

# Intention and Reasons for Action

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## I

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In her influential book *Intention* (1958), G. E. M. Anscombe lays out three kinds of cases pertaining to the concept of intention: (1) expression of intention for the future, where intention is the content of the expression ("I am going to move the table."); (2) intentional action, when someone is intentionally performing an action ("I am moving the table"); and (3) intention with which an action is done ("I am moving the table with the intention of serving dinner on it.").<sup>1</sup> To understand the concept of intention is to understand all three kinds of cases. Donald Davidson in his paper *Actions, Reasons, and Causes* (1963) argues that the primary reason for an action is its cause, the primary reason comprising a pair of a pro attitude or the related belief or both. This essay explores each of the three kinds of cases pertaining to the concept of intention, examines the relationship between intentions and actions, reasons and actions, as well as causes and actions.

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## II

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In discussing the first kind of cases pertaining to the concept of intention - expression of intention for the future, Anscombe identifies that intention is a content which may or may not be expressed. She distinguishes expression of intention for the future from prediction. Both are about the future, but prediction justifies the future through evidence while expression of intention for the future justifies the future either through the agents purposeful action or through reasons provided by the agent. For example, one may say: "it is going to take me two hours to get to work." This is a prediction under which the future can be justified through that fact that it does take the person two hours to get to work. On the other hand, one may say: "I am going to eat this apple." Such a statement, an expression of intention for the future, is justified by the agent purposefully eating the apple. Or, one may say: "I am calling a taxi to go to my grandmothers house." The action of calling a taxi is justified by the reason provided by the agent - going to the grandmothers house. Here, the statement "I am going to eat this apple" expresses an intention to perform a certain action, with no implication about further purposes, while the statement "I am calling a taxi go to my grandmothers house" not only expresses an intention for an action, it expresses an intended result of the action. For Anscombe, intended results are reasons for action.

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Questions can arise as to what intention for an action is when there is a chain of intended results or multiple intended results. Such a statement "I am calling a taxi to go to my grandmothers house to eat some delicious apple pie to bring back the wonderful memories of my childhood to try to get out of my depression" has a chain of multiple intended results. Any of the intended results "to go to my grandmothers house", "to eat some delicious apple pie", "to bring back the wonderful memories of my childhood" and "to try to get out of my depression" can be described as an intention for the action of calling a taxi. In fact, the action of calling a taxi can be described multiple ways and continue to be intelligible: "I am going to my grandmothers house." Or "I am going to eat some delicious apple pie." Or "I am going to bring back the wonderful memories of my childhood." Or "I am going to try to get

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<sup>1</sup>G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Oxford Basil Blackwell (1958), 1

out of my depression." If one has to pick out a pair of intention and action, there is no requirement that the intention and the action follow a one-to-one order as long as the intention is future in time relevant to the action. For example, statements such as "I am going to my grandmothers house to try to get out of my depression;"; "I am calling a taxi to eat some delicious apple pie;"; "I am eating some delicious apple pie to bring back the wonderful memories of my childhood;" are all perfectly intelligible. The multiple descriptions for intentions and actions are like musical scales that allow one to move the intentions and the actions up and down the scale. Looking at it another way, multiple descriptions of intentions and actions put intentions and actions on a web, where one can pick out intentions and actions on a one-to-one, multiple-to-one, or one-to-multiple relationship. On this web, the intentions that are one step further away from the action become intended results. For example, "calling a taxi" is the intention and "going to my grandmothers house" is the intended result. The intentions that are further away from the action are motives. Here, "to try to get out of my depression" can become a motive. Both intended results and motives are reasons to act.

