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C5

5

Enriched Causalism

- C5P1 A recurrent theme of previous chapters has been the compatibility of causalism with the existence of further grounds. Once again, this is the thought that causalism is compatible with the truth of the following claim:
- C5P2 **Further Grounds:** Action/free action facts are grounded in, besides facts about actual causes, the (partial or full) grounds of those facts about actual causes.
- C5P3 In this chapter, I explore a possible set of such grounds. These are facts involving other concepts that are typically associated with our agency, which I'll loosely refer to as *powers*. I'm using the term as an umbrella term that encompasses things like abilities and dispositions (following, e.g., Maier 2021). But I only mean to include powers that are compatible with a naturalistic conception of the world and of human agency (since such a conception is a background assumption of this book, as explained in chapter 1). Can causalism incorporate powers of these kinds? And, what kind of work could those concepts do in a causalist view of agency and free agency?
- C5P4 In what follows, I examine these questions in light of the foregoing discussion about the structure of causalist views and the role that further grounds can play. I discuss two different ways in which powers could play a role in causalist views—two forms of *powers-enriched causalism*. One concerns manifested powers (“MP-Causalism”) and the other concerns unmanifested powers (“UP-Causalism”). I argue that the first proposal, **MP-Causalism**, is quite promising for action (at least given certain plausible assumptions about powers) but faces some significant limitations when applied to free action. In turn, the second proposal, **UP-Causalism**, is quite plausible in the case of free action. I end

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with a reflection on why it's reasonable to think that both manifested and unmanifested powers can be relevant to causalism, and in the way envisaged by **MP-Causalism** and **UP-Causalism**.

- C5P5 My main goal in this chapter, however, is not to argue that causalists *should* embrace the enriched forms of causalism but, rather, to draw attention to the intelligibility of such views, and to explain how they can be embedded into the general causalist framework. In particular, if one was worried that the bare bones of causalism are too “skeletal” to capture everything we need to capture about the nature of action and free action, then enriched causalism can help.

C5S1 **Manifested Powers**

- C5P6 In this section I discuss **MP-Causalism**. As usual, I'll start with action first, and I'll then turn to free action. The discussion of action will expand on the earlier treatment of this issue in chapter 3.

- C5P7 What I argued in chapter 3 was that causalists can use the compatibility with the **Further Grounds** claim to attempt to shed some light on the problem of causal deviance, or on the important question of what makes for “the right kinds of” causal histories. In particular, I argued that this can accommodate some causalist views that appeal to the manifestations of powers (skills, dispositions, or abilities) to single out the right kinds of causal histories, thus giving rise to **MP-Causalism**.¹ In a nutshell, **MP-Causalism** claims the following:

- C5P8 **MP-Causalism:** The right kinds of causal histories are the ones that are grounded in the agent's having exercised the relevant powers at the time of action. (Alternatively: the right kinds of causal histories are the ones that are grounded in whichever facts *ground* those manifestations of powers.)

- C5P9 Back in chapter 3 I illustrated this idea with an example, which I'll now call:

¹ Again, for examples of causalist views that appeal to powers, see Mele and Moser 1994, Setiya 2007, Clarke 2010, Hyman 2015, Sosa 2015, Pavese 2021, Shepherd 2021, and Kearl ~~Ms.~~

Forthcoming

- C5P10 **Deviant photo:** I'm asked to stay completely still, as I'm about to get my picture taken. In response, I rebel and form the intention to move. However, my rebellious stance in turn unnerves me, which involuntarily makes my body move (before I get around to moving voluntarily).
- C5P11 Here the causal chain isn't of the right kind, and thus my behavior isn't an action. **MP-Causalism** would claim that the causal chain isn't of the right kind because it isn't grounded in an exercise of my ordinary power to move my body, or in facts that underlie the exercise of such a power. Although I had such a general power, I didn't actually exercise it in this case, and this explains why my behavior isn't an action.
- C5P12 **MP-Causalism** presupposes that we have some independent account, or some independent grasp, of when powers are manifested. Different views of powers, and of power manifestations, would result in different versions of the enriched causalist view. I'll focus on a particular example just to illustrate how one could articulate such a view. My example will be the account of dispositions presented in Lewis 1997. Although every account of dispositions has its problems, Lewis's account will be enough to motivate the main idea. And the main idea will simply be this: under the assumption that the relevant powers that are at play when agents act are certain kinds of dispositions, the problem of causal deviance for action reduces to a more general, and thus more commonplace and arguably less threatening, problem: a problem about disposition manifestations.²
- C5P13 The Lewis-style view of dispositions is a counterfactual account. But it's designed to improve upon an account in terms of simple counterfactual conditionals linking stimulus conditions with manifestations (an account of this kind: "An object has a disposition to M under conditions C when it would M if subjected to C"; see, e.g., Ryle 1949). Lewis's "sophisticated" counterfactual account appeals to both counterfactuals *and* the actual intrinsic properties of objects—the "causal bases" of dispositions. Roughly, the claim is that an object has a disposition when it has some intrinsic property that would causally result in the relevant manifestation, if the object were subjected to the relevant stimulus while retaining that

