

Intention

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G. E. M. Anscombe (1958) famously argued that it is not profitable to do moral philosophy until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology (*see* ANSCOMBE, G. E. M.). The investigation of what we are morally permitted to do is integrally bound up with the puzzle of what it is to act. Intentional actions are paradigm objects of moral evaluation; therefore, grasping what it is to act is part of understanding and justifying such evaluation. In turn, the study of intentional action is integrally bound up with the notion of intention. What is done intentionally stands in some relation to the intention with which one acts: the very same physical event of an arm rising might on one hand be an unintentional spasm, and on the other any of the intentional actions of hailing a taxi, voting, stretching, or signaling for the revolution to begin. And in addition to contributing to the determination of what is done, the intention with which an action was performed may influence our moral assessment of that action. An account of the nature of intention and its relation to intentional action is thus highly relevant for moral philosophy.

This essay will begin by categorizing the major areas of inquiry that structure the philosophical investigation of intention. A central question is whether or not intention should be understood as a type of mental state. If so, what are the distinguishing properties of this mental state? If not, what are we doing when we ascribe intentions to ourselves and to others? Further puzzles concern the relation of intention to intentional action. We sometimes explain the occurrence of an intentional action by reference to the agent's intention: "She is walking across the street because she intends to mail a letter." Does this type of explanation work by citing the intention as the cause of the resultant action? If intentions are not causes, an alternative account is needed of the explanatory role they play in statements like these. Further, while such statements suggest that there is some dependence relation between what is intended and what is intentionally done, specifying precisely what this connection is remains a challenge.

The second part of the essay will discuss the implications of the answers to these questions for issues in ethics. Most importantly, the concept of intention figures centrally in the controversial moral principle known as the Doctrine of Double Effect, which addresses the moral permissibility of bringing about harm as the unintended side effect of an intended action. Of related interest is the relationship between intention and thought about what is good or best to do: to what extent can our intentions diverge from our evaluative judgments? The possibility of appealing to intention to solve diverse problems concerning free agency, responsibility, and the semantics of moral discourse will also be considered.

Intention and Moral Psychology

The notion of intention is currently taken to be central to theorizing about agency and moral psychology, but this is a relatively recent trend. Traditionally, this role was occupied by the venerable philosophical concept of the will. Contemporary thought about intention diverges over the question of whether intention should be understood as a development of the traditional concept of will, or volition. The classical notion of the will is of a faculty of choice that is the motivation behind all voluntary action. In Aristotle, a form of this idea can be found in his closely linked concepts of *boulesis*, or rational desire, and *proairesis*, or choice of means to the rationally desired end (see ARISTOTLE). In Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the faculty that is the origin of voluntary action (*voluntas*) emerged more clearly as having properties distinct from the intellect, allowing nonrational factors a role in voluntary human agency (see AUGUSTINE, SAINT; AQUINAS, SAINT THOMAS).

But credence in the capacity for volition as the source of all voluntary action diminished in the seventeenth century, thought by Thomas Hobbes and David Hume after him to be dispensable in favor of the notions of desire and aversion (see HOBBS, THOMAS). It suffered further in the mid-twentieth century from the ascent of behaviorism, coming to be viewed as a mysterious and unscientific notion and relegated in the words of Nietzsche to the category of “phantoms” of the inner world. Considerations of parsimony, verificationism, and the repudiation of Cartesian dualism were taken to militate against the appeal to inner springs of action (for a prominent such critique, see Ryle 1949).

According to a currently influential strand of thought, the obscure notion of the will can be revived and demystified by replacing it with the concept of intention, understood as a legitimate mental state on a par with belief and desire. There is a host of particular proposals for how to specify the functional role of this mental state, but the broad idea is that in exercising practical choice in favor of an action one enters into the mental state of intending that action, which in turn tends to lead to the intentional performance of the action. Classical volitionalism survives in the form of claiming that all intentional action involves some relevant mental state of intention on the part of the agent. A compelling motivation for this general approach might be called the “argument from failure.” The thought is that there must be some property shared by two agents who set out to do the same thing, one of whom successfully accomplishes her aim and the other who fails entirely (O’Shaughnessy 1973). Plausibly, whatever makes it the case that the successful agent tries to raise her arm and does so is also present in the second agent who finds that her arm is paralyzed and does not move. The natural suggestion is that what the two agents have in common is the mental state they are in: each intends to raise her arm (but for criticism of this form of argument, see Dancy 1995).