Unlike prediction where the future is justified through evidence (such evidence having no input from the agent), justification of intention takes input from the agent through the efforts or doing of the agent. The nature of the intention is that it is internal, it needs not be symbolized. Unlike a command, which requires a sign (or symbol), i.e., words, sounds, writing or gesture, an intention, unless expressed, is private to the holder of the intention. Intention does not seem to require a sense of rational morality in that one seems to be able to have unjustified intentions, e.g., "I am going to steal the last bread from the hungry man and spoil it." In that sense, Anscombe suggests that intention is not limited to moral agents capable of rationality. An infant can express an intention to be with the mother by holding on tight to the mother. A cat can express an intention to catch a bird by stalking the bird. Where do we draw the line then - can a plant express an intention to have more sunlight by leaning toward the sun? 7

Anscombe does not discuss but I wonder, what is the difference between an intention and a mere disposition of the mind? They both reside in the interior of a being. If, for example, even though one does not intend to be melancholy, he is nevertheless gloomy and depressed. During the darkness of his depression, he has no intention do anything other than being overwhelmed by the ocean of thoughts violently taking place internally in his mind. It would seem that his state of depression is not an intention, but a disposition of his mind. From that, if we stipulate that a disposition of the mind is any state of the mind, we can see that disposition of the mind is a broader concept than intention. Only certain dispositions of the mind are intentions. In other words, only a sub-class of all dispositions of the mind are intentions. Although our natural tendency is to deem intention inevitably bound up with action, as Anscombe does in her book, i.e., discussing intention as intentional action and intention with which an action is done, we could perhaps understand that intention is not limited to being related to action. Someone can intend to be happy, not by forcing a smile on her face, but by holding on to a thought I am happy. A yogi practicing meditation abandons all thoughts except for the thought of his breath with the intention of finding focus. These are intentions for a certain mental state but not intentions for action. In short, intention is a disposition of mind that calls to the future where the future can be affected through the agents physical/mental efforts or doing. 8

Can one have an intention without wanting to make any efforts toward the realization of the intention? I think not. Such is a wish or a desire. A wish or a desire is sharply distinguishable from an intention. Can one have an intention for something she does not have any control over? Since intention requires an agents putting forth, or planning to put forth physical/mental efforts or doing, such intention may appear impossible. For example, can someone intend to help her son score a goal at a soccer game by doing movements while watching the game. When her son has possession of the ball, the mother leans left, moves her legs in the air, leans right, and then kicks her leg aiming at the goal. The mothers actions bear no objective logical relationship to the intention she means to achieve. Subjectively, however, to the mother, her intention of helping her son score a goal is a valid one as she puts forth mental/physical efforts to achieve such intention, even though, objectively, the mothers intention bears no logical relationship to the intended result she hopes to achieve. We can now amend the earlier statement on intention as: intention is a disposition of mind that calls to the future where the future can be affected, at least in the agents mind, through the agents physical/mental efforts or doing. 9

How do we distinguish an intention from wishful thinking? Anscombes intention seems to be intentions that are possible, at least in the mind of the agent. They are achievable intentions that are within the bounds of reality. They are intentions an agent has control over. Are intentions relative certain intentions available to some but not others because different people have different beliefs about their different abilities and different capacities to fulfill intentions? If someone has acrophobia in addition to having no skills at mountain climbing, how can his intention to climb to the top of Mount Everest be a valid intention? But impossible dreams are being achieved every day all over the world. A completely paralyzed man without the ability to speak got married twice, raised three children and became one of the most eminent scientists of our time. That is Stephen Hawking. He must have intended these seemingly impossible things for these things to happen. Perhaps seemingly impossible intentions are not impossible intentions as soon as they are intended. As long as a remote, even the slightest possibility of the intention being achievable, as long as the agent sincerely believes it, it has to be a valid intention. Human potential is vast and boundless. If, even with acrophobia and no mountain climbing skills, if one sincerely intends to climb Mount Everest, it become an intention achievable and it is a valid intention. Sincerity in intention is demonstrated when an agent starts to put forth efforts, whether physical or mental, toward the intended action or intended result. On the other hand, if one wants something in the future, but has no plan to put forth any efforts, the mental state is at a pre-intention stage, it is a desire, a fancy, a kind of wishful thinking, but not an intention. 10

