes have dispositional properties that endow them with the power to cause cancer? I believe we do. To make one point particularly precise, I am not asserting that events do not play any role in the counterfactual explanation. They certainly do. My only claim here is that the dependence view appears to be deficient without recognizing dispositions agents possess.

At this point, it might be important to consider two questions. First, I pointed out that events have a role in the counterfactual explanation. What do I mean by that and what is the actual role of events in powers-based account of causation? Second, is the view of causality I am trying to defend here committed to the claim that substance or agent causation is ontologically fundamental? I will start with the first question.

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As I see it, the powers-based view does not and *should* not completely regard events as causally irrelevant. Events` causal role should be tied up to the fact that they *set off* or *trigger* substances into action. 'Smoking' provokes cigarettes` potency to cause a specific effect. Cigarettes, without participating in some event, cannot cause anything. For that manner, events are necessary because they *put* substances into an activity.

Regarding the second question, Harre and Madden (1973: 132), as well as others (e.g. Lowe 2008: 143), argued that the substance causation is, in fact, ontologically fundamental. I am not sure that this is right. As I see it, we should abolish the attempt to find the final answer to the question about the basic components of causal relations. The question like: 'Is substance or event causation more basic?' is misplaced. Like Steward rightly pointed out, why not settle for the simple truth that both of these views of causality are mutually fundamental (2012a: 211)?[3] I find this observation completely correct. It is almost impossible to conceive that substances can cause anything if they do not act at a particular moment in time. Similarly, events cannot by themselves cause anything because they lack causal powers. Therefore, I hold that the way to understand the metaphysics of causation is to assume that both agents and events are necessary for the proper explanation of causal relationships.

I will conclude this section with the following assertion. Agents must be understood as relata of causation because they are the real possessor of causally efficacious properties, i.e. powers. Of course, one can raise several objections to the view I am trying to defend here. I will consider two of them in separate sections.

1.3. Objection 1 – Events are About Agents with Powers

A proponent of the event-ontology might not be satisfied with my suggestion about agent causation. She might argue that the view of events I was portraying in my analysis is *empty* and that events are *the* relata in virtue of objects and properties they encompass or include in themselves. For instance, the event 'smoking cigarette' is not a depleted metaphysics entity. It is about a particular cigarette with the specific causal powers. More to the point, all events happen to be like that. They are all about agents with some ability to cause a change in the

[3] To be precise, Steward recognizes three distinct ontological categories as equally fundamental. In addition to substances and events, she acknowledges the importance of facts or states of affairs (2012: 213-216). This category is necessary in order to make sense of general causal statements like laws of nature and counterfactual explanations. For my purposes here, it is not important to go into more details about this.

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world. So, the objection goes, events are real causes because they *involve* a specific object or agent.

I do not find this objection especially satisfactory. First, it begs the question what the relationship between objects and events consists of. If someone wants to argue that events are causes because of the objects they encompass, she needs to offer a valid elaboration of what this relationship entails. However, capturing what this relationship might involve is not an easy endeavor.

Suppose, regardless of this deficiency, that someone could give us a precise and satisfactory account of the relationship between agents and events. If that would be the case, the problem is that an event would be causally efficacious only derivatively, i.e. it is going to be a cause only in virtue of agents and the powers it encapsulates. But this is not the outcome a proponent of the event-ontology should settle with. For her, events are not relata because they are second-order descriptions of agents and their properties. They are relata because they are *real* producers of change in the world. In this sense, I hold that an advocate of the event-causal account would not be satisfied with the assertion that events are causes in the derivative sense.

1.4. Objection 2 – Effects Occur in Time, So Causes Also Need to Occur in Time

An objection which has been cited the most against the possibility of AC is the objection offered by C. D. Broad (1952). He argues the following:

> The putting forth of an effort of a certain intensity, in a certain direction, at a certain moment, for a certain duration, is quite clearly an event or process, however unique and peculiar it may be in other respects. It is therefore subject to any conditions which self-evidently apply to every event, as such. Now, it is surely quite evident that, if the beginning of a certain process at a certain time is determined at all, its total cause *must* contain as an essential factor another event or process which *enters into* the moment from which the determined event or process *issues*. I see no *prima facie* objection to there being events that are not completely determined. But, in so far as an event *is* determined, an essential factor in its total cause must be other *events*. How could an event possibly be determined to happen at a certain date if its total cause contained no factor to which the notion of date has any application? And how can the notion of date have any application to anything that is not an event? (1952: 215)

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To argue against objection Broad raises, at least two points concerning AC need to be acknowledged.[4] First, as I pointed out in 1.2., arguing for the existence of AC does not necessarily mean that the substance causation is fundamental and that events do not play any role in the ontology of causation. Although events are not *the* causal relata, they can still be considered as causally relevant because they trigger substances into an action.

Second – and more importantly – I do not believe that the essence of Broad`s objection would apply to the view of AC I want to defend. His objection, as we can see from the quoted passage, ultimately depends on the claim that substance or agent causation is a factor in which the notion of date has no application. But the view of AC I will be defending in the next chapter does not commit us to the claim that the agent`s causal activity does not have any temporal aspect. As I shall argue, it might be possible to understand agents` actions as *processes* in which agents are engaged in. And processes, like events, have temporal dimensions.

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[4] There is an additional way in which someone could mitigate Broad`s objection. One can deny the plausibility of the principle upon which Broad`s argument rests. Namely, one can say that there might be an event whose cause did not occur in time. Take, for instance, the Big Bang. If it is intelligible to say that the Big Bang is a particular event in the history, and if interpretations of the Big Bang Theory that claim that the cause of this event – some quantum fluctuations – did not actually have a date in time, then the Broad`s principle would be false. Although this might be an interesting way of argumentation, a lot of it depends on complex details about cosmology and physics.

Chapter 2 – Human Agency and Agent Causation

In the previous chapter, I argued that we need to recognize agents as the proper relata of causation since agents – and not events – are possessors of causal or dispositional powers. However, claiming that the proper theory of causation needs to recognize agents as causes is only the first step towards a defense of the ACL. The second step, and more important one, is to see how and why the notion of powers and AC could be relevant for understanding human agency. So, this will be the topic of this chapter.