However, it is not universally agreed that predications of intention function to ascribe mental states. We might think instead that the use of the word “intention” is to redescribe an event as having the form of an intentional action. In his early work, Donald Davidson (1980a) proposed that the word “intention” is syncategorematic:

it does not stand for an object or property, but is rather a mechanism for specifying the reason for which one acted. The claim is that saying “Donald went to church with the intention of pleasing his mother” is not a description of Donald’s mental state, but rather a way of asserting that Donald’s reason for going was in order to make his mother happy. Michael Thompson (2008) argues that intentions cannot be mental states because they are not static. Thompson points out that actions are processes that take time to complete, and that the complement of the verb “intend” is therefore a description of a temporally extended act-process. I do not intend *that* I walk across the street, but rather *to* walk across the street, where the latter is an intrinsically imperfective, dynamic process. My relation to the endpoint of having walked across the street is constantly evolving as the act-process unfolds, and hence not one of representing a static proposition. And if the object of intention is not a proposition, then intention is not a propositional attitude.

Thompson concludes that intending is not a mental state at all, but rather a form of doing (see also Moran and Stone 2008). To say that Michael intends to walk across the street is to assert that an act-process is unfolding that will be complete when Michael has walked across the street. Though we might merely say “Michael is walking across the street,” the verb “intend” offers a way to specify more precisely the agent’s relation to the endpoint of the action that is underway; in particular, it can be used to signify that his progress is so negligible that we would be disinclined to say he is actually walking across the street. Thompson claims that explanations of action that cite purportedly psychological entities like intentions and wants can always be translated into “naïve” explanations that omit these psychological references: “I am walking across the street because I intend to go to the gym” can be restated as “I am walking across the street because I am going to the gym.” This suggests that the explanations do not work by attributing mental causes of action.

That said, a majority of theorists do take intentions to be mental states. A powerful consideration convincing Davidson himself that his deflationary analysis was inadequate is the possibility of “pure intending”: one can have an intention for the future that one never consciously decided upon and that one never does anything toward fulfilling (Davidson 1980b). An agent might have the life-long intention to build a squirrel-house without having actively formed this intention and without ever making any effort to gather materials or nail one board to another. The case of pure intending suggests that intention cannot be explained away entirely in terms of doing. Davidson came to believe that pure intentions were mental states after all, and that the same mental state must figure equally in the case where action is taken. The majority of philosophical thought about intention has followed Davidson in this.

Within this tradition, there are a variety of specific views available with respect to what kind of mental state intention is and what its distinguishing properties are. A major theoretical divide turns on whether intention is a *sui generis* mental state type or whether it can be reduced to more familiar states like desire, belief, or some combination thereof. We can get some grip on this debate by defining a notion of the “direction of fit” an attitude can take in relating its content to the world (see DIRECTION OF FIT). All should agree that intentions have a “conative” or “world to

mind” direction of fit, in that they represent their contents as to-be-made-true: they are successful to the extent that the world changes to conform to what is represented in the mind (Searle 1983; Velleman 2000). The paradigmatic conative attitude is desire, the object of which is not actually the case, but is regarded as to be brought about (*see* DESIRE). This is in contrast to attitudes that take a “cognitive” or “mind to world” direction of fit, in that they represent their content as true and where a mismatch between that content and the world should be corrected by changing the content rather than the world. The paradigmatic attitude with a cognitive direction of fit is belief.