² For discussions of the deviance problem for actions that appeal, in some way or other, to disposition manifestations, see Setiya 2007: 32, Hyman 2015: chapter 5, and Sosa 2015: chapter 1. For further discussion, see also Blake-Turner 2022, section 3.2.

intrinsic property. For example, a vase is fragile, or has the disposition to break when dropped, when it has a certain molecular structure that would (if the object were to retain that molecular structure up until that time) causally result in the vase's breaking upon being dropped. A bit more precisely: the molecular structure together with the stimulus would jointly result in the manifestation.³

C5P14 Views of this kind are typically interpreted as accounts of disposition *ascriptions*. For the main thing they do is offer conditions under which it's appropriate to attribute or ascribe a disposition to an object. In particular, Lewis notes that his account is only concerned with when an object *has* a disposition while remaining silent on what a disposition *is* (the disposition could just be its causal basis, or it could be the second-order property of having some suitable causal basis or other; Lewis 1997: 151). Arguably, however, one can also extract from such accounts of disposition ascriptions an account of disposition *manifestations*. By this I mean an account of the conditions under which it's appropriate to think that a disposition has manifested. Lewis's view tells us when an object has a certain disposition; for example, it tells us that a vase is fragile when it has a certain molecular structure that would causally result in its breaking under certain conditions. But, at the same time, it also seems to tell us when the object manages to *manifest* such a disposition; for example, it tells us that a fragile vase manifests its fragility when it breaks as a result of being dropped, and as a result of its having a certain molecular structure.

C5P15 Now, this is what's key: thinking about how accounts of this kind bear on disposition manifestations can help bring to light the need for a *non-deviance condition* in such accounts. For, clearly, not any causal relation will amount to a genuine manifestation of the relevant disposition. Consider, for example, this scenario:

C5P16 **Deviant fragility:** An eccentric evil demon is determined to make fragile vases break, *but only those that have just been dropped*, and before

³ Lewis argues that his account is an improvement over the classical account because it avoids the problem of "finkish dispositions"—dispositions that "fink out" or disappear as soon as the object is subjected to the stimulus. But others have found other problems with the account, and have suggested further refinements (see, e.g., Manley and Wasserman 2008). For further discussion, see Choi and Fara 2021, section 1.4.

they break on their own. When a fragile vase is dropped, this triggers the demon's intervention: he magically makes the vase shatter before it hits the ground. (See also Lewis 1997: 153 and Sosa 2015: 23.)

C5P17 In this case, the vase shatters, and its shattering is a result of its having been dropped. After all, it's part of the "reason why" it broke (recall, in particular, that the eccentric demon wouldn't have made it break if it hadn't been dropped). However, despite the fact that it breaks as a result of its having been dropped, the vase isn't thereby manifesting the relevant disposition—the natural disposition to break as a result of being dropped—when it breaks in this case. Arguably, the demon's intervention prevents the vase's disposition from being manifested in a scenario of this kind. (If it helps, we can imagine that the demon makes the vase shatter in the same way he could have made any *non-fragile* object shatter. This way the vase's fragile constitution wouldn't even be playing a role in this case.)

