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Can I Only Intend My Own Actions?

*Intentions and the Own Action Condition**Luca Ferrero*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1

The possible objects of one's desires and wishes seem to be virtually unlimited: one might desire unattainable states of affairs including, perhaps, even known logical impossibilities. By contrast, the proper objects of one's intentions appear to be much more limited. As Baier (1976: 214) writes: "My intentions must not only be 'made' by me, when I make up my mind, they must be directed upon, they must concern, my own future actions." It seems that the agent can only intend *to do* something *herself*: intentions appear to be necessarily *de actu suo* (Wilson 1989).

This restriction on the proper object of intentions is reflected in the grammar of attributions of intention: an agent is usually said "to intend *to do* such-and-such." The syntactical complement of attributions of intention is usually an infinitival verb phrase whose subject is implicitly understood to be the very agent of that intention. Although it is not ungrammatical to say that an agent *S* intends *that p* be the case, it seems that the propositional complement "that *p*" should be interpreted as making implicit reference to the agent's own action. That is, "*S* intends that *p*" is elliptical for "*S* intends *to do* what it takes for her to bring about that *p*."

This restriction on the admissible objects of intentions—which sometimes goes under the name of the "own action condition"—suggests

that there is a special relationship between an agent, her intentions, and her own actions.¹ The own action condition (OAC, hereafter) might strike the reader as trivial, in the sense of both obviously true and uninteresting. Nonetheless, this thesis has not gone utterly uncontested.² In addition, many philosophers claim that the status of OAC bears on important issues in the philosophy of agency. For instance, according to both Thompson (2008) and Setiya (2011) a proper characterization of the relation between intentions and actions depends on the fate of OAC. Boyle and Lavin (2010) defend OAC as central to their rejection of causal theories of action and their defense of the “guise of the good” thesis. Finally, OAC matters for the characterization of shared intentions in joint agency (See Bratman 1997 and Stoutland 2002).

Hence, in spite of its apparent triviality, OAC is worth a closer look. In fact, in this paper I will argue against it: the genuine object of intentions is neither necessarily nor primarily restricted to the agent’s own actions. Although the agent’s own agency plays a necessary role in carrying out her intentions, this role is not reflected in the restriction of the intention’s objects to her own actions. The object of an intention is not necessarily cast in the infinitival/agential form—“I intend *to do* so-and-so.” The more inclusive propositional clause—“I intend *that* such-and-such”—is actually the proper characterization of the logical form of intentions. Or so I will argue.³

1.2

I will begin with some preliminary considerations on the notion of the object of an attitude in general (Section 2). I will then discuss how to characterize the content of a simpler kind of practical attitude, which I call “aiming.” I will argue that OAC does not hold of aimings (Section 3). Then I will move to intentions and show that the features that make them different from aimings are not sufficient to support the application of OAC to intentions (Section 4). I will then consider whether one’s own actions might still be taken to be the standard although not necessary object of

¹ OAC is defended by Baier (1970: 650), Meiland (1970), Castañeda (1972: 140), Castañeda (1975: 25, 169–75), Baier (1976: 214), Searle (1983: 100, 105), Gustafson (1986: 104, 121, 204), Wilson (1989), Perloff (1991: 403), Velleman (1997), Stoutland (2002), Thompson (2008: 120–3, 127–8, 130–1), Moran and Stone (2009: 143, 147).

² See Bratman (1997), Tuomela (2005), Setiya (2011).

³ In this paper, I use “propositional” as an umbrella term that covers various possible characterizations of content—whether in terms of propositions, sentences, states of affairs, and the like. For present purposes, what matters is only the contrast between the characterization in broadly conceived propositional terms and the one in the agential/infinitival form.

intention. I will argue that although one's own actions might play a prominent role they do not do so as distinct pieces of conduct and separate targets of one's intentions (Section 5). Finally, I will consider the different degrees to which one's own agency might be involved in intentions. I will claim that one's own agency is necessarily involved but in a way that is formal and generic, and as such lends no support to OAC (Section 6). Space constraints prevent me from discussing how my conclusions bear on the various philosophical disputes that invoke the fate of OAC but for the discussion of the distinction between intending and acting. I will argue that my rejection of OAC puts pressure on the tenability of a stark distinction between intending and acting. This is a somewhat surprising development of the standard dialectic, since this substantive claim is usually supported on the basis of the acceptance of OAC (5.8).

2. THE OBJECT OF AN ATTITUDE

2.1

Talk of the "object" or "content" of an intention is not as straightforward as it might appear. Grammatically speaking, the object is the syntactic complement of expressions of intention, but what we are interested in here is rather the object as the complement of the *logical* form of intentions.

Before investigating this logical form, however, we need to make some preliminary considerations about the notion of the content of attitudes in general and various notions of the conditions of satisfaction or success of an attitude.

Let's begin with the simpler case of belief. Take the belief that *p*. The content of this belief—the proposition *p*—*individuates* the attitude. It differentiates this particular belief from other beliefs, such as the belief that *q*. (This individuating content is also something that can be "shared" with attitudes of a different kind, for instance, the desire that *p*, the assumption that *p*, etc.) The individuating content of a belief also seems to indicate its *conditions of success*: the belief that *p* succeeds as a belief when *p* obtains.

At first, it seems that the same holds true of practical attitudes. Consider the desire that *p*. The proposition *p* individuates it by differentiating from other particular desires. In addition, a desire that *p* is satisfied—succeeds as a desire—only when *p* obtains. Likewise for intentions. The object of the intention (whether characterized in infinitival or propositional terms) seems to both individuate a particular intention and indicate its conditions of success.

These considerations, however, are too hasty since they do not pay attention to the different senses in which an attitude can be successful.