Intentions cannot take as their object a state of affairs the subject already believes to be the case or expects to occur without agential intervention. And like desire, an intended state of affairs is regarded as to-be-brought-about. These features of intention suggest the first potential reductionist strategy, which in a broadly Humean spirit attempts simply to identify intention with predominant desire (*see* HUME, DAVID): I intend to A just in case my desire to A is stronger than my desire to perform any action I believe to be incompatible with A-ing. In addition to having the correct direction of fit, the impetus for assimilating intention to desire is the need to capture the motivational aspect of intending. We tend to be moved to bring about what we intend, and desire is paradigmatically a motivational state (*see* MOTIVATION, HUMEAN THEORY OF). But it is almost universally accepted that intention cannot simply be reduced to predominant desire, for desire lacks the element of commitment that is constitutive of intention. Having the predominant desire to A – say, to smoke a cigarette – is neither sufficient nor necessary for intending to A, since one might be committed to quitting and so intend not to smoke the cigarette one desperately desires. Moreover, the predominant-desire view has the implausible implication that one cannot form the intention to pursue one of two or more equally desirable options (for a defense of a desire-based analysis of intention, see Ridge 1998).

A more sophisticated reductionist view holds that intending is constituted by a complex of desire and belief. The thought is that to eliminate the gap between having a predominant desire to A and being settled on A-ing, we must add that in the latter case the agent expects that she will A: intending to A consists in having the desire to A and the belief that one will A (Davis 1997). Adding the belief constraint on intention is meant to explain why forming an intention disposes one to cut off further deliberation, now understood as the question of whether one *will* A. This will not do as it stands, however, for one might meet the conditions of desiring to A and believing one will A without intending to A. If the agent’s grounds for believing she will A are independent of her desire to A, there is no need for her to intend to A. I may desire to stay home tonight and believe that I will stay home, but where my belief is based on the expectation that no one will invite me to go out rather than my desire to stay home. Here, it is not the case that I intend to stay home. A further constraint is therefore required on the relation between the relevant desire and belief to the effect that the agent expects to A partly in virtue of her desire to A.

One objection to this type of view is that the belief condition may be too strong. Some hold that it is possible to intend to A while lacking the belief that one will A

(Bratman 1987; Mele 1992). The idea is that an agent can be committed to doing A in the ways characteristic of intending while considering it a significant possibility that she will fail to A because she turns out to lack the ability, is in circumstances hostile to A-ing, or may forget even to try to A at the appropriate time. A second objection concerns the epistemic justification of the belief condition. In situations where an intention is required, the agent does not already have sufficient evidence that she will A; if she did, she would not need to take the further step of intending to A. This means that her belief that she will A is formed at least partly on the basis of her desire to A, in the face of insufficient prior evidence that she will A. This appears to be a form of wishful thinking rather than rational belief formation (Langton 2004).

The issue of epistemic justification is one consideration in favor of a third kind of view on which intention does not merely involve belief, but simply is a kind of belief (Velleman 1989, 2000; Harman 1997; Setiya 2007). According to belief theories of intention, an intention to A just is a belief that one will A, where the agent is motivated to act so as to bring about the content of that belief. Further, intentions differ from ordinary beliefs in that they are self-referential: intention-beliefs represent themselves as part of the explanation of why they will come true, having something like the form “I am going to A in virtue of this very intention to A.” The epistemic virtue of this view is that if intention does not merely involve belief but is constituted by it, it is possible to hold that the belief is epistemically justified in virtue of being a self-fulfilling prophecy (Velleman 1989).

A major motivation for belief theories of intention is the conviction that there is an important connection between acting intentionally and having a special kind of knowledge of what you are intentionally doing. Anscombe (1963) suggested that if an agent is A-ing intentionally, she will know that she is A-ing, and not by means of observing herself in action. If the agent does not know she is A-ing, or if she must discover this fact through perceptual or inferential means, this reveals that she is not A-ing intentionally. For those who accept some version of the idea that there is a necessary connection between acting intentionally and having nonobservational knowledge of one’s actions, an attractive strategy for explaining this connection is to analyze intention in terms of belief, since beliefs are doxastic attitudes that can constitute knowledge. The reasoning is as follows: if all intentional action involves the presence of some relevant intention, and intentions are beliefs about what one is doing, then all intentional action involves a belief that in conducive circumstances amounts to knowledge of what one is doing.