C5P18 **Deviant fragility** illustrates the fact that the manifestation of a disposition requires not just for the stimulus to result in the response but for the stimulus to result in the response *in the right kind of way*. Lewis himself suggests that something like this is needed to account for other kinds of counterexamples. This shouldn't come as a surprise. After all, Lewis's account appeals to causal counterfactuals, and pretty much any causal account of anything needs a non-deviance condition.⁴

C5P19 So, now return to **Deviant photo**. Why is my behavior not an action in this case? **MP-Causalism** would say that it's because I didn't get to exercise the relevant power (my own nervousness took over and prevented me from exercising that power). Now assume that the relevant power is a disposition: arguably, the disposition to move upon intending to move. Then the reason I didn't exercise the relevant power in this case is simply that my disposition to move was never manifested. It wasn't manifested because, although the intention to move led to the movement, it led to the movement in a deviant kind of way. Just like the vase didn't manifest its fragility because the chain was deviant in **Deviant fragility**,

⁴ An early discussion of the deviance problem for causal accounts of dispositions can be found in Smith 1977. For Lewis's own discussion see Lewis 1997: 153. The scenarios Lewis has in mind are the so-called "mimicking" cases (see Choi 2005 for discussion).

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I didn't manifest my disposition to move in **Deviant photo**, because the chain was equally deviant.

C5P20 At least in principle, one could argue that this account generalizes to other actions (or basic actions), including not just bodily actions but also mental ones such as the making of a decision on the basis of reasons. In the case of mental actions, mental dispositions would have to do the work (things like the disposition to respond to certain reasons by forming an intention with a certain content). And there could only be an action if those powers were manifested when the agent formed the intention.⁵

C5P21 Of course, a causal deviance problem would still remain. The problem is that we don't yet have an answer to this more general question: "When are causal chains of the right kind, and when are they not of the right kind, for dispositions *in general* to be manifested?" However, what this suggests is that the deviance problem for actions may be an instance of a more general, and more commonplace, problem: the deviance problem that arises for disposition manifestations. Imagine that one thinks that this isn't a serious problem for ordinary dispositions, such as fragility (as Lewis, for example, clearly thought). Then, by extension, one is likely to find the problem for actions much less pressing, and much less threatening.

C5P22 I have argued that the causalist view of action could be enriched by manifested powers in an attempt to shed some light on the causal deviance problem. But, again, to be fully clear, I don't intend this as an argument that one *should* embrace enriched causalism in the form of **MP-Causalism**. My main goal here was only to draw attention to some promising ways in which causalism might be enriched by appeal to further grounds. I have suggested that **MP-Causalism** is one such way—at least when it comes to the nature of action. And, of course, there could be others. Again: if one was worried that the bare bones of causalism are

⁵ Of course, this is all very rough and sketchy. There are difficult questions that I must side-step here, such as questions about the nature of the powers involved (arguably, one would have to be quite permissive on the range of powers allowed to accommodate all cases of intentional action—on this see, e.g., O'Brien 2012). Also, in keeping with the assumption that causalism is focused on the basic phenomena, I've focused on cases of basic deviance only, but there are other forms of deviance noted in the literature (on this, see, e.g., Shepherd 2021: ch. 3).

too minimal to capture everything we need to capture about the nature of action, this can help.

C5P23 Now let us turn our focus to free action: Could one build a similarly enriched view of free action by appealing to manifestations of powers?

C5P24 The first thing to recognize is that the problem of causal deviance reappears at the level of free action. After all, again, *any* causalist view has a problem of causal deviance. In particular, for a reasons-sensitivity view of the kind described in the previous chapter, the threat of deviance comes up most prominently at the earlier stage of the formation of an intention, when the intention is formed on the basis of reasons and absences of reasons. Reasons and absences of reasons can result in an intention through a deviant causal chain, and, when that happens, the agent isn't sensitive to reasons in the way required to act freely.⁶

C5P25 In other words: the relevant kind of reasons-sensitivity is one that is reflected in *the right kinds of* causal histories. And just like intentions can deviantly result in behaviors and thus fail to issue in genuine actions, reasons and absences of reasons can also deviantly result in intentions, and thus fail to issue in actions that are done freely. This is yet another point in common between causalism about action and causalism about free action.

C5P26 To illustrate, consider the following scenario:

C5P27 **Deviant artichoke:** I'm about to form the intention to get the artichoke from the fridge, caused by the relevant reasons (such as my craving an artichoke) and absences of reasons (such as the absence of the belief that I'd be significantly harming myself or others by getting the artichoke). An eccentric evil demon has been secretly monitoring my thoughts. The demon is determined to intervene in the causal chain *if, and only if*, he can predict that I'm about to form the intention on my own, caused by the relevant reasons and absences of reasons. When he predicts that this is about to happen, the demon "takes over" and artificially inserts the intention to get the artichoke in my brain before the normal process can go to completion. I then proceed to get the artichoke from the fridge on the basis of that acquired intention.

⁶ I noted this in Sartorio 2016a: 134–6.

