

Intention and Value

By

Joseph Raz¹

In previous writings I joined those who take the view that action with an intention is an action for (what the agent takes to be) a reason, where whatever value there is in the action is a reason for it. This paper sketches the role of reasons and intentions in leading to action with an intention. Part One explains how when humans act with an intention they act in the belief that there is value in the action. Part Two explains the relative role of value and intention in “producing” the action, and relates their role to that of motivation.

Part One: Intention and Belief

1. Intentions

For people, having intentions involves belief in the value of what they intend (to do or resolve, or be etc.).² This thesis, central to the development of my argument, encounters immediate and obvious questions and difficulties. Why, one may ask, does the thesis assert belief in the value of the object of the intention, rather than belief in the value of the intention itself? The answer is that normally intentions are not formed for their own sake, but to lead to the intended action. What constitutes this normality? How does it manifest itself? First, that the specification of an intention involves specification of its object (I intend

¹ I benefited from objections and suggestions made by Victor Tadros, Yair Levi and Pekka Väyrynen.

² Throughout the paper ‘actions’ will refer to actions, omissions or activities. The only intentions I discuss are intentions to do or omit something. In various locutions ‘intentions’ refer to other conditions. I may, for example, intend something to be the case, meaning expect or hope that it will be the case partly as a result of something I do (e.g. I intended you to be grateful ...). The belief in the value of the intended that I refer to can be no more than belief that what is intended is better than the available alternatives. Note that the thesis is about ‘belief in the value of ...’. It is not about ‘valuing ...’. Valuing something is not to be confused with belief in the value of that thing. On valuing see: Scheffler, “Valuing,” in *Equality and Tradition*, pp. 15-40; Theunissen (unpublished).

to drink the water in this glass now, I intend to repeat my teachings this year next year, I intend to help my family during this recession period, I intend to help the fight against discrimination in my country, I intend to dance all the way to the grave, etc.). Second, unfulfilled intentions, which were not revoked, that is which the agent did not decide to abandon, show some failure (though not necessarily a fault) in the agent who had them. Finally, even abandoned or revoked intentions may establish a failure in the agent if their occurrence is due to lack of resolve, to an inadequate ability to persevere, etc. There are occasions in which there is value in having an intention independently of any value there may be in its object. When agents think that this is the case the belief involved in their intentions would be, or include, that there is value in the intention itself. I will return to this point later in this article.³ But there is another difficulty we need to attend to here: Small children have intentions before they have the concept of something being valuable or of value. Furthermore, animals of other species that never have beliefs in values, and are incapable of such beliefs, have intentions.

I am thinking of the duck I watched in Regent's Park the other day. He was swimming in a shallow artificial pond, fed by water cascading down a gentle slope bouncing down a flat ledge before flowing to the pond in a small waterfall. Some ducks were on that ledge, and my duck who was in the pond, swam near the ledge trying to mount it, and failed, slipping back into the pond. He turned back swam a couple of metres away from the ledge, and then turning again swam towards it, approaching at a slightly different point and tried again to climb the ledge, failing again and trying again, finally succeeding at his third attempt. My duck not only acted intentionally, that is he not only displayed an intention in action, he also had an independent intention, an intention which one can have even while not acting on it.⁴ He intended to get to the place to which he eventually got. And that intention governed a number of his actions, guiding their choice and the manner of their execution. But he had no belief in the value of being in, or of getting to, the place that he intended to get to.

Having a belief in the value of the object of the intention is not constitutive of having an intention. Yet, necessarily, those possessing rational powers who have an intention do have that belief. I will try to explain why in the usual way. Given that intentions are a distinctive kind of mental state, not consisting in a combination of some other states, or of some other states under certain conditions, they can only be explained by pointing in a

³ The question is discussed in detail in *From Normativity to Responsibility*, Chapter Three.

⁴ The concept of an independent intention (discussed in *From Normativity to Responsibility*) is similar to "future intentions" used in some philosophical writings, except that independent intentions, while they may be future directed, need not be so. They can be the intentions governing current actions. Unless otherwise indicated I refer to independent intentions when writing of intentions.

general way to their connections to actions, beliefs etc., even though the “pointing” is not always perspicuous when taken in isolation.

Intentions are states in which the agent is set to act. Being in that state takes one some way towards the action. An example will help. It is of the way intentions bring people closer to the intended actions. And generally when referring to people I have in mind people with unimpeded access to their rational powers, powers that are themselves undamaged. With people with limited rational powers, and with animals of other species, there will be different descriptions, appropriate to their psychology. The claim is that so long as we are dealing with a being who can have intention we are dealing with a being who has mental states, or conditions of this generic kind.

My example concerns Jane, who is reading in her study. It is late afternoon and the light is slowly fading, weakening. Being absorbed in her book she does not want to interrupt her reading to go to the doorway to turn on the light. She intends to turn on the light when next she goes to the toilet, as she knows that she will before too long. Half an hour later she goes to the toilet and when returning she automatically, unreflectively turns on the light. She is not then conscious of her prior intention, and only marginally of her action. But she turned on the light intentionally because she had that intention, and was guided by it. Compare the situation with another: Imagine that Jane was so deeply absorbed in her book that she did not form the intention mentioned. On her return from the toilet she did not turn on the light as above, but just as she entered her study I said to her (or the thought came to her unbidden): would it not be good to turn on the light? She paused, however infinitesimally, and realising that indeed the light was rather uncomfortably dim, turned on the light. It is this step, assessing the situation and forming an intention, which was absent in the first example, made unnecessary by the intention she conceived some time earlier. The absence of that step illustrates the way in which the intention set her to act, took her nearer the action. []

Note that in the first example the absence of the extra step was not necessary. It was possible. It is always (well, when we are not asleep etc.) possible to review and revise our intentions. But their importance to our life lies in the fact that there is no need always to do so, and that we often do not. Also, while typically we are aware of our intentions when forming them (though not necessarily: self-deception and other conditions may obscure their formation from our minds), typically, we are not conscious of them for the entire duration of having them, and they can guide our actions even when we are not aware of the fact. Even though many of our intentions (like those in the examples above) are of short duration, they are, while they exist, like beliefs, like having goals and attachments, states constituting aspects of our settled, resolved, orientation to the world.