A different motivation for the belief theory of intention arises from the desire to understand the requirements of rationality that govern intending (*see* RATIONALITY). It is generally considered irrational to have intentions the contents of which are mutually inconsistent or inconsistent with one’s beliefs. Further, it is irrational to fail to intend the means believed to be necessary to one’s intended ends. Let us call these the norms of “consistency” and “coherence” on intention, respectively. Philosophical inquiry into intention involves asking how precisely to specify these and other norms of practical rationality. We further desire to know in virtue of what, if

anything, they apply. The belief theory of intention aspires to answer this question by assimilating these norms to the rational requirements on belief (Harman 1997). Beliefs are also states that are rationally required to be mutually consistent and explanatorily coherent. If intentions are a species of belief, at least some of the rational norms governing intention might be elucidated as the familiar requirements on rational belief formation.

Finally, in opposition to these reductionist theories of intention stands the view that intentions are distinctive *sui generis* attitudes that cannot be fully analyzed in terms of other states. According to the anti-reductionist approach, the kind of commitment involved in intending differs fundamentally from that involved in belief or desire. Proponents of this view are convinced of the aforementioned claim that one can (fully) intend to A without (fully) believing one will A, which suggests that intention is a practical rather than theoretical commitment to action. Michael Bratman (1987) argues that this commitment is best understood by reflecting on the role of intention in planning for the future. We are temporally extended agents with diverse practical goals and limited cognitive resources, and as such we require cognitive technology that allows us to coordinate our efforts at a time and over time and to promote deliberative efficiency. Furthermore, we are social agents who desire to coordinate our actions with others and to act together. We facilitate this intrapersonal and interpersonal coordination over time in part by forming plans, the building blocks of which are intentions. The Planning Theory aims to understand intention by analyzing its functional role in planning.

The proposal is that planning enables coordination in part by imposing structure on practical deliberation (*see* PRACTICAL REASONING). The aforementioned norms of consistency and coherence enjoin the formation of plans that are mutually co-possible, complete in the details of how they are to be realized, and disposed to be stable in a way that anchors further deliberation. We may thus appeal to the coordinating role of intention to explain why intention is subject to these rational requirements. In turn, it is argued that for intentions to play their functional role as elements of plans, they must be distinctively practical attitudes involving a commitment to action that exceeds desire but that may diverge from our beliefs concerning what we will in fact do.

Turning now to a further question that any of these theories of intention must face: what is the relationship between intention and intentional action? It is uncontroversial that what an agent does intentionally is in some way dependent on what she intended to do. One's flipping on the light might have the consequence of frightening off the burglar in one's house, but whether this is an intentional act of frightening the burglar depends on whether one flipped the switch with the intention of scaring him. However, the precise relation between the intention with which one acts and what is done intentionally is a further philosophical puzzle.

An initially plausible thought is that we do intentionally only what we intend to do: if an agent intentionally A's, she must have intended to A (Searle 1983). Bratman (1984) dubs this thesis the "Simple View." The Simple View has the virtue of offering a straightforward account of the unity of intention and intentional action. However,

it faces serious challenges. The first challenge arises from cases in which it is rational for an agent to act so as to intentionally bring about some outcome but irrational to *intend* that outcome. If intention is individuated in part by its role in imposing consistency and coherence on practical deliberation and planning, then it cannot be rational knowingly to have mutually inconsistent intentions. However, the agent's total expected utility will occasionally be increased by pursuing multiple ends she knows to be incompatible, because this will raise her chances of bringing about one or the other. Suppose an aspiring student applies to law school at Stanford and Harvard while believing that admissions are coordinated such that she cannot be admitted to both, and is in fact admitted to Stanford by way of skillfully assembling a successful application. It seems that she has intentionally gained admission to Stanford. But it is problematic to attribute to her the intention to get into Stanford, for if she intended to get into Stanford then she also intended to get into Harvard, from which it follows that she intended to get into both Stanford and Harvard while believing this to be impossible. To avoid attributing to her this apparently irrational set of states, an appealing move is to reject the Simple View and hold that one may do something intentionally without intending to do that very thing (but for dissent, see McCann 1997). There must be some related intention, but the relation in question may be more complex than the Simple View allows.