- C5P28 Here the reasons and absences of reasons in fact cause my intention to get the artichoke for they are part of the “reason why” I formed that intention (again, the evil demon wouldn’t even have intervened otherwise). However, the causal chain is clearly deviant: the reasons and absences of reasons don’t result in my intention in the normal way. As a result, I am not reasons-sensitive and I don’t act freely when I get the artichoke in this case. (I do *act*, since my acquired intention leads to my behavior in the normal way. But I don’t act *freely*, for the intention is not formed in the normal way.)
- C5P29 Given our previous discussion, it’s natural to wonder whether an extension of **MP-Causalism** could be used to explain why I don’t act freely in **Deviant artichoke**. Could one say that the reason I don’t act freely is that I didn’t exercise the powers that are relevant in this case, namely, my powers of reasons-responsiveness? The claim would have to be, again, that, although I *had* the relevant powers, I couldn’t *manifest* them in this particular case because the evil demon prevented their manifestation, which is reflected in the deviance of the causal chain.
- C5P30 But there is a problem with this proposal. The problem is that this description of what’s going on in **Deviant artichoke** is incomplete. Recall that, according to the view laid out in chapter 4 (imported from *Causation and Free Will*), the form of reasons-sensitivity that is relevant to free will is mostly a sensitivity to *absences of reasons*, and not (at least not primarily) a sensitivity to actual reasons. Absences of reasons are really at the heart of the causalist view, for they are the key to distinguishing those actions that are done freely from those that are not. And it’s not clear that the story makes sense for absences of reasons in the same way it does for actual reasons.
- C5P31 The source of the problem is that, as noted in chapter 4, when absences of reasons are explanatorily relevant and thus the agent is being reasons-sensitive in the relevant way, this is naturally cashed out, not in terms of the *activation* of certain powers but in terms of the *inactivation* of certain powers. Back in chapter 4, I loosely referred to these powers as “sensors” that remain inactive under the actual circumstances, and whose inactivity contributes to the explanation of the behavior. For example, when I freely walk towards the fridge to get the artichoke, while being sensitive to the relevant absences of reasons (such as the fact that I’m not

hurting anybody by doing so), the relevant moral sensors are not activated and their inactivity partly explains why I act: I get the artichoke partly because those sensors are not activated. On this view, this is what distinguishes my free behavior from the unfree behavior of a compulsive agent (such as the agent I called “Artie”). Again, what seems explanatorily relevant here is not the manifestation of a power but, rather, the *failure* of a power to manifest.

C5P32 Now, if this is right, then what explains why I don’t act freely in **Deviant artichoke** cannot *just* be the fact that certain powers aren’t manifested. After all, the relevant powers include, most prominently, powers that concern our sensitivity to absences of reasons of certain kinds. And these powers aren’t manifested *both* in the normal case *and* in the abnormal or deviant case for they are powers to respond to reasons that were in fact absent, and those powers are inactive in both kinds of cases. As a result, **MP-Causalism** fails to explain why the causal chain is deviant, and thus why I don’t act freely, in the **Deviant artichoke** case.⁷

C5P33 At the same time, this also shows that there is a *recalcitrant problem of causal deviance* that arises for free action. Free actions are actions that are caused, or explained, by reasons and absences of reasons “in the right kind of way,” and an appeal to manifested powers doesn’t help identify what the right kind of way is. What are we to make of this? Is this a bad result?

C5P34 Not necessarily. Perhaps one shouldn’t expect the two deviance problems to have the same resolution after all. Perhaps the phenomena are sufficiently different to call for a different approach in each case. In particular, if manifested powers don’t play a central role in the case of free action, as I believe is the case, then one obviously shouldn’t expect the account in terms of manifested powers to extend to free action. No big surprises here.

C5P35 Now, what should one say about the recalcitrant deviance problem (the problem for free action)? Is this a serious problem for causalism?

⁷ Note, also, that if there are cases where agents act freely without acting for reasons (as in the habitual actions discussed in chapter 4), the fact that those agents act freely can *only* be explained by appeal to inactive powers of reasons-responsiveness—not by any actually manifested powers.

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For what it's worth, I don't see it as a serious problem.⁸ But I can't give a full defense of this claim here. Instead, I'll just say this. What **Deviant artichoke** shows is that being reasons-sensitive is more than for our behavior to be explained by a pattern of absences of reasons: it's for our behavior to be explained by such a pattern in the "normal" way. In other words, certain causal histories count, and others do not. All of this is, of course, consistent with the tenets of causalism. And, even if we can't give an independent account of what the "normal" way is, we do have clear illustrations of normal and abnormal ways—as in the normal versus the deviant artichoke cases.

