Action, Deviance, and Guidance

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Abstract I argue that we should give up the fight to rescue causal theories of action from fundamental challenges such as the problem of deviant causal chains; and that we should rather pursue an account of action based on the basic intuition that control identifies agency. In Section 1 I introduce causalism about action explanation. In Section 2 I present an alternative, Frankfurt's idea of guidance. In Section 3 I argue that the problem of deviant causal chains challenges causalism in two important respects: first, it emphasizes that causalism fails to do justice to our basic intuition that control is necessary for agency. Second, it provides countless counterexamples to causalism, which many recent firemen have failed to extinguish – as I argue in some detail. Finally, in Section 4 I argue, contra Al Mele, that control does not require the attribution of psychological states as causes.

We should give up the fight to rescue causal theories of action (Davidson 1963; Bratman 1984; Mele & Moser 1994 are some influential examples) from fundamental challenges such as the problem of deviant causal chains; we should rather pursue an account of action based on the basic intuition that control identifies agency. To this end, I propose to revive Harry Frankfurt's concept of guidance (1978). In Section 1 I introduce causalism about action explanation. In Section 2 I introduce Frankfurt's rival idea, guidance. In Section 3 I argue that the problem of deviant causal chains challenges causalism in two important respects: firstly, it reminds us that causalism fails to do justice to our basic intuition that control is necessary for agency. Secondly, it provides countless counterexamples to causalism, which many recent firemen have failed to extinguish. Finally, in Section 4 I argue, contra Al Mele (1997), that control does not in turn require causalism because it does not require the attribution of psychological states as causes.

1. Causalism

The classic version of causalism was first introduced by Donald Davidson in *Actions, Reasons, and Causes* (1963), where Davidson defends the thesis that reasons explanation (rationalization) is "a species of causal explanation" (p. 3). On Davidson's account, then,

some action A is intentional under a certain description only if that action was caused by a primary reason of the agent comprising of a pro attitude towards actions with a certain property, and a belief that action A, under the description in question, has that property[1]:

> R is a primary reason why an agent performed the action A, under description d, only if R consists of a pro-attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that A, under the description d, has that property (1963, p.5).

Pro attitudes, says Davidson, can be "desires, wantings, urges, promptings, and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values" (p. 3). On Davidson's account, my flipping the switch is intentional under the description 'flipping the switch' only if it was caused by a primary reason composed of a pro attitude of mine towards actions with a certain property, say the property of 'illuminating the room'; and a belief that my action, under the description 'flipping the switch', has the relevant property of 'illuminating the room'.

The crucial element of Davidson's view is that the primary reason, composed of a pro attitude plus a belief, is the action's cause. As Davidson himself points out (p. 12), causes must be events, but pro attitudes and beliefs are states, and so they cannot be causes. Davidson therefore proposes the "onslaught" (or *onset*, see Lowe 1999, p. 1) of the relevant mental state as the cause of action. The difference between a mental state and its onset, which is a mental event, is the same as the difference between believing that there is a bottle on my desk (mental state), and forming the belief (noticing, realizing) that there is a bottle on my desk (mental event). Clearly, while both kinds of mental states, pro attitude and belief, are always needed – on Davidson's view - to rationalize an action under some description, only one mental event is necessary to cause the action.

As Stoutland (1985) emphasizes, the mental states required by Davidson's view must have a very specific content:

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[1] Davidson only offers necessary conditions. Any attempt at giving sufficient conditions would, by Davidson's own admission (Davidson 1973), run against the problem of deviant causal chains – see section 3. See also footnote 3 for an example of a full-blown necessary and sufficient account of intentional action (Mele & Moser 1994).

The thesis is a very strong one: it is not saying merely that reasons are causes of behaviour but that an item of behaviour performed for a reason is not intentional under a description unless it is caused by just those reasons whose descriptions yield the description under which the behaviour is intentional. This requires that every item of intentional behaviour have just the right cause (1985, p. 46).

So there must be a content relation between the primary reason and the action description in question. Recall Davidson's definition of "primary reason" (Davidson 1963, p. 5): the belief must make explicit reference to the action description which it rationalizes.

According to Davidson, for example, the following primary reason would not do: a pro attitude towards 'illuminating the room', and a belief that my action, under description 'turning on the light', has the property of 'illuminating the room'. This primary reason makes no mention of the description 'flipping the switch', and therefore it cannot rationalize my action under the description 'flipping the switch'; even though it will rationalize my action under the description 'turning on the light'.

One note of clarification: the content constraint emphasized by Stoutland is on the belief rather than on the pro attitude. That is to say that, as long as the belief has the 'right' content, the pro attitude can have any content. For example, my action of flipping the switch can be rationalized under the description 'flipping the switch' by a very wide selection of pro attitudes - 'turning on the light', 'illuminating the room', 'wasting energy', 'finding some comfort', 'stretching my arm', etc. – as long as the agent believes that her action, under the description in question – 'flipping the switch' – has the relevant property towards which the agent has a pro attitude: 'turning on the light', say.

It must be emphasised that causalism does not depend upon endorsing Davidson's Humean reductionism about motivation: many theorists have proposed versions of causalism that appeal, rather, to a single state of *intention* or *plan*.[2] On these versions of causalism, views will have the following general form: *S A-ed intentionally only if S intended to A*.[3]

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[2] See, amongst others, Searle 1983, Brand 1984, Bratman 1984 & 1987, Thalberg 1984, Adams and Mele 1989, Bishop 1989, Mele 1992, Mele and Moser 1994.

[3] This is actually a statement of the so-called *Simple View*, which not many people endorse (exceptions are, for example, Adams 1986 and McCann 1991). Other views, such as Bratman's (1987, pp. 119-123) or Mele &

In the next section I present an alternative to causal theories of action: Harry Frankfurt's concept of guidance.

2. Guidance

In *The Problem of Action* (1978), Frankfurt puts forward an alternative view according to which what distinguish actions from mere bodily movements are not the movements' causes, but whether or not the agent is in control of her movements. Frankfurt calls the relevant sort of control *guidance*: "… consider whether or not the movements as they occur are *under the person's guidance*. It is this that determines whether he is performing an action" (1978, p. 45).