The second challenge faced by the Simple View concerns the foreseen but unintended side effects of our intended actions. Our movements in the world have innumerable effects, many of which are predictable; we are constantly displacing air molecules, wearing out our clothes, making noises with our footsteps. Some of these effects are ones we aim to bring about, but others are merely foreseeable byproducts. A doctor might prescribe narcotics to a patient in order to have the effect of alleviating his pain, while foreseeing that this will also have the undesirable consequence of addicting him to the drugs. Most agree that we do not intend all of the consequences we expect to incur by pursuing the outcomes at which we aim. The doctor is not disposed to engage in further means–end reasoning and action aimed at addicting the patient to narcotics if the palliative dose fails to have this effect, in the way characteristic of intending an outcome. In contrast, if the patient is still in pain after taking the drugs, the doctor is disposed to pursue alternate palliative treatments. This shows that her intention is to alleviate the pain and that she merely expects the addiction to result as an unintended side effect (Harman 1997).

Nevertheless, we are inclined in some cases to characterize the expected side effect as having been brought about intentionally. This inclination is strongest when the agent explicitly considers that side effect in her deliberation and where the side effect has some negative significance. The aforementioned doctor can be held responsible for creating the patient's addiction, and is in a position to offer a justification for doing so that cites the benefits of the treatment and the unavoidability of the side effect. To capture these features of the doctor's deliberate role in bringing about the addiction, it is natural to say that she has done it intentionally. Knobe (2003) offers empirical evidence that English-speakers do in fact characterize some cases of expected side effects as having been brought about intentionally. These

cases therefore offer a further challenge to the Simple View in that they are instances of doing something intentionally without intending to do that thing.

Intention and Moral Philosophy

The answers to these questions concerning the nature of intention have bearing on a variety of issues in moral philosophy. Perhaps most significantly, intention figures in our moral evaluations of action with respect to the aforementioned category of foreseen but unintended side effects. According to a thesis classically known as the Doctrine of Double Effect, the moral significance of knowingly bringing about an outcome may be sensitive to whether the outcome is intended or merely foreseen (*see* DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE EFFECT). The Doctrine of Double Effect is commonly attributed to Aquinas and was devised to address a puzzling dilemma: is it ever permissible knowingly to bring about a significant harm in the pursuit of a good end? The puzzle is particularly acute for moral theories that deem some actions, such as the intentional killing of another human being, absolutely prohibited, for cases arise in which the good to be achieved appears to outweigh the cost of violating such a prohibition. The Doctrine of Double Effect is an attempt to reconcile this tension by exploiting the distinction between intended aim and foreseen side effect. There is no perfectly agreed-upon formulation of the principle, but the basic thrust is that bringing about a harm in the pursuit of a proportionately greater good is sometimes morally permissible if one does not intend to cause that harm. One must treat the harm as neither end nor means; it is not the claim that one may “do evil that good may come.” But if one’s intention is directed at achieving some proportionately greater good and not by way of causing harm, it may be permissible to act on that intention while foreseeing that so acting will have harmful side effects. A common example concerns incurring collateral damage in the waging of war. Foreseeably causing the deaths of innocent civilians in the execution of a maneuver aimed at disabling enemy forces might be judged permissible whereas intending to kill innocent civilians as a means to winning the war is not. It is a significant question for moral philosophy whether some formulation of the Doctrine of Double Effect is true, and the answer will depend in part on whether our concept of intention can support the needed distinction.

