

# Reasons, Causes, and Inclinations\*

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What is it to be inclined or disposed to do something? What is it to incline, dispose, or incite the will? Do things that incline or incite the will do so by providing reasons for acting? Do they influence the will by serving as efficient causes of acts of will? Both? Neither? In this essay I will conduct a preliminary exploration into various medieval and early modern accounts of being inclined to do something and of inclining the will in the attempt to get an understanding of these notions.

My original motivation for turning to medieval and early modern discussions of inclinations derived from my dissatisfaction with the accounts of human action by two twentieth-century philosophers. In his paper “Motives, Reasons and Causes,” my colleague Mark Wrathall attributes to Maurice Merleau-Ponty a theory that originally struck me as troubling. According to this theory, something fundamental is left out by Cartesians who try to explain our thought and behavior by appealing only to reasons or to causes. Instead we also need to include motives. As characterized by Wrathall, Merleau-Ponty holds what sounds very much like a Davidsonian distinction between reasons and causes.<sup>1</sup> Something counts as a reason only if it is propositionally articulated (Wrathall, 117) and is capable of justifying or supporting a thought (Wrathall, 122–3). Causal relationships are extensional “in the sense that the relationship holds between the relata regardless of the mode by which the relata are presented to us” (Wrathall, 119), or alternatively, that causal relationships are independent of the meaning or significance of those relata, that is, they are blind (Wrathall, 111). The underlying explanation for the extensionality of causation is that “causal relations are relations between events or states of affairs in the world” (Wrathall, 120). In contrast with Davidson, however, Merleau-Ponty thinks that basic sorts of human actions cannot be explained adequately if our only options are to appeal to reason-governed behavior or to mechanistic causes. Motives (or at least some motives) are said to have meaning or significance that is not conceptually articulated (Wrathall, 118), and it is this failure to be conceptually articulated that takes them out of the space of reasons. The fact that

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Davidson, “Mental Events.”

their influence on our behavior depends on their meaning or significance entails that this influence is not causal (Wrathall, 126).<sup>2</sup> Motives are characterized by Wrathall as disposing us rather than causing us to have the thoughts we have and as impelling us to have those thoughts (Wrathall, 122–3). One example provided to illustrate significance that is not conceptually articulated is the illusion of a patch of sunlight being taken as a stone:

Merleau-Ponty notes, for example, that if part of my visual field contains something that looks like “a broad flat stone on the ground,” then “my whole perceptual and motor field endows the bright spot with the significance ‘stone on the path.’ And I already prepare to feel under my foot this smooth firm surface” . . . In this example, the significance of the object is a motor significance—that is, it arouses in me a bodily expectation. (Wrathall, 114)

In locating a middle way between reasons and causes in virtue of which our behavior can be influenced, Merleau-Ponty aims to advance his phenomenological project of showing us how to overcome Cartesian dualism—not in the sense of denying that there is a distinction between mind and body or, as he sometimes puts it, between the psychic and the physiological, but rather by locating something intermediate, a third genus of being, that can explain what mind and body by themselves fail to explain.<sup>3</sup> His solution involves an account of what he calls the living body that is not merely mechanistic. A living body is a body that has understanding on its own that does not reside in thought,<sup>4</sup> that is, in the mind. He notes that Descartes himself was aware of this distinction between the two conceptions of the body, but then raises obscure objections to Descartes’s treatment of the distinction.

Descartes was well aware of this, since a famous letter of his to Elizabeth draws the distinction between the body as it conceived through use in living and the body as it conceived through the understanding. But in Descartes this peculiar knowledge of our body, which we enjoy from the mere fact that we are a body, remains subordinated to our knowledge of it through the medium of ideas, because, behind man as he in fact is, stands God as the rational author of our de facto situation. On the basis of this transcendent guarantee, Descartes can blandly accept our irrational condition: it is not we who are required to bear the responsibility for reason and, once we have recognized it as the basis of things, it remains for us only to act and think in the world. But if our union with the body is substantial, how is it possible for us to experience in ourselves a pure soul from which to accede to an absolute Spirit? (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 199)

Although, for reasons to be explained later, Merleau-Ponty’s theory seems problematic, I noticed that the language Wrathall uses to characterize this middle way—he describes motives as disposing or impelling us—is reminiscent of language used by medieval and early modern philosophers. Attempting to make sense of what Merleau-Ponty might

<sup>2</sup> There is an ambiguity in Wrathall’s exposition as to whether a relation that fails to satisfy the extensionality criterion is not causal (112) or not merely causal (126), but it would seem that as described by Wrathall the extensionality criterion implies that such a relation is not causal.

<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 77 and 350.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 144–145.

have in mind by this notion prompted the embarrassing realization that I did not understand what the medievals and early moderns had in mind by inclinations and by the notions of inclining or inciting the will, and I decided that trying to figure that out would be an interesting and valuable project. Perhaps they had something in mind along the lines of Merleau-Ponty and if I could make sense of their views I could make sense of his. But Merleau-Ponty has in mind such a wide variety of cases that matters become complicated. Some of his examples, like that just mentioned of the illusion of the stone on the path, are supposed to point us to the notion of unconceptualized motor significance that accompanies sensation. These sorts of cases seem at least vaguely like those cases that Aquinas characterizes as actions of a human being that are not human actions, such as moving one's foot or hand or scratching one's beard when one is intent on something else. Other sorts of cases such as typing or playing the organ that Merleau-Ponty refers to as habits amount to skilled behaviors. His point in discussing these sorts of cases seems to be that we can account for our ability to execute skilled behaviors only by appealing to a kind of understanding or know-how located in the body that is outside the space of reasons and outside the realm of mechanical causes.<sup>5</sup> Is this a plausible or even an intelligible position and if so, is it really an improvement over Cartesian dualism?