Frankfurt's proposal does not depend on psychological states as the causes of action, as causal theories do. It focuses, rather, on the relationship between an agent and her action at the time of acting: "What is not merely pertinent but decisive, indeed, is to consider whether or not the movements as they occur are under the person's guidance. It is this that determines whether he is performing an action. Moreover, the question of whether or not movements occur under a person's guidance is not a matter of their antecedents" (1978, p. 45). Frankfurt initially distinguishes between two kinds of purposive movements (p. 46): purposive movements which are guided by the agent, and purposive movements which are guided by some mechanism that cannot be identified with the agent. Through the idea of purposive movement, Frankfurt gives us an insight into what the agent's guidance is:

> Behaviour is purposive when its course is subject to adjustments which compensate for the effects of forces which would otherwise interfere with the course of the behaviour, and when the occurrence of these adjustments is not explainable by what explains the state of affairs that elicits them. The behaviour is in that case under the

Moser's (1994, p. 253)) are more complicated. Here is for example the full analysis of intentional action offered by Mele & Moser, which, as I show in Section 3, is also subject to deviant counterexamples: "Necessarily, an agent, S, intentionally performs an action, A, at a time, t, if and only if: (i) at t, S A-s and her A-ing is an action; (ii) at t, S suitably follows-hence, is suitably guided by-an intention-embedded plan, P, of hers in A-ing; (iii) (a) at the time of S's actual involvement in A-ing at t, the process indicated with significantly preponderant probability by S's on bal-ance evidence at t as being at least partly constitutive of her A-ing at t does not diverge significantly from the process that is in fact constitutive of her A-ing at t; or (b) S's A-ing at t manifests a suitably reliable skill of S's in A-ing in the way S A-s at t; and (iv) the route to A-ing that S follows in executing her action plan, P, at t is, under S's current circumstances, a suitably predictively reliable means of S's A-ing at t, and the predictive reliability of that means depends appropriately on S's having suitably reliable control over whether, given that she acts with A-ing as a goal, she succeeds in A-ing at t" (1994: 253).

guidance of an independent causal mechanism, whose readiness to bring about compensatory adjustments tends to ensure that the behaviour is accomplished. The activity of such a mechanism is normally not, of course, guided by us. Rather it is, when we are performing an action, our guidance of our behaviour (1978, pp. 47-48).

For some movement to be under the agent's guidance, then, the adjustments and compensatory interventions don't need to be actualized; it is just a question of the agent being able to make those adjustments and interventions: "whose readiness to bring about compensatory adjustments tends to ensure that the behaviour is accomplished" (1978: 48). This latter point finds confirmation in Frankfurt's famous car scenario, where he stresses that guidance does not require those adjustments and interventions to take place; it only requires that the agent be able to make those:

> A driver whose automobile is coasting downhill in virtue of gravitational forces alone might be satisfied with its speed and direction, and so he might never intervene to adjust its movement in any way. This would not show that the movement of the automobile did not occur under his guidance. What counts is that he was prepared to intervene if necessary, and that he was in a position to do so more or less effectively. Similarly, the causal mechanisms which stand ready to affect the course of a bodily movement may never have occasion to do so; for no negative feedback of the sort that would trigger their compensatory activity might occur. The behaviour is purposive not because it results from causes of a certain kind, but because it would be affected by certain causes if the accomplishment of its course were to be jeopardized (Frankfurt 1978, p. 48).

So some movement is under the agent's guidance when the agent "was prepared to intervene if necessary, and that he was in a position to do so more or less effectively" (ibid.); and in such cases the movement in question counts as an action. Guidance captures the idea that one can be in control of x without having to be actively controlling it. Guidance is a passive form of control, as shown by Frankfurt. If we understood control in terms of something we do, and we understood action in terms of control, then we would get a circular picture of agency. That's why we want to be able to describe a form of control that does not depend on the

activity of controlling: and that's why we talk, specifically, of guidance.

I'd like to emphasize that the claim is weaker than it might appear at first: I am not suggesting that guidance isn't itself constituted by causal mechanisms; nor am I suggesting that actions do not have causes.[4] My criticism is much more specific than that: by identifying actions' causes with content-specific psychological states causalism runs into difficulties. Also, I am not denying agents' mental phenomenology of intentions, desires, beliefs, etc. Not only do I accept that agents do indeed have intentions, desires, and beliefs; but I also accept that intentions, desires, and beliefs play an important role within agency. Here I am not even disputing that intentions, desires, and beliefs may play some causal role within agency. All I am criticizing is the identification between the relevant psychological states and the action's causes; and the idea that the relevant content-specific psychological states as causes are both necessary and sufficient for intentional action.

This is not the place to develop a full-blown alternative to causalism based on guidance. I just want to touch upon two important points (more on this at the end of Section 4): firstly, if a concept of guidance should be part of an alternative account of agency; and if this alternative view is to be fully naturalistic, then the concept of guidance must not be understood in libertarian terms. Here there are two promising alternatives: one possibility is to develop such a view by going in the direction of Fischer and Ravizza's (1998, p. 31) *guidance control*. Alternatively, the capacity for intervention, correction, and inhibition that characterizes guidance could be accounted for in terms of what has been recently called (by Clarke 2009) *New Dispositionalism*: in brief, the idea (put forward in different versions by Smith 2003, Vihvelin 2004, and Fara 2008) is that having a certain ability to act consists of or depends on having certain dispositions (depending on which of the above versions one takes). Unmanifested dispositions (finkish or masked dispositions) are compatible with determinism; therefore unexercised abilities are also similarly compatible.[5]

Secondly, if guidance is to be developed into a full account of agency, it must be argued that guidance can be sufficient for agency, and not just necessary. If, then, guidance is to be a sufficient condition for agency, and guidance is to be independent from rationalizing mental

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[4] For an idea of the kind of psychological mechanisms that could be appealed to in order to implement guidance, see psychological models of dual control (Norman and Shallice 1986; Perner 2003).
[5] On these points, see also Di Nucci 2011b.

states, then we would be offering an account of agency that does not directly appeal to the agent's motivation. Two things here: first, this conclusion might be too quick in overlooking externalism. Explaining agency without appealing to rationalizing mental states does not mean, according to externalists, explaining agency without appealing to reasons or motivation because, crudely put, reasons are facts rather than psychological states (see Stout 1996, Collins 1997, Dancy 2000, Alvarez 2010).