Before I say in more detail how this chapter will be structured, I would like to call attention to one important point. In the contemporary debate, the doctrine of AC has been primarily associated with the question of free will. For this reason, the discussion about AC has been almost exclusively restricted to the question of how can AC help us to understand *free actions* and not actions or agency in the wider sense.[5] One can see the explicit endorsement of this approach in Clarke, who – while arguing for his *integrated* conception of AC – asserts the following: "(…) agent causation is appealed to not in order to provide an account of *action* but to provide an account of *free action*" (2003: 133, emphasis added). In his essays (1964) and (1976), although not explicitly as Clarke, Chisholm seems to adopt a similar position.[6]

Contrary to the way in which Clarke and Chisholm think about it, I am not going to restrict my discussion of AC only to the question about human free agency. There are two reasons for that. First, it seems to me that the powers-based metaphysics I outlined in the previous chapter – although relevant for understanding the notion of causation – might also be helpful in understanding the concept of agency. Second, I hold that Clarke and Chisholm – while developing their theories of AC – devoted too much attention to the question of control, i.e. in which sense the doctrine of AC could explain the level of control needed for undetermined free actions. This is certainly an important issue one needs to resolve and I will

[5] Of course, there are some exceptions to this. For instance, Hyman and Alvarez (1998) and Steward (2012a) are presenting AC as a solution to the problem of action.

[6] One might be tempted to think that Chisholm`s distinction between *transeunt* and *immanent* causation and his insistence that human action is the only example of the former category of causation points to the idea that AC could be applicable to the question of agency in the wider sense. Although there might be elements of truth in that, I do not believe that Chisholm is primarily interested in trying to resolve the question of agency *per se*. As he points out at the begging of his essay (1964: 3), his primary intention is to illuminate the structure of human freedom. Even in cases where he points out that AC might be relevant for the question of human agency in the wider sense, he defines agency in the idiosyncratic way which vastly resembles the way in which the free agency would be defined. For instance, he asserts: "Since the theory of agency, if I am right, presupposes that 'He could have done otherwise' is sometimes true, it is essential that we try to explicate this important concept" (Ibid. 200). Defining agency in terms of 'He could have done otherwise' is definitively more appropriate way to define the free agency and not the agency as such.

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say something about it in chapter 3. However, the *obsession* with the question of control, I hold, directed Clarke and Chisholm away from the issue which I believe is much more important for the proper theory of free will. Namely, this is the question of agency. Thus, to argue for ACL, I do not believe that a starting point should be the question of control. The starting point should be the question of action.[7]

So, in this chapter, I will develop two general arguments. First, I will start with the problem of action, present the standard way of accounting for it, and then show why this account might be insufficient. In the nutshell, I will argue that (i) there is no particular reason we need to assume that the concept of action is coextensional with the concept of intentionality, and (ii) that the standard account of action fails to provide the proper place for agents in the story of action.

Second, I will propose an account of the powers-based view of agency. Here, I will argue that (i) actions could be understood as exercises of the agent-causal power, (ii) that actions are not events but rather processes, and (iii) that the human`s power to act could be understood as the type of rational power.

2.1. The Puzzle of Action and the Insufficiency of the Standard Account

Take a closer look at activities and doings in the life of human beings. If you analysed them, you will find out that you can discern between two different types. First, there is a class of bodily movements like my knee-jerking or me tripping over the rug. Although, in the broad sense, my knee-jerking and me tripping are things I did, we are usually reluctant to equate them with the second type of bodily movements. For instance, with movements like me cooking or me waving my hand. Thus, in the rough sense, the puzzle of action is the problem of explaining the relevant difference between bodily movements which *merely* happen to me, e.g. my knee-jerking, and movements which we would classify as my actions, e.g. me waving my hand.

According to the standard way of resolving this problem – which has been primarily influenced by the work of Davidson (1980) – the answer to the puzzle is found in the type of

[7] It might be interesting to note that Sartre, although his theory of free will is immensely complicated and at some places even obscure, clearly recognizes this point when he asserts:

> It is strange that philosophers have been able to argue endlessly about determinism and free will, to cite examples in favour of one or the other thesis without ever attempting first to make explicit the structures contained in the very idea of action. (1978: 433)

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explanation actions, contrary to mere bodily occurrences, require. As Davidson argues, to claim that a particular doing is an action of a man, there needs to be at least one way of explaining men`s doing that makes it intentional (1980: 46). For instance, there needs to be at least one way in which me waving my hand can be analyzed by taking into consideration reasons I have. Reasons for action, as Davidson argues in another essay, are constructed by (i) citing a relevant desire – or some other *pro attitude* (e.g. urge) – an agent possesses towards achieving a particular goal, and (ii) by having an appropriate cognitive attitude that the desired end could be achieved in a relevant manner. Thus, according to the standard account, me waving my hand is my action since it is possible to construct the reasons explanation by (i) appealing to one of my desires, e.g. my desire to greet a friend, (ii) by citing the belief I have that by waving my hand I will satisfy (i).

There are two further assumptions that have been central to the standard account of action. First, Davidson suggests that explaining actions by appealing to reasons does not only represent the type of intentional explanation but also represents the form of causal explanation (1980: 4).[8] In this sense, reasons agents possess must also be understood as *causes* of their actions. Second, the causal relationship between reasons and actions seems to be modeled on the *event-causal* view of causality where actions, taken as particular overt events in the world, are nondeviantly caused by the appropriate *mental* events that occur inside agents, e.g. intentions, beliefs, or desires agents possess (1980: 12).[9]

Even though the standard model has been highly influential in the contemporary debate about agency, there are some issues with it. First of all, although it is certainly the case that many of our actions are intentionally performed – and in this sense they are liable to the intentional form of explanation – I do not see why we have to be committed to the account according to which the *concept* of action is coextensional with the concept of intentionality. To

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[8] I am simplifying Davidson`s position here. The main point of his essay *Actions, Reasons, and Causes* (1980) – where he argues that an intentional explanation is the form of causal explanation – is not so much to offer a positive argument why reasons need to be causes of actions. Rather, his main intention, as I understood him, is to show why non-causal accounts fail to provide the proper intentional explanation. According to Davidson, non-causal accounts explain actions by placing them in some *pattern* of rational behaviour and this way of explaining actions cannot account why an agent acted *for* the reasons she acted because it might be possible that there are several different rational patters that equally well explain and redescribe agents` actions. For more details about this see Davidson (1980: 3-19)

[9] It should be pointed out that Davidson is aware of the problem of representing beliefs and desires as particular mental events of an agent. Nonetheless, he suggests that we can treat the *onset* of desires or beliefs in the event like form. As he explicitly asserts:

> States and dispositions are not events, but the *onslaught* of a state or disposition is. A desire to hurt your feelings may spring up at the moment you anger me; I may start wanting to eat a melon just when I see one (…). (1980: 12, emphasis added)

put it more precisely, I am not particularly sure that we need to be committed to the claim that intentionality stands as the hallmark of agency. Why is that so? Several reasons might be pointed out.