It also occurred to me that there was another potential reward to be derived from getting a better grip on medieval and early modern notions of how our will can be inclined, disposed, or incited. I might also gain insight into another account of action that I have found troubling. Rogers Albritton in his 1986 APA Presidential Address defends the view that even the passions cannot undermine absolute freedom of will.<sup>6</sup> Albritton seems to hold that in acting from passion we might suffer from weakness of will, but weakness of will does not diminish our freedom of will. Surely many philosophers would agree with Albritton on this point, but what is distinctive about Albritton's view is that he apparently thinks passions influence our choices, not by providing reasons for them, but in some other way. But what is that other way? It would seem that he cannot be thinking that passions cause our choices, for if passions are causing our choices, then in fact our freedom of will has been diminished because our choices are not up to us. But what other way is there for something to influence the will other than providing a reason for our choices or causing our choices? What is this third way? If passions, in not providing a reason for our choices, are not final causes of our choices, and if they are also not efficient causes of our choices, what kind of influence could they have on our choices in such a way that the freedom of our will is not diminished? Thus it seemed to me that, though for very different purposes, Albritton, like Merleau-Ponty, might have been looking for some sort of middle ground between reasons and causes by which our behavior or our choices might be influenced. Albritton took his aim to be the pro-Cartesian aim of trying to explain how

<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 142–147.

<sup>6</sup> Albritton, "Freedom of the Will."

it is that the human will might be the sort of thing that is absolute in the sense that it can never be constrained. Merleau-Ponty's aim, as noted above, is to overcome the limitations of Cartesian dualism between mind and the mechanical body by offering an account of the living body.

Merleau-Ponty also appeals to motives in accounting for the possibility of human freedom, which may encourage one to think that there are affinities between his project and that of Albritton's. Interestingly enough, in discussing his account of freedom, Merleau-Ponty seems to reject as improper, or at least as misleading, the expression used so far to characterize his distinctive view, namely, that motives incline us:

It is equally inconceivable that my freedom should be attenuated; one cannot be to some extent free, and if, as is often said, motives incline me in a certain direction, one of two things happens: either they are strong enough to force me to act, in which case there is no freedom, or else they are not strong enough, and then freedom is complete, and as great in the worst torments as in the peace of one's home. We ought, therefore, to reject not only the idea of causality, but also that of motivation. The alleged motive does not weigh on my decision; on the contrary my decision lends the motive its force. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 435)

In these sorts of cases where motives are discussed in the context of decision-making, he says that motives are serving as reasons, although in a way that is obscure, since he says that it is our decision that gives the reasons their force:

What do we understand by a motive and what do we mean when we say, for example, that a journey is motivated? We mean thereby that it has its origin in certain given facts, not in so far as these facts by themselves have the physical power to bring it about, but in that they provide reasons for undertaking it. The motive is an antecedent which acts only through its significance, and it must be added that it is the decision which affirms the validity of this significance and gives it its force and efficacy. Motive and decision are two elements of a situation: the former is the situation as a fact, the second the situation undertaken. Thus a death motivates my journey *because* it is a situation in which my presence is required, whether to console a bereaved family or to "pay one's last respects" to the deceased, and, by deciding to make this journey, I validate this motive which puts itself forward, and I take up the situation. The relation between the motivating factor and the motivated act is thus reciprocal. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 258–259)

These passages indicate that Albritton and Merleau-Ponty are in agreement that reasons do not diminish our freedom. Moreover, there is a deeper level of agreement insofar as they both hold that other elements of our situation that are apparently not functioning as reasons, elements that Merleau-Ponty counts as motives—such as pain, fatigue, or an inferiority complex—also do not diminish our freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, at an even deeper level Merleau-Ponty and Albritton are in fundamental disagreement, because Merleau-Ponty does not see himself as defending freedom of will, and he distinguishes decisions from acts of will:

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 441–442.

But neither should we seek freedom in the act of will, which is, in its very meaning, something short of an act. We have recourse to an act of will only in order to go against our true decision, and, as it were, for the purpose of proving our powerlessness. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 441–442)

Here Merleau-Ponty has gone entirely off the rails, and there is no hope of making sense of his views if we try to follow him this far.

So this is how I arrived at the questions raised in the first paragraph of this essay. What is it to be inclined or disposed to do something? Do the notions of inclining the will or inciting the will as understood by medieval and early modern philosophers constitute some middle way of influencing the will, something different from providing a reason for or causing acts of will? A subsidiary question arising from my interest in Albritton is this: do their notions of inclining or inciting the will amount to a way of influencing the will that leaves freedom of will fully intact?

Trying to make sense of confusing views of contemporary philosophers by appeal to the views of medieval and early modern philosophers, especially when the views of those medieval and early modern philosophers are themselves diverse and interpretations of them controversial, requires keeping several balls in the air at once and thus poses difficulties for both the expositor and the reader. I am hopeful that a coherent picture of the philosophical landscape will develop nevertheless.

## 1. Inclinations

In attempting to get a handle on what it is to incline or dispose the will, one potential strategy would be to say that to incline the will is to give an inclination to the will. There is an advance here if we have a grip on what it is for the will to have an inclination. At least some medieval and early modern philosophers, perhaps all as far I know, ascribed various natural (in the sense of innate) inclinations to the will. Anselm of Canterbury and John Duns Scotus ascribe two natural inclinations to the will, one for the beneficial [*affectio commodi*] and one for justice [*affectio iustitiae*].<sup>8</sup> Descartes says that will tends only toward truth and goodness.<sup>9</sup>

However, other philosophers characterize the will itself as an inclination. Aquinas characterizes the will as an inclination towards good in general (ST I.59.1). Malebranche, like Aquinas, identifies the will with our primary inclination toward indeterminate and general good (LO 267). But he also characterizes the will as the faculty of the soul that is capable of receiving various inclinations (LO 4). I presume that the inclinations the will receives are inclinations subordinate to the natural inclination toward the good in general that vary in strength from person to person. These include particular inclinations toward the preservation of the self (self-love) and toward the preservation of our neighbors (love of our neighbor).