C5P36 Do we need more than this? It's not clear to me that we do—but, again, I won't argue for this here. In particular, note that in the case of action the most we've achieved is to reduce one problem of deviance to another more general problem of deviance. And it might be that this is as far as we can get for there might not be an independent account of when the causal chains are of the right kind for powers to have been manifested. Maybe this is where explanation ends for manifested powers in general. And maybe this is, also, where explanation ends for free agency, and the unmanifested powers causally involved in it.

C5P37 In any case, recall that my main goal here was not to solve the problem of deviance (*any* problem of deviance) but simply to draw attention to a potential role that manifested powers could play in an enriched form of causalism. Having done that, it's time to turn our focus to unmanifested powers.

C5S2

Unmanifested Powers

C5P38 As suggested by the previous discussion, unmanifested powers can also play a role in enriched causalist views. For what we have seen is that, when agents are reasons-sensitive in virtue of their behavior being partly explained by a pattern of absences of reasons, they have certain powers that remain inactive, and the inactivity of those powers is relevant to the explanation of their behavior. The scope of those powers tracks the

⁸ For a dissenting opinion, see Heering 2022.

space of (absent) sufficient reasons to refrain from acting. As a result, for any actions for which there could have been sufficient reasons to refrain (which includes at least the vast majority of actions⁹), these two claims go hand in hand:

C5P39 **Claim about absent reasons:** When we act freely, *a pattern of absences of reasons* explains our actions.

C5P40 **Claim about inactive powers:** When we act freely, *we possess certain powers that remain inactive*, and that inactivity is relevant to the explanation of our actions.

C5P41 Now, here is the key move: one way to understand why there is such a correspondence between the two claims is to take the existence of those powers, or their grounds, as *grounds* for the facts about the causal histories. That is to say, the absences of the reasons cause or explain our behavior, when they do, *in virtue of the fact that* we have the relevant powers—or in virtue of the grounds of those powers. This results in a form of causalism that is enriched by unmanifested powers. Briefly, it can be characterized thus:

C5P42 **UP-Causalism:** Facts about freedom are grounded in facts about causal histories, which are in turn (at least partially) grounded in facts about unexercised powers (powers to respond to absent reasons), or in facts about the grounds of those powers.

C5P43 As an example of this view, imagine that one thinks that our powers to respond to absent reasons are grounded in some properties of our internal constitution. Some have argued for this kind of view as an account of the nature of *dispositions* in general. The main idea behind such an account is that the relevant properties about the internal constitution of things are the intrinsic or causal bases of dispositions (basically the ones used by Lewis in his account of dispositions): they are properties that, together with the stimulus conditions, causally result in the relevant

⁹ See Ch.4, n.12.

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manifestations whenever the dispositions are manifested. According to a version of this view, the relation between intrinsic bases and dispositions is a realization relation, which is arguably a type of grounding relation. Thus, dispositions are higher-order or functional properties that are grounded in the particular realizers (the actual intrinsic bases). Given that they are potentially realizable in more than one way, they are not identical with their realizers but are grounded in them.¹⁰

C5P44 Assuming this non-reductivist, “functionalist” view of dispositions, one could argue as follows. When we act freely, facts involving some of our powers (in particular, some of our dispositions) help ground our reasons-sensitivity and thus our exercises of free agency. These grounds can be either the higher-order dispositional facts themselves or, alternatively, the lower-order facts involving the realizers of those dispositions (the relevant properties about our internal constitution). To help us keep track of things, let’s label the different facts as follows:

C5P45 F1 = The agent has the relevant internal constitution.

C5P46 F2 = The agent has the relevant dispositions (dispositions to respond to the absent reasons).

C5P47 F3 = The agent’s act has the relevant causal history (it’s caused by the relevant absences of reasons).

C5P48 There are two possible grounding structures that are compatible with this version of **UP-Causalism**. The first is this:

C5P49 $F1 \rightarrow F2 \rightarrow F3$

C5P50 And the second is this:

C5P51

$$\begin{array}{c}
 F2 \\
 \nearrow \\
 F1 \\
 \searrow \\
 F3
 \end{array}$$

¹⁰ See, e.g., Prior, Pargetter, and Jackson 1982, Prior 1985, Jackson and Pettit 1990, and Jackson 1998. For discussion of these views and some alternatives, see Choi and Fara 2021: section 4.2.

