

## Free Will and Agential Powers

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What is free will, or, as it might be called, freedom of the will? Writers with quite different views on the question often agree that what's at issue is a power (or powers) of some kind.<sup>1</sup> Since will is plausibly seen as itself a power, we would do well to think of freedom of the will *not* as a power of the will but rather, as Locke insisted, of agents.

Locke's own treatment of what he calls liberty or freedom illustrates one difficulty in understanding just what the power in question comes to. His initial offering is a characterization of freedom with respect to *doing what one wills (or might will)*, not freedom in *willing*. I am at liberty to A, Locke says, just in case I have a power to A or not A, according to which of these I will to do. Plainly, being at liberty to *will* to A can't be understood in this fashion. And Locke at one point scoffs at the absurdity of asking whether an agent might have the latter freedom. But the fact that freedom to will can't be understood in the same manner as is freedom to do what depends on willing doesn't imply that there's no sense at all to be made of it.

It has of course proved difficult to say exactly what free will comes to. I'm not able to provide such an account; my aim here is more modest. I hope to contribute to a way of thinking about the problem.

### *1. Willing*

If free will is the freedom of an agent in willing, it behooves us to have some idea of what willing is. In order for an agent to be free *in the relevant sense* with respect to doing something A, A-ing must be the kind of thing that can be done freely. Willing, then, must be something that

one can do freely.

If we can do anything freely, we can freely perform intentional actions. I'll take it that the freedom of an agent in willing is, at least in the paradigm case, the agent's freedom in performing some intentional action. Paradigmatic instances of willing, then, are instances of performing some intentional action (though, of course, not every intentional action is a willing).

For this reason, it isn't appropriate, in the present context, to count *intending* to do a certain thing as an instance of willing. Intending is a state, not an action. And one can intend to A without so much as beginning to do what one intends.

Nor will it do to take willing to be *coming to have an intention*. True enough, one can come to have an intention to A by deciding (choosing) to A. And I take it that a decision to A is itself an intentional action. When one decides to A, one intentionally forms an intention to A. One can perform this action long before, or without ever, A-ing. But one can come to have an intention in a way other than by deciding. Deciding settles practical uncertainty, uncertainty about what to do. But often it's perfectly clear what to do; there's no uncertainty about it. When that's so, one can come to intend to do a certain thing, and do it intentionally, without deciding to do it.

An intention can arise from prior rationalizing states in much the same way in which a belief or desire can. When it does, one's coming to have that intention isn't a free action; it isn't an action at all.

Still, I think we can fairly count *deciding* as a kind of willing. If I decide today to drive to my office tomorrow, I will today to make the drive tomorrow. I settle on doing that; I actively set my will on doing it. Such an act of willing is something that can be free, if anything can be.

Another thing we might consider is *trying* to do a certain thing. I have in mind a notion of trying on which trying can be effortless. Trying is attempting, and some attempts are easy. When you intentionally raise your arm, even in normal circumstances, you've made a successful attempt to raise your arm. And a successful attempt is an attempt, or an instance of trying.

As I understand trying, when you try to A and succeed in A-ing, your trying to A is your A-ing. It is your successful attempt to A.<sup>2</sup>

On this view, trying isn't a distinct action type on a par with walking and speaking. It's not that each act of walking, speaking, etc. is preceded by or begins with an act of a different type, a trying. Trying to A is going about or being engaged in the business of A-ing.<sup>3</sup> Trying is thus different from what some writers call volition.<sup>4</sup>

If I decided to A, or if I tried to A, I willed to A. Deciding to A is willing to A. It might not be quite right, however, given my understanding of trying, to say that trying to A is willing to A.<sup>5</sup> As I've said, I take it that when one tries to A and succeeds, one's attempt to A is one's A-ing. But it doesn't seem to be always the case that doing what one tries to do is identical with willing to do that thing. If I try to sink a putt and I succeed, it doesn't seem that my sinking the putt is my willing to sink the putt.

I'll take it that in such a case willing to do the thing in question is some *early portion* of one's attempt. It's a beginning of the execution of one's intention to do that thing right away. It's an initiation of an attempt. (Just how much of one's attempt consists in the willing is vague, as vague as is willing.)