<sup>8</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, dist. 26, q. un., n. 110, V 10, 35–36.

<sup>9</sup> Descartes, AT 7:432, CSM 2:292; AT 11:464, CSM 1:392.

I have been inclined to think of inclinations as tendencies, so if the will both is an inclination and has inclinations, then it would follow on Malebranche's view that tendencies can themselves have tendencies. I think this is a coherent theory. If the will is a tendency toward general and indeterminate good, then to say that the will has a tendency would be to say that that general tendency is specified.

Malebranche also describes natural inclinations as natural movements of the soul (LO 4 and 265). This later characterization might appear surprising because we are inclined to contrast tendencies with movements or actions. Descartes, who distinguishes between actions and movements, identifies actions with inclinations, both in the case of minds and bodies. In the case of minds he says that "every action by which the mind moves the nerves, in so far as such action is in the mind . . . is simply the inclination of the will towards a particular movement" (AT 5:222, CSMK 357). In the case of bodies he says that "the action of these parts—that is the inclination that they have to move [along a straight line]—is different from their motion [along a curved path]" (AT 11:44, CSM 1:96; translation altered). Aquinas also says that acts of the will are inclinations (ST I.87.4).

I am tempted by these sorts of remarks to conclude that we should not think of inclinations, as the term is used by these philosophers, to be dispositions or habits to act in a certain way. That is, they are not like being soluble or like being a smoker. Instead we should think of them as incipient actions or movements that will have a certain outcome unless something intervenes. So Malebranche says,

Just as all motion proceeds in a right line unless it encounters particular external causes that influence its course and that by their opposition alter it so that it proceeds in a curved path, so all the inclinations that we have from God are right and could have no other end but the possession of good and of truth were there not some external cause that directed the impression of nature toward evil ends. (LO 4)

We should therefore think of inclinations as being aimed at something, as having a target that they will hit unless something intervenes. The target need not necessarily be an endpoint, but just a path, such as a straight line.

Scotus, however, explicitly rejects the view that the will's inclinations are elicited acts. One argument for this is that the will always has an inclination for its own happiness, but it has no perpetual acts. A second argument is that the will cannot have two opposed acts at the same time, but it is capable of having both the inclination towards the beneficial and the inclination towards justice at the same time.<sup>10</sup>

Both Aquinas and Malebranche (LO 267) identify an inclination toward something with love for that thing:

Now in each one of these appetites, the name love is given to the principle of movement towards the end loved. In the natural appetite the principle of this movement is the appetitive subject's

<sup>10</sup> Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, suppl. dist. 49, qq. 9–10, Wolter 184–185.

connaturalness [*connaturalitas*] with the thing to which it tends, and may be called *natural love*: thus the connaturalness of a heavy body for the centre is by reason of its weight and may be called *natural love*. In like manner the aptitude of the sensitive appetite or of the will to some good, that is to say, its very complacency in good, is called *sensitive love*, or *intellectual* or *rational love*. So that sensitive love is in the sensitive appetite, just as intellectual love is in the intellectual appetite. (ST I–II.26.1)<sup>11</sup>

Given that inclinations toward something are identified by Aquinas both with a tendency to that thing and with love for that thing, the question arises whether one is to be regarded as the more fundamental notion or whether they are somehow to be identified. I don't have an answer to this question.

Another reason this passage from Aquinas is significant is that it reflects his view that we have other inclinations or tendencies besides those belonging to the will, most importantly those belonging to what he calls the sensitive appetite. These include the passions of the soul, and as we will see later, they are capable of inclining the will, but only indirectly. In distinguishing between will or rational appetite and sensitive appetite, and attributing passions to sensitive appetite, Aquinas's view differs sharply from that of his successor Malebranche who conceives of passions as modifications of the will.

So far I have mentioned elements of the views of Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, Descartes, and Malebranche, but in my effort in the remainder of this essay to locate an intelligible notion of inclining that is intermediate between providing a reason and being a mechanical cause, I will focus on the views of Aquinas, Descartes, and Leibniz. Besides the fact that I have greater familiarity with the views of these three philosophers and it seems wise to begin with the familiar, I am choosing Aquinas because of the prominence and comprehensiveness of his account of the will and of appetite in general, Leibniz because the notion of inclining the will is closely associated with him, and Descartes because Merleau-Ponty and Albritton are both responding to him.

## 2. Aquinas

Aquinas speaks interchangeably in terms of inclining the will and moving the will, and he distinguishes two ways in which the will can be moved or changed: on the part of the object and on the part of the power. He argues that since God gave us the power of willing, God alone among external things can move that power. On the part of the object, goods other than God can in a certain measure incline the will, it is just that they cannot move it sufficiently (ST I.106.2; *Disputed Questions on Evil*, q. 6, L 23, 149). Aquinas thus distinguishes between moving or inclining the will sufficiently, which is when the capacity of the will is exhausted by its object, and its act is thus necessitated, and merely moving the will when its capacity is not exhausted by its object and thus

<sup>11</sup> The translation of the *Summa* used here and in the following is by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

when its act is not necessitated. Only what is good in all respects, namely God, can exhaust the capacity of the will (ST I.83.2.2; I.105.4).

Aquinas's apparent identification of inclining the will with moving or changing the will may tempt to us to think of inclining the will as being an efficient cause of an inclination. This seems reasonable when it is a matter of moving the will on the part of the power, but not when it is a matter of moving the will on the part of the object. First, Aquinas says that the object moves the will as a formal principle, that is, as specifying its act (ST I-II.9.1). Second, in arguing that the will tends only to the good as apprehended, Aquinas asserts that every inclination follows from a form, and in the case of the will, from an apprehended form (ST I-II.8.1), which suggests that the object moves the will as a final cause, as something good.