I repeated several times that intentions guide actions. They can of course fail to do so. I can unintentionally do something that I intend to do. I intend to turn on the light, when it suddenly comes on. 'Why did the light come on?' 'You turned it on'. 'Oh I did not realize that I did that'. 'You moved the switch to the "on" position'. 'Oh that is the light switch? I was looking for it and in doing so just leaned against it and accidentally turned it on'. It has become a familiar example: we can do what we intend because we intend, but unintentionally. While the intention plays a causal role in producing the action, it does not guide the action.

One can also intentionally do something in a way that is unrelated to one's intention to do it. Think of Jane again, and vary the example yet again: She intends to turn on the light on her way back from the toilet. But as she returns, someone, gun in hand, threatens her: 'turn on the light or I will blow your brains out'. She intentionally turns on the light, but from the moment she encounters him her intention to do so anyway completely flies out of her mind in the shock of the encounter. She did not abandon it or forget it. It is common for our intentions not to be present in our mind when concentrating on other matters. As we saw, they may still guide our actions even then. But they may not. We may be so deeply immersed in some activity, or startled or shocked or otherwise diverted from our dominant frame of mind, that the intentions, though neither abandoned nor forgotten, are silenced, disabled for awhile. That is what happened to Jane when encountering the gunman. Her action though intentional is not over-determined, as it were. It is not guided both by the new intention to avoid the threat and by the previous one. That previous intention is not guiding her at all. It was rendered temporarily inoperative. An intentional action is guided by a pre-existing independent intention when it is performed because of that intention, and the manner of its performance is governed by that.⁵

Three constitutive elements of intentions that are relevant to our discussion. It is constitutive of intentions that: (a) They set the agent to act (as intended), resolve him so to act. Given that action with an intention is an action the agent resolved to take, forming intentions bring the intended action closer. One element of it is already in place. (b) They can both lead to and govern the intended actions, and other actions facilitating them. They play a causal role in the "production" of the action, though as will be seen in the discussion of motives later on, it may be misleading to say that they "cause the action". (c) When they do lead to and govern the intended actions they govern choice and manner of action through the operation of the rational powers of the agent. This last condition explains why it

⁵ Though we need to remember that agents can change the intentions that guide an action in mid-performance.

is wrong or misleading to give a purely dispositional analysis of the second condition. Whether the intention leads to the action depends on various contingencies, but also on the proper functioning of the agent's rational powers. Using their rational powers, agents identify the opportunity for the intended action, the advisability of preparatory or facilitative actions, and direct and adjust the action (trajectory of movement, speed, etc.) to fit the intention.

I will return to the three constitutive elements of intentions below. The remainder of Part One concerns the difference that human rational powers make. All these constitutive elements are true of my duck. The intention sets him to act, and governs and guides his actions: he swims in the direction he does, etc. because of his intention. And the intention guides him through the functioning of his rational powers. Its guidance relies on his (perceptual) beliefs about the location of the ledge relative to his location, the conditions of the water etc. and he relies on his knowledge of how to navigate himself and how to overcome certain obstacles, etc. That the duck has intentions entails that he has beliefs and other rational powers. It does not entail that his rational powers are the same as ours. They include, and they must include, given that he can have future directed intentions, an ability to choose means directed at ends that he has, and whose pursuit he can intend. Where he can intend the end he can choose some means to that end. Crucially, this does not mean that the duck can choose among his ends (nor that he can recognize or choose all the means that would have served his end had he been able to choose them).

Given that ends may themselves also be means to other ends, the duck may be able to choose among some ends one suitable to a further end of his. What is not assumed is that to be able to intend an end he must have the rational capacity to approve, revise or jettison that end.⁶ But is not that power part of, or at any rate a necessary concomitant of the power to choose a means (namely to choose facilitative steps) to the end? The doubt is not based on the thought that if we have some rational powers we have them all. There is plenty of evidence that that is not so. The doubt is more specific: can I intend to do something without knowing that I intend to do so? Can I φ in order to secure E, without knowing that I intend to secure E? And if I know that I intend E, can it be the case that I cannot approve or disapprove of having that intention?

I think that those who intend to φ know that they do. But that knowledge consists in their seeking for ways of making it the case that E, in their inclinations to avoid acts that will make E harder to achieve. In other words it consists (in part) in conduct that is guided

⁶ So far as I know any animal that can pursue an end can abandon the pursuit, the end unachieved. It does not follow that they can decide to do so. They may abandon intentions when their attention is diverted by something or other, etc.

by the end of realizing E. That establishes that they intend E. These and similar facts (e.g. that they have a sense of satisfaction at securing E) establish that they know that they intend E. It may be objected that that falls short of showing that these beings believe that they intend E. Possibly so, but if so then knowledge does not imply belief. We could keep an open mind on that controversial issue.

An open mind on that issue does not require doubting whether the duck can have any beliefs. What I observed may not warrant attributing to him capacity for having beliefs whatever their content, e.g. he may not have the capacity to have self-referential beliefs. But it is entirely possible that he can have false beliefs (e.g. about ways of getting to the ledge), which would show that he is capable of having some beliefs. In conclusion, the three constitutive elements of intentions that we discussed imply that to have intentions one must be capable of having knowledge or beliefs that some acts would or may facilitate the realization of one's intentions, and therefore that one has those intentions. But one need not have belief in the value of one's intention or of its object, and therefore one need not have beliefs about the value of the facilitative steps.

Ducks can learn from experience. I was not assuming that my duck's successive attempts to get to the ledge were improved by the experience of his earlier failed attempts. His learning may have involved correcting false beliefs. But learning from experience need not depend on reflection on one's experience and changing one's beliefs as a result of such reflection. We are aware of ways in which people change their habits in light of their experience without even being aware of the change, let alone of its origins. Conditioning is one account of how such learning may occur, but we should not assume that either conditioning, or capacities due to some evolutionary advantage explains all learning. All we need acknowledge is that the possibility of learning does not require reflection about one's beliefs, and therefore it does not require belief in the value of the objects of one's intentions.