We now further examine whether a physically impossible intention so objectively obvious to an agent can be a valid intention. For example, one intends to make the earth flat by stomping on the ground. Intuitively, if this is a true intention, it is crazy and irrational. We have earlier discussed that an intention does not require rationality. Crazy and irrational it may be, if the person starts to put forth efforts, it should be recognized as an intention. Thus, a madmans desire to make the earth flat through stomping the ground with efforts putting forth to fulfill such desire is an intention. Perhaps we want to conclude that the sunflowers leaning towards the sun to get the maximum sun light would not be a valid intention because the sunflowers are not putting forth efforts - the sunflower simply is driven by what has been encoded in its 11

DNA for doing what it does. As we observe so far, putting forth effort, whether mentally or physically, is a necessary condition for an intention. But how do we know? Imagine that the sunflowers are saying now I am turning toward the sun now I am turning some more toward the sun.” Similarly, Anscombe gave an example about Wittgenstein imagining some leaves blown about by the wind and saying “now I will go this way now I will go that way” as the wind blew them.<sup>2</sup> Would it make a difference of the leaves movement if the leaves are without the accompanying thoughts? What if the leaves sincerely believe that their intentions are making a difference in their movements? Objectively, we know that the intentions of the leaves would not matter for their movement. How does one know that? Objective science. One may suggest that the leaves have free will because they have a will to go left and then go right. However, regardless of what the leaves believe about their intentions, their intentions still would not make a difference in their movement. Therefore, while intentions are subjective, based only on the agents belief and her mental/physical efforts or doing, free will relies on an objective standard on whether an agent can give effect to an intention. Because agents seem free to have intentions but not free to have actions, the term “free will” now seems strange to me. We even can assume free will on the part of the leaves and sunflowers. The will is always free, but actions are not. In other words, one is free to have intentions but is not free to have actions to render the intentions. Why isn't the “free will and determinism” issue the “free action and determinism” issue? This seems to be what the character Tom insists in the novel Uncle Toms Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. In a powerful scene when Tom, a slave, is being beaten by his master, Tom insists that while he is not free (to have actions), he is free in mind and in his intentions.

Anscombe also discusses how one detects another's intentions. It seems that in general the agent has the ultimate authority on what her intention is.<sup>3</sup> What is in the agent's mind cannot be seen. However, are intentions a sub-class of self-knowledge? Intentional states such as belief and desire are self-knowledge. But intentions are not like intentional states such as belief and desire which purely occur in the interior. Intentions requires the agent to put forth mental or physical efforts to affect the future. Yet, because intentions themselves and the potential mental efforts put forth remain hidden from the outside world, even though intentions often have ulterior demonstrations, part of intentions remain in the interior, with the agent having the ultimate authority of its content.

### III

As intentions are so bound up with agent putting forth of efforts, especially physical doing, Anscombe directs her discussion to how intentions related to actions. There are two kinds of cases for intentions to relate to action, intentional action and intention with which an action is done. In discussing intentional action, Anscombe distinguishes events that are intentional from events that are not. From the agent's perspective, events that are intentional renders a special sense of the question “why” applicable and, in turn, the answer to “why” provides “reason for acting.” On the one hand, the question “why” addresses the fact that an intentional action

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<sup>2</sup>Anscombe, Intention, 6

<sup>3</sup>Anscombe, Intention, 9

usually has a reason when the action is examined retrospectively. "Why did you knock the cup off the table?" "I was startled by the look on his face." On the other hand, the question "why" addresses the fact that intentional action usually has a purpose prospectively. "Why are you taking a taxi?" - "Because I want to go visit my grandmother." When an intention and an action are looked at concurrently, the "why" question provides a reason for acting. "Why are you staring into the sky for no reason?" - "Because three other people are doing it." The special sense of "why" question all find application in these intentional actions.