Willing might go on just about as long as an action does. Suppose that I slowly wave my arm in a figure eight. My moving my arm continues for several moments. So does my willing to

wave it in a figure eight, even if my willing isn't the whole of my action. We can think of the action as a process, one that begins in my head where my having an intention to so wave my arm right away begins to excite certain neurons,<sup>6</sup> that continues with the excitation of neurons running to my shoulder, the contraction of certain muscles, and the motion of my arm. There will be a beginning portion of such a process occurring for several moments, as long as my having that intention continues to excite the appropriate neurons inside my head.

There might be other kinds of thing that should count as willing.<sup>7</sup> But in what follows I'll focus on these, deciding and the initiation of trying.

## *2. Up to You*

It's a common thought that if you have free will, then at least sometimes when you act, it's up to you whether you do the thing you do on that occasion. Applying this idea to willing, we can say that if you're free with respect to willing to A, then on the occasion in question it's up to you whether you will to A then.

Where the willing at issue is the making of a certain decision, say, the decision to B, if you're free with respect to making that decision, then it's up to you whether you decide then to B. Where initiating an attempt to C is in question, if you're free with respect to doing so, then it's up to you whether you initiate such an attempt on that occasion.

We often use the expression 'it's up to you' in a way that isn't concerned with free will. I might have said to my daughter on some occasion: "You can straighten up your room, or you can stay home; it's up to you." A certain outcome—whether she goes out or stays home—depends on whether she straightens up her room. Whether she does the latter or not will be the difference-

maker. The choice is hers. But all this might be so whether anyone has free will or not.

Similarly, if I have no preference regarding what you do on some occasion, or don't wish to express one, or refuse to offer any suggestions or advice or exert any pressure, I might say the matter is up to you. Make the decision without my direction. That's something you can do whether we have free will or not.

But if we have free will, then not only do certain outcomes depend on what we will to do, but also it's sometimes up to us whether we will certain things. And its being up to us whether we will certain things isn't a matter of no one's offering us advice or direction. Indeed, it can be up to you whether you will a certain thing even if someone is offering you advice, expressing his or her preference about what you do, or exerting pressure on you to do a certain thing.

I take this requirement to be a constraint on construals of a power possession of which by an agent amounts (perhaps with further conditions) to that agent's having free will. It must be the case that having that power (perhaps together with those further conditions) can suffice for its being up to an agent whether the power is exercised.

It might *not* be a requirement of *moral responsibility* that we have such a power.<sup>8</sup> It might be that I can be responsible for doing something even though it wasn't up to me whether I did that thing on that occasion. I take the possibility here to be the possibility that we might not have to have free will in order to be morally responsible for some of the things we do.

That we have such a power is nevertheless, I submit, part of our ordinary conception of our agency. When I'm deliberating about whether to A, I take it that it's up to me whether I decide to A. I presume not just that my decision will be a difference-maker with regard to what happens subsequent to it, but that it's up to me whether I make one decision or another. It is free

will of the sort that is presumed in this kind of case that is my target here.

### 3. Powers

Powers are a class of properties including dispositions, tendencies, liabilities, capacities, and abilities.<sup>9</sup> I include here both what Locke called active powers and what he called passive powers. Defining this class of properties might be difficult, but it's easy enough list some members. In discussing dispositions, for example, philosophers frequently focus on such things as fragility, solubility, flexibility, and flammability.

Whether the several terms I used—'dispositions', 'tendencies', etc.--pick out distinct species of powers I don't know. But I do think that some things that are sometimes assumed in philosophical discussion of *dispositions* should *not* be assumed about all *powers*. And if we wish to understand free will in terms of agential powers, we'll need to see whether the sometimes assumed things apply to the powers in question.

Each of the dispositions mentioned above can be designated, as I've done here, using a single-word term. It's sometimes taken for granted that each such term can be defined in a certain standard way, one that specifies a characteristic stimulus and a characteristic response for the disposition in question. For example, it might be suggested, as a rough first approximation, that 'fragility' can be defined as 'the disposition to break in response to being struck'. The template 'the disposition to R in response to S' is supposed to provide a canonical form for definitions of such disposition terms. And defining a disposition term in this manner is often held to be the first step toward an analysis of attributions of dispositions.<sup>10</sup> For example, given the simple proposal regarding fragility, an analysis of 'o is fragile' might take this statement to be

equivalent to 'o is disposed to break in response to being struck'. Often some further analysis of this latter sort of claim is then offered.