For instance, Hyman righty observed that if we assume that there is some special link between actions and intentions, then the *meaning* of action verbs we use to refer to agents` activities would also have to include the reference to intentions (2015: 31). However, this is not the case. We use action verbs like 'build' in a variety of different contexts where we sometimes assume that there is a distinct intention behind the verb and sometimes we do not. For example, when we claim 'engineers build the bridge' we assume that there are some reasons why engineers did that. However, we can also use the verb 'build' to refer to cases where there is no specific intention behind it. For instance, when we claim 'a blackbird build a nest' or 'a beaver build a dam', the term 'build' does not have to imply that there is a particular reason behind it, i.e. it is not the case that blackbirds or beavers have distinct desires or believes to perform activities they performed.

Furthermore, it appears that taking the concept of intentionality as the hallmark of agency might be too restrictive, i.e. it would exclude evident cases of agency that are not performed for particular reasons. For example, say that, while walking through the park, I kicked a pebble without any particular reason for doing so. I just, plain and simple, kicked it. Should we take kicking to be my action even though there is no way of explaining it that makes it intentional? It seems to me that we should. Kicking is something *I* am performing. It is my activity even though there is no particular reason why I performed this action.

There is another difficulty with the standard account of action that is not concerned with the concept of intentionality. Rather, it has to do with the failure of this model to find the place for human beings in the story of action. The worry has been succinctly formulated in the often-quoted passage by Velleman:

> In this story [the standard account of action], reasons cause an intention, and an intention causes bodily movements, but nobody – that is, no person – *does* anything. Psychological and physiological events take place inside a person, but the person serves merely as the arena for these events: he takes no active part. (1992: 461, original emphasis)

As Velleman rightly observed, if the standard account of action is correct, persons or agents are nothing more than passive bystanders in the event-causal sequence where only agent`s mental events do all the causal work. However, if this is the case, then it seems that *I* did nothing.

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One might point out that – and this is the solution Velleman actually offers at the end of his paper (Ibid. 480) – agents do play a causal role in their actions but their causal role is exhausted by mental events that occur inside them. For instance, when I raised my hand because I wanted to greet a friend, my causal role is nothing *over* and *above* the causal role my beliefs and desires have. Thus, Velleman suggests, I am *functionally equivalent* to my mental events.[10]

But this modification is untenable. First, as I argued in 1.2., we should be skeptical about the view of causation according to which events stand as *the* causal relata. Although my argument there was directed towards overt events, I do not see why the same line of argumentation could not be applicable to mental events as well. Second, even if we could assume, quite implausibly I suppose, that mental events are only causally relevant factors when I act, this would assume that I – as an enduring substance – am completely identical to my mental events. However, this is not true. I have certain properties or powers my mental events do not. For example, I have the power to raise my hand: or open the door; or score a goal, not my beliefs and desires.

How should we understand actions then if not by reference to the intentionality? Furthermore, how can we secure the place for human beings in the story of action? I propose that the powers-based view of agency might be helpful here. Let`s see in more detail how the model of human agency based on the powers-based metaphysics would look like.

2.2. The Powers-Based View of Agency

According to this view of agency, actions are not taken to be intentional undertakings from the side of agents. Rather, they are understood in the more primitive sense as exercises of powers agents possess.[11] In this sense, to act simply means to manifest a power to produce something, or to cause a movement or change, or to initiate a process, etc… In which sense can this proposal help us to resolve the puzzle of action, i.e. how does it help us to differentiate between

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[10] One might wonder why Velleman criticized the standard account of action then if he, in the end, accepts the fact that events are only causally relevant entities. The reason why he criticized the standard account is because the belief-desire structure the standard account assumes seems to be, according to him, too simplistic and he defends the more complex structure of human agency by emphasizing the role of second-order motives.

[11] Of course, understanding agency by reference to the powers-based metaphysics broadens the scope of beings that can be put into the category 'agents'. (This is also the consequence of application of the powers-based metaphysics to the concept of causation). Regardless of this, my focus here will only be on human agents.

movements which *merely* happen to me, as my knee-jerking, and movements that are manifestations of my agency?

The solution is the following. The reasons why kicking the pebble is my action – contrary to the case where I tripped and fell or where my knee jerked – is, I propose, because when I kicked the pebble, I manifested my dispositional power to act while this is not the case when I tripped. Of course, my kicking can sometimes be intentional. For instance, I can kick a ball with the intention of scoring a goal. But the crucial thing about the puzzle of action is, as I see it, that we need to account for the difference between doings where *I* appear to be actively involved, e.g. kicking a pebble in the park, contrary to cases where my involvement in a doing is minimal or even nonexistent, e.g. when I tripped over a rug and fell. However, this *explanandum*, even if it sometimes does involve the explanans which contains reasons agent has, does not have to be inevitably committed to it. The difference between activity and passivity we have to explain when discussing the puzzle of action could be accounted solely by pointing to the *causal involvement* from the perspective of an agent. For example, when I kicked a pebble, *I* was involved in making this happen by exercising my dispositional power. In the case where I tripped over a rug, my engagement is absent. Thus, it is possible to explain the puzzle of action without referring to the intentionality view.

With regards to securing the role of human beings in the story of action, I believe this role could be secured simply by emphasizing that human beings, as agents with specific sorts of powers to act are the ones that cause things in the world. Thus, agents come into the story of action because they are the one who exercises their powers.

However, this is only an outline of the powers-based model. To see how it might work in the context of human agency, three further claims need to be made. First, I am going to explain in more detail what do human beings cause when they act, i.e. when they exercise their powers. Second, I will argue that it is wrong to claim that agents` actions belong to the category of events and that it might be more appropriate to understand agents` actions as *processes* agents initiate and causally sustain. Third, I will present what type of powers humans possess that enable them to act.

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2.2.1. What do Agents Cause?