For actions not are not intentional, the special sense of "why" question is rendered inapplicable. "Why did you do that?" "I did not know that I was doing that." Or "Why are you doing this?" "I am not aware that I am doing this." The inapplicability of the "why" question here, according to Anscombe, is similar to the question "How much money do you have in your pocket?" "I have none." Since an action can have multiple descriptions, one may know that he is intentionally performing an action under one description but not under another. "Why are you making so much noise?" "I am not aware that I am making noise. I am practicing my new piano piece." Or "Why did you shut me outside of the house?" "I did not mean to shut you out of the house. I wanted to shut the door for the night." Or "Why did you break my Lego construction?" "I only tried to break the Lego construction in front of me. I did not know I broke yours." Therefore, for an action that has multiple descriptions, only the ones that the agent is aware of are the descriptions for the intentional action. The action under the descriptions that the agent is not aware of has no application for the special sense of the "Why" question. 15

Using the special sense of the "Why" question as the criteria for determining whether an action is intentional may run into difficulties. For example, "Why are you lying down?" "I am just lying down for no reason." In this case, the agent is aware of the action, but has neither a reason for it nor a purpose for it. Certain actions are involuntary yawning, sneezing, muscle spasm, etc. and these are clearly not intentional actions. However, one could fall victim to moments of irrationality. When someone becomes extremely angry with another, even though he knows not to shout or scream, even though he takes time beforehand to think about what his reactions ought to be and concludes with certainty that he ought not to shout or scream, he nevertheless starts to shout as soon as he see the person he is angry with. Although he is not insane at that moment of shouting and is aware of what he is doing, yet he continues to shout. "Why am I shouting?" "I cant help it." Is his shouting not an intentional action? It would be counterintuitive to decide that such cases of performing irrational actions against ones better judgement despite his awareness are not intentional actions. 16

Anscombe includes such actions as intentional actions through discussion of mental causes for intentional action. For example, "why did you shut the door in such a panic? "I saw a bear coming this way and was startled." Such a cause, from internal and external stimulation, and not arising from a desire, is a mental cause. The question earlier "Why am I shouting?" should be more accurately answered "Because I am angry." Anger is the mental cause for shouting. A mental cause for an intentional action is not a mental event. The smile of the girl on the street reminds me of my daughter and I cant help but taking a step toward her. It is not a mental event of desire or belief but a mental cause due to sensory input and stimulation. Anscombe says: "a mental cause is what produced this action or thought or feeling 17

on your part: what did you see or hear or feel, or what ideas or images cropped up in your mind, and led up to it?"<sup>4</sup>

Anscombe then distinguishes between motives and intentions. For example, if a man intends to kill someone, he could do out of a good motive or a bad motive. As Anscombe describes, he could do the killing in the forms of "to release the victim from the awful suffering" or in the forms of "to get rid of the swine." As Anscombe describes that there is such phenomenon as doing A in order to B, doing B in order to C, doing C in order to D, and so forth. Here, the action of killing is A, and B stands in for either releasing the victim from the awful suffering or getting rid of the swine. A, B, C, D, are in some ways either chain reactions or ripple effects. Anscombe may call killing an intention and releasing the victim from the awful suffering or getting rid of the swine motives. I do not wish to make such distinctions. A, B, C, D, if conceived in the agents mind, if foreseeable, they are all intentions. Perhaps one is in closer proximity to the action, and the other requires additional conditions to come to pass. But if foreseeable, all of A, B, C, D are in the agents mind, they are all intentions with which the agent act. When Harry Truman signed on a piece of paper to authorize the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, his intention was to end the war. His action also cost the lives of thousands of innocent civilians. For that, Anscombe put Truman in the league of Genghis Khan, Nero, or Hitler and opposed Oxford Universitys proposal to give Truman an honorary degree.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Truman had no intention to hurt innocent civilians on its own. But the action of signing on the piece of paper carried the intention of ending the war and the intention of killing innocent civilians because while the intention of ending the war was what was sought after, the killing of innocent civilians is so obvious an effect that an intention must be constructed. If one insists that some certain and obvious result of an action does not occur in ones mind prior to the action, he will be charged with willful blindness. Willful blindness is a way of objectively constructing an intention when the agent denies having the subjective intention. The construction of intention says that the result of the action is so obvious and natural to someone of your capacity that for you not to see the result is inconceivable. There is also the phenomenon of mixed intentions. Perhaps two people are in a good relationship and they love each other. But one of them needs a green card in order to stay in the United States. So, when they get married, they have the dual intention of being committed to sharing their lives together and helping one of them to obtain a green card so that they can remain together. Such issue of dual intention posts no conflict in the framework we discuss thus far.