A second philosophical topic linking intention to ethics is the subject of practical reason. Broadly speaking, practical reason is the capacity to deliberate and decide what to do, where this normally issues in an intention to act. Understanding this capacity involves investigating the relation between practical reasoning, intention, and thought about the good. Aristotle famously maintained that every inquiry, action, and pursuit aims at the good, and all can agree that practical reasoning normally involves thought about what it would be good to do. If an agent intends to A, this is ordinarily because she takes A-ing to have some value, or in Anscombe’s words, some “desirability characteristic.” The controversial question is whether believing a course of action to be good in some respect is internal to the very concept of intention, such that one *necessarily* believes that the end of one’s intended action has some value.

There are descending degrees of strength to theses that have a claim to be versions of the affirmative answer to this question. Most strongly, there is the Socratic thesis that no one errs knowingly: one necessarily intends to do what is best, and errs only in apprehending what that action is. On this view, there is no such thing as “clear-eyed akrasia”: believing it to be best to A but choosing instead to do B (see WEAKNESS OF WILL). Phenomenologically, this is difficult to maintain; it certainly seems coherent to have the thought “I ought to A, but I intend to B.” In a similar vein, Davidson (1980b) proposed to identify intending to A with the unconditional evaluative judgment that any action of type A is desirable, given the rest of one’s beliefs about the future. (Importantly, by “evaluative judgment,” Davidson does not mean that intentions are a type of belief; he considered intentions to be a species of “pro attitude,” which can be roughly characterized as the genus of attitudes that have a conative direction of fit) (see PRO-ATTITUDES). But this linkage of intention to unconditional evaluations of desirability incurs a serious problem in handling situations in which the agent takes multiple actions to be equally desirable (Bratman 1999). In an illustration of this plight typically credited to Jean Buridan, a rational ass is confronted with two equally attractive piles of hay and starves to death for lack of a rational basis to prefer one to the other. Unlike Buridan’s Ass, agents like us clearly have the capacity to choose between alternatives we take to be equally desirable. But if intending to A is understood as the unconditional judgment that A-ing is *more* desirable than each of the relevant alternatives, Davidson’s theory mistakenly entails that one cannot intend any one of several options judged equidesirable. Alternatively, on a weaker understanding of the relationship between intending and evaluative thought, one must merely judge A to be *no less* desirable than each of the alternatives. But this would allow for the agent to both intend A and intend B in Buridan cases while believing A and B to be mutually incompatible, and this is irrational. There is thus strong reason to reject the attempt to identify intention with unconditional evaluative judgment.

This leaves open the more moderate view that intending to A entails taking A to have some aspect of desirability, but where one need not judge it to be the best option or even no less desirable than the alternatives. This has come to be known as the thesis that all action takes place under the “Guise of the Good,” or *sub specie bonum* (see GUISE OF THE GOOD). One might be led to this view in the attempt to understand the relationship between acting with an intention and acting for a reason. A defining feature of acting with an intention is that one is thereby subject to being asked why one so acted, where the appropriate answer cites a reason for action. If I am asked why I intend to buy eggs, the kind of answer that is desired is a consideration that rationalizes the procurement of eggs – a consideration that “speaks in favor” of buying them, and explains why I am so acting. The challenge is to explain what it is to take a consideration to be a reason for action, and how this is connected with intention. An explanation many have found attractive is that the intention with which one acts specifies the reason for which one acted, where a reason for action is a consideration one takes to establish that the action has some *value* (Raz 2010). My buying eggs for the reason that I am making an omelet is

understood as involving the judgment that buying eggs has value in virtue of its instrumental contribution to omelet-making.