Aquinas holds further that passions cannot move or incline the will directly, but only indirectly (ST I-II.77.1). They cannot move or incline the will directly because the passions themselves are not the direct object of the will; they move or incline the will indirectly by impeding reason—either by distracting it or by focusing its attention upon the object of the passion.

Finally, Aquinas holds that habits, including virtues or vices, incline the will. He says that it is proper to a habit to incline a power of acting by making what is suitable to it seem good and what is unsuitable seem evil (ST I-II.24.11). Thus it would appear that habits are similar to passions in their manner of inclining the will—they incline the will by making objects seem good or evil.

Is there anything in Aquinas's account of inclining the will that would help us understand either (1) how inclining is something intermediate between providing a reason and causing or (2) how the passions can influence the will without being reasons for our choices, but yet not diminishing the will's freedom?

I'm inclined to think not. It would seem in the first place that on Aquinas's view, an object can incline the will directly only by appearing as good or bad, that is, by serving as a final cause, in other words, as providing a reason for an act of will. The idea here is that if an object appears good, that constitutes a reason for pursuing it; if it appears bad, that is a reason for avoiding it. Second, when the passions incline the will by impeding the functioning of reason, that doesn't seem to be a way of influencing our choices that is intermediate between providing a reason for them and causing them. It is something else entirely. Moreover in those cases Aquinas wants to say that our freedom is diminished, although not to the point where we can be said to be unfree (ST I-II.77.6–7).

Nevertheless, in explaining the sorts of behaviors that count as mere actions of a human being and not human actions, Aquinas seems to agree with Merleau-Ponty that there is an important range of human behavior that falls outside of the space of reasons and yet is not merely mechanistic either. Actions of a human being that are not human acts have an imagined end and hence cannot be explained mechanistically but rather only in terms of their significance, but reason is not involved.

However, I would argue that Aquinas is committed to the view that such behavior is conceptually mediated. As the following two quotations indicate, while he thinks animals do not conceive of universals as such, that is, apart from particulars, they do conceive of particulars as falling under universals:

I answer that, There are two ways of speaking of the universal: first, as considered under the aspect of universality; secondly, as considered in the nature to which it is ascribed: for it is one thing to consider the universal man, and another to consider a man as man. If, therefore, we take the universal, in the first way, no sensitive power, whether of apprehension or of appetite, can attain the universal: because the universal is obtained by abstraction from individual matter, on which every sensitive power is based.

Nevertheless the sensitive powers, both of apprehension and of appetite, can tend to something universally. Thus we say that the object of sight is color considered generically; not that the sight is cognizant of universal color, but because the fact that color is cognizant by the sight, is attributed to color, not as being this particular color, but simply because it is color. Accordingly hatred in the sensitive faculty can regard something universally: because this thing, by reason of its common nature, and not merely as an individual, is hostile to the animal—for instance, a wolf in regard to a sheep. Hence a sheep hates the wolf universally. On the other hand, anger is always caused by something in particular: because it is caused by some action of the one that hurts us; and actions proceed from individuals. For this reason the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 4) that anger is always directed to something singular, whereas hatred can be directed to a thing in general. (ST I-II.29.6)

Note, however, that the cogitative faculty differs from natural instinct. The former apprehends the individual thing as existing in a common nature, and this because it is united to intellect in one and the same subject. Hence it is aware of a man as this man, and this tree as this tree; whereas instinct is not aware of an individual thing as in a common nature, but only in so far as this individual thing is the term or principle of some action or passion. Thus a sheep knows this particular lamb, not as this lamb, but simply as something to be suckled; and it knows this grass just in so far as this grass is its food. Hence, other individual things which have no relation to its own actions or passions it does not apprehend at all by natural instinct. For the purpose of natural instinct in animals is to direct them in their actions and passions, so as to seek and avoid things according to the requirements of their nature. (*Sentencia libri De anima*, lib. II, lect. 13, L 45.1, 122)<sup>12</sup>

These passages are perhaps not entirely consistent. The first suggests that the sheep does hate the wolf in terms of its common nature, that is, as a wolf; whereas the second suggests that the sheep should hate the wolf not as a wolf, but only as something that will act toward it in a hostile way. But the main point remains the same—that sense impressions and appetites are conceptualized—Aquinas is allowing that the sheep conceives the wolf as a wolf or at least as something hostile.

There are, admittedly, large issues here about what is required for concept possession. My view is that the mere ability to perceive something as F is sufficient for the

<sup>12</sup> The translation of the *De anima* commentary is by K. Foster and S. Humphries.

possession of the concept of F. I do not think concept possession entails that its possessor have any linguistic capacities. So I would say that an infant cannot see something as red without deploying the concept of red, even if that infant has no vocabulary and only limited inferential capacities with respect to red. Aquinas in these passages seems to be saying that perceiving something as F involves conceiving it as falling under a universal. For Aquinas then, what distinguishes human cognition from animal cognition is not that we have access to universals and they do not, but rather that we can grasp universals as such, that is, apart from particulars. And if universals are concepts, as I think most philosophers would agree, then on Aquinas's view what distinguishes human cognition from animal cognition is not that we have access to concepts and they do not, but rather that we have a special kind of access to concepts that animals lack. In the following passage Aquinas makes it clear that universals, that is, concepts, can be grasped by the senses as well as by the intellect:

For it is clear that sensing is properly and *per se* of the singular, but yet there is somehow even a sensing of the universal. For sense knows Callias not only so far forth as he is Callias, but also as he is this man; and similarly Socrates, as he is this man. As a result of such an attainment pre-existing in the sense, the intellective soul can consider man in both. But if it were in the very nature of things that sense could apprehend only that which pertains to particularity, and along with this could in no wise apprehend the nature in the particular, it would not be possible for universal knowledge to be caused in us from sense-apprehension. (*Expositio libri Posteriorum*, lib. II, lect. 20, L 1\*2, 246)<sup>13</sup>

So on Aquinas's view the actions of animals and the actions of humans that are not human actions involve a response to something in terms of the thing's significance and that response is outside of the space of reasons and does not require a mind.<sup>14</sup> To this extent Aquinas's position resembles that of Merleau-Ponty. But it differs in three fundamental respects. First, Aquinas does not conceive these sorts of responses as outside the space of causes as he conceives of causes. Merleau-Ponty seems to think of causes as purely mechanistic, but for Aquinas all causation presupposes a final cause, hence he would deny that there are any purely mechanistic causes in Merleau-Ponty's sense. Second, even if these responses do not require a mind, they do require a soul capable of representation. Third, these responses involve conceptualization. Aquinas, that is, would argue against Merleau-Ponty that there is no perceptual or motor significance without conceptualization. So in response to Merleau-Ponty's

<sup>13</sup> Translation by the F. R. Larcher.