According to the view of agency I am developing here, human beings – as agents with specific sorts of powers – cause things in the world. But what do they cause when they act? A suggestion that has been prominent among some advocates of AC, e.g. Chisholm (1964, 1976), Clarke (2003), and O`Connor (2000, 2008), has been that agents cause their actions. For Chisholm, Clarke, and O`Connor it is not of particular importance whether relevant actions in question are *mental* actions, i.e. decisions or choices, or overt bodily movements, i.e. my hand movements. The crucial thing is that when agents act, they cause their actions.[12]

But the idea that agents cause their actions is problematic. As some authors rightly pointed out, e.g. Hyman and Alvarez (1998: 222) and Steward (2012a: 199), if we accept the claim that agents cause their actions by acting, and if we assume that agents actings are also events of some kind – and this is something Chisholm, Clarke, and O`Connor assume – then this view becomes liable to a potential regress. For example, if an answer to the question: 'How does an agent cause her action?' will be: 'by acting' – and where acting is understood as a particular event in the world – it will be possible to ask a further question: 'How does an agent cause her acting?'. However, if an agent-causalist again claims 'by acting', then we have to suppose that an agent causes his actings by acting and this is absurd. Thus, the view of AC according to which agents cause their actions should be abandoned.

If agents do not cause their actions, what do they cause then? I suppose numerous things. For instance, they can cause events in the world, e.g. I can cause the floor to be wet by spilling water on it. I could causally initiate the process, e.g. by pushing the button in the lift, I cause it to go up. But most importantly, when it comes down to basic human actions, agents could also cause movements in their own bodies. For example, by moving my hand, I can cause my hand *to be moved*.

One might be reluctant to accept the last suggestion and argue that it is not particularly clear what does it mean to say that by moving my hand, I caused my hand to be moved. The objector is certainly right that there is something peculiar in this proposal. However, I believe that a part of the reason why this seems peculiar lies in the fact that we often fail to distinguish between (i) the causing of an action, i.e. the manner in which a particular action is brought

[12] It should also be pointed out that Chisholm, Clarke, and O`Connor have comparatively different understandings regarding what *types* of actions agents cause. For Clarke, this is simply a decision or choice (2003: 151). O`Connor claims, somewhat unclearly I must admit, that an action an agent causes is the complex mental event that triggers the overt bodily behavior. He calls this event „the coming to be of a state of intention to carry out some act" (2009: 195). Chisholm, contrary to Clarke and O`Connor, seems to hold that agents directly cause overt bodily movements (e.g. 1964: 8, 1976: 199).

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about, and (ii) a result of an action, i.e. an end product of a causing.[13] For instance, when I claim that I caused my hand to be moved by moving it, the moving should be understood as my causing, i.e. my exercise of the power to act, and my hand being moved is the end result of me causing it. So, according to this picture, when I act, it is not the fact that I cause my action. I cause an event in the world that can be classified as my action`s result and I do this *by* acting.

However, one can still be skeptical about this suggestion and can argue that it is certainly the case that when I spilled the water, I caused the floor to be wet. But why do we have to assume that, when I moved my hand, I caused it to move? Why not assume that I simply moved it without relying on the causal terminology?

As I see it, the reason why we have to rely on the causal language here lies in the fact that action verbs we use to describe human activities are essentially causal, i.e. they involve a production or *bringing about* of some kind. For instance, to move a particular object means nothing more than to cause it to change its position, i.e. to bring it about that an object is moved. Similarly, to kill someone means that we cause his/her death. To raise something is to cause it to be in an upward position. If it is the case that action verbs are causal in their nature – which I hold to be a reasonable assumption to make – then this is the reason why we have to assume that when I moved my hand, I caused it to be moved.

With this cleared out, let`s focus on the next question. How can we understand agents` actions with respect to their temporal aspects? Are agents` actions events as it has been generally assumed? In the next section, I am going to discuss potential arguments one might offer for the idea that actions are events. I will reject them and suggest that we could understand agents` actions as processes.

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2.2.2. Actions, Events, and Processes

The belief that agents` actions belong to the category of events has been the prominent assumption in the contemporary debate about agency. Davidson, for instance, starts his essay *Agency* by asking the following question:

[13] A similar point has been defended by Hornsby (1980) and Hyman and Alvarez (1998).

> What *events* in the life of a person reveal agency; what are his deeds and his doings in contrast to mere happenings in his history; what is the mark that distinguishes his actions? (1980: 43, emphasis added).

Although the belief that actions are events has been influential, oddly enough, there has not been many arguments that support it. What reasons one might have for supporting this idea?

The first reason might derive from the assumption that actions are bodily movements. For bodily movements, e.g. Mark raising his hand, are transparent to us through perception, they obviously have a spatio-temporal dimension. If they have a spatio-temporal dimension, they must be events of some kind.

Although it is the case that some of our actions are bodily movements, it is equally true that some are not. Say that I made a decision that I will avoid greeting a friend because I hold that his behavior has been repugnant in recent times. As a result of not greeting him, he got offended. Similarly, I could make a resolution that I will reduce the water consumption in my house. Because of this resolution, every time I brush my teeth, I refrain from leaving the water drain open. Offending a colleague and saving the water are certainly instances of my agency even if there is no particular bodily movement, i.e. there is no specific event one can pinpoint to and assert: 'This is his action'. Thus, I hold that linking actions with bodily movements and taking this as an argument why actions need to be events is not particularly efficient.

The second reason might derive from Davidson and his logical analysis of action sentences (1980: 105-122). To be more precise, the idea that actions are events appears to be a consequence of his solution to the problem of *variable polyadicity* Davidson holds Kenny`s analysis of action sentences opens up (Ibid. 108). For my purposes here, it is not of great importance what this problem actually is. The essential thing is, as Davidson sees it, that a solution to the problem of variable polyadicity requires that the logical notation of action sentences should contain existential quantifiers that quantify over events. As he elaborates, the statement 'Shem kicked Shaun' will have to be analysed in the form:

> ∃(x) (Kicked (Shem, Shaun, x)) (Ibid. 118)

Here, the action verb 'kicked', when formalized, becomes a three-place predicate where two places are reserved – in this particular case – for people, Shem and Shaun, and one place for the particular event in question, kicking. Thus, for Davidson, the statement of the form 'Shem kicked Shaun', after being formalized, actually means: "There is an event x such that x is a kicking of Shaun by Shem" (Ibid.).