Second, this conclusion would similarly overlook what used to be called the *Logical Connection Argument* (Anscombe 1957, Hampshire 1959 Melden 1961, von Wright 1971) against which Davidson's (1963) original statement of the causal view was addressed. If the relation between an action and the reason why that action is performed is rational, then it cannot be causal – that was the thrust of the old argument. Therefore denying that rationalizing mental states as causes are necessary for agency does not amount to denying the role of motivation simply because the motivational aspect does not entail the causal aspect; just as, in my previous point, the motivational aspect does not entail the psychological aspect.

With these brief remarks about guidance I hope to have shown in which alternative direction I think it would be fruitful to look for an account of agency, given the shortcomings of causalism; but here is not the place to develop such an alternative account in full. Rather, for the rest of the paper I shall motivate the thought that we should look elsewhere by discussing the fundamental weaknesses of causalism. In the next section I argue that deviant causal chains still provide plenty of counterexamples to causalism, despite many attempts at sorting out the problem.

3. Deviant causal chains

Deviant causal chains have long ago been recognised as a problem for causal theories of action.[6] Most attempted solutions assume that we must find a way to reconcile deviance within a causal framework. I argue, rather, that deviant causal chains are symptomatic of a fundamental problem with causalism; and that we should give up the fight to accommodate deviant cases and focus, rather, on developing an alternative to causal views of action which

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[6] Deviant causal chains are, since Davidson, the classic challenge to the *sufficiency* of causalism. There are many challenges to its *necessity* that I don´t have room to discuss here: Dreyfus's skilled activity (1984, 1988, 2005); arational actions (Hursthouse 1991), emotional behaviour (Goldie 2000), passive actions (Zhu 2004), habitual actions (Pollard 2003 & 2006), omissions (Sartorio 2005 & 2009; more on this in section 4), and automatic actions (Di Nucci 2008).

recognises that there can be no action without control, and that control cannot be fully accounted for solely in terms of the content of those motivational states which causalists take to cause action.

The first point to emphasize is that, whether or not one thinks that the problem of deviant causal chains can be solved from within causalism, the strength of deviant counterexamples depends on the absence of control. It is because the climber loses grip on the rope that it would be implausible to insist that she lets go of the rope *intentionally* (Davidson 1973). And it is because a herd of wild pigs can hardly be controlled that it would be implausible to say that I shot dead my enemy intentionally even though my shot only killed her by awakening a herd of wild pigs which trampled her to death (Davidson 1973, Bishop 1989). These two are paradigmatic cases, respectively, of *basic* deviance – the climber's – and *consequential* deviance – the wild pigs': both, importantly, are built around lack of control.[7]

What this suggests is that, whether or not we can meet the challenge posed by deviant causal chains, the very fact that we intuitively find these cases challenging tells us that within our intuitions about intentional action and agency more in general there is embedded some kind of *control* condition: such that if a case does not meet this control condition, we won't find it at all plausible that the case can constitute an intentional action. This control condition would, then, appear to be a *necessary* one.

This would have potentially devastating consequences for causal theories of action. If we accept that a control condition is necessary in our account of action, then we cannot also accept the central thesis of causalism according to which whether something is an action depends solely on its causal history. The relevant content-specific psychological states as causes might be necessary for intentional action; but they could not be necessary and *sufficient* if the control condition is also necessary. But then an action – and also, crucially, the difference between an action and any other event – cannot be defined only in terms of its causal history. This would mean, in short, that the causal theory of action – understood as above – is false.

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[7] Mele & Moser (1994, pp. 47-48) mention these two cases as 'exemplary', referring to basic deviance as 'primary' deviance and to consequential deviance as 'secondary'. Both scenarios are explained in detail within this section for those who are less familiar with them.

Importantly, we would have just shown that the causal theory of action is false without having to rely on the ultimate success of deviant causal chains as counterexamples; all that is needed is that deviant cases are found to be intuitively challenging – and if the philosophy of action literature of the last 40 years shows anything, it certainly shows that deviant causal chains have some degree of intuitive plausibility.

Not so quick: that some control condition is embedded in our intuitions about intentional action might suggest, but it does not imply, that a control condition also ought to be present in our *philosophical account* of intentional action. Still, it is important to remark that if the former did imply the latter then we would have already shown, in the few paragraphs above, that the causal theory of action is false: not because it is falsified by deviant causal chains, but simply because it does not include a control condition – as emphasized by deviant scenarios. But that a control condition is embedded in our intuitions does not imply that it should also feature in our philosophical account of intentional action because there might be other ways to account philosophically for our intuitions about control: that is what most attempts at 'solving' deviant causal chains have tried to do: articulate a causal theory which at the same time does not renounce its central claim that causal history alone can individuate actions and also accommodates our intuitions about deviant causal chains.

Here I cannot evaluate every attempt at solving the problem of deviant causal chains[8]: but I will analyse some representative proposals, showing that they are ultimately unsuccessful. A standard causalist proposal, as a solution to the problem of deviant causal chains, is the idea that psychological states 'guide' and 'sustain' action (see, for example, Brand 1984 or Thalberg 1984). The already introduced account of intentional action by Mele & Moser (1994) is a good representative of this tradition. Their second necessary condition for intentional action goes as follows: "(ii) at t, S suitably follows - hence, is suitably guided by - an intention-embedded plan, P, of hers in A-ing" (1994: 253).

This is supposed to rule out cases, such as deviant causal chains, in which a 'freak' event interposes itself between intention and action (basic deviance) or between action and intended result (consequential deviance), so as to make it implausible that the agent acted intentionally. The 'freak' event, this proposal goes, breaks the guiding and sustaining relationship of the intention with the action or result; so that the action has not, in deviant cases, been guided and

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[8] For a recent anthology article on deviant causal chains see Stout 2010.

sustained by the relevant intention or primary reason; even though the relevant intention or primary reason still causes and rationally explains the movement in question.

Here I argue that emphasizing the guiding and sustaining role of intentions fails to accommodate deviant cases. I will start from cases of consequential deviance because they help illustrate my argument, and then show that my argument applies just as well to cases of basic deviance.