<sup>14</sup> Now if the sheep is withdrawing from the wolf as something hostile, why not say its behavior falls within the space of reasons? I am inclined to respond that Aquinas thinks that to be within the space of reasons a being must have a conception of ends as ends, and to do that a being must have a conception of universal good where the conception of universal good is the abstract conception of good that animals lack. See ST I-II.1.2 response and ad 3. The fact that Aquinas says in this article that beings that lack will and intellect cannot apprehend universally might be counted as evidence against my interpretation, but I think his point is that they cannot apprehend universals abstractly, not that they cannot apprehend universals at all.

example above in which a bright spot has the significance for me of “stone on the path,” I believe Aquinas would agree with me that this significance is conceptually mediated because *stone*, *on*, and *path* are perfectly good concepts. Now Aquinas would agree with Merleau-Ponty that there is perceptual or motor significance without abstract thought in the sense of thinking of the universal as such. But, as I have been arguing, it is a mistake to think that Aquinas thinks conceptualization requires abstraction.

In sum, it seems to me that Aquinas is aware of behavior outside of the space of reasons not unlike that which Merleau-Ponty is trying to explain, but Aquinas believes that it can be explained only by appeal to conceptualized representations and he rejects the notion of purely mechanical causation. Defenders of Merleau-Ponty might reply that these differences are minor. First, there is fundamental agreement that we (and animals) have some sort of recognitional capacity that does not take us into the space of reasons, and it is a mere verbal quibble about the word “concept” whether we say that this capacity is conceptualized. Second, because both of them reject the view that mechanical causation can account for this sort of behavior falling outside the space of reasons, they are in fundamental agreement, even if Aquinas thinks this sort of behavior falls within the scope of a richer notion of causation.

But I would argue that in the end Merleau-Ponty cannot find a friend in Aquinas. First, even though they agree that the sort of recognitional capacity in question does not require a mind, Aquinas believes that it requires a soul capable of representations. I would argue that philosophers who think that a given behavior requires a soul capable of representations are committed to something sufficiently like a Cartesian mind that it cannot serve as the right sort of intermediary between the mind and the mechanical body that Merleau-Ponty is seeking.

Second, the sort of behaviors that Merleau-Ponty is concerned with include not just actions of human beings that are not human acts such as scratching one’s beard inattentively, but skilled behavior of the sort that he refers to as habits. Skilled behavior includes things like walking (at least in human beings), driving, typing, playing the organ, and playing basketball. Aquinas’s interest in what he calls habits has to do primarily with the fact that they incline us to act in a certain way. But Merleau-Ponty’s interest in skilled behavior is much different. He is concerned with what is involved in executing a skilled behavior (that is, using Aquinas’s terminology, he is concerned not with choice but with the act of will that Aquinas refers to as use) (ST I-II.16). Once one has acquired such a skill, typically one does not need to pay attention to all the elements involved in executing it. Merleau-Ponty’s conclusion is that the mind is not involved and therefore we must attribute some understanding to the body that is independent of thought to explain such actions. His primary example is that of an organist who learns to play a new organ with just an hour’s rehearsal. He says that this shows that habits “reside neither in thought nor in the objective body.” He says such a period is too short to develop conditioned reflexes, so that a mechanistic explanation is

ruled out, and it is also too short to draw up a plan or to memorize objective spatial positions for each stop and pedal, which takes the resulting performance out of the realm of thought.<sup>15</sup>

I want to make two points about these sorts of examples. First, it is far from clear to me that in the process of executing a skilled behavior we are acting outside of the space of reasons. Surely a driver who stops at a red light on a route he takes every day, a basketball player executing a drive to the hoop, and a pianist playing a concert are making various judgments in the process of carrying those tasks. Are these judgments outside of the space of reasons? I think not. As Descartes held, clear and distinct ideas count as reasons, and he at least entertains the possibility that we could achieve clear and distinct ideas without going through a process of deliberation (AT 7:58, CSM 2: 40). It is not even clear to me that we should deny that these behaviors involve deliberation. As Duane Long has argued in trying to reconcile Aristotle's claims that virtuous behavior results from choice and from habit, deliberation need not be viewed as propositional but rather as a matter of forming a unified picture of a situation.<sup>16</sup> This process of unification is a kind of reasoning, which, by developing the right sort of habits of identifying the significant elements, can be accomplished quite quickly.

Nevertheless, when we speak or play a musical instrument there is not a separate judgment or intention for each syllable or note, and this is generally the case for almost everything we do. We do not form distinct judgments or intentions regarding each element required to execute a given action. It is in order to account for this fundamental element of human behavior that Merleau-Ponty argues that we must attribute understanding to the body that is independent of thought. His view is that our body is responding appropriately to certain environmental cues without the mediation of thought.

There is no doubt that we can get our bodies to behave in complex ways by willing or intending actions other than the specific motions of our bodies required to execute those actions. And this is a mystery that calls for explanation—though it needs to be noted that it is almost as mysterious how we can get our body to move in a certain way by willing that it move in that way. Merleau-Ponty himself calls our attention to this latter mystery:

We still need to understand by what magical process the representation of a movement causes precisely that movement to be made by the body. The problem can be solved only provided that we cease to draw a distinction between the body as a mechanism in itself and consciousness as being for itself. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 138–9, n. 2)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 144–146.