2. Human Intentions: how do value beliefs come in?

Does not that contradict my contention that human intentions (the intentions that humans have) involve belief in the value of their object? It does not. People (not all of them and my claim should have been qualified to apply only to people in full possession of their rational powers) do have rational powers that include the power to assess, affirm or criticize the objects of all their intentions. It does not follow, and we need take no position on the matter, that people can abandon any intention they have, or that there are no intentions that they cannot avoid having. Nor does it follow that people assess the value, the point or worthwhileness, of everything that they are able to assess. Obviously, there are many

matters about the value of which people have no view, even though they are able to have such a view.

But two points should be born in mind: First, our rational powers are active and engaged throughout our waking life (though they are not always functioning at their best). We can decide to reflect on this matter or that. But we do not need to decide whether to reflect nor do we need an advance intention to reflect on a matter in order to do so. Our rational powers engage with matters which attract our attention. Certain phenomena, events or happenings are salient and they attract our attention and engage our rational powers willy nilly (though for how long and to what effect will then depend on the functioning of our rational powers). With time we develop habits and dispositions which make us take up for examination matters that, if those habits and dispositions are well judged, merit or require our rational attention.

Second, our intentions set us to act, they move us closer to the action in dispensing with certain controls over whether to act (as intended) or not. Adopting an intention is up to a point like adopting a purpose. It is subject to revision, and revisions do not require much to be justified, but so long as it is not revised it remains my purpose and I can pursue it in action without the need to reconsider it or re-adopt it. That happens when the action follows the intention right away (so that the opportunity for action is thought to be appropriate at the same time). “Future directed intentions” (as they are called) can be followed into action only upon judging that the opportunity for action is appropriate, but they set us to act intentionally in that we have already adopted the purpose that the intention constitutes.

Of course saying that does not add to the explanation of how formation of an intention takes us closer to the intended action sketched above. And it reaffirms that intentions are forms of practical resolve. They are not beliefs. For human beings, however, having an intention means (a) that one has formed the view that the action is advisable, and (b) that means that one need not raise again the question of whether it is advisable to do so. That too manifests the way in which, for humans, forming an intention takes one closer to the action (to acting with an intention) than one was before.

But why? Perhaps we can agree that if for humans forming an intention to φ involves a belief (that is not an integral part of the intention) that it is advisable (right, or something like that) to φ then having a future directed intention will make an intentional action (meaning acting with that intention) possible without re-examining, re-confirming, that belief, and in that way it brings the agent closer to the action, an action that – being done with an intention – would otherwise involve forming such a belief at the time of action. But why does the formation of an intention involve such a belief at all?

The answer is in the two features just noted. Forming intentions is adopting purposes, and that makes their formation salient for assessment by our rational powers, powers that are always engaged and (more or less) alert to matters that should be examined. Risking circularity one would be inclined to say that we cannot act intentionally (meaning here acting with an intention to do what we do) without assenting to the action, without taking it to have a point. Hence, given that once we intend we waive the necessity for a further assessment, having an intention must involve having the view that its object (or the intention itself) is worthwhile.⁷

But, one may object, none of this shows that we attend to and deliberate about the value of each one of our intentions. That is indeed true, but it is no objection to the thesis that human intentions involve belief in the value of their object. Having beliefs does not require attending to them. It does not require that the believer ever entertained the belief, or even was aware of it. I do not mean merely that people need not have their beliefs in mind, entertain them etc. all the time. I mean that they can have beliefs that they never had in mind, beliefs that have never occurred in their deliberations or reflections. For example, until I thought it up now, to use as an example, the thought that $1300+1=1301$ never occurred to me. Yet I had this belief for many years. This raises the question: if I never thought (i.e. it was never in my mind) that $1300+1=1301$ what does my believing that consist in?

First, another question: Is it not the case that I know, and knew all along, that $1.3+1.7=3$ rather than I believed that to be the case? In this case it is more natural to speak of my knowledge than about my belief. It does not follow that I did not have the belief as well. That I did have it becomes apparent when considering cases in which I do not have knowledge. Suppose I believe that no woman over 40 can bear children. I believe that because someone I trusted told me so. That is a belief that did occur to me, that I had in my mind at least once. It follows, that I also believe that women who had their fortieth birthday two hundred days ago cannot bear children. This is my belief even though I may never have had it in mind, and of course there is no question of knowledge here, since the belief is false. If I have the belief in such cases there is a strong case for holding me to have it even when I not only believe but also know.

So, what makes it the case that I have a belief that I never had in my thoughts? It is common to take the content of each belief to be expressed or represented in a proposition. There is nothing wrong with that so long as it does not induce an over simplistic view of the conditions which determine what is the content of a belief one has and of the conditions

⁷ For a more nuanced and detailed discussion see my *Engaging Reason*, chapter 2, and *From Normativity to Responsibility*, chapter 4.

that determine whether one has that belief.⁸ The temptation to think that if one believes that *p* then the thought that *p* occurred to one, was in one's mind, at least at one time, is a result of such simplistic ways of thinking about beliefs. For one thing the thesis that if I have a belief that is not currently in my mind it must have been in my mind sometime before does not help much with the question "in what does one's belief consists when it is not in one's mind?" Why would the fact that it was once in one's mind make a difference? After all we may forget, thus ceasing to have beliefs that we once had.

The answer that suggests itself is that we have a belief if and only if it comes readily to mind when the question arises (perhaps that thought can be fleshed out like this: when we have reason to ask ourselves whether *P*, we instantly affirm that *P*), and we do so even though there was no new source of information, or of putative information, that could establish that we have just acquired it, that it is a new belief deriving from that source. We should and could improve that test. For example, it is sufficient to show that we had the belief all along if affirmation of the proposition is instantaneous when our attention is not distracted, and our rational powers not dimmed (by tiredness, alcohol etc.), and only if there is a plausible account of how we acquired it at some past time, or period (for example that we saw something that could have generated a perception-based belief, even though we were not aware of it at the time).