I don't think it should be assumed, and in fact I think it isn't true, that all powers are amenable to this kind of treatment. In particular, I doubt that for every power there's some familiar term designating that power that can be defined in the canonical fashion just described. It might be that all *dispositions* can be treated in this way, and if that's so then what I suspect is that some powers aren't dispositions; dispositions would be a species of power, differing in this way from some others.

I accept that all powers are powers *to do* something--to produce or undergo or inhibit or resist some change, or to remain in or sustain some state.<sup>11</sup> Each has some (perhaps more than one) characteristic manifestation. What I doubt is that every power has some characteristic stimulus that can be identified by semantic analysis of a familiar name for that power.

Free will aside, there seem to be examples of powers that do not. Consider certain tendencies or susceptibilities that might be thought of as passive powers. People with narcolepsy tend to fall asleep. Episodes of sleep that manifest narcolepsy might well have characteristic triggers, and it might be that these triggers are co-causes, with the narcolepsy, of these manifestations. But it would take empirical investigation to find out whether this is so and, if it is, what the characteristic triggers are. It isn't a matter of semantic analysis of 'narcolepsy'; linguistic competence and analytic subtlety won't reveal it. Narcolepsy doesn't lend itself readily to the kind canonical definition just described.

Other powers might have characteristic stimuli that are identifiable by semantic analysis, but lack semantically identifiable stimuli that, given possession of the powers, *guarantee* their

characteristic manifestations. The issue here doesn't concern indeterminism. It might be that every manifestation of such a power is fully determined. It might nevertheless be that there's no stimulus condition identifiable by semantic analysis of any familiar name of the power that, together with the power, *determines* that the manifestation will occur. What, if anything, determines whether the manifestation occurs, given possession of the power and occurrence of the stimulus, might be discoverable only by empirical investigation.

Philosophers sometimes speak of "sure-fire" dispositions, sometimes taking these to be the same as dispositions whose manifestations are determined by their stimuli. The powers I have in mind here aren't such sure-fire dispositions, even if determinism is true. For analysis of familiar names referring to them fails to reveal what determines whether or not they're manifested. I suspect that very many of our familiar names for powers, such as 'irritability', 'diligence', and even 'fragility' are of this sort. It isn't semantic analysis that shows us exactly what kind of striking, or what in addition to striking, suffices to cause fragile things to break.

Finally, there appear to be powers that simply don't have any relevant stimulus conditions. Everything with rest mass has, in virtue of having rest mass, a power to curve space-time. That power is manifested constantly, so long as the thing retains rest mass. Beyond possession of this property, there seems to be no stimulus needed or relevant to whether the power is manifested. Other powers manifest spontaneously. The instability of some particles or elements is manifested in spontaneous decay. There seems to be no stimulus needed and none relevant to whether the kind of decay in question occurs.<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to the kind of power that Locke focused on—the freedom of an agent with respect to doing what the agent wills or might will—there seems to be an obvious relevant



stimulus: the willing of that thing. I think it doubtful that such a power is sure-fire, even if determinism is true. One can have a power to do something in response to willing to do it and yet sometimes fail in one's attempt to do it.

It seems even less likely that the freedom of an agent with respect to willing a certain thing is a sure-fire power. Indeed, it isn't so obvious what, if anything, might be the relevant kind of stimulus when it comes to such a power. We might consider desiring to do that thing, preferring to do it, or judging it best; I'll suggest later a certain kind of intending. But previous attempts to construe free will in this way aren't encouraging.

If, as I've suggested, having free will requires that it's up to you whether you will this or that, there might stem from this requirement a familiar difficulty faced by any such effort. As standardly understood, the manifestation of a disposition that has a characteristic stimulus is *dependent* on the occurrence of that stimulus. A glass that's fragile might break in the absence of any characteristic stimulus of fragility, but if it does, its breaking doesn't manifest its disposition to break in response to being struck.

And now, it's hard to see how it can be up to me whether I now will to A if whether I manifest my power to so will depends on whether some stimulus, the occurrence of which isn't itself be up to me, occurs. And to try to make it out that it's up to me whether the stimulus in question occurs is to begin a regress, one that certainly looks to be vicious.