Perhaps there is a different way to identify an intentional action. Perhaps we check whether there is a counterpart in the agents mind that corresponds with the action being performed. Lets say an intentional action ought to have a counterpart in the mind. For example, if I have an intention to move the table and I am moving the table, then the action of moving the table is intentional because the action has a counterpart in my mind. In contrast, assume I knock over the chair while moving the table, knocking over the chair is not an intentional act because the action of knocking over the chair does not have a counterpart in my mind while the knocking over is happening. It seems that, in order for an action to be intentional, the counterpart in mind has to be time bound. An intention occurs after the action is not a counterpart. There must exist a kind of mapping between the counterpart in mind and the

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<sup>4</sup>Intention 17-18

<sup>5</sup>Essays on Anscombes Intentions, Chapter 1, 4

action prior or at the time of the action. What does a mental counterpart look like? Certainly, the counterpart and the action are not identical. For example, if someone intends to cross a river on foot but doesn't know where his steps should land, every step is a trial and error and it is impossible for him to know how to take each step beforehand. It may then be impossible to have the kind of accurate counterpart in mind to map to the action. However, as long as mapping between intention, i.e., the counterpart in the mind, and the action is possible, symmetry between the two is not necessary.

Anscombe also characterizes an intentional action as something that the agent knows through "knowledge without observation." This makes sense because an intentional action is one where there is a counterpart in the mind. Knowing this counterpart in mind, the intention, is part of self-knowledge. As Akeel Bilgrami convincingly argues in *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (2006), an agent has direct access to self-knowledge due to the self-knowledge's special property of transparency. Also, as Bilgrami argues, this self-knowledge of intentional state also has the property of authority as discussed earlier, the person with the intention has the ultimate authority to settle what the intention is. It occurs to me that, with an intentional action, self-knowledge of one's intention and performing the action according to intention are insufficient to make the whole process complete. The agent must also know and confirm that the action being performed is indeed the action intended. In other words, to have an intentional action, the agent must also have knowledge of the external world and ensure that there is correct mapping of what is in the external to what is in the internal. For example, if someone intends to cut a tree, but he instead cuts the family dining table, believing that he is cutting the tree. This is not an intentional action based on our earlier discussion requiring that there exist a kind of mapping between the counterpart in mind and the action at the time of the action. There is clearly no mapping between the action of cutting the family dining table and what's in the person's mind. Looking at it from the angle of knowledge, although the agent has self-knowledge of his intention, he nevertheless lacks knowledge that his action is not in accordance with this intention. What is internal to the agent is the agent's first-person perspective. What is external is an objective third-person perspective. Therefore, intentional action requires that the agent performs a matching of a first-person perspective and a third-person perspective.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps not all intentional actions form a sub-class of the things a person knows without observation. Although the intention is knowable to the agent due to the transparency property of self-knowledge, an intentional action, if it interacts with any external object, requires the agent to make an observation to ensure that the action is indeed as intended. It is true that we intuitively understand that certain intentional actions do not require observation, for example, if I intend to lift my index finger up from the computer keyboard, I could do so without observation. I could move my index finger to touch my tip of the nose with my eyes closed, like the sobriety test performed by a police officer on potential drunk driver. These are actions that we intuitively come to understand that a well-functioning human being is capable of performing. However, actions that involve an external object must require the supplemental knowledge of the external object through observation. If I intend to sit down on a chair, I must make observations to make sure I will indeed sit on the chair. Anscombe raises this problem of intentional actions requiring two

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<sup>6</sup>I base this idea on what I heard from L.A. Paul at a lecture 2019.

objects of knowledge ones intention and what is actually taking place.<sup>7</sup> Because Anscombe has argued that ones knowledge of what one does is not by observation, her solution for this problem includes the same argument. Her formula for addressing the problem is what she refers to as "I do what happens." When the description of what happens is the very thing which I should say I was doing, then there is no distinction between my doing and the things happening. <sup>8</sup> This explanation is not entirely satisfying. Not all intentional actions are like throwing rocks out of the window you intend to do something, take your action and accept what happens. Some intentional actions require constant negotiation with the environment, e.g., crossing the river one step at a time on foot, and therefore requires external observation to continue to carry out the intention.