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How well this argument supports the idea that actions are events? As I see it, not that much. Davidson`s analysis indicates that there needs to be *an* event that we need to quantify over if we want to make a proper first-order predicate description of action sentences. Although it might be natural to assume that an event in question is an action, this does not have to be the case. As Hyman and Alvarez rightly argued, an event we quantify over could be an *accomplishment* or *result* of an action (1998: 225).[14]

The third reason can be found in the same essay by Davidson. While analyzing von Wright`s view on action, Davidson asserts:

> First, he [von Wright] says that an action is not an event, but rather the bringing about of an event. I do not think this can be correct. If I fall down, this is an event whether I do it intentionally or not. If you thought my falling was an accident and later discovered I did it on purpose, you would not be tempted to withdraw your claim that you had witnessed an event. (1980: 113)

I hold that Hyman and Alvarez offered the right response to this argument also (1998: 225). According to them, Davidson erroneously assumes that it is possible to witness my intentional action, i.e. my falling, without there being an event in question. However, this is not something we need to assume if we adopt the powers-based view of agency. The idea of actions as exercises of causal powers does not commit us to the claim that when we are intentionally trying to make something, e.g. me raising my hand, that there is no event someone could witness. What you are witnessing is the result of an action, i.e. my hand being raised. So, if my falling is an intentional action, then you are going to witness the result of my action, i.e. my fall. Similarly, if you found out that my falling is not intentional in the end – as Davidson suggests – you would witness the same event, i.e. my fall. But, contrary to the former case, the fall in the latter case is not a result of my action. It is a result of an accident.

This leaves us with the following question. If the results of our actions are events, how should we think about our actions then? Hyman and Alvarez, for instance, claim that actions are not events and that we should not ascribe any temporal characteristics to them (1998: 233). I am not sure that this is the way to understand actions.

First, I hold that it is reasonable to assume that – at least sometimes – agents` actings are perceptually observable. For instance, when we observed that someone raised his hand, it

[14] In (1999), Alvarez proposes a way of formalizing action sentences that only requires quantification over results of actions.

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is possible to distinguish between (i) his hand rising, i.e. his causing his hand to be in the upward position, and (ii) his hand being raised, i.e. the final product of his causing. But if we can witness (i), then it needs to have some dateable property.

Second, if we assume, as Hyman and Alvarez, that agents` actions are causings or ways in which an agent brings about events in the world – and this is something I am assuming – we need to suppose that these causings also have some temporal characteristics. Why do we have to suppose that? As I see it, if that is not the case, then we would not have a valid answer to the objection Broad has raised and the objection I have previously discussed in 1.4. So, how should we think about actions then?

My suggestion is the following. It might be possible to understand agents` actions as things which are temporally dateable even if we do not assume that they are events. For instance, we can assume that they are causally directed *processes* agents initiate and sustain until their completion. To illustrate what I have in mind, take as an example a process an agent could be engaged in. For instance, running a marathon. If we say that an agent ran a marathon, we are supposing that this is a process an agent was involved in. We can say, even more precisely, that it was a process that lasted from 7:00 am until 1:00 pm on the 11th of May. The process was initiated by an agent at the moment she started running and it was sustained by her until the moment she crossed the finish line.

I propose that something analogues might also be the case when the time span of a process is much shorter. For instance, me raising my hand – taken as my action – might be a simple and short-lived process that I initiated and directed until its completion. The initiation of the process starts simply at the moment when I exercised my power to raise my arm and it is completed when it reaches the desired outcome. Namely, the arm`s being raised.

One could argue that I would not make any kind of progress in understanding actions as processes because processes are nothing more than a sequence of events. However, I do not think that this is true. Steward argued at one place that (2012c: 377), even though events and processes occupy the same spatio-temporal region, it would be wrong to reduce processes to events. According to Steward, the reason why reduction is impossible lies in the fact that process, unlike events, could *change* over time while events could not. For example, during the process of running a marathon, I am able to change my running tempo. I could start easily and aim to speed up as time progresses. Similarly, in the context of human action, I can raise my

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hand slowly or quickly and, in this sense, change the way in which the process is unfolding. However, the same thing cannot be said for events since events do not change as processes do.

2.3. Human Agency and Powers to Act

So far, I argued that we could understand the concept of action as an exercise of causal powers human agents possess and that actions might be understood as processes. However, I have not said anything about the type of powers humans have. In this section, I am going to explore the idea that humans` powers to act are the type of rational powers.[15] Obviously, the idea that humans` powers are rational has something to do with reasons to act. Thus, in the first part of this section, I am going to see in which sense can we understand the relationship between powers to act and reasons for action. After that, in the second part, I will criticize the contemporary interpretation of rational powers offered by Steward (2012a, 2012b) and Alvarez (2013) who argue that rational powers are *two-way* powers. In the end, I will offer an outline of an account of rational powers I found most plausible.

2.3.1. Humans` Powers to Act and Reasons for Action

One way in which we could understand the relationship between reasons and powers to act is to assume that reasons are particular stimulus conditions that causally influence manifestations of human powers, i.e. their actions. A proposal of this kind can be found in O`Connor (2008). He explains it in the following sense:

> (…) the obtaining of the reason appropriately affects (in the typical case, by increasing) an *objective propensity of the agent* to cause the intention. (…) Agent causal power is a structured propensity towards a class of effects, such that at any given time, for each causally possible, specific agent-causal event-type, there is a definitive objective probability of its occurrence within the range (0,1), and this probability varies continuously as the agent is impacted by internal and external influences. (…) Where reasons confer probabilities in this manner, I will say that the reasons *causally structure* the agent-causal capacity. (2008: 197-198, original emphasis)

[15] The idea of rational powers is originally Aristotelian. See *Metaph.Θ.*

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There are at least two worries with representing reasons to act in this sense. First, it is not particularly clear to me how it is possible to ascribe a level of probability to the way in which a particular reason could influence my action. Say that I am in the doubt about raising my hand. I have the reason to raise my hand because I want to ask a question. Contrary to this, I also have the reason to keep my hand down because I am a shy person. What would it mean to say that, in this context, there is a 30% chance that I am going to raise my hand? Reasons certainly have motivational strength but it is not so clear to me why this motivational strength needs to be understood as the type of nondeterministic influence O`Connor believes it to be.