First, an attitude is *constitutively successful* when it meets the standards that govern the acquisition, retention, and abandonment of attitudes of its kind. For instance, beliefs are regulated by the standards of veridicality: the belief that p is constitutively successful when p is true. This explains why the obtaining of the conditions of individuation of a belief coincides with the obtaining of its conditions of “constitutive” success.

This coincidence, however, might not hold of other attitudes: conditions of constitutive success need not be the same as the attitude’s individuating content. For instance, assumptions are not regulated by veridicality: the assumption that p is individuated by p but, unlike the belief that p , it might be constitutively successful even if p is false.

Something similar holds of desires. The constitutive standards of desires are those of “desirability”: one is supposed to acquire, retain, and abandon a desire in light of the “desirability” of its content—whatever that turns out to be according to the substantive accounts of the nature of desires. The desire that p can be constitutively successful even if p does not obtain and never will. The obtaining of p , however, matters for a different kind of success, the desire’s *fulfillment* or *satisfaction*.

2.2

The satisfaction of a desire is a form of success distinctive of *practical* attitudes, but it is not to be confused with another kind of practical success, the “achievement” as the success of *executive* attitudes. An executive attitude, such as an intention, is an attitude that *moves* the agent toward a goal. When the agent has an executive attitude aimed at the state of affairs g , the mere obtaining of g is not sufficient for the attitude’s executive success. The obtaining of g does not count as an achievement if g comes about independently of the attitude or via its deviant operation (although the agent’s non-executive desire that g , which might accompany the executive attitude toward g , can still be successful—in the sense of “satisfied”—no matter how g comes about).

Thus, for executive attitudes like intentions, there are three kinds of conditions: (i) of individuation (formulated in terms of the goal g), (ii) of constitutive success (to be met in order for the agent to be correct in having that attitude), (iii) of executive success (the non-deviant obtaining of g *by way of* the proper operation of the executive attitude). The distinction is not simply between these notions but also between the substantive conditions: the goal g might individuate the attitude, but its obtaining is neither necessary for constitutive success nor sufficient for the executive one.

The difference between these conditions matters for the attitude's logical form. Talk of its "object" should be cast in terms of individuating content. The conditions of individuation are those that matter for the discussion of restrictions on the proper objects of an attitude. Considerations about constitutive and executive success pertain instead to discussions about *kinds* of attitudes. They matter for the understanding of the distinctive operation of attitude-types—their distinctive *mode* or *force*—rather than the content of their tokens.

It can be quite tempting to conflate the different conditions, especially when talking about the objects of attitudes. Particularly dangerous is the nowadays common philosophical talk of the attitudes' aims. This expression when properly used indicates what regulates attitudes as a matter of their constitutive conditions (for instance, to say that beliefs aim at truth is to single out veridicality as their constitutive standard). This "constitutive aim," however, should not be confused with the "individuating aim" of particular *executive* attitudes, that is, with the particular goal *g* that the agent has when she is set on a particular pursuit. Only executive attitudes have individuating aims, since having aims in this sense is what makes them executive. (Additionally, executive attitudes are also under conditions of executive success and, as a result, there might be a sense in which they "aim" at achievement but the target of this aiming is not to be confused with the substantive goal that provides their individuating content—see 5.7.)

3. AIMING

3.1

Before discussing whether OAC holds of intentions, let's consider whether it is true of a simpler kind of executive attitude, which I call "aiming." Aiming is the distinctive attitude of the *basic* form of representational agency. When an agent aims at a state of affairs *g*, she has *g* as her goal, that is, she is set on making *g* true in light of her representation of it.

The pursuit of *g* by aiming at it consists of the combined exercise of several *executive powers*.

1. Power of *self-motion*. The subject *as a whole* is the source of its conduct (the conduct is not the mere product of external forces or uncoordinated operations of the subject's subsystems).⁴

⁴ See Frankfurt (1978), Burge (2009).

2. Power to *represent* the goal and orient one's conduct in view of it.⁵
3. Power to *respond to interferences* by (i) adjusting conduct in the face of perturbations and (ii) persisting in the pursuit in the face of some setbacks.
4. Practical *ingenuity and opportunism*: the ability to take advantage of favorable conditions, including: (a) refraining from interfering with advantageous courses of events, (b) reliance on other agents, (c) exploration of novel ways to progress toward the goal.
5. *Two-way powers*. The exercise of executive powers might not be merely *reactive*: the subject might not simply react automatically and in fixed ways. It might respond to circumstances in light of its perception of or belief about the fit between its response and the circumstances, rather than being simply triggered by them (See Kenny 1992: 70).

Some of these powers might be exercised in isolation from each other and, as such, underpin even simpler forms of agency. In addition, agents might have these powers in domain-specific forms and exert them with different degrees (if any) of conceptual sophistication and reflection. Nonetheless, I contend that some combination of these powers, even if in the absence of conceptual sophistication and reflection, is constitutive of basic goal-directed agency, of the agency exhibited in "aiming."

3.2

A particular aiming is individuated in terms of its goal g , the state of affairs toward which the aiming is *executively* directed. When g obtains nondeviantly *by way of* the combined operation of executive powers constitutive of aiming, the aiming at g is executively successful—it achieves g .

The conditions of executive success are not part of the individuating content, of the goal g : when one aims at g , one is orienting the executive capacities toward making the states of affairs g obtain. One is not orienting them toward "the bringing about of g in a nondeviant manner and by way of this very aiming." The nondeviant bringing about of g is not the individuating goal of the attitude. Rather it spells out what aiming consists in as an attitude *kind*. Hence, it needs to be spelled out only when *articulating* the characteristic force of aiming as a kind, rather than the distinction between token aimings.

⁵ The orientation might be minimal: it requires neither a plan toward g , nor the representation of g as a goal. At bottom, it amounts to the capacity of taking instrumental steps and registering one's progress toward g (at least, registering when g obtains so as to stop its pursuit).