Possibly a test along these lines may provide a sufficient condition for possession of a belief, and one point in its favour is that it does not require that we ever were aware of having that particular belief. But unless enriched it does not distinguish having a belief and some cases in which we are merely disposed to form a belief, and form it, instantaneously, when prompted. Furthermore, even if it provides a sufficient condition for belief, the test does not suggest an explanation of why it is a correct test. What is it about beliefs that makes it a correct test? Moreover, the test does not show, is not meant to show, and it is not the case, that our beliefs affect us only through being recalled to mind. They are our beliefs and they affect us and our life even if never called to mind, even if we never become aware of them or of having them, that is at least part of the difference between beliefs and dispositions to form beliefs – the latter do not shape our perspective on things while beliefs do. Explaining that is part of explaining what constitutes having a belief.

It is helpful here to recall one similarity between beliefs and intentions. They are both states in which one's orientation towards the world (including oneself) is set. With intentions, as we saw, one is set to act in a certain way, and that means that some of the steps leading to action with an intention have already taken place. Metaphorically speaking,

⁸ As will emerge, one mistaken simplification to avoid is the assumption that the two sets of conditions I just referred to are necessarily the same.

one has waived the need for a certain additional control on whether to perform the action. Beliefs are less specific in the way they affect our orientation towards the world. We can only say that when we believe that P we are taking the world as being one where P is the case.⁹ That affects what else we believe, what intentions we may have (assuming that there is some believed feasibility condition on the possibility of intentions), and which of the intentions that we may have it is sensible to have. It affects which emotions we can have, and which emotions are beyond criticism and which are not. It also affects the limits of our imaginative powers, and of the meaning and significance of various imaginings. In all these regards beliefs differ from suppositions, hypotheses, desires, wishes, and many other psychological states that lack that “being-settled” element, and obey different conditions for happy cohabitation with other desires, wishes, imaginings, day dreams, suppositions, etc.

And, as with intentions, the way beliefs are states in which one’s attitude towards the world is set consists in waiving the need for some steps that mark one’s control of oneself, of one’s attitudes, so that even though beliefs are transient and revisable, one waived the need to take those steps. Once one came to believe that it will be warm tomorrow one could proceed, in thought, intention and action, on that basis, without any need (though not without the possibility) of raising and answering the question: will it be warm tomorrow? So long as one has no view whether it will be warm tomorrow it is irresponsible, and sometimes irrational, to proceed in the same way. One has first to answer the question: will it be warm tomorrow? In forming the belief one has answered that question in advance (of later planning or deliberation on other matters, etc.).

Should it not be warranted beliefs rather than beliefs that entitle one to proceed without asking whether the belief is justified? By the same token one could argue that it is not intentions but only justified intentions that bring one closer to the action. In making these observations about intentions and beliefs we are not implying that the condition is good or justified in each individual case, regarding each intention and each belief. We are merely describing/analysing systemic aspects of the psychology of beings that have intentions and beliefs. Such beings necessarily have rational powers, as both beliefs and intentions are controlled and guided by one’s rational powers. Hence, they are liable to be irrational, namely when the rational faculties malfunction, when the rational powers are lax, and these beings have beliefs or intentions that they should have avoided as unjustified, and they are irrational, akratic, if they are aware that an intention or a belief is unjustified.

⁹ Though belief can be imperfect, as well as a matter of degree, and that requires modifying the statement in the text above, as does of course the fact that we are sometimes irrational in not responding appropriately to our beliefs.

The grounds for attributing belief that there is some good in the object of one's intention are analogous to those for attributing to me belief that $3000 + 1 = 3001$. Given what we believe and know (must believe or know to have intentions) and given that we have rational powers we also have the attributed belief.

Six clarifications would help to establish that conclusion: First, some who would agree with the preceding would add a qualification to the possibility of people having beliefs that never occurred to them, namely that the people in question have the concepts used in expressing the content of the belief. If so then people who do not have the concept of value cannot believe that the objects of their intentions have some value. I think that this restriction is mistaken. Some restrictions along those lines apply, though I will not attempt to formulate any. However, as stated the restriction is not true of the concept of belief. Example: imagine a person who believes that there are some chairs in the room. It is true of him that he believes that the room contains some items of furniture, even if he does not have the concept of furniture. Another example: people who believe that the warmth of an object is affected by the warmth of its environment also believe that the temperature of an object is affected by the temperature of its environment, even if they do not have the (scientific) concept of temperature. More generally, in most contexts when people believe that some object falls under the concept G, and if it is true in virtue of the essential properties of G that any G is an F then they believe that that object is an F, even if they do not have the concept of F, unless they hold (on independent grounds) a belief that is inconsistent with "all Gs are Fs". And the same holds if G is an "everyday" concept and F is a theoretical equivalent, the theoretical version of G. But for this it would have been difficult to develop any general account of any topic to do with people's beliefs.¹⁰

Second, does not the fact that some people believe that intentions do not involve belief in the value of their object show that at least those people's intentions do not involve such beliefs (that they fall within the exception mentioned above)? It does not, because the exception has to be qualified (or understood to be sensitive to the following observation). People may have concepts and beliefs while being mistaken about some features of these concepts and beliefs. Our interest is in cases in which the mistakes are due to a theoretical misunderstanding of what those beliefs and intentions involve. They have the belief but they are unaware of the fact because they misdescribe or misunderstand it due to their theoretical mistakes. For example, if self-deception involves holding contrary beliefs then people who do not believe that self-deception involves such beliefs nevertheless can be self-deceived, in which case, contrary to their theoretical belief, they do have contrary beliefs.

¹⁰ Possibly the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* beliefs helps with the point I am making, but possibly the point is more general.

Third, there is no cogent argument (analogous to the argument that intentions involve belief in the value of their object) that every belief involves another belief that it is true. Any belief is a belief that things are as it expresses them to be. No further belief is in play. Intentions, however, are not beliefs. But their formation assumes belief – as explained.