Second, and more importantly, O`Connor does not offer any positive argument why the relationship between reasons and our power to act needs to be *causal* in nature. Why not assume that this relationship is non-causal? What arguments could O`Connor offer for his assertion that the relationship between reasons and our power is causal?

He could argue that the only way in which we could secure the *intentional control* over our actions, i.e. manifestations of our powers, is to assume that there is a causal relationship between our reasons and actions. Although this would require much more elaboration then I could provide here, I do not believe that the only way in which agents could intentionally control their actions is by supposing that reasons causally influence their powers to act. How could we understand the relationship between human powers to act and reasons for action and how do agents intentionally control their actions?

As I see it, we should suppose that humans` powers to act – as rational powers – are *responsive to reasons* where responsiveness is understood in the non-causal sense. For instance, when an agent deliberates what she is going to do, she takes into consideration different reasons why she needs to perform a relevant action. When she makes a decision what reason will become operative, she acts in *the light of it*. However, acting in the light of a reason does not imply that a reason in question needs to causally influence or guide an action.

Furthermore, an agent exercises the intentional control over action in virtue of the fact that action, or more precisely, a result of an action, is an end product of the agent`s rational power to act. In this sense, when an agent acts in a particular manner – and acts because she has a reason for that – an action is intentionally controlled by her because it is the exercise of *her* power.

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2.3.2. Rational Powers as Two-way Powers

Some authors have pointed out that rational powers humans possess are *two-way* powers. Here is the way Steward explains this feature:

> (…) the agent is conceived of by the agency scheme as a possessor of what is sometimes called two-way power – the power to φ or not to φ. Exactly what will occur is not settled in advance by antecedent states and events, according to the agency scheme. It is settled by the agent at the time of action by means of an exercise of a two-way power. (2012b: 250)

Two elements seem to be central for Steward here. First, she argues that the human`s power to act – as the two-way power – is a type of power whose manifestation does not essentially depend on prior stimulus conditions, i.e. antecedent states and events in the world. Rather, its manifestation depends on an agent who possesses this power. Second, Steward argues that a two-way power is a single dispositional power directed at two opposite manifestations. It is the single power to φ and not to φ.

I agree with Steward that the type of powers human beings possess should not essentially depend on prior stimulus conditions. However, there is a problem with the way she defines two-way powers. As it has been rightly recognized by some authors (e.g. Frost 2019 and van Miltenburg and Ometto 2018), arguing – as Steward does – that two-way powers are powers to φ or not to φ is simply too weak. The reason why it is too weak is because it cannot help us to differentiate between indeterministic powers some inanimate agents in the world possess, e.g. a power of a radium atom to decay spontaneously, and human`s power to act. The type of power we want to have is not simply the power to $\varphi$ or not to $\varphi$. It is the power that would enable us to say that it is *up to us* when we act in a particular manner. However, this is not something Steward`s definition of two-way powers could secure for us.

Alvarez (2013) offers a slightly different proposal. She also argues that two-way powers are powers to φ or not to φ but she additionally claims that these powers could be analyzed by considering abilities and opportunities a particular agent has (2013: 108-110). Abilities, as she claims, are agent`s internal capacities. To use one of her examples, I have the ability to cook omelets. This is something internal to me. However, to say that my ability to cook omelets is my two-way power, it needs to be combined, as Alvarez sees it, with the relevant opportunity. Opportunities are equated with external factors that might, or might not, thwart my abilities. For instance, if someone tied my hands, this can be understood as the external factor that undermines my ability to cook omelets. So, according to Alvarez, to say that I have the two-

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way power with regards to cooking omelets, I have to be able to cook them and I also must have the relevant opportunity to do so.

But Alvarez`s proposal is not particularly promising. The reason for this lies in the fact that she does not explain why possession of the two-way power needs to be linked with opportunities agents have. Say, for instance, that someone locked me in a room and I am unable to go out. The fact that I am unable to leave the room does not have to imply that I lost my two-way power to go out. It is just the fact that I lost a *chance* to exercise it. It is not that I lost *possession* of it.

Even if Steward and Alvarez could mitigate issues I raised, there is a much more serious difficulty their accounts face. As I see it, the fundamental problem with proposals presented by Steward and Alvarez is that they do not offer a reason why human powers to act need to be *single* powers directed at two opposite outcomes. To see what I have in mind here, it might be helpful to go back to Aristotle and see what reasons he offered for understanding rational powers as two-sided.

In Metaphysics *Θ,* Aristotle argues:

> As regards those capacities which are rational, the very same capacity is a capacity for opposites, but as regards the non-rational capacities a single capacity is for one thing: for example, heat only for heating, while the medical craft for both disease and health. The explanation of this is that knowledge is an account (logos), and the same account clarifies both the thing and the privation, though not in the same way, and in one it concerns both, while in another way it concerns rather the positive. So it is also necessary that such sciences should be of opposites, but concerning the one per se while concerning the other not per se. For indeed the account concerns one opposite per se, but concerns the other opposite in a way incidentally. (Metaph.Θ,1046b4–15)

According to Aristotle, the reason why rational capacities or powers – as those of medicine – are two-way is because they contain *logos* which help us to explain (i) health, i.e. the actual manifestation of the medical science, and (ii) disease or sickness, i.e. a potential privation of health. So, for Aristotle, in order to explain sickness, we would have to rely on the same logos as we do when we try to understand health. For that reason, rational powers are powers for opposites.

Could Steward and Alvarez rely on the Aristotelian line of argumentation? I do not see how this would work. First, Aristotle seems to suggest that rational powers, and their two-ways

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characteristics, are manifestations of art or knowledge. If rational powers for Aristotle are understood in this sense, it might be questionable can the same line of argumentation be used for understanding the notion of agency. Second, and more importantly, Aristotle argues that rational powers are not directed at both of their manifestations in the same manner. Although medicine does help us to explain disease – and in this sense it can be understood as one arm of its two-way power – it is only directed at it accidentally. However, the idea of two-way powers Steward and Alvarez want to defend is grounded on the claim that both arms of two-way powers are open to an agent in the same sense. For instance, when it is said that I have the two-way power to raise my hand or not to raise it, it is believed that both arms of this power are equally open to me.[16]

What reasons could Alvarez and Steward offer for the claim that the single dispositional power has two contrary manifestations? As I see it, the only argument they could offer is the one I already mentioned while discussing Steward`s proposal and it is the claim that the two-way power is the type of dispositional ability whose manifestation does not essentially depend on previous conditions for its exercise. In this sense, Steward and Alvarez could claim that the reason why a single power is directed at two possible manifestations is because, at the moment before an agent exercise it, she had it in her power to φ or not to φ. But as I argued previously, this seems to be too similar to the indeterministic power some inanimate objects have. So, if human powers to act should not be understood in the two-way sense, how should we understand them? In the next section, I will offer an outline.