These considerations suggest that the following is the canonical logical form of aiming:

(A) *S* aims at *g*

where *g* stands for the state of affairs whose obtaining constitutes the aim's achievement—*g* is the goal of this executive attitude. The “object” of the aiming is specified in (broadly conceived) propositional terms, not in agential/infinitival ones.

3.3

Limiting the content of the simpler form of goal-directed agency to one's own actions is overly restrictive. Although it is possible to aim just at one's own actions, this restriction does not seem supported by reflection on the operation of goal-directed agency. Executive capacities can be oriented toward goals quite remote from the agent's own actions, that is, from the agent's exercises of these capacities. As long as the cognitive and conceptual abilities allow for it, the agent's goals can extend as far as the remote *consequences* of her actions, including the results of her omissions, the actions of other agents, and the effects of other agents' actions. That a state of affairs *g* might obtain either by omission or the mediation of others' actions does not make it illegitimate as a goal.

A state of affairs qualifies as a goal as long as it can provide suitable orientation for the exercise of executive capacities. There might be limitations on *how* remote the object might be to qualify as a goal rather than the object of a wish. But this is a concern with the *upper* boundary of aiming's possible objects, which puts no pressure on restricting acceptable goals to the lower boundary of the agent's own actions.

These considerations rule out OAC for aimings. If, as I maintain, talk of the object of an attitude should be interpreted in terms of individuating content, and an aiming's individuating content is its goal, then the object of aimings cannot be restricted to the agent's own actions.

One might try to reject this conclusion by interpreting talk of the aiming's “object” in terms of what is especially relevant in the attitude's psychological operation rather than in its individuating content. For instance, one might argue that the main focus of the exercise of one's executive capacities in the aiming at *g* is not the (explicit) representation of *g* but of the instrumental actions to be taken toward it. And one might continue with the claim that the object of an attitude is to be equated with the content of this focus. But this suggestion is problematic. It is not sufficiently systematic and comprehensive. First, the focus of the psychological operation of aimings might vary widely; second, oftentimes the remote goal rather than the means seems to be at the

center of one's attention (this is especially so, I surmise, for the simpler executive attitudes like aimings).⁶ In addition, even if the goal is not the focus of orientation, it is hard to deny that it plays some role in the actual psychological operation of aimings.

3.4

To reject OAC for aimings is not to deny that they display important *de se* features: these features can be found both (i) in the ownership and exercise of executive capacities, and (ii) in the path toward the achievement of *g*.

First, the immediate exercise of the executive powers that underpins the agent's aiming cannot but be the agent's own. For it is *constitutive* of the subject's identity as an agent that she is the locus of this immediate exercise. This is an instance of a more general phenomenon: the fundamental *de se* involvement that characterizes the existence and identity of subjects as separate loci of individual psychologies. A subject is none other than the locus of the *unmediated* exercise of psychological powers, including the executive ones (See Burge 2000).

Second, the path toward achievement originates in the agent. Execution originates *in* the agent and proceeds *from* her: from her specific location in space and time and from her point of view on her surroundings. In addition, execution is subjected to the limitations imposed by the agent's present executive powers and circumstances. In this sense, execution is always ego-centered and perspectival.

These features do not entail that the object of one's aiming should be restricted to the exercise of one's executive capacities. Execution is necessarily *ab se*, but its object/target need not be *de se*.

The psychological work is, ultimately, always of one's own. For the subject of this working is nothing other than the locus of the unmediated psychological operations. This is not to say that one's executive attitudes are either exclusively or primarily oriented toward these operations or their immediate effects. The distal and outward-looking orientation of aiming is rather a manifestation of the proper operation of goal-directed agency.

The *ab se* character of execution does not bear directly on the object of executive attitudes, but it matters for determining the conditions of both executive and constitutive success. First, executive success can only be secured via the initial and unmediated exercise of one's executive capacities.

⁶ The focus of the psychological operation on instrumental steps might affect the content of intentions as more complex executive attitudes; see plans-as-recipes in 4.5.

It must originate in the agent. Second, constitutive success is related to what counts as an acceptable goal, which is partly a matter of what is attainable by the agent *ab se* from her present circumstances.

The *ab se* character of execution is undeniable, but it does not support OAC. For it is the *de se* aspect of agency in its source rather than in its target. Although any achievement has to go through the agent's contribution via the exercise of her executive powers, her targets can be at much remove from that origin.

A state of affairs might not count as a genuine goal if the connection between its eventual occurrence and the exercise of executive capacities is excessively remote—too thin and fragile. But a concern about excessive distance gives no reason to push the objects of executive attitudes all the way back to the immediate exercises of executive powers.⁷

The relation between the exercise of executive powers and the obtaining of the goal *g* can be quite indirect. For *g* might just be a remote and indirect effect (including via the intermediation of other agents) of processes initiated by these exercises. The ability to aim at such distal states of affairs is one of the remarkable products of practical ingenuity and opportunism, when coupled with the agent's predictive ability.

Opportunistic capacities and the two-way volitional powers also make it possible to pursue goals by relying on already favorable circumstances. Agents often make progress toward their goal simply by refraining from “antagonistic” interventions in the natural course of events. These nonantagonistic omissions can contribute to genuine achievement as much as acts of commission. In the limiting case, an agent might achieve *g* simply by monitoring the unfolding of a favorable course of events. She is to monitor it with an eye toward making possible corrective interventions, which she is able and ready to perform but might not to be required.⁸ This nonantagonistic attainment is still a *bona fide* achievement, i.e. an executive success.

3.5

To sum up: the discussion of aiming shows that there are fundamental *de se* elements in the location and working of executive attitudes. But these elements do not necessarily make the content of these attitudes to be exclusively or primarily about one's own actions: the admissible goals of aimings are

⁷ My claims concern the logical form not the metaphysics of executive attitudes. It might well be that possessing an executive attitude amounts to nothing more than a disposition to or the actual exercise of certain immediate executive capacities.