Perhaps it is for this reason that some writers on free will (e.g., McCann 1998: 174) describe its exercise as a kind of spontaneity. Of course, it won't do to see the exercise of free will as just like the untriggered decay of an unstable atom. It isn't up to anyone or anything whether the atom decays at some particular time. And it's hard to see how a spontaneous

manifestation of a power to will *could* be up to the agent in question. But the problem of free will *is* hard.

Most of what I say in this paper will concern efforts to construe free will in terms of powers that *are* susceptible to analysis in the canonical way described above, powers that have characteristic stimuli on which their manifestations depend, and whose manifestations are caused by, among other things, those stimuli. (Though, as I said, I won't take these powers to be sure-fire in the sense explained above.) Toward the end I'll briefly consider alternatives that construe free will in terms of different sorts of power.

Reid (2001) maintained that the active powers of intelligent agents are utterly different in kind from the powers of inanimate objects.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, he took only the former to be powers in the proper sense of the word. I don't agree. But I do take seriously the possibility that no powers that are fundamentally like those of inanimate things can bestow us with free will of the sort that we commonly take ourselves to have. Indeed, it might be that we don't and couldn't have such freedom. But we should explore the matter thoroughly before accepting this pessimistic conclusion.

#### *4. A Power to Initiate an Attempt*

Imagine a young child who sees a shiny object across the room, crawls over to the object, and grasps it. The child, we might suppose, lacks the capacity to deliberate and make decisions for reasons that would be needed for her to have free will. But there's no reason to deny altogether that she's an agent. She has, and on this occasion exercises, many of the powers that are distinctive of agency.

The child exercises a power to try to crawl over and get the shiny object. And likewise she exercises a power to initiate an attempt to crawl and get the object. In this case, the child can have these powers even if it isn't up to her whether she exercises them on this occasion. One might have a power to will without having free will, without having a power to freely will.

We might manage an account of a power to initiate an attempt to do a certain thing if we set our sights lower than free will, on something that the young child has despite lacking free will. When one initiates an attempt to A, one begins to execute a present-directed intention, an intention to do something right away. To be engaged in initiating an attempt is to be in the process of implementing a present-directed intention.

We might, then, consider a construal of a power to initiate an attempt to A as, at least in part, a disposition to initiate an attempt to A in response to coming to have a present-directed intention with relevant content. This approach would allow us to see a power to initiate an attempt as, at least in part, a causal disposition. We might think this an advantage, since, we might think, we have a good understanding of causal dispositions. Or we might think that our account of agency must see present-directed intentions as causes anyway, for we might think that that's the way to understand the implementation of an intention.

If we're on the right track, then it appears that having powers to initiate attempts to do various things requires having a host of other powers. One must, for one thing, have a power to come to have present-directed intentions (or functionally similar executive states). Intentions are themselves motivated in light of beliefs. Hence, it seems, in order to have powers to initiate attempts to act, one must have powers to come to have motivational states and beliefs.

A power to initiate an attempt to do some specific thing would require, it seems, having

some specific motivational and conceptual capacities. An agent who lacks a power to become motivated to A, or to try to A, or to have any other relevant motivation, would seem to lack an ability to initiate an attempt to A. Likewise for an agent who lacks a power to come to think of doing a certain thing.

Even setting aside the problem of free will, then, a power to will includes a variety of powers, many of them not powers to do things intentionally. Even relatively simple agents capable of intentional agency are sophisticated beings.

### *5. Up to the Agent Whether She Wills*

Our powers to will are, even if those of the young child aren't, rational powers. And if we're eventually to have a conception of free will in terms of agential powers, it will have to include a conception of rational powers. No agent with free will entirely lacks the latter.

If these are powers to do various things in response to various stimuli, the stimuli might be a kind of seeing-as, or taking there to be reasons to do certain things. The powers to come to have present-directed intentions that concern us might be understood as powers to do so in response to taking there to be certain practical reasons, or reasons to act. Likewise, it seems, for the powers to become motivated to do certain things. The powers to come to believe might be understood as powers to acquire beliefs in response to taking there to be evidence for those beliefs or arguments in their support.<sup>14</sup>

I don't pretend to be able to say precisely what any of these powers comes to. I've suggested that they might be causal dispositions, with characteristic manifestations and stimuli. I haven't offered, and I'm not able to offer, an analysis of dispositions of this sort.