2.4. An Outline of Rational Powers Humans Possess

I hold that Steward and Alvarez are right when they emphasized the fact that humans` powers to act do not essentially depend on previous stimulus conditions. However, as I argued, there is a problem with understanding powers to act as single dispositional powers with two opposite manifestations. How can we understand rational powers then?

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[16] One could point out that Aristotle claims that a doctor has the power to heal the patient only if he also has the power to harm the patient and that this might be the way Steward and Alvarez are understanding two-way powers. However, I am not particularly sure how this line of argumentation would work in the context of human agency. Say that I have the two-way power to raise my hand and to refrain from raising it. If we apply Aristotle`s line of argumentation, then we would have to assume that I have the power to raise my hand only because I have the power to refrain from raising it. But why assume that I have the power to raise my hand because I have the power to refrain from raising it? Why not simply assume that I have a single power to raise it?

A proposal I find most plausible is the one offered by van Miltenburg and Ometto (2018). According to them, a specific characteristic of humans` powers to act is their specific level of *generality*, i.e. the idea that powers to act do not have to be directed at any particular type manifestation. To see what van Miltenburg and Ometto have in mind, it would be helpful to compare their proposal with the two-way power model.

As I pointed out previously, according to the two-way power model, the feature of powers humans have is its directedness towards contrary effects. For instance, I have the power to raise my hand and I have the same power to refrain from raising it. However, according to van Miltenburg and Ometto, the power to act – because of its specific type of generality – does not operate in this sense (Ibid. 7). The way in which it operates is that it is simply a power whose manifestation is nothing more than the 'performed an action φ intentionally' where φ could be *any* intentional action an agent wants to perform. For instance, φ can stand for me raising my hand, or not raising my hand, or me raising my hand in five minutes, or me taking a walk, or lying on the bed, etc. Thus, according to their proposal, the human`s power to act is not a single power directed at two contrary manifestations. It is the single power to act that enables the agent to act intentionally where the *content* of power`s manifestation can be any intentional action an agent has a reason to perform.

Why should someone favor this conception of rational powers? I see at least two reasons for that. First, the proposal van Miltenburg and Ometto present help us to circumvent the problem of explaining how rational powers – as powers that are not necessitated by their previous conditions – can be powers with two contrary manifestations. As they argue, we can assume that powers to act are single powers that can have *any* intentional action as their potential manifestation. In that sense, the rational power is not the two-sided power. It is the one-sided power whose content depends on reasons agents have.

Second, their proposal allows us to differentiate between powers humans have and mere indeterministic powers radium atoms have. What seems to be the distinguishing mark of humans` powers is that they have the type of manifestation that can be captured with 'performed an action φ intentionally'. However, a radium atom will not have this type of manifestation.

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Chapter 3 – Rational Powers, Libertarianism, and Agent Causation

In previous chapters, I argued that (i) there is no reason why we should be suspicious about the concept of AC, (ii) I presented how the idea of AC might work in the context of human agency. In this chapter, I am going to focus on the last piece of the puzzle needed for a defence of ACL. Namely, I am going to show how the idea of AC and rational powers I have been developing could help us to understand the libertarian notion of free agency.

The salient element of every libertarian theory is the belief that when agents act freely, they have access to alternative courses of action. This further requires, according to libertarians, that some kind of indeterminism needs to be involved in the process leading up to a free action. Two questions arise as crucial for libertarians here. First, how can we understand the indeterminism required for free actions, i.e. how can we secure access to alternative courses of action? Second, how does an agent control the outcome of undetermined free actions?

I am going to say something about these two questions in the first part of this chapter. I will start by criticizing some previous attempts by agent-causalists to answer these questions. After that, I will provide my own solution. In the second part of this chapter, I will offer an answer to the objection which has been present the most against libertarianism. This is the luck objection.

3.1. Alternative Courses of Action, The Indeterminacy Requirement, and Agent Causation

According to some advocates of AC, simply by acknowledging the fact that human beings are agents, i.e. substances, there is a sense in which we could secure the indeterminacy requirement needed for alternative courses of action. Additionally, since agents are initiators of their free actions, they are in control of them. One such line of argumentation can be found in Clarke when he asserts:

> An agent, it is held, is a substance, and hence not the kind of thing that can itself be an effect (though events in its life can be). On these agent-causal accounts, then an agent is in a strict and literal sense an originator, and initiator, and ultimate source of her directly free action; she is an uncaused cause of that behavior, and one whose causing that behavior is not causally determined. (2003: 134)

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But Clarke`s line of argumentation is weak. First, it is not particularly clear to me how can we make sense of the idea of an agent being the 'ultimate source' of her free action. Second, adopting the powers-based metaphysics – as I did – expands the scope of entities that can be understood as agents that operate in the world. In that sense, we are not in the position, as Clarke is, to hold that human beings are only agents in the world. Since we cannot insist on the fact that human beings are only agents in the world, we should not insist on this line of argumentation.

As I see it, for a solution to the indeterminism needed for alternative courses of action we do not have to look into the idea of AC *per se.* Rather, we should look into the type of powers agents possess. More precisely, into the generality and non-deterministic nature these powers exhibit. Van Miltenburg and Ometto, whose view of powers I have discussed previously, offered such a proposal (2018). According to them, the fact that rational powers exhibit a specific level of generality allows an agent to be in the position to choose between different courses of action.

I agree with van Miltenburg and Ometto that the nature of rational powers is the place we need to look into if we want to satisfy the indeterminacy requirement. However, there is a problem with the way in which Van Miltenburg and Ometto present how an agent secures the control for alternative courses of action. According to them, an agent secures control by exercising her rational powers but rational powers, as they assume, are *self-determining* (Ibid. 7). This is something I find problematic. To assert that rational powers are self-determining implies that agents, when they freely acted, caused their actions. But as I previously suggested (see 2.2.1.), we should put aside the conception of AC according to which agents cause their actions.