- C5P52 That is, according to the first grounding structure, the relevant properties concerning the internal constitution of free agents make it the case that those agents have the relevant dispositions, which in turn makes it the case that their acts have the right kind of causal history for them to be acting freely. In contrast, according to the second grounding structure, the relevant properties about the internal constitution of free agents both make it the case that they have the relevant dispositions and that their acts have the right kind of causal history; however, the dispositional facts themselves don't play an explanatory role—only the underlying bases do.
- C5P53 Finally, an alternative version of **UP-Causalism** is the simpler view that dispositions are just *identical with* their intrinsic bases. Some embrace this simpler, reductivist view of dispositions.¹¹ On the assumption that this view of dispositions is true, the grounding structure takes instead the following simple form:
- C5P54 $F1 \text{ (or } F2, \text{ since } F1 = F2) \rightarrow F3$
- C5P55 That is, the dispositional facts themselves (or the facts about intrinsic bases, since these facts are identical) directly ground the reasons-sensitivity facts.
- C5P56 To sum up, there are different versions of **UP-Causalism**. But, on any of these versions, certain facts intimately connected with our dispositions to respond to absent reasons ground the reasons-sensitivity facts. If any of these views is true, dispositions—or their grounds—play a central role in grounding our freedom.
- C5P57 I think it's quite plausible that *one* of these views is right even if it might not be totally clear which one is the true one. For consider the fact that ordinary free agents like most of us are constituted in a certain kind of way, and Artie, the compulsive artichoke consumer, is constituted in a different kind of way, at least as far as artichoke consumption is concerned. Intuitively, this difference is part of what makes it the case that, when each of us gets an artichoke from the fridge, our acts have different causes or explanations. In particular, when we are sensitive to

¹¹ See, e.g., Armstrong's contribution in Armstrong, Martin, and Place 1996.

the relevant absences of reasons and he is not, this is, plausibly, due to our different internal constitutions. And this is a difference that is, plausibly, intimately connected to a difference in our dispositions. (Again, this could be either because the dispositions just are the internal constitutions, or because they're otherwise grounded in them; we don't need to decide this issue here.) So, this supports **UP-Causalism** as a plausible extension of the bare causalist view.

C5P58 Let me re-emphasize the fact that, according to this form of enriched causalism, actual causes are still “all that matters,” in the relevant sense. **UP-Causalism** is still a form of causalism. For, the way I'm interpreting it, the view is still committed to the claim that the facts about causal histories *fully ground* the freedom facts, or that acting freely is “just a matter of” having the right kind of causal history. The claim made by this enriched causalist view is a consistent addition to that central causalist thesis. For, again, the basic thought is that, in order for acts to have the right kind of causal history, agents must have certain kinds of powers (in particular, some dispositions) which remain inactive in the actual circumstances, and those powers, or the grounds of those powers, could play a role in grounding the facts about actual causes. As a result, the powers, or the grounds of those powers, could serve as further grounds.

C5S3 Dispositions or Abilities?

C5P59 Now, what kinds of powers are those, exactly? So far, I've been treating them as dispositions of certain kinds. I think it's safe to assume that those powers at least include dispositions (dispositions to respond to patterns of reasons). But, do they rise up to the level of *abilities*? In particular, are they “agential” abilities (abilities that agents have to act or to exercise their agency)?

C5P60 At this point, things are less clear. In the literature on these topics, there is quite a bit of disagreement about the nature of abilities and their relation to dispositions. Traditionally, dispositions are regarded as a quite basic or fundamental kind of power. But it's a further question whether agential abilities (potentially a different kind of power) simply are special kinds of dispositions. Some have argued for this claim but

others have disagreed. Also, even if abilities were in fact dispositions of certain kinds, this wouldn't necessarily mean that every disposition to respond to reasons would result in a corresponding agential ability. For maybe some dispositions of that kind don't give rise to any such abilities.¹²

C5P61 For our purposes here, not much hangs on whether the relevant powers include some agential abilities. But, for what it's worth, this is how I see things. On the one hand, we have the powers to respond to the relevant patterns of reasons. As suggested by the discussion above, these powers are primarily dispositions of certain kinds. However, it also seems quite plausible to think that those dispositions, in turn, give rise to agential abilities of certain kinds. Roughly, these are abilities to exercise our agency in response to those (absent) patterns of reasons. Perhaps we can think of them as abilities that are, themselves, grounded in those dispositions to respond to the absent patterns of reasons.