Fourth, many assume that there is some physical condition, e.g. some brain state, necessary for the existence of beliefs. Similarly, people may assume that there are psychological entities, beliefs, whose existence is necessary for any being to have a belief. Such suppositions are not discussed in this paper. However, it is important that if some such suppositions are true, it does not follow that there is a distinct physical state, or a distinct psychological entity for each distinct belief. It would be more sensible to assume that there is one physical condition, say, underpinning the existence of any set of beliefs such that the person having them cannot have one of them without having all of them (for some kind of necessity, which I will not consider here). For example, for most people it is possible to believe that there are chrysalises in Victoria without believing that there are butterflies in Victoria, and vice versa. For such people having both beliefs may involve having two distinct physical conditions, each underpinning one of them. But as having simple arithmetical beliefs about real numbers requires a basic understanding of the arithmetic of real numbers, no one can believe that $3000 + 1 = 3001$ without also believing that $3001 + 1 = 3002$. Therefore one physical condition may underpin both beliefs.

Fifth, allowing for everything argued for so far one may still doubt whether belief in the value either of the object of the intentions or of the intention itself must accompany all our intentions. And that is a just observation. Given that the belief is not an essential feature of intentions, but rather a result of their nature and the possession of human rational powers there are various ways, not all of which can be anticipated in informative detail, in which failure of our rational powers will make for intentions not accompanied by such a belief. Mostly irrationalities would lead not to intentions without value beliefs but to irrational beliefs in the value of the intention or its object; mostly, the intention will be abandoned, or the belief corrected once the conditions that degraded one's rational powers (intoxication, hypnosis etc.) pass. But that would not always be so. Exceptions of that kind attach to most general truths about human psychology.

Habitual action is sometimes mentioned as intentional action undertaken out of habit and without any accompanying value belief. As a generalisation about all actions out of habit this is mistaken as the habit may be accompanied by a belief that there is value in each and every of its instances. Equally, some actions performed out of habit are not performed with an intention to do them, even though they are intentional actions. On most occasions when I leave home in a south-easterly direction my destination requires me to cross Charing

Cross Rd. But often enough it does not, and quite commonly when I walk say to the National Gallery I will suddenly realise that I crossed Charing Cross Rd., and will have to backtrack. When I cross it on such occasions my action is intentional, but it is not done with an intention to cross it, nor with any other intention. It is not my intention to walk to the National Gallery that made me cross it (as it would have done had I thought that it is east of Charing Cross Rd.). It is my momentary failure to be guided by my intention that causes my mistaken action. In brief, there are too many kinds of habitual actions, but I doubt that any of them constitutes an exception to my general claim.¹¹

Sixth, and final clarification: I mentioned at the outset that while normally the belief that accompanies intentions is about the value of the intended action it may also be a belief in the value of having the intention itself. The attempt by some philosophers to revive “fitting attitude” accounts of value led to an extensive discussion of “wrong kind of reasons” and many who hold no hope for “fitting attitudes” accounts joined in. Some suggested that reasons that are state- rather than object- related are of a “wrong kind”. Even if there is something to be said in favour of that claim regarding epistemic reasons, it has no application to reasons for actions, and none for reasons for intentions either. There are only two points to make about reasons for intentions which turn on the value of having the intentions rather than on the value of the intended action: First, for reasons explained in the first section they are not the normal kind of reason for an intention. Second, some beliefs about the intended actions are a condition on having intentions to perform them. Some argue that they include belief about the possibility of that action, others that they include beliefs about the point of the action. If there is any truth in such views then they limit the possibility of reasons for intentions depending on the value of the intention, for they limit the possibility of such intentions.

Part Two: Value, Intention and motivation

For humans, and as all my discussion from here on will be confined to humans I will not reiterate that restriction, acting for a reason involves being guided by what one believes is a reason, and that involves thinking that there is value in the action because it relates in an appropriate way to how things are. That, in turn, implies that one takes something about the action to confer value on it. It could be something that is bad and the action would help avoid (a fire) or a good opportunity that the action would help one to seize, etc. The schema is that the reason is a good in the action that is conferred on it by some feature of

¹¹ For a contrary view see David Owens

the situation that is either good or bad. When we act for that reason we act because we recognise it (as we see matters) as a reason for that action.

This schematic description is liable to strike many readers as altogether false to the realities of human motivation. The aim of this part is to dispel these doubts. First, I will discuss the role of the will and its relation to this account of intentional action. Second, I will consider a variety of human motivations and their function in leading to intentional actions.

1. The will

The will may relate to the spirit with which we react to reasons: “reluctantly I had to concede that he behaved decently” (meaning something like: I was reluctant to believe so, but the evidence made me come to that belief, even though I would have been happier had it not been so), “I hate my tendency to be envious of my rivals, but against my will I do feel envy”, “I did not want to pay my debt, but I did so, however unwillingly”. In this regard the will is an emotion, or similar to an emotion. We can be happy, or sad, delighted, relieved, surprised as well as welcoming a conclusion, or willing it to be true, etc. There is, however, a different aspect to the will, the will as resolve, as will power, manifesting itself in the ability to form intentions, to take decisions, and to persevere, to stick with them, to be firm in our resolve etc. And of course, there are the opposite phenomena, of prevarication, indecisiveness, weakness of resolve, wavering, etc.

The will in the resolve sense applies only to actions, omissions and activities, including mental acts. It does not apply to beliefs or emotions, except in special kinds of situations. I can intend to have ice cream tomorrow, decide to avoid smoking, or to run in the London Marathon. I cannot decide that the woman I am looking at in the street wears a hat, nor intend to believe that she does. Similarly I cannot decide or intend to be angry, or resentful or joyful. I can of course decide to try to make myself less morose, or jealous, or to avoid my bias affecting my beliefs. And there are other specialised contexts in which the will as resolve can be manifested regarding beliefs and emotions. They call for explanation (such as that the will can protect beliefs from corrupting emotive influences, or aim at creating the circumstances in which we can have certain beliefs or emotions). But they do not undermine the general contrast between the ubiquitous presence of the will regarding actions and its limited and special possible effects on our beliefs and emotions.