<sup>16</sup> Long, "Deliberation."

<sup>17</sup> Note that here Merleau-Ponty seems to be aiming to overcome Cartesian dualism in the strong sense of denying that there is a distinction between mind and body.

However, Merleau-Ponty's solution by his own account preserves rather than explains away the magic:

But my body itself I move directly. I do not find it at one point of objective space and transfer it to another, I have no need to look for it, it is already with me—I do not need to lead it towards the movement's completion, it is in contact with it from the start and propels itself toward that end. The relationships between my decision and my body are, in movement, magic ones. (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 94)

I do not see that any philosophical advance in our understanding is made by advocating as Merleau-Ponty does that the elements of skilled behavior are not directed by will and intention (remember that he distinguishes between decision and will), and that instead our bodies are responding on their own in an unconceptualized way to environmental cues, since he concedes that there is something magical in his account. One mystery has merely been substituted for another. And it seems only to deepen the mystery to attribute some kind of understanding to the body that is independent of thought. Not only is the relation between the source of my behavior and the behavior still magical, but on Merleau-Ponty's theory the source itself has been rendered obscure.

### 3. Leibniz

Among early modern philosophers the notion of inclining the will is most closely associated with Leibniz, who speaks of the will being inclined without being necessitated. Although this echoes the view of Aquinas, it differs from it fundamentally. For Leibniz, the fact that will is not necessitated does not imply that it is not determined. Leibniz thinks something is necessary only if its negation implies a contradiction. But something whose negation does not imply a contradiction can still be certain and determined. Leibniz rejects the view that the will is indifferent in the sense of what he calls "indifference of equilibrium" that "exempts us from determining reasons," and even goes so far as to say that choice is always determined by perception (*New Essays*, 182) and that it follows the greatest inclination (*Letter to Coste*, 194) and that inclination is determining (*New Essays*, 198). His commitment to the view that there is always something that makes us choose seems to imply that he thinks there is always an efficient cause of our choice. So Leibniz seems to think that the strongest inclination is the efficient cause of our choice.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Leibniz suggests that it is perceptions of things as good that incline the will toward them (*New Essays*, 199).

<sup>18</sup> There is an ongoing dispute whether Leibniz thinks efficient causes operate only at the level of phenomena and final causes operate at the level of created substances, or whether efficient causes and final causes both operate at the level of created substances. Here I am agreeing with Adams in "Moral Necessity" and Rozemond in "Leibniz" that efficient causes do operate at the level of substances and disagreeing with what I take to be the view of Murray in "Spontaneity."

So far from holding that inclining the will is something intermediate between providing a reason for our choices and being the efficient cause of them, Leibniz seems to maintain that inclining the will involves both providing a reason for our choices and being their efficient cause. But there is more to the Leibnizean story. Leibniz is committed to the view that in many cases our behavior is determined by insensible perceptions of perfection and imperfection. Since Leibniz thinks that we must be aware of and capable of reflecting on voluntary action, he declines to call the efforts [*conatus*] that result from insensible perceptions volitions, but only appetitions (*New Essays*, 173). These appetitions, which he also refers to as insensible inclinations (*New Essays*, 194),<sup>19</sup> are directed toward putting us in the state of being more completely at ease, which is a necessary condition for happiness. They are a kind of instinct. Now these appetitions sound something like Merleau-Ponty's motives insofar as they do not reach the level of providing reasons that guide our behavior, even if they are directed at an end. However, Leibniz would not, on my interpretation of him, deny that they<sup>20</sup> are efficient causes. So even here I do not think someone trying to defend Merleau-Ponty is going to get help from Leibniz. On the contrary, it shows how far Leibniz is from Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty holds that motives cannot be efficient causes because they are not blind and are capable of influencing us only in virtue of their significance. But Leibniz conceives of efficient causes in such a way that they need not be blind.

I also think that Leibniz does not provide help for someone trying to make sense of Albritton's view, although here the story is textually more complicated. I read Leibniz as distinguishing, at least in the *New Essays*, between two different kinds of effort when he asserts that insensible perceptions result in efforts that are not volitions but appetitions. Given this distinction between efforts that are volitions and those that are appetitions, it is tempting to think of volitions as choices, so the idea would be that appetitions influence our behavior without influencing our choices. But then Leibniz's appetitions would be of no use in helping us understand how our choices can be influenced in a way other than providing reasons for them. However, there are other passages in which Leibniz clearly says that these insensible appetitions do contribute to our choices (*New Essays*, 166). But even here there is no help in understanding Albritton's account of why our choices would remain free, because Leibniz thinks such choices are not free. Leibniz appears to be of the view that our choices are free when they result from the intellect, but not when they result from passions or insensible appetites. He argues in the *Theodicy* that "intelligence, which involves a clear knowledge of the object of deliberation . . . is, as it were, the foundation of freedom" (*Theodicy*, 303), and he explains with apparent endorsement in the *New Essays* the Stoic view that we are free only insofar as we rise above passion because the passions prevent us from willing with proper deliberation (*New Essays*, 175).

<sup>19</sup> Note that he allows that we can be aware of some appetitions, 173.

<sup>20</sup> Or the insensible perceptions which perhaps are identical to them—for he also refers to the insensible perceptions as inclinations (*New Essays*, 194).

#### 4. Descartes

Descartes shares Leibniz's position that freedom of will does not require liberty of indifference, and indeed he says that we are more free the more we incline [*propendeo*] in one direction (AT 7:57–58, CSM 2:40) and that the will is carried [*fertur*] voluntarily and freely, but also infallibly, towards a clearly known good (AT 7:166, CSM 2:117). More generally, Descartes says in *The Passions of the Soul* that the will is inclined [*se porte*] only to things that have some appearance of goodness (art. 177, AT 11:464). This use of the notion of inclining cannot help us understand how inclinations can be independent of reasons. By linking the strength of the inclination to the clarity of perception of something as good, Descartes is linking inclinations with reasons for acting.