Take the standard scenario of consequential deviance: I shoot to kill you, but you only die because my wayward shot awakens a herd of wild pigs, which trample you to death. I intended for my shot to kill you, and my shot did kill you, so that my intention is satisfied; and my intention did cause its satisfaction. Still, this does not appear to be an example of intentional action; indeed, it isn't even clear that the statement 'I killed you', let alone the statement 'I shot you dead', are true: it is rather the pigs who killed you. But even though my intention is satisfied and it has caused its satisfaction, things did not go according to plan: I meant for the bullet to hit the victim in the chest, killing her. The idea is that the content of my intention has not successfully guided and sustained my movements; otherwise the bullet would have hit the victim in the chest, killing her. So even though my intention has been satisfied, what Mele & Moser (1994) call my 'action-plan' – to hit the victim in the chest, killing her – has not been satisfied; and that's why this is not a case of intentional action.

But the problem with this reply is that we can compare it to one where we would be changing the scenario so that I no longer intend to shoot you dead. If I did not intend to shoot you dead, then this scenario would not be a counterexample to the sufficiency of reasons (or intentions) as causes for intentional action, because it wouldn't be a scenario in which a reason or intention causes its satisfaction but the agent still hasn't acted intentionally. We wouldn't accept a reply to the deviant counterexamples that changed the agent's intentions or reasons; therefore we shouldn't accept this kind of proposal either: because it changes the agent's intentions or reasons.

Superficially, it looks as though the agent's intention hasn't changed, because the agent is still described as having acted with the intention to shoot her victim dead. But by stipulating that the intention contains an action-plan to act in a certain way, the agent's intention *has* actually been changed: the agent no longer simply intends to 'shoot her victim dead'; she now intends

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to 'shoot her victim dead by hitting her in the chest'. What's the difference between 'shoot her victim dead' and 'shoot her victim dead by hitting her in the chest'? The difference is quite simply that there are other ways to shoot someone dead other than hitting them in the chest. And the deviant counterexample works exactly on the intention to 'shoot her victim dead' being realizable in multiple ways. If we change the content of the intention by narrowing down its conditions of satisfaction, just like if we change the intention altogether, then obviously the deviant scenario no longer shows that the sufficiency claim is false. But given that, in both cases, we have changed the scenario instead of arguing against its supposed implications, then that's no surprise.[9]

And changing the scenario won't do also because the deviance can be changed accordingly, so that a new deviant case can be built around the intention's new, more specific, content of 'shoot her victim dead by hitting her in the chest'. Suppose that, after the events, the shooter is interviewed: "Did you mean to kill her by having a herd of wild pigs trample her to death?" "No, I meant for the bullet to hit her directly and kill her". "Didn't you know she was wearing a bullet-proof vest? Suppose that the bullet had hit her on the chest, and that the vest had protected her. Still, it pushed her to the ground, where she fell on a deadly sharp knife, which killed her. Would you have killed her intentionally *then*?" "No, I meant for the bullet itself to kill her, *directly*". "OK, now suppose...". The regress could continue until we reach action-plans too detailed to be plausibly attributed to agents who act intentionally.

Independently of this regress, we should be in general wary of over-intellectualising planning agents by thinking that their intentions are as specific as Mele&Moser's action-plans. Three points here[10]:
(a) there is probably an indefinite number of micro-descriptions of what we do, but to think that agents where representing all of them would make the intellectual life of the planning agent much more complicated than it is or needs to be;
(b) lots of evidence on automaticity and habitual action suggests that we regularly act purposefully and intentionally without consciously or unconsciously representing our goals; (on this and the previous point see my Di Nucci 2008, Di Nucci 2011c and Di Nucci 2013a);
(c) finally, over-intellectualising may also get agents and their priorities wrong; especially

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[9] I accept that there may be other strategies here which cannot be compared to changing the agent's intentions; but my point is only directed against Mele & Moser's attempt to deal with deviance by further specifying the intention's content through their 'action-plans'; and that particular strategy has the problem I just emphasized. I thank an anonymous referee from pressing me on this point.

[10] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on the regress.

when the means are morally neutral, agents are only bothered by ends and not also by means; stipulating that the end is achieved intentionally only where a specific set of means has been fulfilled may just represent agents' reasoning and priorities in planning and acting.[11]

It could be objected that the above strategy, whatever its merits, was at least able to explain (or at least account for) the relevant sequences being deviant. Why was the way in which the intention was satisfied thanks to the pigs' contribution deviant? Because the agent had in mind a way to satisfy the intention which was different from the way in which the intention was satisfied in reality. And this miss-match between mind and reality explains why those cases cannot count as intentional actions. So then the burden would be on critics of this proposal to be able to explain why these cases cannot count as intentional actions without specifying the intention's content as above.

And it is by recognising that what deviant cases expose is, primarily, the absence of control that we can also explain why those are not intentional actions; in the pigs' case, the agent does not intentionally kill her victim because she is not in control of her victim's death, since she cannot control the pigs. Similarly, in the climber's case the agent does not intentionally let go of the rope because she is not in control of the rope when she lets go of it. So control can explain these cases as non-intentional ones.

Here one could object that control is not necessary for intentional action, Take, for example, the case in which the agent did in fact intend to kill by awakening a herd of wild pigs which would then trample the victim.[12] Here, it could be suggested, the agent can be said to have killed intentionally even though she lacked at least some decisive degree of control over the satisfaction of her plan – namely she could not control the herd of wild pigs. Here intuitions may indeed differ so I will just defer to the standard literature on the topic in the philosophy of action, where the talk is of rational constraints on intention: I intend A only if I believe I will A is Grice's stronger version of the constraints (1970); and I intend A only if I do not believe that I will not A is Bratman's weaker version of the constraints (1984 & 1987). On both versions the idea would be that if an agent believes that she will not achieve her goal (either because achievement is impossible or because it is improbable or because it is, all things considered, unlikely – as in less than 50% likely), then she does not intend to achieve it

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[12] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this scenario.

and even if she were to achieve it then the achievement would not be intentional – even though her trying would be intentional. Take the case of someone who has never played golf before but manages a hole-in-one on her first ever time: here it seems that these accounts of rational constraints on intention are in line with intuition in saying that the hole-in-one was neither indented nor intentional.[13]

Specifying the intention's content, on the other hand, does not guarantee control – that's the point of the regress of deviant cases. The only way of doing so is stipulating control within the agent's motivation; so that agents don't simply intend to kill or drink water; agents intend to kill and for the killing to be under their control; and they intend to drink and for the drinking to be under their control.