C5P62 If the relevant powers are indeed abilities, they are abilities to act differently under circumstances that differ from the actual circumstances in important ways (circumstances where the relevant reasons are present, not absent). This means that they are, in a sense, "abilities to do otherwise." But they are not what philosophers call "specific" abilities to do otherwise. They are, at most, non-specific or "general" abilities to do otherwise.

C5P63 The distinction between general and specific abilities is typically cashed out in the following way.¹³ General abilities are abilities that we have simply in virtue of our intrinsic properties or our internal constitution; specific abilities are, in contrast, abilities that we have in virtue of both having those general abilities and being situated in circumstances where we can exercise them. For example, I may have the general ability to lift 100 pounds but lack the specific ability in circumstances where no 100-pound weights are around, for these are circumstances where I cannot exercise my general ability. Note that any ability to do otherwise in response to the *actually absent* reasons would clearly fall in that same

¹² For arguments that agential abilities are dispositions, see Vihvelin 2004 and 2013: chapter 6, and Fara 2008. For arguments against this idea, see van Inwagen 1983: 10–11, Clarke 2015, Clarke and Reed 2015, Vetter and Jaster 2017, Vetter 2019, and Wallace Forthcoming.

¹³ See, e.g., van Inwagen 1983: 13, Mele 2002, Vihvelin 2013, and Vetter 2015. See Jaster 2020 for a different characterization of the distinction. For our purposes here, it doesn't really matter which characterization we use.

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category. For, if the relevant reasons are absent, the actual circumstances are obviously not such that we can exercise our general ability to respond to those reasons in those circumstances. Hence, if we have an ability to act in response to those reasons, this is not a specific but a more general ability.

C5P64 But, do we really have such a general ability? It's not obvious to me that we don't. After all, it's not a "flimsy" power but one that is based on a quite stable disposition to act in response to patterns of reasons.¹⁴ In some cases, it's an ability that we'll rarely get to exercise. (It's hard to think of many circumstances where reaching for an artichoke would threaten to cause harm!) However, we seem to have some general abilities of that kind. Consider a morally virtuous person, someone who is generally very much opposed to the idea of lying. Intuitively, that person may still have the general ability to lie. For we can imagine ranges of circumstances where she would have been disposed to lie—for example, if lying were needed to save lives.

C5P65 You might worry that a view like this would saddle us with lots of uninteresting or "boring" powers ("boring" in the sense that we rarely exercise them). But I don't see this as a reason to think that we shouldn't think of them as real abilities. After all, we all have lots of abilities of that kind (consider, for example, the ability to do something so risky that it seems just dumb to try it, at least in normal circumstances). What's interesting about the powers relevant to free will is not the fact that we have them—after all, we have lots of uninteresting powers—but the *grounding role* that they play, if UP-Causalism is true. Again, if UP-Causalism is true, the causal histories are what they are *thanks to* those unexercised powers. Those powers ground our freedom because they ground the facts about causal histories.

¹⁴ Thus, the claim isn't that the mere possibility of our doing something differently is enough for us to have the ability, as the ability ascription is based on a robust pattern of reasons-responsiveness. At the same time, though, this gives rise to interesting questions about what it takes to have general abilities. Some recent views of powers require the manifestation in a wide range or "suitable proportion" of cases, but there's some wiggle room about how to understand this (see Manley and Wasserman 2008, Vihvelin 2013: 184–7, Vetter 2014 and 2015: chapter 3, and Jaster 2020). For recent discussions of the abilities required by free will and moral responsibility—and, in particular, whether they are general or specific abilities—see Franklin 2015, Cyr 2017, Cyr and Swenson 2019, Metz 2020, and Jaster 2022.