Even setting this point aside, the suggestions face a by-now familiar problem. Supposing it granted that we can construe in this way a power to rationally will, how do we construe a power to *freely* will? For that requires not just rational powers; it requires that it's up to the agents who have free will whether they exercise some of these powers in certain ways on certain occasions. If the exercise of our powers to will depends on things not themselves up to us, it's hard to see how it can be up to us whether we exercise these powers.

### 6. *Opposing Powers*

It might help with this problem to say that being free to will to A requires having competing or opposing powers: if it's up to me on a certain occasion whether I will to A then, I must have a power to will to A and also some power to do something incompatible with my willing to A. One such power would be a power to will not to A. Another would be the sort of power that Locke appealed to when he finally (*Essay* Bk. 2, Ch. 21.48) took the notion of free will seriously: a power to suspend the execution of one's motivational states while one evaluates their objects, considering whether they're worthy of pursuit. This latter might be called a power to reflect rather than willing, though there might be some willing involved in reflecting. Reflection sometimes itself involves the active direction of attention and pursuit of certain lines of thought.

Consider being free to decide to A. To have such freedom, it must be up to me whether I decide to A. Suppose that I have a power to decide to A in response to coming to intend to make up my mind whether to A, and also a power to decide not to A in response to that same stimulus. It might be that having both of these powers, or two or more similarly opposing powers, is required for being free to decide to A.

Consider being free to initiate an attempt to A. To have such freedom, it must be up to me whether I initiate such an attempt. Suppose I have a power to initiate such an attempt in response to coming to intend to A right away, and also a power to suspend execution of such an intention in response to the same stimulus. It might be that having both of these powers, or two or more similarly opposing powers, is required for being free to initiate an attempt to A.

### 7. *Stimulus Presence*

Suppose I have both of the powers to decide just mentioned: a power to decide to A in response to coming to intend to make up my mind right away whether to A, and a power to decide not to A in response to this same stimulus. But suppose I don't now intend to so make up my mind, I'm not going to so intend, and it isn't up to me whether I so intend. How can it then be up to me whether I decide to A?

Such circumstances commonly render it *not* up to an agent whether she does a certain thing. Imagine that Sue's standing on a tall ladder is necessary for her changing a certain light bulb in a chandelier. Suppose that she isn't standing on a tall ladder, she won't be, and it isn't up to her whether she comes to stand on a tall ladder. It then seems that it isn't up to Sue whether she changes the light bulb.

It might contribute to conditions in which it's up to me whether I decide to A if the characteristic stimulus of my power to so decide is in fact present. We might consider whether the presence of this stimulus together with my having both the power to decide to A and the power to decide not to A in response to it will suffice.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of such a stimulus surely isn't *necessary* for its being up to me whether I

decide to A. For it might be that, although the stimulus is absent, it's up to me whether it's present. I observed earlier that requiring such a thing would begin a regress that appeared vicious. The suggestion here isn't that it's *required*, but rather that together with other conditions it might be *sufficient*.

Suppose that I've just now taken there to be good reason to A and I've not yet become motivated to A. Suppose that I have a power to become so motivated in response to taking there to be good reason to A. And I have further powers: to come to intend to make up my mind right away whether to A in response to coming to be motivated to A, to decide to A in response to coming to have such an intention, and to decide not to A in response to this same stimulus.

We might decline to say that it's up to me whether I become motivated to A. For coming to have a certain motivation isn't typically something we do intentionally, and we might think that only in the case of things done intentionally can it be up to us whether we do them. Still, we might consider whether the circumstances just described suffice for its being up to me whether I decide to A. The characteristic stimulus for my power to decide to A isn't present, but the stimulus for some prior power is present, and I have that prior power, as well as powers linking its manifestation to the presence of a characteristic stimulus of my power to decide to A.

These suggestions are sketchy, and I'm not able to determine whether, even if filled in, they might give us a satisfactory account of free will. They do seem to me worth consideration.

### 8. *Non-Causal Powers*

Some philosophers will think that I took a wrong turn early on, when the question of rational powers was broached. The manifestation of a rational power is something done in *the light of*

*reason*, something done *for a reason*. And some philosophers maintain that nothing can be both *done for a reason* and *caused*. A rational power, they say, can't be a causal power. It can't be one that has a characteristic stimulus that, when the power is manifested, is a cause of the manifestation.

