

# I Intentions

Webpage: <https://rjh221.user.srcf.net/courses/intentionwill/>

Why be interested in intention & the will?

(i) Theory of Mind: do intentions constitute a basic psychological kind (along with beliefs, desires, etc.)? Do we need to acknowledge a discrete faculty of the will, or is that just so much mysticism? (And what is a faculty anyway?) If we do have intentions, how do we know about them? What are the rational constraints on them? How do they differ from predictions about our actions? Do we always need them to act? How do intentions relate to intentional action? Can there be disorders of the will (addiction)? And so on.

(ii) Ethics: the importance of intention in evaluating actions and agents. The doctrine of double effect.

(iii) The law: the doctrine of *mens rea*. The doctrine of attempt.

It is contentious whether there was a notion of the will in Aristotle (probably not). Mediaeval philosophy, and much that followed it, made plenty of reference to the will, and to intentions. And yet, through most of the 20th century, analytic philosophy made hardly any mention of it. Why?

Anscombe's Three Uses

- (i) I have an intention to take this course (future directed intention)
- (ii) In taking this course I intend to learn about the will (intention-with-which)
- (iii) I am intentionally taking this course (intentional action)

Three approaches that focus on (ii) and (iii):

- (a) A broadly Wittgensteinian approach: Anscombe
- (b) A behaviorist approach; Ryle; belief-desire theories and the Humean Theory of Motivation
- (c) Davidson

Ryle on the myth of volitions.

Anscombe and neo-Anscombians (Richard Moran, Michael Thompson): to have an intention to do something is to be doing it intentionally; one can be doing it intentionally even if one doesn't complete it.

Davidson: to being with (1963), start with something like (ii), phrased in terms of 'primary reasons'; explain (iii) in terms of it. Later (1978) understand (i) as 'an all-out, unconditional judgement that the action is desirable'.

Velleman: intentions as self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment and represent themselves as such.

Ridge: intentions as *predominant* desires.

Bratman and others: Intentions as *Sui Generis* Mental States

(I) Deliberation curtailment

Two aspects: don't spend too much time; control when you deliberate. Do you need to form an intention to obtain these benefits? Why not just a judgment?

(II) Interpersonal and intrapersonal coordination

Do one's intentions need to be *known* to achieve these benefits? Does one need to know that they will be successful?

(III) Self-knowledge (Velleman)

(IV) Resolving indifference and incommensurability

How do these differ? John Broome's Abraham example.

(V) Resisting temptation

Features needed to achieve (at least the first two of) these results

Control

Stability

Consistency

Means-Ends Coherence

Why aren't they desires?

Consistency requirement; volitional control

Why aren't they beliefs?

Motivating; volitional control; determinacy in cases of indifference and incommensurability. Do they, however, entail beliefs?

### Empirical Work

Stability: Alloy and Abramson on delusions of control. Gollwitzer on deliberative and implementational mindsets.

Control: Gollwitzer on goal intentions and implementational intentions.

### Intentional Action and Acting with an Intention

The video game example (from 'Two Faces of Intention'): I play a game in which the goal is to hit either of two targets with either of two guns. I am ambidextrous, and so can simultaneously shoot with each hand. If both targets are about to be hit simultaneously, the game shuts down. But I consider that it is worth taking this slight risk in order to increase my chance of hitting one of the targets. Do I intend to hit both targets? Bratman argues that I don't. Do I intend to hit one rather than the other? But which? So I have no intention, though I do *endeavour* to hit them both. But, Bratman argues, if I did hit one of the targets, I would intentionally hit it. Are endeavours really distinct from intentions?

Other examples: the doctrine of double effect. The Knobe effect. The intentional as a moral category.

### What has become of the Humean Theory of Motivation?

Modest revision: all intentions must result from desires. More radical revision: they need not. Couldn't we just start out with intentions? Why *must* we start with desires?