⁸ Compare the case of the driver going downhill in Frankfurt (1988).

not limited to the immediate exercises of one's executive powers or their proximal outcomes. OAC is not true of aimings.

4. INTENTION

4.1

Let's return to intentions. Intentions are executive attitudes. They are considerably more complex than aimings, but does this difference affect their logical form and support OAC?

Intentions differ from aimings in four ways:

1. Intentions are under distinctive rational pressures for stability and agglomeration, whereas aimings are not rationally criticizable when unstable or unagglomerable (See Bratman 1987).
2. Intentions extend the temporal reach of agency, by allowing the pursuit of very distal goals and engagement in temporally extended and "unified" activities (See Ferrero 2009b).
3. Full-fledged intentional agency usually goes together with more sophisticated conceptual capacities. It is the agency characteristic of agents who are (a) able to articulate their goals and their plans to reach them, (b) in the business of both offering and asking for folk-psychological explanations, and (c) capable of at least some reflection about their agency and psychology.
4. Intentions are *planning* attitudes (Bratman 1987): (a) they frame further deliberation and help coordinate conduct over time (in part by fixing expectations about future conduct); (b) they often come with plans as (partial and hierarchical) recipes that list some of the steps to be taken toward one's goal.

None of these distinctive features of intentions support OAC. This is easy to show for the first two features. First, the rational pressures on the intention do not concern the form of their individuating content. Likewise for the temporal reach of agency. It does not affect the content's form, although it allows for the pursuit of more complex and distal substantive goals.

4.2

Perhaps, one might devise a way to support OAC starting from the *de se* character of the alleged self-referential nature of intentions, which relates to the third feature of intentions, their alleged conceptual sophistication.

Some philosophers maintain that the content of an intention includes the role that the intention plays in securing its executive success.⁹ If so, its logical form is something like:

(I-sr) *S* intends that: *this very intention* nondeviantly results in the obtaining of *g*.

The content of (I-sr) has a necessary although indirect *de se* element. For the intention included in the content is none other than the agent's own intention (that is, "*S* intends that: this very intention *of one's own* non-deviantly results in the obtaining of *g*"). But this *de se* element does not support OAC. For it does not bear on the characterization of what the intention is supposed to result in. One needs a separate argument to prove that *g* is to be restricted to the agent's own actions. The self-referentiality of the intention only pertains to the origin of executive success. It spells out the *ab se* character of achievement (see 3.4).

In any event, I find the self-referentiality of intentions problematic for two reasons. First, it is based on a confusion between the individuating content of a particular intention (which is not self-referential) with the reflective articulation of the conditions of executive success of intentions as a kind of attitude.¹⁰ Second, it is psychologically unrealistic insofar as it demands that only agents with the capacity for entertaining self-referential content can have genuine intentions.¹¹

The last concern ultimately undercuts any strategy of attempting to derive OAC from the conceptual sophistication of subjects capable of intentional agency. Although intentions might be the characteristic executive attitudes of reflective and conceptually sophisticated agents, it is

⁹ See Searle (1983: 85), Harman (1986: 86), Harman (1993: 141).

¹⁰ This confusion underlies the "content satisfaction view" used by Searle (1983) to support self-referentiality. According to him, the content of an attitude should be equated with its conditions of satisfaction. But as shown above (2.2), the idea of satisfaction/success is ambiguous. The content satisfaction view seems to work for some attitudes, such as beliefs and (nonexecutive) desires—the content of beliefs happens to correspond to the conditions of their constitutive success; the content of desires happens to correspond to the conditions of their success as satisfaction. But this equivalence is accidental; there is no principled reason to think that it holds of attitudes in general, let alone of executive attitudes given that the conditions of constitutive and executive success of executive attitudes are much more complex than their individuating content. (My point here is stronger than the one made by Mele (1987: 316–17), who only claims that the content satisfaction view does not hold of intentions but might be fine for beliefs and desires.)

¹¹ See the criticisms of Mele (1992: 204–6), Kapitan (1995: 154, fn. 8), Roth (2000), and Harman's (1993: 145) acknowledgment of the problem. In addition, Kapitan (1995: 163) correctly remarks that the efficacy of intending does not seem to depend on the representation in its content of the conditions of its success.

problematic to limit their possession to these agents. Conceptual and reflective sophistication might help with shaping one's agency by helping in devising more complex goals and improving one's rate of success thanks to one's understanding of how the intention contributes to the attainment of one's goals. But explicit understanding of executive success does not change the logical form of intentions. In particular, it does not induce the agent to take her own achievement of *g* as her goal: having the goal *g* already equates with being set on *achieving g*, on obtaining it in the mode of executive success (see 5.7).¹²

4.3

Consider now the last distinctive feature: the planning character of intentions. Their role in framing and coordinating deliberation and conduct does not concern their content. But the plan-as-recipe component does. An agent might not simply intend to pursue a goal *g* but to pursue it *by way of* a plan-as-recipe *r*; that is, she might pursue *g* guided by a specification of some of the steps that she expects to take toward it. The intention with a plan-as-recipe plays a somewhat different role in organizing the agent's deliberation and conduct than an intention directed at the same goal without a plan or via a different one. To this extent, the recipe is part of the individuating content of the intention.

However, this qualification of the content does not support OAC. First, the change does not restrict the goal, which still needs not to be formulated in terms of one's own actions. Second, a recipe need not be formulated in terms of the agent's own actions. Sometimes it only specifies intermediate nonagential goals on the way to *g*.