Why must something done for a reason be uncaused? Something done for a reason is responsive to the normativity of reasons. But causal processes, it's sometimes said, "bring about their effects with complete indifference to the question of whether those effects have cogent considerations in their favour" (Lowe 1998: 156). No causal process, then, can result in something that is done for a reason.

I don't think this argument is correct. Taking there to be a reason for something can cause some outcome, just as taking something to be a horse can. And there can be causal outcomes that are sensitive to whether earlier stages of the processes leading to them consist of someone's taking there to be reasons of various sorts. Further, taking there to be a reason can be responsive to there actually being something that has a certain normative significance, just as taking there to be a horse can be responsive to there being something with horsiness. We can have powers to recognize reasons as such just as we have powers to recognize horses as such.

One might doubt this if one doubts that there really is any such thing as normativity, but the proponent of the argument sketched above certainly doesn't doubt that. It might be objected that normativity differs from horsiness in that only the latter is a causally relevant property. But normativity's lack of causal relevance would seem to undercut its reality.

When one's taking there to be a reason to A results in an appropriate way from there being a reason to A, and one's A-ing is caused in the right way by one's taking there to be a



reason to A, one can have A-ed for a reason. Coming to desire, believe, and intend, and deciding and trying can be things that we do for reasons and also things that are caused. Powers to do these things can be causal dispositions. Rational powers can be causal dispositions.

This is not yet to say that *free will* can be. For there remains the problem of understanding how it can be up to me whether I do a certain thing if my power to do that thing is a causal disposition of the sort we've been considering. If it is, then the manifestation of that disposition depends on the occurrence of some stimulus, and it won't typically be up to me whether that stimulus occurs.

However, it's hard to see how appeal to a non-causal power is going to help here. It isn't up to an unstable atom, or to anything else, whether that atom's spontaneous power to decay is manifested at a given moment; how can it be up to me whether some non-causal power I have is manifested? Nor does it seem to help to observe that the powers in question are *rational* powers. As I argued above, it doesn't seem that such powers must be non-causal. On the contrary, it's hard to believe that a power to come to believe, desire, or intend *for reasons* could be anything but causal, with its manifestation caused by the stimulus of one's taking there to be a reason to do, or evidence in favor of, the thing in question.

### 9. Agent-Causal Powers

There's a different understanding of causal powers that's sometimes appealed to in discussions of free will. When an agent freely makes a certain decision, it's said, the agent causes something, such as her coming to have a certain intention, and the agent's causing that thing isn't causation by any occurrence or state. It's causation by an enduring substance, which, on this view, is what

a rational agent is.<sup>16</sup> A power to freely decide, then, is a causal power, but its manifestation is some event caused by the agent. Such a power might have a characteristic stimulus, but, it's usually said, the stimulus isn't a cause of the manifestation.

Sometimes it's said that there exists this kind of substance causation only in the case of exercises of free will. All other causation, it's said, is causation by events or states. I find it rather incredible that causation might vary in this way. Why would events involving rational agents be so impotent? And why couldn't any other substances cause things?

Other theorists (e.g., Lowe 2008, chs. 6 & 7) hold that all causation is, fundamentally, causation by objects or substances.<sup>17</sup> All causal powers, then, are powers of substances themselves to cause certain occurrences. Free will might differ from many other powers in that it's a power that only a rational substance can have, and it might differ in that it's a power of a middle-sized substance, rather than some sub-atomic particle, to cause things. But this power has the same general character as all causal powers: it's a power of something to be a substance-cause.

Substance-causal powers of this sort might have characteristic stimuli. Indeed, it's sometimes held that they must. An object causes something, it's said, always *by doing something, or by undergoing some change* (Lowe 2008: 146). It's just that the cause isn't the thing that the object does; it's the object.

This kind of view of agential powers requires only minor alteration of the dispositional view suggested earlier. A power to initiate an attempt will be a power of an agent to agent-cause the initiation of an attempt by coming to have a present-directed intention. Powers to intend, believe, and desire will similarly be powers of rational beings to substance-cause their coming to

have certain mental states by taking there to be certain reasons or evidence.

