

Human Motivation in Thomas Reid¹

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1. Introduction

According to Reid (1969, 283) motives are an ens rationis. Because of that they may influence to action, but they do not act as causes or as agents, that is motives are only advisory (cf. Seebaß 1993, 329; Lehrer 1989, 210). Instead motives presuppose an efficient cause, namely an agent (cf. Rowe 1991, chapter 4), and the agent's freedom (Reid 1969, 284). In opposition to Leibniz (1994, 84-85) who defends subtle reasons Reid (1969) claims that motives have to be conscious (cf. Seebaß 1993, 269). For to "be influenced by a motive of which I am not conscious, is, ..., an arbitrary supposition without any evidence," (Reid 1969, 285)

Reid (1969, 288-290) distinguishes between animal motives, which human beings have in common with animals and which influence the will by impelling us, and rational motives, which are peculiar to rational beings (cf. Seebaß 1993, 269) and which influence the will by convincing us of what we ought to do. Only the latter are proper motives (Reid 1969, 290). Reid (1969, 287) poses contrary motives of the same kind, which differ only in quantity, like bribes of different amounts, and contrary motives of different kind, like money and fame.

According to Reid (1969, 95) motives are related to other concepts as follows: "By *principles* of action, I understand every thing that incites us to act. ... To every action ..., there must be some incitement, some motive, some reason." Reid (1969) distinguishes between (1) "mechanical principles of action", like "instinct" and "habit", where no motives are present, (2) "animal principles of action", like "appetites", "affections", and "passions", and (3) "rational principles of action". In Reid's (1969, 329) discussion of Leibniz' principle of sufficient reason Reid interprets "reason" among other things as "motive", so that in some cases "reason" can be equated with "motive".

Advocating free will Reid (1969, 283-293) criticises several postulates of the necessity doctrine of his time. I will deal with Reid's responses.

2. Reid on every deliberate action must have a motive

Reid (1969, 285) claims the truth or falsity of this thesis depends on the meaning of the word "deliberate". He distinguishes:

(i) The original meaning of the word: If a deliberate action is an action where motives are weighed, then there must be motives and also contrary motives. For otherwise they couldn't be weighed.

(ii) The common meaning of the word: If a deliberate action is an action which is done by a cool and calm determination of the mind, then there are innumerable many actions done without a motive. For if motives are marked by consciousness, then there are many unimportant actions done every day where the agent

isn't conscious of a motive. Because there are many actions performed without a motive, the common meaning of the word "deliberate" seems to be more appropriate.

According to Reid motives are marked by consciousness; for there is no proof of unconscious motives. Yet if one takes unconscious motives like Leibniz (1994, 85) to be habits, then Reid's claim turns out to be false. For one can gather evidence of habits quite easily. But one can doubt that Reid would accept habits as unconscious motives; he rather considers them as mechanical principles of action. Besides one usually knows one's habits, so that they are conscious after all. Even if they are not conscious at the moment, they can be made conscious by asking the person what kind of habits she has. Thus habits are potentially conscious.

Yet one can argue for unconscious motives: If there are words which lie on the tip of the tongue, which one is certain to know, and which need only a trigger to come to the fore, why shouldn't there be also unconscious motives which just need a trigger for becoming conscious? Reid would probably respond by claiming that such motives are no counterexamples to his position, because they are potentially conscious. Another argumentation for unconscious motives can be taken from Reid (1969, 286-287): Reid states that there is wilfulness, caprice, and obstinacy among human beings, because we have names for them. Likewise one can argue that there are unconscious motives. For we have a name for that. Yet having a name for something, for example, extraterrestrials, doesn't prove their existence.

Contrary to Leibniz (1994, 40-41) who claims that nothing is without reason Reid (1969, 285-286) postulates that there are many unimportant actions performed every day without any conscious motive. For there are many important intended goals, like paying one's debt, which can be done by several different means, like paying with this or that shilling, in which the agent has no difficulty in taking one of them despite his indifference to these means. Thus the agent is free to want this or that shilling for payment. Because Buridan's ass doesn't differ from the shilling case (Reid 1969, 285-286), the ass has no difficulty in taking one of the haystacks to cure its hunger, thereby going against Leibniz' and Locke's (1961) point of view.

Locke (1961, 220) postulates that freedom of action consists primarily in the ability to postpone the decision "till they have looked before them and informed themselves whether that particular thing which is then proposed or desired lies in the way to their main end, and make a real part of that which is their greatest good", so that the agent cannot pay his debt and Buridan's ass dies of hunger still waiting for a decisive reason to pay with this particular shilling respectively to eat this particular haystack. Yet Locke could save his action theory by maintaining à la Leibniz that there are no Buridan situations in real life.

Yet if one asked the agent why did you take this particular shilling for paying your debts, the agent would

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probably answer: I took this shilling, because I wanted to pay my debts and because this particular shilling was equally apt for this purpose as any other one. Thus there seem to be motives present in the shilling case. If one objects that the agent didn't address the question by his answer, because he didn't say why he preferred this particular shilling to the other ones, one can respond that agents don't distinguish between two kinds of motives while deliberating: Motives which speak for a particular action and motives which speak for preferring one particular action over the other ones. Agents rather consider every available motive during deliberation.