In *The Passions of the Soul* Descartes frequently talks about passions inciting or disposing: passions incite or dispose the soul to will various things (art. 40, AT 11:359), they incite the soul to consent to bodily movements (art. 137–8, AT 11:430–431), fear incites the legs to flee (art. 46, AT 11:364), love incites the soul to join itself in volition to the objects that appear suitable to it (art. 79, AT 11:387), emulation disposes the soul to undertake various things (art. 172, AT 11:461), vainglory and shame incite us to virtue (art. 206, AT 11:483). But it is not only passions that can incite us. At one point he also talks about our being incited by probable reasons to act (art. 175, AT 11:363). It is worth noting as well that he sometimes says that various passions themselves are inclinations (art. 149, AT 11:444; art. 162–3, AT 11:454–455).

So what does Descartes have in mind by passions inciting us to will or to consent to various things? I think it is crucial that Descartes, in contrast to Aquinas and in spite of characterizing some passions as inclinations, ascribes passions to our apprehensive faculty rather than to our appetitive faculty. He says that passions are ideas that represent their objects in various ways; most commonly they represent their objects as being good or bad for the composite human being. This provides important evidence, though not conclusive evidence, that for Descartes inciting is something that takes place within the space of reasons. If something influences us to will something in virtue of its being a representation of something as good or bad for us, that certainly strongly suggests that it is influencing us by providing a reason. And the fact that Descartes does refer to probable reasons inciting us to will something at the very least shows that he thinks inciting is not inconsistent with providing a reason.

Now it might be objected that to say that we are inclined or incited to will something or to consent to something by appearances or representations of objects as good or bad is not sufficient to support the claim that we are dealing with reasons.<sup>21</sup> As noted before, Wrathall in his exposition of Merleau-Ponty says that something counts

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas might have a stronger requirement for being in the space of reasons. If the sheep avoids the wolf as something hostile, that is tantamount to having a representation of the wolf as bad for him. But as I suggested above, on Aquinas's view responding to a particular good or evil is not sufficient to place one in the space of reasons. That requires a conception of universal or abstract good.

as a reason only if it is propositionally articulated and is capable of justifying or supporting a thought.<sup>22</sup> It seems to me that these two conditions come apart. I agree that appearances or representations of an object as good or as bad need not be propositionally articulated, but I do not think that that shows that they are incapable of providing support or justification. So I am inclined to conclude that the constraint that reasons must be propositionally articulated is too strong.

But if someone were to insist on attributing to Merleau-Ponty the strong requirement for being in the space of reasons, that reasons must be propositionally articulated, then, since Descartes allows that passions are representations that are not propositionally articulated though do influence our behavior in virtue of their significance, that is, in virtue of being representations of things as good or as bad, it begins to look as if Cartesian passions are very much like Merleau-Ponty's motives. Moreover, since passions are intimately linked with the body—by definition they are caused by motions of the animal spirits and, as I have argued elsewhere, they are modes or aspects of modes that straddle mind and body—one might well conclude that Descartes already has a well-developed notion of the living body.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, I think there are important reasons to resist assimilating Cartesian passions to Merleau-Ponty's motives. First, there are some indications that Merleau-Ponty thinks motives are not just pre-propositional and pre-conceptual, but also pre-representational.<sup>24</sup> That is, he seems to think representations go hand in hand with concepts and propositions. However, it is difficult to determine to what extent this is a substantive and not merely a verbal dispute about representations. Merleau-Ponty holds that things in our visual field need not be representational and Descartes would deny this, but is this a substantive or verbal dispute? Second, and related, Merleau-Ponty's motives and his living body are prior to and independent of thought and mind, but, for Descartes, passions and the union of mind and body are posterior and dependent on thought and mind.

Third, I also do not think one can rule out that Descartes thinks of inciting as being an efficient cause. That is, he might well be thinking that passions, which represent to us things as good or evil, cause us to will or to consent to something. It is clear that he thinks that inciting has something to do with being an efficient cause, for example, when he talks about fear inciting the legs to flee. What Descartes says about the case is

<sup>22</sup> Wrathall, "Motives," 117 and 122–123.

<sup>23</sup> See Hoffman, "Cartesian Passions."

<sup>24</sup> So he asserts that "to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made independently of representation. Motility, then, is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point of space of which we have formed a representation beforehand" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 139) and that "Here two mistakes are to be avoided: one is to fail to recognize in existence any content other than its obvious one, which is arranged in the form of distinct representations, as do philosophies of consciousness; the other is to duplicate this obvious content with a latent content, also consisting of representations, as do psychologies of the unconscious" (168).

that “if fear incites the legs to flee, the will can stop them” (art. 46, AT 11:364). I take it that if the will did not stop the legs, then the legs would move and fear would be the efficient cause of their moving. But being the efficient cause of *x* implies that *x* actually occurs, merely inciting something to *x* does not imply that *x* actually occurs. So the passions can incite something without that thing actually taking place.

I am not sure whether Descartes would say that when a passion incites us to will something, the passion will be the efficient cause of our willing if nothing intervenes. But on the other hand, I do not see any decisive textual evidence that Descartes thinks our passions cannot cause us to will things. In one interesting passage he says that ambition and fear can agitate the will in different ways (not at the same time but successively), with the result that will is in opposition to itself and the soul is enslaved (art. 48, AT 11:367). The notion of agitating the will to me suggests that we are in the realm of efficient causes.