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There is an even more decisive reason why we should not believe that rational powers are self-determining. The reason is that the self-determination condition does not serve the purpose it is supposed to serve. Namely, it is not necessary to assume that agents are in control of their actions only if they cause them. As I see, when humans exercise their rational powers, final products of their actions, i.e. their results, are *up to them* simply because they are the ones who exercised them. More importantly, since rational powers are sensitive to reasons agents have, agents are also *intentionally controlling* manifestations of their powers.

So, how does the rational-powers view and AC help us to secure control needed for alternative courses of action? My suggestion is the following. Agents possess rational powers

with a specific level of generality. These powers allow agents to choose between any alternative course of action they desire to take. When they acted in the way they wanted to act, agents are exercising control in virtue of the fact that these powers are powers they possesses and exercises at the moment they wanted to.

One might point out that by arguing in this sense, I am not making any relevant distinction between the notion of free agency and the notion of 'regular' agency? This is correct. In my view, the human agency – understood as the exercise of rational powers that enables an agent to intentionally control her actions – is all we need in order to make sense of the idea of 'free agency'.

But someone might further point out that I am right that free actions need to be intentionally controlled. However, there needs to be some *extra* condition that is going to transform *mere* intentional actions into free actions. I do not see why this should be the case. To act intentionally, i.e. to exercise the rational power to act, is *intrinsically* free. When I acted for the reason I wanted to act, this is something that is *up to me*. If exercises of my rational powers are up to me, why do I have to suppose that some other condition needs to be satisfied that is going to turn my intentional actions into free actions? I hold that there need not be any extra condition here. In that sense, AC and rational powers are all libertarians need to have to secure control relevant for alternative courses of action.

3.2. Agent Causation and The Luck Objection

In this section, I would like to say something about the objection which has been presented the most against libertarian positions. This is the luck objection. Since there are numerous versions of this objection one can find in the literature, I am going to focus only on the version presented by Mele (2006).

Mele starts his argumentation by assuming that libertarianism implies that when an agent performed a free action A, she could have done otherwise where 'could have done otherwise' entails that an agent – with completely identical historical conditions – is able to act differently than she actually does. Then, he presents the following worry:

> In the actual world, Joe decides at *t* to A. In another world with the same laws of nature and the same past, he decides at *t* not to A. If there is nothing about Joe`s powers, capacities, states of

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mind, moral character, and the like in either world that accounts for this difference, then the difference seems to be just a matter of luck. (Ibid. 9)

How should one respond to this worry? The way to argue against the luck objection is not by answering the objection directly but by questioning the way in which Mele formulates the libertarianism. More precisely, by questioning how he formulates the 'could have done otherwise' condition.[17] What I have in mind?

Mele assumes that when we assert that an agent was able to act otherwise, we hold that an agent, with the completely same historical condition, could have performed a different action. However, this strikes me as implausible. Claiming that an agent could have done otherwise does not have to imply that an agent – under the same set of conditions – would have done otherwise. If this is not the way in which we should understand the 'could have done otherwise' condition, how should we understand it?

As I see, the proposal which has been recognized by classical compatibilists might be correct and useful here (e.g. Ayer 1954). According to them, to say that an agent 'could have done otherwise' assumes that if an agent had reasons to perform a specific action φ, she would have done it. In that sense, the 'could have done otherwise' condition does not have to imply that under the same set of conditions, there is a chance or possibility that an agent would have acted otherwise. It only implies that, if an agent had different reasons to perform a specific action, she would have had performed it.

This suggestion raises the following question. How can I accommodate the compatibilist reading of the 'could have done otherwise' condition with the version of libertarianism I am trying to defend here?

This might be possible by emphasizing the fact that reasons do not causally influence agents` rational powers to act. As I already pointed out, when an agent has a reason A to perform an action φ, she performs an action φ in the light of the reason A. Furthermore, when we say that an agent could have performed an action γ instead of φ, it seems to me that we are not saying anything other than, had an agent possessed some other reason – say K – to perform an action γ, she would have had performed it.

[17] Of course, Mele is not the only one who defines the 'could have done otherwise' condition in this sense. This has been the dominant way of thinking among libertarians. For instance, see Kane (1999) and Franklin (2011).

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Thus, my suggestion to answer the luck objection is simply to be reluctant to accept the *rules of the game* Mele and other libertarians are laying out in the first place. Does this mean that my view of AC is not libertarian? I do not think it does. As long as we assume that reasons do not, and *could* not, causally determine agents` actions, it seems to me that we can have the compatibilist reading of 'could have done otherwise' and the libertarian requirement for alternative courses of action.

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Conclusion

In this thesis, I offered a line of defence of the agent-causal view of libertarianism. In the first part of the thesis, I argued, by relying on the powers-based view of causation developed by Harre and Madden (1973) and (1975), that we need to acknowledge agents as causes that operate in the world.

In the second part of the thesis, I offered a detailed presentation how AC could work in the context of human agency. This is, I hold, the crucial part for understanding the concept of AC and its relevancy for the problem of free agency. Three claims have been central here. First, I argued that the standard story of action and the intentionality view of agency are problematic and I offered the powers-based view of agency. Second, I claimed that agents` actions are not events but processes. Third, I presented the version of powers human beings possess.

In the third part, I presented how rational powers could help to secure the libertarian notion of free agency. The crucial claim here was that, by exercising rational powers, agents could intentionally control alternative courses of action. This is, in my view, all that is needed for the proper theory of free agency.

Of course, a lot of arguments and points I have made throughout this thesis need further elaboration than I provided. I will mention some of them. First, I have argued that actions could be understood as processes but have not provided a lot of clarification how this might actually work. This is definitively something that needs further refinement. Also, I hold that more things need to be said about the nature of rational powers humans possess. I argued that the proposal made by van Miltenburg and Ometto (2018) might be on the right track but more work needs to be done to illuminate the structure of these powers. Additionally, I need to explain in more detail the non-causal structure between reasons and humans` powers to act. I only suggested that an agent could act in the light of reasons but have not said much about how this could be understood. Furthermore, I have not said a word about reasons one might have for adopting the libertarianism in the first place. In this context, I would have to say more about why someone should favor libertarianism instead of some compatibilist alternative.

Regardless of these deficiencies, I believe I offered a reasonable proposal how agent causation might work and in which sense this idea could be relevant in the context of free agency. A further work on the mentioned deficiencies would provide a more coherent picture of this intriguing – and often unfairly disregarded – theory of free agency.

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