I would like to suggest that knowledge of ones intentions, or self-knowledge, is most meaningful and useful when the self-knowledge also contains knowledge outside of ones own mind, i.e. knowledge by observation. When one suddenly wakes up in the middle of the night, she knows it is night time. She believes that it is night time self-knowledge. However, her self-knowledge would be more meaningful and useful if she checks out the clock on the night stand to find out that it is 2:30 AM. Similarly, if one is dropped off by the road side on the way from New York to Washington, DC in the dark of the night, self-knowledge may give him the idea that he is on the way from New York to Washington, DC. But the self-knowledge will be more helpful and meaningful if he could rely on his GPS to find out that he is only five-minute walk away from a train station. Does needing external observation cause self-knowledge of the intention to lose the property of authority the agent has the final authority on the content of the intention? I do not think so. If something has both a private element and a public element, the agent as the only one who has access to the private element will remain the final authority on what the something is.

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## IV

For the third kind of cases on the concept of intention, intention with which an action is done, Anscombe gets to "intended result." For example, if I intend to get some fresh air the intended result, I may take the action of going outside or opening the window. The action itself is not as important as the result which is the intention in the agents mind. Once the intended result is set, the agent then takes actions toward producing that result based on whats available or what the agent is capable of or what the agent prefers to do. The intended result as intention is another way of getting at Anscombes classification of intentional action as an action to which a certain sense of the question Why? is given applications. In other words, the intended result as intention gets at Anscombes implication on the teleological structure of intentions. We tend to only intend for the end result either because the particular action to get to the result is not known at the time of intention or because the particular action is one of the many options available or that the particular action is contingent on other things being available. Not all intentional actions have intended results. Some are merely reactions, e.g., in the case of mental causes such as getting startled and knocking off the cup or shouting out of anger. We discuss a chain of multiple intended results and a web of intentions and actions in earlier parts of the essay, which illustrates the teleological structure of intentions and actions.

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Anscombe discusses motives and reasons for actions, and motives as reasons. For example, when someone asks, why did you kill him?, the answer because he killed my father is a motive and a reason but not a cause. A motive and a reason belong to the same category of things in that they are both directed at what Anscombe describes as intention with which an action is done. In the question and answer above, although because he killed my father states a past event and not an intention, the intended result is implicit I want revenge. Therefore, stating a reason or a motive for an action is to state the intended result. As I do not make a distinction between motives and intentions, I do not make a distinction between a motive and a reason. A motive and an intention are indistinguishable because both tend to the intended result, even though one may be in a closer proximity to the action in question. A reason is not necessarily an intended result and can include mental causes as described earlier, e.g., why did you shut the door in such a panic? I saw a bear coming this way and was startled. This is a mental cause such that the action has no intended result, but it is a reaction to something due to external stimulation or internal perception. A reason can also be another way of stating the intended result, e.g., "What is the reason you called a taxi?" "I want to go to my grandmothers house." Therefore, there are two types of reasons for intentional actions, namely, mental causes and intended results. In the sense of mental causes, reasons are causes while in the sense of intended result, reasons are motives and intentions.