C5P66 In any case, what's important for our purposes here is that, if we have the relevant abilities, these are not specific but merely general abilities. For this means, in particular, that **UP-Causalism** is *not* an "alternative possibilities" account of freedom, or an account that appeals to the "ability to do otherwise," given how those expressions are typically understood in the free will literature (and given how I am understanding them here). The standard meaning of the expressions is captured by the standard interpretation of the PAP principle mentioned in chapter 2. This is one that postulates a specific ability to do otherwise. PAP doesn't just require the general ability to do otherwise (which is easily satisfied by agents in most cases) but the capacity to exercise that ability in the *actual* circumstances.¹⁵

C5S4 Final Reflections

C5P67 To conclude, I'd like to draw attention to an important advantage of **UP-Causalism**. It is this: although **UP-Causalism** is not an account that appeals to alternative possibilities (on the standard meaning of the term), the abilities or dispositions to do otherwise that it does postulate can do at least some of the same explanatory work. For example, we can partly explain the difference between a compulsive behavior and a free behavior in terms of a difference in the *unexercised powers* that the agents had when they acted. A free agent has certain unexercised powers that Artie, the compulsive artichoke-eater, doesn't have (the powers to act in response to a certain pattern of reasons). According to **UP-Causalism**, that difference in powers—or the corresponding difference in the grounds of those powers—grounds the difference in freedom. Again, this is not because the free agent had alternative possibilities that Artie lacked. Rather, it's because having or lacking those powers determines whether the action has *the right kinds of causes*—causes that reflect the agent's sensitivity to reasons, which is required for the act to be free.

¹⁵ For further discussion see Clarke 2009 and 2015, Whittle 2010, Cyr 2017, and Jaster 2022.

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C5P68 In other words, on this view, unexercised powers matter, but not in the way envisaged by PAP. Unexercised powers—or their grounds—are lower in the grounding hierarchy because they ground the actual causes. By subscribing to **UP-Causalism**, then, causalists can embrace the rather intuitive idea that unexercised powers to do otherwise are relevant to our freedom (at least typically, or for cases where it's conceivable to imagine our having sufficient reasons to do otherwise). And they can do this while remaining true to their causalist commitments for they can rightfully insist that freedom still is, in the only sense that's relevant in this context, *fully grounded in the actual causes* of our behavior.

C5P69 As a result, **UP-Causalism** combines two different types of motivations about freedom into a single account. One is the original motivation for causalist views (originally put forth by Frankfurt and discussed in chapter 2), according to which freedom is fully grounded in the actual causes. The other is the motivation to think that unexercised powers are also relevant to freedom. Although these motivations might initially seem to pull in opposite directions, we have seen that it is possible to reconcile them in the form of an enriched causalist view: **UP-Causalism**. This is an important virtue of the account.

C5P70 Let us now take stock. We have discussed the role that manifested and unmanifested powers could play in an enriched causalist account. We have seen that manifested powers are likely to be more helpful in the case of causalism about action, and unmanifested powers are likely to be more helpful in the case of causalism about free action. Now, what are we supposed to make of this divergence? Should it be surprising?

C5P71 I don't think it should be that surprising. Causalist accounts of action and free action are unified by the central tenet that actual causes are full grounds. Again, this is what gives rise to big-picture causalism: at the "top" level, all we have is actual causes. But big-picture causalism is compatible with the existence of different kinds of grounds for the actual causes in each case: the "bottom" levels can vary. In particular, if absences of reasons play a unique role in the case of free action, and if their relevance is tied to the relevance of the inactivity of certain powers, then it's only reasonable to expect that unmanifested powers will play a role for free action that they don't play for action. So, on reflection, it seems to me that this divergence is a natural result for it's simply the

consequence of the fact that different types of causes are involved in action and free action. And different causes call for different grounds.

- C5P72 To sum up, these are the main highlights of this chapter:
- C5P73
- Since causalism is compatible with the existence of further grounds, it is natural to wonder if **powers** of certain kinds could play that type of role, resulting in enriched forms of causalism. As usual, this question was examined from the perspective of both causalism about action and about free action.
- C5P74
- First, I discussed **MP-Causalism**, a causalist view enriched by manifested powers. A potential advantage of this view is that it may be used to shed light on the deviance problem about action by reducing it to a more general and commonplace problem about power manifestations. But I noted that it doesn't help with the parallel problem for free action.
- C5P75
- I then discussed **UP-Causalism**, a causalist view enriched by unmanifested powers. In light of the discussion in previous chapters I argued that this is more relevant to free action. Plus, a potential advantage of this view is that it can incorporate some of the motivations behind alternative possibilities views without carrying a commitment to alternative possibilities.
- C5P76
- I also discussed the nature of the relevant powers in each case—and, in particular, the reasons to think that they may be dispositions, or abilities, or both.
- C5P77
- Finally, I explained why it shouldn't be surprising if different powers—and, in particular, manifested versus unmanifested powers—played a role in the case of action and in the case of free action.

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