But now, precisely because this construal of agential powers involves such a minor reformulation of the dispositional view, it's hard to see that it constitutes any advance over that view. If that dispositional view has trouble capturing the idea that when someone freely wills, it's up to that agent whether she so wills on that occasion, then it seems that this view of free will as an agent-causal power will equally have trouble capturing this idea.<sup>18</sup>

### *10. Indeterminism*

Some readers will think that I've failed to raise the key, or one of the key, requirements for free will, namely, that its exercises be undetermined by what precedes them. If we've had trouble capturing the idea that when you freely will something, it's up to you whether you so will on that occasion, that's because we haven't recognized that free will is incompatible with determinism.

I acknowledge that thinking of agential powers in the context of determinism, it's hard to see how it can be up to agents whether these powers are manifested when and as they are. But I doubt that thinking of their manifestations as caused but not determined makes the problem any easier. Maybe in some way it does; but I'll leave it to proponents of this idea to explain how.

### Notes

1. Locke (*Essay*, Bk. 2, Ch. 21.10) holds that freedom (or as he sometimes calls it, liberty) is a power of the agent. Hume takes it to be “*a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will*” (*Enquiry*, Sec.8, Pt. 1). Van Inwagen (1981: 8) maintains that if an agent has free will, then on some occasions there are two or more mutually incompatible courses of action each of which is such that the agent has it within his power to carry it out. And Lowe takes will to be a rational power, one “that is characteristically exercised *in the light of reason*” (2008: 155).
2. Adams and Mele (1992: 326) take this view of trying.
3. I agree with some of McCann’s remarks on this matter. He says: “even though it is fair to say trying attends all overt doing, trying should not be taken as a *species* of action equivalent to volition. Rather, *trying* is a general term for the business of going about the performance of an action, and an agent’s attempt consists in as much as he accomplishes, or could reasonably have been expected to accomplish, toward the action at issue” (1998: 6). However, unlike McCann, I see no need to posit volitions in addition to intentions and attempts.
4. Ginet (1990: 9-14) takes trying to be a mental action that, in the case of successful bodily action, causes some bodily exertion. The mental action in question, which Ginet calls a volition, need not have any cause, and it lacks internal causal structure; it doesn’t consist of one thing’s causing another. (In contrast, although McCann posits volitions, he doesn’t identify them with tryings.)
5. Stephen Kearns brought this point to my attention.
6. Brand (1984: 20) suggests this view of where and when actions begin.
7. O’Shaughnessy (2009) describes a kind of will that is neither deciding nor, he claims, trying. It might equally be said not to be an initiation of an attempt.
8. We might formulate the conclusion of Frankfurt (1969) this way.
9. Some philosophers hold that all (genuine) properties are powers. I don’t rule this out here, though nothing I say is committed to it, either.
10. Lewis (1997) suggests this procedure, and Choi (2008) follows it.
11. Molnar (2003: 60) calls this feature of powers “directedness.”
12. The examples are from Molnar (2003: 85-87).
13. Reid maintained that power, in the proper sense of the word, implies will and is incompatible with necessity.

14. Pettit and Smith (1998) and Smith (2003) offer accounts of freedom in terms of capacities to believe and desire rationally. Free will includes such capacities, but it includes more; let's not forget the action!

15. In work in progress, Thomas Reed proposes that having an ability to A consists in (i) having a certain disposition, (ii) the obtaining of the stimulus conditions for that disposition, and (iii) the absence of all extrinsic and certain kinds of intrinsic finks and masks for that disposition. It was his work that suggested the idea in my text here to me.

Note to readers: Reed isn't the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher to whom I refer in section 3 of this paper.

16. For views of this sort, see Chisholm (1966), Clarke (1993), O'Connor (2000), Pereboom (2001, ch. 2), and Taylor (1966).

17. Note that Lowe doesn't hold that decisions (or willings generally) are agent-caused; he takes them to be uncaused manifestations of spontaneous powers. On his view, it's by deciding (or, more generally, willing) that a rational agent causes various things. Thus, it isn't Lowe's view of free will that I'm discussing here, but rather one that construes agent causation as Lowe does *and* takes willings to be agent-caused.

18. Jacobs and O'Connor (forthcoming) suggest a somewhat different view on which all causes are substances, one that rejects Lowe's claim that always a substance causes something by undergoing some change. Still, they want to hang onto the idea that effects can be explained by prior events. The events that do the explaining would seem to be somehow involved in substances causing the effects in question, as that in virtue of which the substances cause those outcomes. (Otherwise, how do they explain?) The difference from Lowe's view thus seems to vanish.