

II Intention, Belief & Knowledge

Bratman holds that belief in one's success is not a requirement on intention. He cites various examples (the log; the bookstore visit) in support of this. His final position is that you can't intend to do something if you believe you won't do it; but you can intend in the absence of belief. (Not just a failure to believe; a state of believing neither on way nor the other.)

But this raises some apparent problems:

- (i) how can the account explain how intentions serve to enable coordination if we do not in general believe that we will do what we do intend?
- (ii) how can the account explain why there is a consistency requirement on our intentions?
- (iii) more broadly, how can it explain the special epistemic status that intentions have. How is it that we can know what we intend, perhaps even know what we are intentionally doing, without looking? (Anscombe's concern.)

One response to the first two of these worries is to hold that intention does entail belief in success. Then we can coordinate around what we believe will happen; and consistency follows from a consistency requirement on belief.

Velleman's account goes even further: not only does intention entail belief, it actually *is* belief, though belief of a special kind: 'self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment, and that represent themselves as such'. And this presumably explains how we can know about our intentions, since we know when we form such beliefs.

Self fulfilling: the belief is true as a (causal) result of having the belief. So a prediction that I will fail to finish an essay in time doesn't count as an intention to fail, since it isn't an intention that is self-fulfilling.

Motivated by desire: Consider the insomniac who believes he will not go to sleep, and whose belief is what keeps him awake, and who realizes that this is so. We wouldn't say that he intends to stay awake. But if his belief is motivated by a desire to stay awake, then perhaps we would say that he intends to do so.

Represent themselves as such: not quite sure what work this does. I find Velleman's discussion (Practical Reflection pp. 96ff.) a little hard to follow. I take it that the basic idea is that if we don't think the expectation is self-fulfilling, or don't think that it is motivated by desire, it doesn't count as an intention.

Elsewhere ('What good is a will?' Introduction to *The Possibility of Practical Reason*) Velleman goes further and argues that self-knowledge is a constitutive aim of action.

Some worries

Descriptive: is it possible to form a self-fulfilling belief as a result of one's confidence that it is self-fulfilling? James's rock leaping example. Or imagine that there is a box in the corner and I tell you that inside is a square of card that has whichever color you believe it to have. Can you form a belief about what color it has?

Normative: even if you can do this, are you right to do so? Doesn't this give belief the wrong direction of fit? Don't we form beliefs about our intentions because of their content, and not the other way round? One issue here: couldn't we form

Keeping a belief requirement without equating intention and belief?

We can get an agglomeration requirement just by insisting that intention entails, or presupposes, belief. (Or at least this will give us some agglomeration; it is controversial whether belief agglomerates completely: the lottery paradox.) And that will also give us the coordination benefits. What do we say about Bratman's examples though? They involve partial belief. So perhaps there is some corresponding notion of partial (uncertain) intention. All out belief agglomerates; partial belief doesn't (if I have a .5 belief in p , and a .5 belief in not- p , I don't have a .5, or even a .25 belief in p and not- p). Similarly maybe all out intention agglomerates, and partial intention does not. But couldn't we have all out intentions where we lack beliefs? Anscombe's examples of St Peter, and of the man who is to be tortured.

Knowledge of intention

Go back to knowledge. Anscombe's account: I know what I am intentionally doing without observation. Objection: to know what we are doing don't we have to know what the world is like, and that requires observation? Response: we don't need to successfully complete an action for it to be true that we were intentionally doing it. Someone can be intentionally crossing the road when they are run over. Objection again: but we need to know that we are on the right path? If I am intentionally collecting coconuts, they'd better be coconuts.

Anyway, this speaks only to knowledge of intentional action, not to knowledge of intentions. One thought: perhaps we have knowledge of our intentions in the same way that we have knowledge of our beliefs: by looking out to the world. But what could we be looking to? What it would be best to do? That rules out the possibility of *akrasia*. Alternatively might we look to what we believe we will do (see Alex Byrne, 'Transparency, Belief, Intention')?

Is it true that we have special knowledge of intention? Could it be that we sometimes know and sometimes don't? Perhaps if we form intentions by consciously deciding, and we know what we consciously decide, then we know (not because we remember deciding, but because once we decide we form the belief that we intend, and then we remember that belief). But if we get intentions in other ways—deciding unconsciously; having them implanted by hypnosis—it is less clear.