E. J. Lowe
Personal Agency: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action.
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In this book E. J. Lowe defends an account of the metaphysics of mind that provides a foundation for a theory of free rational action. The result is a well-organized, clear defense of unorthodox views about the mind and action.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1, 'Mental Causation, Causal Closure, and Emergent Dualism', is devoted to a presentation and defense of a version of substance dualism. In Part 2, 'Persons, Rational Action, and Free Will', Lowe develops and defends a libertarian theory of free action.

Much of Part 1 addresses mental causation (Chapters 1-3). Lowe focuses on causal closure arguments for physicalism. He argues that the myriad causal closure principles, which aim at excluding non-physical causes from among the causes of an event, fail to do so. He contends that a non-physical cause may be among the causes of an event that is not causally overdetermined, although the physical causes alone are sufficient to account for the occurrence of the event. He argues that, 'physical science can present us with the semblance of a complete explanation of our bodily movements, and yet it will be an explanation which leaves something out …' (53). What may be left out is the self as a non-physical entity that unifies 'apparently independent causal chains of neural events' that converge to produce bodily movement (53). So he thinks not only that there is no good reason to exclude non-physical causes in accounting for behavior, but that such causes may have a significant role to play in understanding human agency.

Lowe defends a non-Cartesian interactionist substance dualist theory of the mind that treats persons as having both mental properties and physical properties (Chapters 1, 4-5). A person's body does not have any mental properties. And the person possesses physical properties '*in virtue* of possessing a body that possesses those properties' (95). But a person does not possess every physical property of her body. For possessing some properties would make the thing possessing them a body (95).

Lowe rejects the thesis that the self is a composite entity (22). He offers a Cartesian argument for the distinctiveness of persons from the body and its parts. He appeals to the unity of experience. Each mental state of an agent depends upon some part of her brain; but her mental states *in toto* depend upon the agent *qua* subject of all of her mental states and not upon her brain. Since the brain as a whole is not the subject of an agent's mental states but the agent is, her brain cannot be the subject of mental states and

cannot be identical with her. So there may be a part of an agent's brain the destruction of which would result in the end of her mental states (97). But Lowe concludes that 'neither [an agent's] brain *as a whole*, nor any distinguished part of it *as a whole*, is something with which [she] can be identified' (98).

Lowe's dualism does not share all of the liabilities of Cartesian dualism. But it has problems, some of which he fails to address. For instance, Lowe ignores philosophical debates over the unity of consciousness that focus on split-brain cases. Some think split-brain cases cast doubt on the sort of unity of experience that Lowe depends upon in making his case for the self as something distinct from the brain. For instance, research on patients in whom the corpus callosum has been severed suggests there may be partial disunity in their phenomenal consciousness. Lowe's failure to engage with the recent empirical and philosophical literature on split-brains and the unity of consciousness that has implications for a unified self is a lacuna in his defense of dualism in this book.

In Part 2, Lowe focuses on action. Lowe's interest is ultimately in providing a libertarian theory of free action. Three topics receive the lion's share of attention in this section: the priority of agent-causation, the indispensability of volitions, and an externalist account of reasons-explanations.

Lowe begins by defending the conceptual and ontological priority of agent-causation (Chapters 6-7). Agent-causation is understood as ontologically irreducible causation by a substance. The ontological priority of agent-causation is not a new idea. Thomas Reid defended this idea. The difference between Reid and Lowe, however, is that Reid understood 'agent' in a narrower sense than Lowe. Lowe has an expansive conception of an agent, taking any object to be an agent.

Central to Lowe's case for the priority of agent-causation is the claim that events lack causal powers and causal liabilities. But, contra Lowe, the opponent of agent-causation should *not* concede this point. If we consider some of the more informative theories of events, which are variants of exemplificationist accounts, we find that events are not basic items but are reducible to objects exemplifying properties at times. An event *qua* event without its constituents has no causal powers. But a constituent of an event, namely, the property exemplified, is a source of causal power. So an event has a causal power among its constitutive elements. But Lowe is right that the causal work is not done by the event *per se*. However, he does not appear to think that *mutatis mutandis* this lesson about powers applies to objects. He admits in this book and elsewhere that the causal powers and liabilities of an object are conferred upon it by its properties. So this raises a question. Is it the object *qua* object that causes events or is it the manifestation of a power by an object that is causally responsible for the occurrence of an event? If it is the latter, then it looks like event-causation. But lest some event-causalists rejoice too quickly, it is neither the event *qua* event nor an object *qua* object, for that matter, that does any causal work. The properties are in the driver's seat, so to speak. Of course,

since it is the exemplification of properties (or changes thereof) that trigger events, event-causation seems to be on a surer footing than Lowe realizes.

Surprisingly, Lowe does not endorse an agent-causal theory of free action (Chapters 7-8). Rather, agents cause their actions by making choices (157). Neither an agent nor an event is the cause of any choice. Moreover, the will is not a *causal* power. It is, rather, a *spontaneous* power that affords agents the dual ability libertarians regard as necessary for the exercise of free agency (150). Lowe does not think there is anything mysterious about any of this, comparing this power to the radioactivity of radium atoms (155). What is odd is that this is also a *rational* power because it is a power that is exercised in light of reason (155). But if this power is anything like the radioactivity of radium atoms, we have little reason to think that such a power is rational and intelligible.

It is surprising that Lowe spends so much space defending agent-causalism, given that his final proposal looks less like the agent-causal volitionism of Thomas Reid and more like the non-causalist volitionism defended by Carl Ginet and Hugh McCann. While Lowe's defense of the priority of agent-causation is one of the most interesting parts of this book, one cannot help but wonder why he bothers with such a thorough defense of the priority of agent-causation.

Finally (Chapters 9-10), Lowe rejects a causal role for reasons for action. He asserts that, 'For a substance to act in a certain way because it was *caused* to act in that way…is not for that substance to act rationally…' (156). Critics of causalism such as defenders of teleological theories of reasons-explanations may welcome Lowe's claim. But Lowe is a mere co-belligerent and not an ally of the non-causalist. He rejects the doctrine that reasons are internal mental states altogether. He echoes the views of Jonathan Dancy and others who have defended a view of reasons for action as external to an agent. At first he suggests that reasons are facts about an agent's circumstances (180). But later he admits that such facts may give reason for belief, but reasons for action need to support acting in certain ways. The category that will do the work for us is *needs* (208). More specifically, these would not just be an agent's felt needs but an agent's objective needs.

Lowe's account of reasons for action is provocative, but he fails to engage with the ongoing debates over both the nature of reasons for action and the debates over reasons-explanations of action. This is one of the greatest shortcomings of this book. He ignores the important distinction between motivating reasons and justifying reasons for action. Actions are judged intelligible in the light of the former type of reasons, whereas the latter reasons bear on judgments of the rationality of actions. Debates over reasons-explanations have been over motivating reasons. Lowe ignores this distinction and the case for his position is weakened because of it.

While this book is frustrating at times, it is always stimulating. Lowe's prose is clear, and the arguments are rigorous without being muddied by the needless employment

of the technical apparatus too often deployed in work on metaphysics. Finally, the chief value of this volume lies in the creative and original proposals defended within it. It deserves to be read by anyone working on metaphysical issues in the philosophy of mind and action.

Andrei A. Buckareff
Marist College