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The Causality of Moral Actions Integrating Mind and Body: Thomas Reid and Thomas Aquinas

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Introduction

Thomas Reid is a prominent philosopher featured in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action* (2010). A renewal of interest in his philosophy has emerged since the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the realms of epistemology and human agency. María Alvarez, in her dedicated chapter, highlights Reid's valuable contributions and acknowledges his subtle critique, offering insights beneficial for contemporary action theory.

Reid's defense of agent causation, a concept implicit in medieval philosophers like Scotus and Aquinas, distinguishes itself through a sharp contrast with event causation. Event-causation theory, influential from Hume to the present day, contrasts with agent-causation theory, which challenges the former in contemporary philosophy discussions, incorporating Reid's ideas.

However, Alvarez notes that Reid's treatment of human agency is not unproblematic. The central issue revolves around the agent-cause theory, specifically the idea that agents can cause events at will, a relation irreducible to event causation. This theory aims to restore the concept of human action, countering reductionist views treating actions merely as impersonal events—a tradition rooted in Hume and modern physics.

Agent-cause theory, championed by Roderick Chisholm and influenced by Reid, posits the agent as the immanent cause of actions, disputing the notion that actions are events caused by other events. Richard Taylor elaborates on this theory, linking bodily movements to the agent as the cause, raising the question of how an agent, an immanent cause, can initiate physical events integral to actions. Thomas Reid acknowledges this problem without providing a conclusive answer, leaving it open for exploration.

After exposing the problem in Reid, I will deep now into metaphysical presuppositions within a Scottish Reformed Scholasticism tradition, exploring why the question of agent causation poses challenges for Reid and his followers in the context of contemporary philosophy. The historical investigation is not merely retrospective; it aims to address a contemporary problem within agent-cause theory by critiquing Reid's metaphysical assumptions and potentially finding a resolution from the legacy that this scholasticism left, that of Aquinas.

1. Thomas Reid: The Will as an Efficient Cause of Moral Actions and Its Limits

Thomas Reid, a prominent figure in the Scottish School of Common Sense, grappled with a significant philosophical dilemma in his exploration of human agency. In his *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Reid defends the concept of human active power, asserting that our understanding of power is relative to its effects. However, his inability to philosophically explain how the agent causes bodily motions integral to moral action presents a challenging problem.

Reid posits that human power can be measured by its twofold effects: the ability to impart motion to our bodies and direct our thoughts. Yet, the challenge arises when attempting to reconcile moral responsibility for bodily movements without a clear philosophical explanation of their causation.

Reid's reliance on the Newtonian method limits his ability to elucidate how agents physically cause bodily movements within the framework of moral actions. Despite acknowledging a gap in explanation, Reid contends that moral responsibility rests on the agent's will, irrespective of the physical causes involved.

Critics argue that attributing moral responsibility solely to intention without addressing the physical causation of actions poses inherent problems. Contemporary analytics, influenced by thinkers like Chisholm and Taylor, emphasizes the causal role of the agent in initiating events, which is a problem for Reid's stance.

Reid's defense often relies on common sense, asserting that individuals are aware of their ability to move their bodies. However, this common-sense approach falls short of providing a robust philosophical explanation for moral responsibility beyond mere intentionality.

Reid's philosophy introduces a dualism, separating the efficient cause of voluntary actions (mind) from the physical causality associated with bodily movements (body). This dualistic perspective creates a challenge in explaining how the agent causes events that trigger subsequent bodily movements.

Reid's immersion in the Reformed Scottish Scholasticism tradition, which posits the soul as a distinct substance from the body, further complicates the issue. The historical context of this dualism sheds light on the difficulty Reid faces in explaining how the will, as a faculty of the soul, can move the body.

While Reid's recognition of the will as an efficient cause offers a departure from contemporary reductionist views, his dualistic philosophy hampers a complete explanation of mind-body interaction. This poses a challenge to contemporary philosophical discussions on the nature of the will and moral responsibility.

Thomas Reid's exploration of human agency reveals a complex interplay between common sense and philosophical explanation. The unresolved problem of

reconciling the agent's will with bodily movements underscores the limitations of Reid's dualistic approach, inviting further inquiry into the intricate dynamics of mind-body interaction within the philosophical tradition.

2. Thomas Reid's Dualism. The Influence of Scottish Reformed Scholasticism

Ginet notes the contemporary analytical view of volition as a process of the brain, or in a dualistic fashion, assuming that volition causes the movement of the brain. Reid can be classified as a dualist, but as a substance dualist, because he was influenced by the Scottish Reformed Scholasticism tradition.

Reid straddles modern and earlier traditions, attempting to reconcile empirical scientific views with asserting the necessity of a subject for bodily and mental qualities. His substance dualism posits a distinction between the soul and body as distinct substances, influenced by the Scottish Reformed Scholasticism, which later incorporated Cartesianism.

The Scottish Reformed Scholasticism assumed some Scotist theses, which facilitated the reception of Descartes in Scottish universities. Scotist theses on *prima materia* and the mode of union between body and soul gradually replace Thomistic views during the 17th century in Scottish universities. Scotus's *prima materia* introduces the concept of matter with its own metaphysical act, quasi-substance, and independent properties.

The shift from Thomism to Scotism is evident in the published theses by regents and students of Scottish universities. Cartesian elements are incorporated later. Scotist essentialism combines with Cartesian dualism in the separation between body and soul.

Reid's Newtonianism result in a disconnection between the metaphysical study of the will and empirical moral philosophy, leaving the metaphysical question open, which allows us to review its scholastic antecedents in order to seek a solution to the dualism mentioned.

3. The Will as the Cause of Our Moral Actions by Integrating Soul and Body in Thomas Aquinas

Van Cleve finds Reid's treatment of the will's role in causing bodily motions in moral actions to be a challenging issue. Reid suggests that volitions alone constitute our actions metaphysically, leaving doubt about whether we are the efficient cause of our body's voluntary motions.

Hoffman, while not providing a solution, highlights Reid's distinction between willing and activating bodily abilities. Reid posits that the will's exercise may

not be the real cause of bodily movements. Hoffman draws parallels with Aquinas, suggesting Reid introduces a problem but doesn't solve it.

Aquinas discusses "use" as the application of soul powers to external things. The will, as the prime mover, moves the locomotive faculty, using the body's members as instruments. Actions can be voluntary because the will commands them or because they originate from the will itself. Aquinas asserts that the will can move the bodily locomotive faculty.

To understand this, Aquinas' metaphysics of being is crucial, focusing on the act of being rather than essences. He rejects the dualism and emphasizes the unity of body and soul. Aquinas provides reasons for this unity, opposing, among other things, the claim that the body remains unchanged once the soul is removed.

Ultimately, Aquinas argues that the will, a soul faculty, can move the body locally. This is possible due to the ontological unity of human beings, where the act of being is foundational. The more in act a substance is, the more effectively it acts. Spiritual substance, being more actualized than the body, can move it with local movement.

Aquinas concludes that the will's ability to move the body is in accordance with the bodily nature to be moved locally by the spiritual nature. The soul's driving virtue animates the body. The morality of bodily actions depends not only on the will desiring effects but also on the will's capability to move the body locally.