One can question the analogy. For Buridan's ass is construed in such a way that there is no reason, not even subtle ones, to prefer one particular haystack, while in the shilling case such reasons can be present. Reid (1969, 285-286) only states that each coin can be used for payment leaving the possibility open that the coins don't lie in equal distance from the agent, so that he can cite economical or habitual reasons for taking the nearest one. One can defend Reid by saying that an agent searching in his purse for a shilling doesn't perceive a difference in the distances of the shillings to himself, so that the analogy holds after all. Against this one can object that an agent arguing in this way must also be able to tell me when a difference counts. This seems difficult to me. For I cannot see how an agent can legitimate that a difference doesn't count up to a certain point and that it counts from a certain point onwards. Thus the analogy isn't perfect.

3. Reid against if there is only one motive, then this motive must determine the agent

According to Reid (1969, 286-287) motives are not the sole causes of action, because there is also wilfulness, caprice, and obstinacy among human beings. If one denies that the latter exist, one has to explain why they have names in all languages. If one, however, affirms that they exist, a single motive doesn't have to determine the agent.

Yet having a name for something doesn't prove its existence. In the case of extraterrestrials it couldn't even be evidence for its existence. In the case of wilfulness, caprice, and obstinacy, however, like in the case of human freedom of will and unconscious motives, it could be evidence for our feeling to be wilful, capricious, obstinate, and free, and for our feeling that there are unconscious motives, but not for its sole existence.

4. Reid on if there are contrary motives, then the strongest motive must prevail

Since Reid (1969, 287-291) defends agent causation, he maintains that the agent determines which motive prevails, be it the strongest or not. For contrary motives can be compared to "advocates pleading the opposite sides of a cause at the bar" where the "sentence is in the power of the judge" (Reid 1969, 288) and not in the power of the advocates.

Because the defenders of the necessity doctrine have never explained what is meant by the strongest motive (Reid 1969, 287-288), one cannot judge whether the strongest of contrary motives must prevail. Reid then argues that either we measure the strength of motives by their prevalence or by some other measure distinct from their prevalence. If we do the former, we are confronted with two possibilities: (1) If we define the strongest motive as the one which prevails, then it is true indeed that the strongest motive prevails. Yet this means no more than the

strongest motive is the strongest motive, and one still cannot judge whether the strongest motive prevails. (2) If one takes the strength of a motive to be the cause of its prevalence, and not its prevalence like in (1), one takes for granted that motives are the sole causes of actions which Reid (1969, 286-287) already has argued against. Therefore after having dismissed these two possibilities Reid does the latter and devises two tests by which the strength of motives can be tried, namely an animal and a rational test of the strength of motives. While the former consists of the competition of animal motives for prevalence, where the strength of animal motives is perceived by our feeling, the latter consists of the competition of rational motives for prevalence, where the strength of rational motives is perceived by our judgement. While animal/rational motives are strongest/weakest when tried by the animal test, animal/rational motives are weakest/strongest when tried by the rational test. Hence according to Reid the strongest motive doesn't always prevail.

The necessitarian would probably object that even if we suppose agent causation and that the agent determines which motive prevails, the prevailing motive becomes the strongest, when it is chosen, so that the strongest motive prevails after all. Although the first definition of strongest motive can be criticised, the second definition does better. For as I already pointed out Reid's argumentation against motives as sole causes of actions isn't conclusive. The necessitarian could maintain that Reid's animal and rational test of the strength of motives is no improvement to the prevalence definition. For to say with regard to the animal test that the strongest motive is the one to which the agent "can yield with ease or which it requires an effort of self-command to resist" (Reid 1969, 289) doesn't give an objective standard either by which the strength of animal motives can be measured. Besides yielding with ease is just the opposite side of the coin of prevailing. With regard to the rational test it is also not convincing to say that the strongest motive is the one "which it is most our duty and our real happiness to follow" (Reid 1969, 290), because one has to explain what the latter actually means and whether this amounts to an objective standard. Thus Reid's proposal has several weaknesses.

5. Reid on we draw conclusions from an agent's motives to his actions, as we draw conclusions from other causes to their effects

Reid (1969, 291-292) objects that we reason from an agent's motives to his actions, because agents act as if they are free, that is foolish agents prefer present small gratification, whereas wise agents prefer the greater and more distant good. Thus the analogy to cause and effect doesn't hold.

Yet acting as if they are free, doesn't prove that they are really free. For even if motives are no causes, there might be other causes which might determine the agent and which might even explain the different behaviour of wise and foolish agents. E. g. there might be genes which are responsible for the wise and foolish behaviour, in the sense that they determine the behaviour of the agent completely, so that agents are not free after all. If we take certain genes to cause certain motives which in turn cause wise respectively foolish behaviour, even the analogy to cause and effect can be saved and the necessitarian wins out.

6. Reid on if human beings are free and are not directed by their motives, then their actions can only be capricious, and rewards and punishments have no effect

Although human freedom of will may be abused by foolish and vicious agents to result in capricious actions, Reid (1969, 292) concedes, this doesn't mean that human freedom of will cannot be put to its proper use, namely to act wisely and virtuously.

If we suppose human freedom of will and see transgressions of human and divine law, this can be explained by the following: While rewards and punishments may have no effect on foolish and vicious agents, they have their due effect on wise and virtuous agents (Reid 1969, 292-293). If we, however, suppose the necessity doctrine to hold and see transgressions of law, then rewards and punishments have not been strong enough to produce obedience to the law, that is they have not functioned properly and therefore cannot be properly called rewards and punishments.

With regard to the second scenario where the necessity doctrine holds one can object that it is to be expected that rewards and punishments don't function properly in all cases; and even if there are transgressions of law, there are also many cases of obedience to the law, so that rewards and punishments work properly in these cases and can be properly called in that way.

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