4.4

Putting these considerations together, we might conclude that none of the ways in which intentions differ from aimings make a difference to the

¹² A conceptually sophisticated agent might have *second-order* intentions about the efficacy of her first-order intentions. For instance, she might become aware of failures of her executive capacities and address them by intending to improve her rate of executive success. By engaging in the self-policing of her executive capacities, she acquires *new* goals that make reference to the role of her intentions in securing executive success. But she does not thereby change the content of her first-order intentions. In addition, the second-order intentions about the success of one's first-order intention do not have as a goal the securing of their own conditions of executive success (if not in the indirect sense in which they themselves might benefit from the self-policing of executive capacities that the second-order intentions might put in place).

structure of their content. Intentions are just a more psychologically and normatively sophisticated form of aimings, but they retain the basic logical form of the individuating content of aimings. Therefore, by analogy with (A) in 3.2, I maintain that the canonical form of intentions is propositional rather than agential:

(I) *S* intends that *g*

where *g* stands for a state of affairs in the role of the goal of intending as an executive attitude.

Are there restrictions on the acceptable goals of intentions? The restrictions parallel those imposed on the content of aimings. At most, there might be an *upper* limit: the goal must be in principle attainable or, more restrictively, its attainment should not be *too* remote from the exercise of the agent's executive powers (and the remoteness, like for aimings, allows for executive success even when the agent relies on nonantagonistic waiting, monitoring, and the intermediation of other agents, see 3.4). But this limit does not impose the lowest possible restriction to the agent's own actions.

Likewise for *de se* features. The executive powers whose exercise underpins intending are necessarily *de se*. The subjects of intentions are none other than the loci of possession and exercise of these executive powers. But this constitutive relation between agents and their executive powers only makes the path to the intention's success *ab se* rather than the intention's object *de actu suo*.

4.5

The only modification to the logical form warranted by the distinctive features of intentions is the introduction of a recipe component. Some intentions have the following form:

(I+r) *S* intends that: (by way of *r*) *g*

where *r* stands for a plan-as-recipe, the specification of some of the instrumental steps that the agent expects to take in the pursuit of *g*.¹³

The recipe's instrumental character is indicated by the parenthesis. Unless *r* is entirely composed of necessary means to *g*, it is possible genuinely to *achieve g* even if the agent does not follow the recipe (not to be confused with the accidental or deviant obtaining of *g*, which does not count as an achievement). In this sense, the agent might be executively

¹³ For a similar suggestion about the role of plan components in the content of intentions, see Mele (1987: 326).

successful in carrying out the more generic intention (*I*) directed at the same goal but without the specification of a plan of action. (For recipes that are partly constitutive of the goal and incorporated into it, see 5.4.)

4.6

To sum up, in this section, I argued that there are no differences in logical form and the *de se* involvement between simpler aimings and intentions. Aimings and intentions share these features in virtue of their common executive character. Their only differences concern (a) the rational norms that govern them and the specific ways in which the executive powers are called upon to meet these norms; (b) the possible presence of the recipe component in intentions. None of these differences, however, support OAC for intentions.

5. ACTION AS THE OBJECT OF INTENTION

5.1

Rejecting OAC does not imply that one's own actions might not be the object of one's intentions. One might actually argue that they are the paradigmatic objects at least of *future-directed* intentions, which ordinarily seem directed at one's own future actions. A future-directed intention to ϕ at f seems to have as its genuine object the action of ϕ -ing, which is to be initiated at the future time f and whose inception marks the transition from the mere intending to ϕ to the actual ϕ -ing.

This reading might seem obvious at first, but it needs to be handled carefully since it might induce a misleading picture of the relation between intending and acting, a picture that exaggerates their differences by taking the intention to be directed at the action as a truly *distinct* piece of conduct. This distinction is perfectly in order when an agent intends that *another* agent does something. For one intends that the other agent acquires a separate intention and carries it out successfully as a matter of a separate course of action. But as I am going to argue, a similar distinction is problematic for ordinary intentions directed at one's own actions.

In this section, I will discuss how best to understand the relation between an intention to ϕ and one's ϕ -ing. This discussion will reinforce my case against the OAC but also offer a diagnosis of its intuitive appeal. In addition, it will allow a more fine-grained characterization of the *de se* elements of intention.

5.2

As soon as one acquires the intention that g , one puts oneself under various rational pressures, including the continuous demand to secure the possibility of eventual success and, when appropriate, to make actual progress toward it. What is specifically required to meet these demands depends on one's particular circumstances (including one's present and expected skills, opportunities, and information). At times, one has to take specific steps, including making particular bodily movements and using specific tools; at other times, one might simply take advantage of favorable conditions and let the natural course of events unfold unperturbed. At times, one might have to engage in particular deliberations about implementation and coordination; at other times, one might automatically implement prior plans and policies, or let habits determine one's conduct. Discharging the rational pressures of intention is a matter of the agent's continuous "intelligent guidance" toward g , which requires a mix of antagonistic interventions, nonantagonistic monitoring, and the management of attention and deliberation. This mix of bodily and mental events is what I will call a *Course of Active Intelligent Guidance* (CrAIG, henceforth) directed at g . Responding to the rational pressures of the intention that g is thus a matter of engaging in the appropriate CrAIG.

Although a CrAIG is produced by exercising one's executive powers, not all portions of the CrAIG need to be "actions" in the sense of *antagonistic* bodily interventions. In the limiting case, an agent might secure that g simply by monitoring the favorable unfolding of a natural course of events that eventuates in g without requiring any antagonistic intervention. In this case, there is no action in the narrow sense of some antagonistic intervention, but the achievement is still the agent's *doing*.

5.3

Imagine that I intend that I *be* at a party tonight but I don't care about *how* I get there (this includes not caring about getting there by antagonistic interventions of mine; it would be fine, say, if someone were to take me there while I am asleep). However, given my circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that some antagonistic intervention of mine is required. Yet, I do not need to commit to any specific implementation. My intention only commits me to exercising my executive powers toward g , i.e. to engage in a CrAIG directed at g —whatever shape this CrAIG might take in response to the specific demands imposed by my present and future circumstances until the goal is either achieved or abandoned.