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Anscombe insists that motives are not causes. Here I would like to discuss causes. Aristotelian metaphysics provides for four causes of being: (i) the material cause - of what is it constituted? For example, the bowl is made from bronze. Bronze is the material cause; (ii) the efficient cause - what moves it? For example, the movement of my fingers causes the keys on the computer to move; (iii) the formal cause - what is it? For example, I am a human being; and (iv) the final cause - what is its purpose (telos)? Health, for example, is the purpose of exercising. It seems that we could at least borrow the idea of an efficient cause and a final cause from the Aristotelian framework and apply them to intentions. When an intention is expressed in terms of an intended result, they point to a purpose, e.g. "I am calling a taxi to go to my grandmothers house." Here, the intended result, or the intention, points to a purpose, and the intention of "going to my grandmothers house" serves as a final cause of the action of calling a taxi. When an intention is a mental cause, it points to the intention being an efficient cause in the Aristotelian framework, e.g. "I was startled, and I knocked over the cup." Or "I was so angry, and I started to shout." When one talks about the cause of an action, as Davidson does in *Actions, Reasons, and Causes*, it instantly feels off because as complex as an action is, it is often the result of multiple inputs. Pinning down the cause seems unrealistic. To speak of the cause of an action is to ignore the nature of complexity in an action. It is still insufficient even with Davidson's use of a pair of (a) the pro attitude or (b) the related belief or both. When one says: "the cause of B is A," it points to the inevitability of B in the presence of A. Yet the presence of intention often do not make action inevitable. Free action is not inevitable. In contrast, saying that an intention is an efficient cause that moves the action or a final cause that provides a purpose recognizes the complexity and possible multiple inputs to an action. Perhaps the cause under Davidson, the primary reason, which comprises the pro attitude, the related belief or both, should be a formal cause for action, in that it is a cause that speaks to the constituency of the agent. One knows that an action can not take

place unless the environment supports it. So perhaps the environment, comprising the objects and the structures in the world, is the material cause of action.

Davidson suggests that "whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterized as (a) having some sort of pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that his action is of that kind." He argues, because the reason for an agent to do something is often a matter of naming the pro attitude (a) or the related belief (b) or both, the pro attitude (a) and the related belief (b) are the primary reason why an agent performs an action. This claim feels rather counterintuitive. If one goes up to the top of a snowy mountain, being a good skier, she thinks that skiing down the mountain will be fun (pro attitude (a)), and she believes that she can ski very well (related belief (b)), so she performs the action of skiing down the mountain. Imagine another person who also thinks that skiing down the mountain will be fun and believes that he can ski very well, but because he is neither at the top of the mountain nor is he actually capable of skiing, he will not be able to perform the action of skiing down the mountain. Because, in addition to the agents intention, i.e. the pro attitude and the related belief, being at the top of the mountain and being skillful at skiing are also necessary causes of the action of skiing down the mountain, calling intention, i.e. the reason for action, the primary reason, as Davidson calls it, does not seem to match our experience or our intuition. 27

Therefore, I propose, mirroring the Aristotelian framework of causes for being, a framework of causes for action: (i) the material cause what is the environment? I am calling a taxi to go to my grandmothers house. I am able to call the taxi because there are taxis around where I am in New York city; (ii) the efficient cause what moves it? I was startled, so I knocked over the cup; or I was angry, so I shouted; (iii) the formal cause what are the pro attitudes and beliefs of the agent? I am kind, and I gave the homeless person all the money in my wallet; (iv) the final cause what is the purpose of the action? I am calling the taxi to go to my grandmothers house. 28

## V

Anscombe does not discuss degree (or intensity) of intention. But is there such a thing as a strong versus weaker intention? Surely, everyone intends to write a good paper. What makes some peoples intention stronger and therefore causes them to put more efforts into writing the paper than those having weaker intention of writing the paper? Two people both intend to help the poor. He gives \$5 and feels good about himself for doing that. She empties her wallet and feels that she has not helped enough. What distinguishes the two? Should they be distinguished? It can be said that ones mind often contains multiple intentions. As Walt Whitman so famously wrote in Song of Myself, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." One can have multiple intentions at any given time. How do the multitude of intentions end up represented in an action? Because there can be multiple intentions present at the time of action, these multiple intentions could pull a potential action in all directions. Which intention or intentions take precedence and end up being the one(s) causing the action may be a matter of competition among the intentions. Imagine man as a machine. Perhaps all the 29

intentions are adjusted by their various intensity with each one breaking down to its four causes and the agents action is thereby computed. Intentions can also affect one another as if in a complex system. Each intention can change and can interact with other intentions.

## **References**

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Endnotes