This contrast raises a potential difficulty for a reason-based explanation of intentional actions, omissions and activities. If recognition of epistemic reasons is sufficient to lead us to appropriate beliefs, without the intervention of intentions to believe or decisions to believe, why is not recognition of practical reasons sufficient to make us act appropriately

without the intervention of intentions and decisions? Why is it the case that whenever we act for what we took to be a reason for that action it is true that (in some sense of 'want') we did what we wanted to do, whereas it is not true that when we believe what we take ourselves to have adequate reasons to believe we believe what we want to believe? And why are emotions genuine when it is not the case that we have them because we wanted to have them, and suspect when we have them because we wanted them, and beliefs that we have because we want to have them are irrational, whereas actions we perform because we want to perform them are suspected neither of inauthenticity nor of irrationality?

Of course, intentions and decisions, just like the actions they aim at, are had for reasons. That helps in explaining why that we acted as we intended does not cast doubt on the rationality of the action. But it does not help in explaining why intentions, decisions and other manifestations of the will as resolve are needed at all. To explain that we need an account of differences between actions, omissions and activities on the one side and beliefs and emotions on the other, an account that will show the need for the will on the one side and not on the other.

Three differences are relevant (and there may be others). First (a point that articulates aspects of the first constituent of intentions mentioned in the first section), we can in our mind determine what to do in the future, but not what to believe or feel in the future. We can hope to have or not to have certain emotions or beliefs in the future, but we cannot determine, mentally, to have or not to have them. We can determine what to do in the future. And such determinations require power of resolve. The ability to determine our future actions requires having will power. It is manifested by deciding and by forming intentions regarding future conduct. I can decide now to have an Indian meal tomorrow, but I cannot decide now to believe tomorrow that Indian meals are very tasty, nor can I decide now to be happy tomorrow at having an Indian meal.

The explanation is simple: if I know that a proposition will be true tomorrow I now believe that the proposition will be true tomorrow, and if I know that tomorrow there will be adequate reason to believe that a proposition is true I now have adequate reason to believe that the proposition is true. But if I now know that it will be good to do something tomorrow I have no reason to do it now. If it will be good tomorrow I have to do it tomorrow. There may be no reason for me to do anything about it now, or there may be reason to resolve, namely intend or decide, to do it tomorrow. As was observed above, intending moves us towards the action. It is a stage in moving to act. But that is as far as one can go. Hence the role of the will in action, a role that has no place regarding beliefs.

Decisions and intentions, just like actions, are taken for reasons, and, not exclusively but typically, these are the same reasons. Typically, when there are reasons to decide or

intend, the reasons for an action are among the reasons for intending to, and for deciding to perform it.¹² The need for the involvement of the will as resolve is not in order to motivate. For all we know (and we will return to the point below) reasons or belief in reasons motivate both belief and action. But in action, unlike in belief, there are occasions when there is a case for forming a resolve to perform the action ahead of the appropriate time for its performance. That is what the will – intentions and decisions – provides. We come to will as we come to act by coming to believe in a case for the intention or the action. The contribution of the will is to form and maintain our resolve till the time for action arrives.¹³ Of course intentions and decisions are revisable, but a tendency frequently to re-examine them shows lack of resolve, weakness of will, which may be justified. It may reflect residual doubts about the initial decision, suppressed or unarticulated concerns about it, and the like. I am not arguing for the correctness of any course, only about the role and function of the will, which is, to repeat, not to motivate but to form and maintain resolve.

The same lesson emerges from the second difference between actions and beliefs, their difference regarding the nature of conflicts of reasons for beliefs and for action. It too points to occasions for resolving to do something that do not arise regarding beliefs. Reasons for any particular belief are considerations that support the conclusion that it is true. Reasons for a belief may conflict with reasons against it, namely considerations that support the conclusion that it is not true. Given that if the belief is true then it is false that it is not true, and vice versa, it follows that of conflicting reasons for belief at most one leads to a true conclusion, and at most one leads to a belief that is not flawed. Reasons for conduct (for actions, omissions or activities) conflict when two or more independent reasons support the case for two modes of conduct such that if one is realised the other cannot be. Any conflict of practical reasons will involve reasons for an act or activity on the one hand and for its omission on the other. Inherent in conflict of practical reasons is that both conflicting reasons point to something of value in the conduct they support. Whereas an epistemic reason is a clue to a truth beyond it, a practical reason is the fact that there is something valuable in the conduct it is a reason for. There may be stronger reasons for incompatible conduct. But any independent reason that is not conformed to marks a loss,

¹² I say that they are among the reasons for forming the intention or taking the decision because, as Ulrike Heuer has argued, reasons for an action are never sufficient to form a future directed intention or decision to perform it. There needs to be something additional that gives point to forming the intention now.

¹³ Some writers think that beliefs and/or intentions are commitments. Being committed differs from being resolved in many ways (and undertaking a commitment differs from becoming resolved in many more). To mention but two: commitments typically are towards someone else, and they are never subject to the will of the committed. Intentions may lapse with no fault when one turns away from them, without even noticing that one is abandoning them. Commitments cannot be shaken off by being ignored.

something valuable that has been, rightly or wrongly, abandoned in favour of something else which is also valuable. Or, to present the point allowing that agents may have misconceptions about the reasons that apply, any time agents do not conform to what they take to be a reason for a conduct, even when, as they see matters, they do conform to another reason for incompatible conduct, the agents think that there is some real loss, namely the lost opportunity to realise the good pointed to by the reason they did not conform to. So, unlike epistemic conflicts, every practical conflict points to an unsatisfied reason(s), and is a possible occasion for a decision about ways of minimising that loss. Even though such resolutions will not always be made, and will not always be appropriate, the prevalence of occasions for making them is an important aspect of our practical rationality, and – as explained above – it depends on the will, on the powers of resolve.

So far the account focuses on future directed decisions and intentions where the role of strength of will and resolve is evident, lending – I hope – credence to the explanation that the will has to do with steadfastness rather than with motivation. The third difference between beliefs and actions complements the account by explaining the function of intentions during intentional conduct. Beliefs are psychological conditions, states or dispositions or combinations of different conditions, which are relatively durable (though they can be forgotten, or fade away, and fail to resurface and affect judgement or decisions when needed, and of course one can come to reject them as mistaken). They are there, affecting one's thought, imagination, emotions and actions in various ways, all as part of one's general mental condition. Intentional conduct is, typically, of limited duration and possessing a defined shape (apart from omissions it typically has a beginning and an end). Actions and activities are something we accomplish. That is why they require an executive power to oversee and guide their performance, and that is, as we saw in the first section, the task of the intentions with which the intentional actions are performed. So here again, the will is the power that keeps us on the track we chose, but it is not the motivation for choosing it.