Imagine now that my goal is still simply to *be* at the party, but I also plan on driving there as the most reasonable or likely means to my goal. Not only does my intention include a recipe (my driving) but it might also be expressed in its terms as “I intend to drive to the party,” even if the driving is only instrumental to my goal (that is, “I intend that: (by way of my driving) I be at the party”). The driving-as-recipe provides the default focus for the organization of my executive capacities. As I embark in the CrAIG directed at *g*, I exert these capacities toward *g* in large part by being oriented toward my driving. As a result, I am going to engage in an episode of “driving” as a course of action with a characteristic mix of antagonistic interventions (including the use of various tools and the performance of distinctive bodily movements), nonantagonistic monitoring, and correlated management of deliberation and attention.

A plan-as-recipe offers a default yet revisable orientation for especially salient albeit instrumental stages of an otherwise *continuous* CrAIG directed at *g*. The CrAIG does not necessarily consist only of my driving, nor does it necessarily start or end with my driving. My actual driving should not be equated with the executive success of the intention. But my starting to drive marks the point where the progress toward *g* begins to unfold as “intended” in the sense of “according to the plan-as-recipe;” the point where the course of active intelligent guidance directed at my being at the party begins to take its expected shape.

5.4

There are cases where the recipe becomes part of the goal. For instance, I intend to be at the party *only* by my driving (maybe, I want to impress the partygoers by showing off my new car and I do not care to be at the party otherwise). In these cases, the intention takes this form:

(*I+gr*) I intend that: *g*-by-way-of-*r*

Although *g* might be a goal by itself, here it is only a portion of the goal, which now also includes some of the means to *g*—the recipe *r*. When so, the inception of *r* marks a more momentous transition in the CrAIG: when *r* begins, the *achievement* of the intention begins as well. From that moment on, the intention is “in achievement,” so to say. But this transition does not mark the acquisition of a new intention or the inception of a novel CrAIG. It is not a transition between the intention and a genuinely separate action. Rather, the transition is only the beginning of the *internal* culmination of the original CrAIG, the inception of its *finale*.

Oftentimes, the recipes that are part of the goal are what might be called “performances”: specific and characteristic combinations of mostly antagonistic interventions in the form of certain bodily movements and the distinctive uses of specific tools—for instance, playing a piano sonata or dancing the tango. The beginning of the performance marks the inception of the achievement but it is still a transition *internal* to the CrAIG that began when the intention was first acquired (which might occur well in advance of the performance’s inception).

Whenever the execution of a recipe begins (whether it is instrumental to or constitutive of the goal), there is no break in the continuity of the agent’s active guidance toward the goal. The execution of any of the actions included in the recipe does not mark the termination of the intending and the inception of a distinct piece of conduct, the acting. It is only an internal transformation of the CrAIG’s shape, as required by the dynamics of intentional progress toward *g*.

To claim that there is a single course of active intelligent guidance that begins with the acquisition of the intention and continues until the intention is given up, voided, or carried out is not to deny that this course of guidance has distinct stages. These stages might be quite different from each other given that the specific demands on the agent’s executive capacities might vary widely as she progresses toward *g*. For instance, if she uses her planning abilities well, earlier stages of a CrAIG tend to demand few, if any, antagonistic interventions. At the outset, many well-planned projects require minimal, if any, interference with the natural course of events. The agent might only need to monitor for the persistence of currently favorable circumstances. At the earlier stages, the specific effects of the intention tend to be limited to the framing and organization of further practical deliberation rather than antagonistic interventions in the outer world. Conversely, later stages tend to keep the agent busier with antagonistic interventions since more interference is usually needed at the later stages to secure that the course of events eventuates in the intended state of affairs. But this is only a simplified illustration of a typical but not necessary progression of the demands imposed by an intention. The distribution of these demands can differ widely (for instance, the agent might be kept busier earlier rather than later, or cycle through the different stages).

The transitions between the stages can vary from the smooth and subtle to the abrupt and sudden, depending on the changes in the demands imposed by the circumstances. In any event, these transitions do not mark a hard and fast metaphysical boundary between two utterly *distinct* kinds of practical engagement with the world—intending vs. acting. When describing the unfolding of an intentional pursuit, the distinction between merely intending and actually acting is between two stages of an underlying

unitary process of active intelligent guidance, stages whose boundaries need not be hard and fast.¹⁴

5.5

The temptation to think of the acting stage as a distinct item to which the intention is directed might arise from the possibility of engaging in the same kind of conduct independently of the future-directed intention. It is often possible to imagine circumstances where one might initiate the action of ϕ -ing without any prior intention directed at it. But from this it does not follow that in acquiring a prospective intention to ϕ at f one aims at initiating a distinct piece of conduct in the future. The prospective intention and its correlated CrAIG are not successfully carried out by “passing the baton” to another intention and its correlated CrAIG at f . What occurs at f is rather a transition to a different stage within the same intention and CrAIG. It is a matter of *internal* transformation dictated by the dynamic unfolding of the pursuit of the goal g to which the ϕ -ing is directed.

When one acquires the prospective intention to ϕ at f one is—so to say—“stretching over time” the pursuit of g by bringing its inception forward in time. One is not preparing in advance for a *distinct* future undertaking. Rather, one is advancing the time when one first acquires the goal g and, thereby, puts oneself under the rational pressures distinctive of that particular intentional pursuit. In turn, if one is rational, this is also the time when one begins discharging these pressures by engaging in a CrAIG directed at g .

5.6

We are now in a position to better appreciate what it means for an intention to be directed at an action as a genuinely distinct item, as it happens when one intends the action of *another* agent. The latter intention is directed at the initiation of a *separate* course of active guidance. The target of my intention that *you* ϕ is the success of your distinct CrAIG directed at your goal. Your ϕ -ing is not a stage of my CrAIG. When an action is a genuinely distinct goal, the inception of the action marks a break in the continuity of intentional guidance rather than a transformation induced by its internal dynamics.