On the other side, perhaps indicating that passions cannot cause us to will something, are his claims that volitions are absolutely in the soul’s power and can be changed only indirectly by the body (art. 41, AT 11:359) and that they come directly from the soul and seem to depend only on the soul (art. 17, AT 11:342). These are difficult passages, however. While I think they clearly commit Descartes to the view that the soul is the proximate or direct cause of our volitions, I do not see that they rule out passions causing the soul to will something. Indeed, the claim that volitions can be changed indirectly by the body might well suggest that passions can cause us to will something. But this is obscure. Descartes may be thinking instead that passions can influence our volitions, not by causing us to will something but rather by interfering with our ability to reason in something like the way Aquinas did. This is suggested by his remark in a letter to Elizabeth that certain remedies against excessive passions prevent the soul from losing its free judgment (AT 4:411; CSMK 287).

To be fair to Merleau-Ponty’s criticisms of Descartes, one might plausibly agree that Descartes provides an inadequate account of the sort of behavior that Aquinas labels acts of a human being that are not human acts. Descartes says of such behavior, behavior that does not involve the will, as often occurs “when we breathe, walk, eat, and in short do all the actions common to us and beasts,” that it can be explained in the same way the movements of a watch can be explained, in other words, that it can be explained mechanistically (art. 16, AT 11:341). Merleau-Ponty’s view, as is clear from the original example of the stone on the path, is that behavior such as walking cannot be explained mechanistically. He thinks that objects in our visual field influence us in virtue of their significance, and significance cannot be captured by mechanistic explanations. But modern robotics might lead us to conclude that Descartes is correct after all. Such behavior can be explained mechanistically. However, even if behavior such as walking can be explained mechanistically in robots, it is not so clear that such behavior in us or in animals can be explained mechanistically.

## 5. Summary

I have given only the briefest of sketches of the views of just a few philosophers on inclining and inciting the will and more generally of the role of inclinations in our behavior. Much more exploration is required. But let me summarize what I think I see in the views of Aquinas, Descartes, and Leibniz. All three seem to me to think that representations of objects as good or bad incline or incite the will. Thus it seems to me that they view inclining or inciting as something that often takes place in the space of reasons, even if these representations do not meet the strong condition of being propositionally articulated. Aquinas and Leibniz however also recognize cases of inclining that occur outside of the space of reasons. Leibniz seems to think that insensible perceptions or appetites can incline the will outside of deliberation and in that sense outside of the space of reasons, but in so doing, they result in acts of will that are not free. Aquinas thinks that all human actions involve choice and thus are within the space of reasons; however, he recognizes that we engage in various behaviors that do not involve the will and thus do not count as human actions. But even these behaviors I argued are conceptualized. Hence I would conclude that they involve thought in Merleau-Ponty's and our sense of the term, even if not in Aquinas's sense of the term, because for Aquinas thought involves not just the perception of universals but the perception of universals as abstracted from particulars.

The three philosophers seem to differ on whether inclining or inciting can ever amount to being an efficient cause of acts of will. I read Aquinas as holding that it never does. In providing an object for the will, the intellect is acting as a formal cause, not an efficient cause of the will's acts. I read Leibniz as holding the contrary view that in inclining the will our perceptions are the efficient causes of our volitions, it is just that they do not necessitate those volitions. Descartes's view is less clear, but I do not see that it is ruled out that he thinks passions cause us to will one thing rather than other.

## 6. Albritton

Let me conclude with one last look at Albritton. I have argued here and elsewhere that there does not seem to be a plausible story about how the passions can influence our choices without diminishing our freedom in a way other than providing reasons for those choices. But perhaps Albritton had something else in mind.

Albritton shifts from discussing acting from passions such as desire and fear to discussing addiction, alcoholism, and child molestation. In an earlier essay I claimed that the flow of his discussion suggests that the latter cases of addiction, alcoholism, and child molestation are also supposed to be cases in which we are making choices and yet still acting from passion.<sup>25</sup> But perhaps that is a mistake. It may be that he was in fact arguing, as I originally argued in a still earlier essay, that when we act from passion the

<sup>25</sup> Hoffman, "Freedom and Weakness."

will is bypassed and hence is not rendered unfree.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the examples of addiction, alcoholism, and child molestation are supposed to be examples of something else, namely, acting out of habit. His point seems to be that acting out of habit when it involves automatism is not really acting at all, so there is no unfreedom of will because the will is not involved, but when it is not automatic and involves choosing, there is also no unfreedom in these choices. One might say that habit inclines us to make a certain choice without giving us a reason for it, yet still we are choosing when we act from habit and we could have chosen otherwise. We might make such a choice out of weakness, but that does not mean we are not free. Aquinas, as noted earlier, holds that habits influence our choices by making objects appear good or evil, so that they influence our choices by providing reasons for them. But Albritton seems not to want to say that when we choose to do something out of habit, the habit influences us by providing a reason. Now if Albritton's view is that habits can incline us or influence us to make choices in some way other than providing a reason for them, one wants to know how this is possible, and we are back to the original mystery. But perhaps his view is that it is a mistake to think of habits as inclining us or influencing us. Perhaps Albritton's view is instead that to say we act out of habit is just to say that we engage in a certain pattern of behavior and is not meant to be explanatory. On such a view, alcoholism, or more generally weakness of will, is not something invoked to explain a pattern of behavior but rather to describe it.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hoffman, "Freedom and Strength."

<sup>27</sup> In addition to the conference on Emotion and Cognition in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada, May 3, 2008, earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Early Modern Workshop, Harvard University, July 3, 2008 and at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meetings, Vancouver, Canada, April 11, 2009. I would like to thank my respondents Lyle Crawford at the first Vancouver conference and Vere Chappell at the second. In addition I would like to thank Jeffrey McDonough for arranging the Harvard session, and for the helpful discussion with, among others, Kenneth Winkler, Leonard Katz, Catherine Elgin, and Amélie Rorty. Finally, I would like to thank Gideon Yaffe, Calvin Normore, Claude Panaccio, Pierre Keller, Mark Wrathall, and especially Charles Stewart, Lisa Shapiro, and Martin Pickavé.

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