This account can be developed a good deal further to explain, for example, how the will has a limited role in protecting our beliefs from the improper influence of wishful thinking and other emotions. For current purposes the important lesson is that recognition of reason motivates whereas the will does not. But saying that does little to explain human motivation and its relation to practical reasons.

2. Basic and other motivations

For there is no doubt that the capacity to respond to practical reasoning has a lot to do with human motives. The schematic observations that follow assume that to a degree

explanation of conduct by practical reasons and its explanation by reference to human motivations are two complementary ways of referring to the same phenomena, first in terms of the reasons recognition of which leads to action and second in terms of the psychological dispositions to respond to those reasons. But the full account of the relations between responsiveness to reasons and motivations is much more complex. A simple view has it that directed motivation, that is motivation to realise some end, is triggered in some way which is explained non-normatively (hunger, hormones, conditioning, whatever) and that motivation sets the reasons we have. Normative reasons either OK or reject the motivation, providing reasons to allow it to move us, or to resist its promptings, and we have reasons to follow the steps that would lead to satisfying our motivations or to achieve their objectives. Examining human motivation even in only slight detail helps display the misunderstandings that breed variants of the simple view. The following observations aim to provide such a sketch. As it is based on lay observations much of it may be mistaken. But the burden of the argument is in the structure of the sketch, and it can survive many inaccuracies or outright mistakes in the details.

As the previous remarks show, I am using 'motivation' in a sense much wider than its meaning in English. I lean on its meaning as 'The (conscious or unconscious) stimulus for action towards a desired goal, esp. as resulting from psychological or social factors' (OED) but add to those stimuli for action stemming from biological factors (an extension which leads to dispensing with 'desired' in the OED definition). I am forced into this extension of the meaning of the term because I need a word with more general meaning than 'motivation' and do not know of any which would serve.

There are a number of apparently independent sources of native, untaught, motivations: the promptings of hunger are distinct in origin, in their phenomenological manifestations as well as in their objects and the means for their satisfaction, and they differ in all these respects from the promptings of sex, or of the motivation to escape exposure to extreme cold, etc. Second, the sources and manifestations of these motivations are largely species specific. For the most part they are common to all members of the species, who differ in degree along all the dimensions in which any given source of motivation is manifested, but rarely do people lack any of them altogether, and even more rarely do they have types of motivations that are shared by only few members of the species. In making this observation I do not mean either to commend or to denigrate any source of motivation, common or rare, or their absence. I am making the point because it is important for the emergence of cultures, of socially shared meanings, sensitivities, and practices. Indeed it is among the culturally induced or enhanced motivations that we are likely to find a great divergence among people.

First, if only to put them aside we may notice a type of particularly elemental motivation, barely meriting this name, namely that which, when unimpeded, is manifested in reflex actions. Blinking at the approach of objects to the eye, recoiling from contact with hot objects, knee jerks and many others are actions that are never intentional as they are never mediated by or guided by reasons. As our interest is in the interplay of reasons and motivations we can ignore factors that trigger reflex actions.¹⁴

There is a wide array of divers motivations, namely urges or drives towards action that are either triggered from outside or arise through the operation of our bodies. Some of them are, like reflexes, “hard wired” as it were towards a specific kind of action or activity. Others are not, but they cause discomfort, or worse, unless some action is taken, and the fact that these actions assuage the discomfort establishes them as the object of those motivations. Examples will help: Our biology generates an urge to breathe, a very specific urge in its origin and its object. It leads us to breath without an intervention of will or reason. But unlike sweating, and other bodily actions, it is our action because it can be suppressed and modified, at least to a degree by forming an intention to suppress or modify it on occasion. And we can train ourselves to improve the degree to which we can intentionally control our breathing. Some actions arising out of bodily responses to some stimuli become important not, like breathing, for biological survival, but for social life. For example, smiling is often an involuntary, but controllable response vital for the ability to connect with others, and so are dispositions to emit various sounds (of joy or pain etc.). Being hungry is my contrasting example. Yes, in a way it has a specific object: hunger motivates us to eat food. But for one thing we may be hungry for a while, feeling discomfort as a result, without realising that we are hungry. Furthermore hunger does not automatically produce action as the urge to breath does. Rather it leads to intentional conduct to obtain, prepare and consume food.

Both examples are of basic motivations; basic in not being mediated by reason, nor derived from any other motivation. There are of course considerable differences between the various basic motivations that affect us. But up to a point they share a common feature: they can drive us towards action on their own. Reasons, deliberation and will come in later. They enable us to approve of the actions needed to satisfy these drives and urges (and in the second type of case I mentioned they then guide their performances), or they can lead us to intervene, repress, delay or modify the actions we are driven towards. But this similarity uniting all the basic motivations may mislead. It is true of the narrowly focused motivations,

¹⁴ Similarly, I ignore actions like breathing, which while admitting a greater degree of voluntary control are completed so long as we do not interfere.

the ones that can lead to action without intention or reflection, and it is true of some of our reactions to the second type. But they affect us in very different ways as well.