¹⁴ One might think of the two stages of intending and acting as akin to phase-sorts, and to their transitions as akin to metamorphosis (See McDowell (2010)).

In the first-person case, the continuity of active guidance is what normally precludes taking one's own actions as genuinely distinct items targeted by one's intentions. For one's ϕ -ing to be a genuinely distinct object of one's intention, either (i) one intends only to *prepare* for ϕ -ing without being already committed to its actual pursuit, or (ii) one is alienated from one's future self and treats one's future conduct third personally, i.e. as if it were of another agent. Unless one is in either of these two scenarios, it is paradoxical to intend to initiate an action of one's own but not to be successful at carrying it out. This is not problematic, instead, for the genuinely distinct action of another agent (or of an alienated future self).¹⁵ This is another way to show the lack of separation between having an intention and the normal first-personal engagement in the correlated CrAIG.

Under normal circumstances, when one's own actions are presented, both in thought and speech, as the objects of one's intentions, they are not the distinct targets of one's intentional agency. Rather, they are just the descriptions of the more specific shapes—that is, of the characteristic patterns of bodily movement, tool-use, monitoring, attention management, and appreciation of the situation—that the CrAIGs are supposed to take at some crucial stages in their unfolding (whether as a matter of instrumental recipes or of goal-constituting performances).

5.7

Let's consider one last attempt at defending OAC. One might concede all the points I made but claim that there is still a sense in which the object of intention is necessarily one's own action. The argument would revolve around the necessary *ab se* character of executive success. As argued above (3.4), executive success can be secured only via the agent's exercise of her own executive capacities: achievement is necessarily *ab executione sua*, so to say. Hence, any achievement amounts to the culmination of an actual *doing* on the agent's part, that is, the culmination of a CrAIG directed at g (i.e. of a sequence of exercises of the agent's own executive capacities that eventuates in the nondeviant obtaining of g). Why can't we claim that the object of the agent's intending is necessarily this CrAIG, which is by its very

¹⁵ There are some special cases in which one might genuinely intend to pursue a goal g and yet hope, without any paradox, that one will never be in a position to actually succeed at carrying it out. For instance, I am fully committed to go the hospital if I get a life-threatening injury but also hope that I will never have to carry out this precautionary conditional intention. If I can have some control on the antecedent, I might even intend to avoid that it ever comes true (that I ever get a life-threatening injury), see Ferrero (2009a).

nature always of her own? In other words, according to this suggestion, the object of intentions is necessarily the agent's own doing, in the broad sense of "doing" that encompasses the various modes of intelligent guidance.

The problem with this suggestion is that it indicates as the object a *formal* and *generic* target. The course of action that leads to the achievement is not something to which one can aim in the substantive and specific way in which one aims at a particular goal *g*. As the necessary object of the intention, the CrAIG in question is nothing other than the very operation of an executively successful intention; it is the same as the successfully completed process that constitutes the "perfection" of one's intending that *g*. A formal target cannot be the individuating goal of an intention, since there is nothing specific to it. The executive capacities are oriented toward substantive targets, not toward executive success as such. In intending that *g* one necessarily "aims" at the formal target as well, at the achievement as the successful culmination of one's own doing. But in this purely formal sense of aiming, it is uncontroversial but also uninformative to claim that in intending one aims necessarily at the doing of one's own that would amount to the executive success of that intention.

5.8

Time to take stock. In the first part of the paper, I discussed whether OAC could be supported on the basis of considerations on the individuating content of intentions and their conditions of success. I started by considering whether OAC might hold of the simpler kind of executive intentions—aiming. I argued that it doesn't. Intentions are a special kind of aiming. Their distinctive features, however, do not make a difference to the structure of their individuating content. Hence, I argued that OAC does not hold of intentions either.

I then moved to a distinct but related question. Could action at least be the paradigmatic target of future-directed intentions? I argued that this is not so, if the action is understood to be the *separate* target of the intending. The actions of other agents are genuinely distinct pieces of conduct that can be made into the proper object of one's intentions. But one's own actions do not normally play this role. In the first person mode of full temporal identification, there is a deeper continuity between intending and acting. This continuity is deeper than it might appear at first, especially if one were to read the logical structure of intentions out of the grammatical structure of ordinary expressions of intentions with their infinitival complement, since the latter seems to suggest that one is targeting one's actions as distinct pieces of conduct.

My conclusion supports a picture of diachronic agency that takes as fundamental the unity of what I call courses of active intentional guidance (CrAIG), which correspond to sequences of exercises of the agent's planning executive capacities directed toward a particular goal. According to this picture, intending is not directed at acting. Rather, intending is a matter of engaging in courses of active intentional guidance, some *stages* of which we describe as actions or activities. These stages provide a focal point for the organization of the courses of active guidance (whether as central recipes or as goal-constituting performances). Further development of this picture must be left to another occasion, but let me notice that this conclusion is a somewhat surprising twist in the debate about OAC. The picture that I have just sketched has some affinity with the one championed by some on the basis of the very views that I have rejected: the infinitival reading of the object of intentions and the defense of OAC (See Thompson 2008, Boyle and Lavin 2010, and Moran and Stone 2009). Hence, more work needs to be done to explore the implications of my rejection of OAC on those additional issues where the fate of OAC is supposed to bear, such as the status of the causal theory of action, of the "guise of the good" theory, and the nature of shared intentions (see 1.1).

6. DEGREES OF *DE SE* INVOLVEMENT

6.1

Although I have argued that the content of intentions is neither necessarily nor paradigmatically cast in terms of one's own actions, I do not deny that intending necessarily involves one's own agency. This necessary involvement is a matter of the metaphysics of executive attitudes, which are necessarily of their own agent, both in ownership and exercise. Any executive attitude is necessarily (but also trivially) *de executione sua*: possession of an executive attitude is a matter of the agent's exercise of her relevant executive powers. This *de se* involvement of agency is fundamental but also unspecific. This is just the *ab se* dimension of execution (see 3.4), a dimension that does not impose any formal restriction on the objects of executive attitudes.