Indeed, were we to define agency in terms of control instead of in terms of motivation (as causalists traditionally do following Davidson's (1971, 1973, 1978) lead), it would be implied in the content of the intention to 'drink' or 'kill' that the performance must be under the agent's control. If action requires control, then 'kill' can only refer to a true action if it implies control. So that if I intend to perform some action, then I must intend for the performance to be under my control – otherwise I wouldn't intend to perform an *action*.

But, again, specifying the intention's content does not guarantee control. Ian might have an intention to shoot Jen dead by putting a bullet through Jen's forehead, whereby the bullet cuts through her brains destroying systems that are essential for Jen's basic survival – so that it directly causes her death. And suppose that Ian does shoot, and that the bullet does exactly what Ian meant for the bullet to do, and that Jen dies as a direct result of the bullet's trajectory – which was exactly as Ian had planned it. But, unbeknownst to Ian, the bullet only managed to hit the target thanks to an invisible superhero's crucial intervention: it was the invisible superhero that, when the bullet was halfway to its target, took control of it and guided it so precisely where Ian meant it. Ian did everything as planned, but it was only through the superhero's timely intervention that Ian's shot was so precise.

Even though Ian's intention and action-plan were satisfied to the last centimetre, still it looks as though Ian did not intentionally kill Jen – indeed, Ian didn't even kill Jen: the invisible

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[13] On these issues see also a recent exchange between Di Nucci and McCann in Analysis (Di Nucci 2009 & 2010b, McCann 2010 & 2011).

superhero who intervened at a crucial time did. Ian might have fired the shot with the relevant intention and action-plan, but since he did not control his shot, it wasn't *he* who killed Jen. Again, the missing link turns out to be control. Without control there is no action. So Ian killed Jen, and killed her intentionally, only if he controlled the events that proximally caused her death, including the bullet.

What about the case where the invisible superhero does not need to intervene because Ian's shot is precise enough? It may be suggested that guidance has the unwelcome consequence that this case would not count as Ian's intentionally killing because the control is with the superhero, but that on Mele&Moser's account the case would count as intentional killing because things went as Ian's action-plan set them up. Two points here: firstly, whether Mele&Moser could claim that this is an intentional case is not obvious, as the superhero's presence and potential intervention was not part of the action-plan. Secondly, I am not sure that one could not claim that this was Ian's intentional killing on a guidance account: after all, that the superhero has guidance does not rule out that Ian may also have guidance; indeed, this may be a case where both have guidance, so that both intentionally kill. And given that the superhero could have easily saved Jen it does not sound implausible to attribute her killing also but not only to the superhero (on these kinds of scenarios, see Di Nucci 2010a, Di Nucci 2011a and Di Nucci 2011b).[14]

What if, the causalist might propose, we build control within Ian's intention and action-plan so that Ian had specified, in formulating his plan, that he meant for no outside intervener to interfere with his murder? Then causalists would be conceding that agents take control to be necessary for intentional action. And also that indeed control is necessary for intentional action – because some movement would then qualify as an intentional action only if it meets some control condition – in this case one stipulated by agents themselves.

But if control is necessary for intentional action, then causalists are wrong. Because then reasons as causes are not sufficient: namely, a movement being caused by a psychological state which rationalizes it isn't sufficient for that movement qualifying as an intentional action – that movement must also be under the agent's control.

These arguments also apply to cases of so-called basic deviance such as Davidson's original

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[14] I thank an anonymous referee for suggesting this scenario.

climber's scenario (1973):

> A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never chose to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally (Davidson 1973: 79).

A climber formulates the intention to let go of the rope to which her fellow climber is attached so as to kill her fellow climber. Her murderous intention so unnerves the climber that she loses her grip on the rope, thereby letting go of it. The relevant intention caused the movement, but still the movement was no intentional action of the climber: it was an accident. Again, it is lack of control that makes it implausible to argue that the climber let go of the rope intentionally. And, again, we could specify the climber's action-plan so as to rule out the possibility that the intention is satisfied by the climber losing her grip. But at this stage the case becomes equivalent to the one I analysed in this section, so that the previous arguments apply.[15]

3.1 Deviance and Intentional Content
The standard causalist strategy of embedding the guiding and sustaining role in the intention's content fails for both cases of basic deviance and cases of consequential deviance. I will now discuss a more recent proposed solution to the problem of causal deviance, showing that this one comes up short too. It has been recently argued that, assuming "the intentional contents of reason states are causally relevant and causally explanatory" (Schlosser 2007: 191) of action, then cases of so-called 'basic' deviance can be accommodated within a causal view.

Markus Schlosser's proposed solution to Davidson's climber scenario goes as follows: the climber's intention to rid himself of his fellow climber by loosening his hold on the rope causes him to loosen his hold; but it does not do so in virtue of its content, because part of the causal chain is the climber's nervousness, which is caused by the climber's intention, and

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[15] It has been argued that the action-plan strategy cannot be applied to cases of so-called basic deviance because some of these cases are too *basic* to think that agents might have planned how to go about them (Bishop 1989, 132-34; see also Schlosser 2007). I am sympathetic with this point; but anyway my arguments in this section show that even if Bishop is wrong and there is a way to apply the action-plan reply to basic deviance, still the reply would be unsuccessful.

which in turn causes the loosening of his hold. But, Schlosser says, "the event of nervousness, trivially, does not cause the movement in virtue of content" (2007: 192). And so the intention could not have caused the movement in virtue of its content, given that it only caused the movement through the state of nervousness. And that is why the movement is not an intentional action even though it is caused and rationalized by the agent's intention to loosen his hold.

Schlosser says that "the reason-states do not explain the occurrence of the particular movement in virtue of their contents—why that particular type of movement occurred, rather than another, cannot be explained by reference to the contents of the reason-states" (2007: 192). That is, according to Schlosser, because the reason-states only cause the movement through a state of nervousness which is, "trivially", a state which lacks intentional content. And it therefore couldn't cause anything in virtue of its intentional content.

Schlosser concludes that "Being caused and causally explained in virtue of content, an action is not merely a response to a cause, but it is a response to a reason-state qua reason-state; it is a response to the content of the mental state in the light of which its performance appears as intelligible" (2007: 192).