Some reject the Guise of the Good thesis altogether, however, arguing that acting for a reason should not be understood as acting for normative reasons (*see* REASONS, MOTIVATING AND NORMATIVE). If what it is to take a consideration to be a reason for action can be explained without appeal to judgments about value, then it is possible to act for reasons without viewing that action as in any respect good. A person suffering from severe depression might intentionally get the crockery from the kitchen in order to smash it against the wall while seeing nothing of value in this action – he does not even expect it to make him feel better (Stocker 1979). One way to motivate the rejection of the Guise of the Good thesis is to note the possibility of acting intentionally for no reason at all. Warren Quinn (1993) offers the example of a man who is driven by brute inclination to turn on any radio in his presence, for no further purpose than that he has this inclination. He intends to turn on the radio, but he does not take himself to have any reason to do so. But if acting intentionally for no particular reason is possible, it must also be possible to act for a reason one does not take to be good (Setiya 2007).

The Guise of the Good thesis is of interest in part because we wish to know what makes an entity a moral agent, and why such an entity is held morally responsible for her actions (*see* RESPONSIBILITY). What is it about some actions that makes them attributable to the agent, and why do we evaluate the agent with respect to those actions? Under what conditions can we be said to be acting freely or autonomously (*see* FREE WILL; AUTONOMY)? A theory of free and autonomous agency aims in part to explain when and how action reveals “where the agent stands” (Frankfurt 1988, 1999). For instance, if the Guise of the Good thesis is correct, a person’s intentional actions necessarily reveal something about her evaluative commitments. This link between acting intentionally and judging valuable might be appealed to in an account of what it is for a person to act freely and autonomously as opposed to being a mere locus of causal forces.

Alternatively, even if the Guise of the Good thesis is rejected, we might appeal to the attitude of intention to ground these notions of free agency and responsibility. Perhaps the sufficient conditions for autonomous agency specify a certain psychological structure, where intentions and intention-based policies are fundamental in constituting this structure. The Planning Theory of intention holds that intentions and self-governing policies anchor the psychological functioning constitutive of agency over time by coordinating one’s practical commitments both at a time and over time. These commitments include intentions to treat some considerations as reasons for action and not others, to categorically act in some ways and not others, and to take some general goals as ends in a way that anchors practical deliberation and planning (Bratman 2007). The proposal is that when an action is motivated by an element of the very psychological structure that constitutes the agent’s practical standpoint over time, this amounts to free and autonomous agency.

Lastly, the understanding of intention may also be of relevance to questions in metaethics: the investigation of moral discourse and practice, in abstraction from substantive first-order moral commitments (*see* METAETHICS). A central problem in

metaethics concerns the semantics of moral claims such as “murder is wrong.” While sentences like this have the superficial form of factual assertions, aiming to express a true proposition believed by the speaker, some have denied that moral claims play the semantic role of ordinary indicative assertions. According to the metaethical view known as “non-cognitivism,” the role of moral discourse is instead to express some non-cognitive attitude of the speaker’s (*see* NON-COGNITIVISM). Within the non-cognitivist genus, there are a variety of proposals as to what non-cognitive state of mind is expressed by the use of moral language. On one influential view proposed by Allan Gibbard (2003), the attitude in question is intention: to make a moral judgment is to formulate a kind of plan that rules in some courses of action and rules out others for a variety of conceivable situations. Roughly, to judge that murder is impermissible is to plan to rule out murdering in all possible circumstances, while to judge that murder is permissible is to accept a set of contingency plans that do not exclude murdering. One advantage of understanding moral thought and discourse as expressing the acceptance of plans is that the norms of rationality on intention and planning might aid in explaining why these judgments ought to be consistent and support certain inferences even though they do not express beliefs.

See also: ANSCOMBE, G. E. M.; AQUINAS, SAINT THOMAS; ARISTOTLE; AUGUSTINE, SAINT; AUTONOMY; DESIRE; DIRECTION OF FIT; DOCTRINE OF DOUBLE EFFECT; FREE WILL; GUISE OF THE GOOD; HOBBS, THOMAS; HUME, DAVID; METAETHICS; MOTIVATION, HUMEAN THEORY OF; NON-COGNITIVISM; PRACTICAL REASONING; PRO-ATTITUDES; RATIONALITY; REASONS, MOTIVATING AND NORMATIVE; RESPONSIBILITY; WEAKNESS OF WILL

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