This fundamental but generic degree of *de se* involvement of agency is not reflected in the individuating content. It is rather implicit in the reference to the subject of the executive attitude: in a first-person attribution of intention, we might say that it is implicit in the "I" of the "I intend."

There are two other degrees of involvement of one's agency in intending. They concern the role that the agent *might* play in the individuating content of her intentions. The agent might plan on playing an instrumental

role in the pursuit of g . That is, she plans on relying on her taking certain specific steps (say, her ϕ -ing) toward g but she is open to the possibility that someone else might take her place in promoting g . Alternatively, an agent might take specific exercises of her own agency to be constitutive of her goal—putting herself under a rational pressure to prevent anyone else from taking those steps instead.

Here is how the three degrees of *de se* involvement of agency appear (in boldface) in the logical form of intentions as formulated in the first person:

- (1st) I intend that: g
- (2nd) I intend that: (by way of **my** ϕ -ing) g
- (3rd) I intend that: g -by-way-of-**my**- ϕ -ing

It is only in the first degree that one's own agency is necessarily involved, although in the form of the *generic* exercise of one's executive capacities. By contrast, one's specific agential involvement in the recipes and goals of one's intentions is not required. These goals or recipes might actually involve other agents, both instrumentally and constitutively (for instance, I might intend that: (by way of *your* ϕ -ing) g ; or I might intend that: g -by-way-of-*your*- ϕ -ing).

6.2

One might be involved to the second and third degree in a temporally "alienated" form. Let's imagine that, out of a concern for my own health, I intend to work out tomorrow. My intention is that my body undergoes the strenuous exercise. However, the satisfaction of my desire to be healthy does not require that I work out *directly out of* my prior intention rather than just *as a result* of it. Given that I expect that tomorrow I will be so lazy that I might irrationally abandon my intention, I can still carry out my intention by setting up a pre-commitment device that manipulates me into working out tomorrow in spite of my reluctance to do so at that time.

In this case, my intention involves me to the third degree (the goal is my performance rather than someone else's) even if tomorrow I need not endorse the considerations that supported my original intention. I might act in response to that intention in the same way as *another* agent might be cajoled by it. If so, my lack of full identification with myself in the past makes my working out a *distinct* action, which is the genuine object of my prior intention. This action is the culmination of a separate CrAIG guided by a new intention, the intention to work out that I acquire tomorrow as a result of the manipulating effect of my prior intention.

Standard intentions are not of this alienated kind. We ordinarily take ourselves to continue to identify over time, to continue to embrace and

sustain the same intention throughout its unfolding and, thereby, to engage in a single continuous CrAIG without self-directed goading, cajoling, or manipulating. Hence the strongest degree of *de se* involvement is that of *full temporal identification* rather than that of mere (and potentially alienated) temporal identity.¹⁶

6.3

Although the second and third degrees of *de se* involvement are not necessary, it is very common for ordinary intentions to take these forms.¹⁷ Hence, many of our recipes and goals are formulated in terms of specific manifestations of our own agency (usually in the nonalienated form). I surmise that this explains why ordinary expressions of intention usually take the infinitival form. For two reasons:

First, verbal expressions help characterize the specific ways in which the agent's executive capacities are involved in pursuing her goals. Nongeneric verbs of action describe distinct and characteristic patterns of bodily movement, tool-use, monitoring, attention management, and appreciation of the situation. Ordinary expressions usually make explicit the communicatively most salient elements of the intention, in terms of (some aspects) of its recipe and/or goal. But we should not expect these expressions necessarily and fully to articulate the content of the attitude.

Second, usually the intention's most salient elements concern the agent's exercise of her executive capacities in the mode of full temporal identification. Hence it is often pleonastic to make explicit the subject of the infinitival

¹⁶ To mark this stronger form of first-personal transtemporal relation, one might introduce an *augmented* quasi-indicator, *S***. Hence, “*S* intends that: *S** works out tomorrow,” leaves it open that one might manipulate one's future self, whereas “*S* intends that: *S*** works out tomorrow” doesn't.

¹⁷ The existence of the various degrees of *de se* involvement raises one important question. Even if many of our ordinary projects involve by default the agent to the third degree, should this involvement matter to us? Are there *intrinsically personal* projects—projects that cannot be pursued but *de se* to the strongest degree? And if there are, should we care about them? (See Perry 1976, Whiting 1986.) Reflection on the nature of the fundamental first-degree of *de se* involvement does not seem to help with these questions. The fundamental form of *de se* involvement makes it metaphysically impossible for the *source* of agency to be but particular agents involved in the *immediate* exercise of their own executive capacities. What does it take for this involvement to extend over time? That is, to extend over its immediate and momentary exercises? Is some temporal extension metaphysically required by the nature of agency itself? (See Burge (2004).) And if not, what does it take to secure this extension? And is it worth it? These questions cannot be addressed in this paper, but the discussion of the object of intentions and their relations to the first person makes them particularly vivid. (For some initial considerations about what makes extended intentional agency valuable to us, see Ferrero 2009b.)

complement. In saying that “I intend to ϕ ,” it is implicit that I am talking about my own ϕ -ing. But this does not imply that the agent is *necessarily* involved in the recipes and/or goals of her intentions. The only necessary *de se* involvement is that of the first degree, which is not reflected in the content of the attitude, but in its subject. The standard grammatical form of the expressions of intention in the infinitival form lends some initial support to the “own action condition,” but—as I hope to have shown—these expressions, although perfectly in order in their everyday use, are a misleading guide to the logical form of intentions.¹⁸

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