It has been recently pointed out (Tannsjo 2009) that even if the interposed state of nervousness is, as Schlosser argues, content-less, still that cannot be enough to account for why those cases do not constitute intentional action. Tannsjo argues that it is often the case, when we act intentionally, that our behaviour is constituted by non-intentional and content-less components:

> The problem is that there are some cases where even folk psychology allows for such nonintentional parts of an action. A simple example is when I kick a ball. There are many movements of my legs that are not made in response to the content of my wish to kick the ball; they just happen, and their happening is caused by my desire to kick the ball (2009: 470).

The problem for Schlosser's proposal would then be that many of our movements aren't caused by our reasons or intentions in virtue of their intentional content, simply because it would be both implausible and unnecessary to require that all that we do intentionally is

represented within the intentional content of our reasons or intentions. When we kick a ball, we normally do so both successfully and intentionally even though many of the minute performances and movements involved are not represented within the intentional content of our reasons or intentions, and they are therefore not caused by our reasons or intentions in virtue of their content.

The general problem is that we cannot plausibly require that every component of our agency be represented within the psychological states that are supposed to have caused our intentional action. Agents aren't gods; and not only gods act intentionally. Mostly, agents act intentionally even though they could not possibly be aware of every facet of their movements, so that those couldn't be represented within the agent's motivational states.

The problem with Tannsjo's objection is that causalists might very well be happy to concede that these movements, which couldn't be plausibly represented within the agent's reasons or intentions, are not intentional movements. That I intentionally kick a ball does not mean that every aspect, component, or element of my ball-kicking is something that I did intentionally. Kicking a ball might then turn out to be intentional under descriptions such as 'kicking a ball', 'playing football', and 'showing my son how it's done', without thereby having to be intentional under descriptions such as 'moving my foot forward', 'lifting my leg by 12 centimetres', and 'shortening the life-expectancy of the grass'.

And if we accept that the former set of action descriptions can be intentional without the latter set also having to be intentional, then causalists might be happy to concede that the latter set of action descriptions are not intentional; and then they could say that, indeed, these action descriptions are not intentional because they have not been caused by the agent's relevant intention in virtue of its content – since the intention's content makes no mention of them.

The issue, here, becomes foundational: it is argued, on the one hand, that agents do not have to think, occurrently, dispositionally, or unconsciously, about every detail, element, and consequence of their actions: that those elements, details, and consequences are intentional even though they were not represented in the content of the agent's reasons or intentions. To demand so much of agents would be absurd. On the other hand, it is argued that no such absurdity is involved, since those details, elements, and consequences are not intentional actions.

But aren't these components still necessary to the performance? And wouldn't agents own up to them if you asked them? "Did you mean to move your foot forward?"; "Did you mean to lift your leg by 12 centimetres?" On the one hand, no agent could have possibly known the exact height at which to lift her leg. But, on the other hand, no agent would deny that they had somewhat meant to do that, since it was required in order to kick the ball – and they definitely meant to kick the ball.

So they hadn't thought about it but, with hindsight, they must have meant to do it if it was part of kicking a ball. What started as a problem for the sufficiency of causal views of action is now starting to look like a problem for the necessary conditions of causal views: are the relevant psychological states really necessary, since agents appear to have meant to do even things that they hadn't thought about, either occurently, dispostionally, or unconsciously? If even those things turn out to have been performed intentionally by agents, then it looks as though the causal view's necessary conditions for intentional action are being challenged – since there is no trace of those performances in the agent's reasons or intentions.[16]

Here the discussion soon becomes fairly technical and complicated if the causal view has to appeal to such things as non-propositional content and sub-personal states in order to show that these performances can indeed be traced back to the agent (see, for example, Bermudez 1995). But here we don't need to take on this major task, because we don't need to accept, as Tannsjo does, Schlosser's assumption that the movements of the climber aren't caused in virtue of the intentional content of the climber's psychological states.[17]

We can accept that the climber's intention to loosen his hold causes the climber to loosen his hold only through a state of nervousness. What we don't need to accept is the bit that Schlosser does not argue for but rather stipulates as 'trivial' (2007: 192): that since the loosening of his hold is caused by a state of nervousness, and since states of nervousness are, by definition, devoid of intentional content, then the loosening of his hold could not have been caused in virtue of content – and therefore it cannot be an intentional action.

Schlosser says that "the reason-states do not explain the occurrence of the particular

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[16] For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Di Nucci 2008.
[17] Schlosser's own reply to Tannsjo (2010) is therefore not relevant to my argument here.

movement in virtue of their contents—why that particular type of movement occurred, rather than another, cannot be explained by reference to the contents of the reason-states" (2007: 192). And also that: "Being caused and causally explained in virtue of content, an action is not merely a response to a cause, but it is a response to a reason-state qua reason-state; it is a response to the content of the mental state in the light of which its performance appears as intelligible" (2007: 192).

Neither of these points is so obvious as not to require argument. Isn't it reasonable that the agent, being nervous, loosened his hold on the rope? Isn't that the sort of thing that would happen to a nervous climber, loosening his hold? Think of the sweat; think of how difficult it would be to maintain the required level of concentration. Furthermore, isn't it reasonable that a person with a conscience would grow nervous at the thought of sacrificing his fellow climber? Wouldn't that be likely to happen to any half-decent person?

Schlosser says that "the state of nervousness... renders it a coincidence that the reason states cause and rationalize the bodily movement" (2007: 191). But it is no coincidence that the climber loosens his hold. And it is no coincidence that the climber becomes nervous. It is in virtue of his intention to loosen his hold that the climber becomes nervous. Another intention, such as, say, the intention to 'have a drink once the climb is over', could hardly have been expected to result in nervousness – it would have been likely to have had a calming influence if anything.

And it is in virtue of his nervousness that the climber loosens his hold. It is because he is nervous that he loosens his hold. Another emotion, such as, say, a sudden rush of affection towards his partner back home, could hardly have been expected to result in the loosening of his hold – if anything, the climber would have tightened his grip on the rope.

The point is that malicious intentions such as the intention to kill a fellow climber are precisely the kind of mental states that normally cause nervousness. And that emotional states of mind such as nervousness are precisely the kind of states of mind that cause loss of control, mistakes, accidents; such as, in these circumstances, the loosening of the climber's hold.

So it is, after all, in virtue of the climber's intention to 'loosen his hold' being an intention to 'loosen his hold' – and not an intention to have a pint later that evening – that the climber

grows nervous: it is in virtue of the intention's particular content, 'loosening his hold', that the state of nervousness arises – had the content of the intention been different, it is reasonable to suppose that the agent would not have grown nervous. And it is in virtue of the climber's state of nervousness being that particular state of mind – as opposed to a sudden rush of affection or love – that the climber loosens his hold: had the climber been in a different emotional state of mind, it is reasonable to suppose that he would not have loosened his hold.

Schlosser's solution depends on the idea that, on top of a causal relation, there is also a rational relation between 'normal' pairs of reason (or intention) + action. And that in deviant cases this breaks down: there is no rational relation between the climber's intention to loosen his hold and his loosening his hold, because there is no rational relation between the climber's nervousness and his loosening his hold. So even though the causal relation still holds, the rational relation is interrupted by the state of nervousness.

But I have just shown that there are rational relations both between the climber's intention and his nervousness, and between his nervousness and his loosening his hold. Each pair of events is neither randomly nor coincidentally connected: we would reasonably expect them to be connected in just the way in which they are connected.

Naturally, this is not the same kind of rational relation: because the agent does not loosen his hold in light of his state of nervousness; but isn't his state of nervousness the reason why he loosens his hold? To say this is to misinterpret what 'reasons' are, a causalist ought to reply. And that's true. The climber does not grow nervous *in order to* satisfy his intention; nor does he let go of the rope *in order to* satisfy his nervousness either. But that's just to re-state the agreed upon data: deviant cases are different from *normal* cases. The point is that the difference is not where Schlosser places it: namely in the idea that the presence of the intermediary contentless state brakes down the normative relation between the intention to let go and letting go; because not only does a normative relation between intention and action still stand, but it also runs, importantly, through the very intermediary state of nervousness.

Let's be perfectly clear here: I am not arguing that the relation between the agent's intention to let go and the state of nervousness, and the relation between the state of nervousness and letting go, are the same kind of rational relations as, say, the relation between my desire for a cup of tea and my boiling the kettle. Even though these are both kinds of explanatory

relations, they are different kinds of explanatory relations. So my argument does not amount to equating them; I am only denying that the difference between these two kinds of explanatory relations is that only the latter is a rational/normative relation in which two events are causally connected in virtue of content. This much – which is the distinctive feature upon which Schlosser rests his argument – both kinds of relations have in common.

We can now see the same argument from a different point of view. Schlosser claims that "why that particular type of movement occurred, rather than another, cannot be explained by reference to the contents of the reason states" (2007: 192). We can now see that this is not true. It is exactly the fact that the content of the climber's intention is 'loosening his hold' that explains why the climber grows nervous. Indeed, we couldn't reasonably have expected the climber to suddenly feel *gratitude* towards his fellow climber as the result of his intention to 'loosen his hold'. Similarly, it is exactly the fact that the climber grows nervous that explains his loosening his hold. Loss of control is often explained by nervousness – and it is reasonable that a nervous person would lose control. As a result of nervousness, for example, we would not have expected the climber to, say, take a novel out of his rucksack.

This alternative fails too, then. In this section I have argued that the problem of deviant causal chains cannot be accommodated by the causal theory of action. I now turn to the relationship between causalism, psychological states, and control.

4. Control, causalism, and psychological states

It could be thought that guidance isn't really an alternative to causal theories of action because guidance itself depends on the attribution of psychological states as causes. Al Mele (1997) has gone in this direction. In this section I challenge his arguments, arguing that guidance, as opposed to causal theories, does not require psychological states. Before analysing Mele's argument, I should emphasize the generality of my discussion in this section: in arguing against the need to necessarily attribute psychological states as causes, I also provide an another independent general reason against causalism as contrasted to guidance, namely that it needs the attribution of psychological states as causes. And while deviant causal chains are a challenge to the sufficiency of the causal view, arguing that psychological states as causes are not necessary to account for control is a challenge to the necessity of the causal view (see footnote 6 for literature that challenges the necessity of the causal view).

Mele applies his argument directly to Frankfurt's coasting scenario:

> In the absence of a desire or intention regarding 'the movement of the automobile', there would be no basis for the driver's being 'satisfied' with the speed and direction of his car. So we might safely attribute a pertinent desire or intention to the driver, whom I shall call Al. What stands in the way of our holding that Al's acquiring a desire or intention to coast down hill is a cause of his action of coasting, and that some such cause is required for the purposiveness of the 'coasting'? … his allowing this [the 'coasting'] to continue to happen, owing to his satisfaction with the car's speed and direction, depends (conceptually) on his having some relevant desire or intention regarding the car's motion (1997, p. 9).

Mele thinks, then, that we can "safely attribute" the relevant psychological states, and that nothing stands in the way of thinking that those psychological states are causing the agent's behaviour. "Then it is natural to say that Al is coasting in his car because he wants to, or intends to, or has decided to – for an identifiable reason. And the 'because' here is naturally given a causal interpretation. In a normal case, if Al had not desired, or intended, or decided to coast, he would not have coasted; and it is no accident that, desiring, or intending, or deciding to coast, he coasts" (1997, p. 9).

My argument against Mele in this section will develop in two directions: first, I will argue that the issue is not the possibility of the attribution of the relevant psychological states, but rather its necessity. Secondly I will argue, following Carolina Sartorio (2005 & 2009), that these cases cannot be explained by appeal to 'reasons as causes'.

It has already been noticed (Zhu 2004, p. 304) that arguing for the attribution of the relevant intention is not enough for the causalist. What the causalist needs is to argue for the attribution of the relevant intention as a cause. But one might think that the relevant intention is necessary without thinking that the relevant intention is necessarily causal: "the explanation that Al allows the car to continue to course because 'he wants to, or intends to, or has decided to' for certain reasons, does not imply that it must exclusively be a causal explanation. Some philosophers contend that reasons explanations of action can be non-causal explanations as well" (p. 304).

Also, it is not enough for Mele to show that it is possible to attribute the relevant intention to the agent – namely, the agent's intention to coast. What Mele needs to show is that the attribution of the intention to coast is necessary in order for the agent to coast intentionally. If Mele doesn't show that, then he leaves room for an alternative account, one on which there is no intention to coast. It might be, for example, that all the agent intends to do is get home: and that, because coasting doesn't undermine the satisfaction of that intention, the agent doesn't intervene. The agent's intention to get home doesn't imply the agent's intention to coast: it might be that the agent's intention to get home leaves room for the agent's intention to coast, given that coasting is, admittedly, one of many ways in which the agent can satisfy her intention to get home.

But, again, that is not enough: what Mele needs is to show that the intention to coast is necessary. That, namely, the agent could not have coasted without an intention to coast; rather than just that the agent could have been coasting as the result of an intention to coast. Mele has only shown the latter, but not the former, and that is why Frankfurt's account stands.[18]

Mele's point might show that the agent doesn't intend not to coast – because if she had intended not to coast, presumably, since her behaviour was under her guidance, she would not have coasted. But showing that the agent doesn't intend not to coast falls short of attributing any intention to the agent: it doesn't show that the agent intends to coast. So that isn't enough either. And it is important to emphasise that it is not open to a causalist to argue that 'intending to φ' and 'not intending not to φ' are equivalent, since only the former points to an *actual* psychological state: and the causalist needs actual psychological states because she needs causes.

Mele is looking for a reason not to attribute psychological states to the agent; and a reason not to take them to cause the agent's movements. But what Mele needs, in order to refute Frankfurt, is to show that there cannot be guidance without those psychological states causing

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[18] Obviously a general intention or plan to 'get home' is not enough for a causalist. Let us explain that in Davidson's terms: if we analyse the general plan to 'get home' in terms of a desire to 'get home' and a belief that 'driving will get us home', for example, that belief-desire pair does not rationalize 'coasting' because there is no mention of 'coasting' in either the content of the desire or the content of the belief. And that is the same reason why a general intention to 'get home' which makes no mention of 'coasting' in its content will not do. That is why, if the intentional action in question is 'coasting', Mele needs to argue that an intention to coast (or a desire to coast, or a similarly suitable belief) is necessary.

movement. Frankfurt's challenge is exactly that guidance doesn't depend on causal antecedents. Because all that Mele shows is that it is possible to attribute those psychological states, Mele does not show that guidance isn't possible without those psychological states. In order to show the latter, Mele should have argued that the attribution of those psychological states is necessary, and not merely possible.

So far I have been granting to Mele the possibility of attributing the relevant psychological states, arguing that to reduce guidance to causalism is not enough that it is possible to attribute these psychological states; the relevant psychological states need to be necessary, but they are not, and therefore Mele's case fails. But recent work on omissions suggests that the attribution might be problematic, so that the argument against Mele would be even stronger.: not just that Mele fails to show that the attribution is necessary. More importantly, the attribution would not be warranted.

If we take Frankfurt's scenario to be a case of omission (omission to actively drive; omission to intervene; omission to grab the wheel), then it is not clear that the psychological states required by Mele's argument can explain the driver's behaviour. Sartorio has recently argued (2005 & 2009 – see also Clarke 2010) that causal theories of action cannot accommodate omissions because omissions cannot be explained in terms of 'psychological states as causes'. Focusing on an example involving a drowning child and a passive by-stander, she argues that the failure of the by-stander to intervene to save the child – which constitutes an omission – isn't causally explained by the by-stander's psychological states (Sartorio focuses specifically on the state of intention). She claims that the following causal explanation is false: (A1) 'My forming the intention not to jump in' causes (O2) `my failure to jump in'. Granting the possibility that omissions can belong to causal chains, Sartorio claims that this causal explanation – which exemplifies the kind of causal explanations provided by causalism – fails; and that therefore, generalizing, causalism fails with regards to omissions.

According to Sartorio the truth of ´My forming the intention not to jump in causes my failure to jump in´ is challenged by the following being true: (O1) ´My omitting to form the intention to jump in´ causes (O2) ´My omitting to jump in´. Sartorio's claim is a conditional: If ´O1 causes O2`, then it is false that `my forming the intention not to jump in causes my failure to jump in´. Sartorio argues for the antecedent by arguing that (O1) is a better causal explanation of (O2) than (A1), my forming the intention not to jump in. Indeed, the claim is even stronger:

I omitted to jump in because of O1 and not because of A1: "I failed to jump in because of what I omitted to intend to do, not because of what I intended to do" (2009: 519), where what I omitted to intend to do refers to (O1) and what I intended to do refers to (A1). So I failed to jump in not because of my intention not to jump in. Therefore my intention not to jump in does not explain my omitting to jump in. It follows that the claim that ´my forming the intention not to jump in causes my failure to jump in´ - which is an example of causalist explanation - is false.

Therefore, following Sartorio's argument, it would not just be, as I have argued above, that the psychological explanation as causal explanation in Frankfurt's scenario is merely possible but not necessary; also, the psychological explanation as causal explanation fails because the explanatory work is done by what I don't intend and not by what I do intend.

Here it might be insisted, on behalf of Mele, that at least the actual intervention, if not the coasting, isn't possible without the agent being in some mental state; and that if the agent is not able to intervene, then she hasn't got guidance over her actions. So guidance does depend on the agent being in some psychological state. But, again, all that is needed, if anything, for the agent's intervention is some intention to get home. If something happens or is about to happen that might undermine the satisfaction of such an intention, then the agent might intervene. But her intervention doesn't require an intention to coast, nor does her intervention show that the agent had an intention to coast.

Mele might have been hinting, rather, at the intention to coast being necessary in order to *explain why* the agent is coasting. Two points here: firstly, the difficulties faced by causalism that I emphasized in this paper are a direct result of the ambition to offer, all-in-one, a definition of intentional action together with a reasons explanation: that's at the root of the problem of deviant causal chains. Secondly and more importantly, as I pointed out in my discussion of Mele, we can actually make rational sense of the agent's coasting without attributing an intention to coast. If, for example, all the agent intended was to go home; and the agent did not intend not to coast, then his coasting makes perfect rational sense; and we have then explained why he is coasting. And we have done so, contra Mele, without attributing an intention to coast.

We have here rebutted Mele's attempts to reduce a form of control such as guidance back to

the causalist model of psychological states as causes. In conclusion, let me just summarize what this article has achieved: I have argued that we should abandon the long struggle to patch up causalism, and that we can make sense of control independently of causalist commitments.

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