The drive to eat can again serve as an example. We learn that we need food from time to time, both to assuage hunger-sensations and for our health and for our capacity to function well – and these are only a few of the reason for eating. I have not even mentioned the pleasures of eating. But just for a moment put aside all the reasons, other than avoidance of the discomfort that being hungry brings with it. We prepare food before we get hungry, and often we eat before we get hungry. Assume that we do so only to avoid the discomfort feeling hungry involves. Nevertheless the drive to eat that hunger feelings produce does not operate when we prepare the food and often not when we eat either. In such cases our actions are not triggered by our drives and urges. Typically they are intentional actions taken because we believe that we have reason to take them. That is so even if the only reason is to avoid the discomfort of feeling hungry. So the basic motivation is in the picture, but not as initiating action which reason does not stop (as with breathing and the like). This is perhaps the most elemental way in which we acquire the capacity to form reason-led intentions, and to act for what we take to be reasons for those actions. What is the role of our basic motivation in a case like this? It is sometimes supposed that the appreciation of reasons for taking the means to some goal can lead to action only if and to the extent to which it channels some basic motivation to pursue that goal causing it to be attached to the means to that goal. When this image, derived from the behaviour of liquids, is taken seriously this statement is highly misleading. The kernel of truth that it contains amounts to little more than the assertion that the basic motivation to pursue the goal plays a role in leading us to form intentions and to act when we recognise the facilitative reason to do so (i.e. that the action will facilitate realisation of a result of the kind we have a basic motivation to realise). What remains to be explained is how it does so.

The crucial point is that we take the facilitative actions because we see a reason to take them, that reason being that they will facilitate achieving a goal that is worth achieving. Our knowledge, even if implicit and inarticulate, of the experiences involved with the presence or absence of the goal make us think that it is worth securing, and further, sometimes more complicated reasoning leads to an appreciation of the reasons to take the facilitative action. The process, even in the relatively simple example of securing food, depends on our evaluative attitude to the motivation for having food, and to the experiences that having it or avoiding it involve, or cause at a later time, as well as to the choice of means and ways of securing it.¹⁵

¹⁵ Perhaps in simple situations confronted by young children whose ability to adopt ends and secure them is not yet developed, and with other people who do not have it for various

Derived motivations display additional aspects of the relations between value and motives. We can again use food as a source of our examples. Food, its preparation and consumption do, after all, play a major role in the economy, in shaping relations within families and structuring their life, in facilitating social interactions, in sex, in the arts, religion and more. Obviously, social practices generate forms of activity that have at least the potential to respond to various basic-motivations. However, habituation in the social practices that create and underpin activities such as working lunches, dinner parties, drinks, snacks, receptions, Sunday lunches, etc. generates a taste for, a motivation for some of them. These are new, derived, non-basic motivations. People develop a taste for some food-related occasions and not for others. Of course, sometimes one prefers one dinner party to another because one prefers the company of the diners in one of them, etc. However, I have in mind a different kind of response, a liking, say, for a drink and a quick dinner with colleagues and friends after work and a dislike of elaborate dinner parties with the same people. There are many diverse explanations for such tastes, depending on the circumstances of the people involved. Of interest for our purpose is the fact that a taste for a particular socially constituted form of activity may emerge and stabilise. It becomes a taste that cannot be explained or justified by the degree to which it satisfies basic-motivation. It is acquired because the distinctive mix of the constituent activities and the attendant features of the activity are taken to be desirable, valuable. People who find it desirable acquire an independent, derived motivation to pursue it. The motivation is derived because it builds on some of their basic motivations. It is independent because – as can be seen when those people have to choose between options – its perceived desirability cannot be accounted for simply by reference to their basic motivations.

Experience, imagination and judgement combine to breed motivations that are, as it were, “value-bred”, namely that are sustained by belief in the value of their objects. Needless to say they are also responsible for mistaken beliefs about the value of options, and for the emergence of regrettable tastes sustained by such mistaken beliefs. This does not sustain any claim for the primacy of motivations for options over beliefs in their value in explaining intentional actions.

We are considering beings in whom rational powers and innate motivations combine in forming states of mind such as desires, hopes, aspirations, goals, beliefs and intentions, in ways unknown to species with no rational powers. Our desires, hopes, aspirations, goals, just like our beliefs and intentions, are transformed by the injection of rational elements into the mix that goes into the making of those states of mind, which are

reasons the process is one merely of evaluating means in response to the promptings of basic motivations.

complex states in all beings that have them. Normative responses are ones where a view of how things are, and what, if any, way of responding is appropriate, leads to an attempt, guided by that view, to realise that response.¹⁶

3. Does motivation survive intention?

Let us accept that while motivations sometimes figure in non-normative explanations of actions, actions performed with an intention are explained normatively, that is as reactions to what the agents take to be reasons for them, reasons (or believed reasons) that either trigger and arouse motivations, or that sanction and are supported by the motivations already active in the agents. Regarding intentions leading to action that begins right away this may explain how the role of intention is not to motivate but to keep the agent on course to the realisation of the motivated intention. Both motivation and intention play a causal role in the explanation of the action, but they have different roles.

But think of future intentions: is it not the case that once formed the intentions themselves motivate the action? Do the beliefs that the actions are adequately supported by reasons and the motivations to perform them still have a role to play? Do they survive the formation of the intention, or rather would not the intention lead to the action even if they do not survive? Is it not the case that once we intend to do something we will do it because we intend even though the belief that underpinned the formation of the intention has been abandoned and even though the motivation that led to it no longer moves us?

True, but that is irrelevant. The question is not whether we would act so long as we intend to act. Rather, it is whether we would intend to act even if we no longer have the belief that underpinned the formation of the intention and are no longer moved by the motivation that led to it. That is true too. We might still intend so to act, but that is still irrelevant, for it could be that the intention is now sustained by alternative beliefs about its point and by alternative motivations. This is analogous to the way belief survives the rejection of the evidence that led to it so long as one continues to believe that it is supported by some reasons. But unlike epistemic reasons, which are normally independent of the belief that they support, the reasons and motivations underlying intentions may be produced by or as a result of the formation of the intention. It may have changed one's frame of mind, arousing further, previously dormant motivations, and it may have led to changes in planning and in preparations that now make carrying out the intention a better option than abandoning it.

¹⁶ Not all our beliefs about what actions are appropriate play a normative role in determining our responses to our situation. Self-deceived beliefs that some action is required etc. usually play a non-normative causal role in masking the motivations that lead to our responses.

True, but these factors do not touch the way that intentions constitute a resolve but do not motivate: If their continued existence depends on the existence of appropriate beliefs and motivations, even though not necessarily those that originally led to the intentions, in what sense do the intentions constitute being resolved? What role is there for resolve given that the underpinning beliefs and motivations are there, doing all that is needed to make one perform the action?

These are good questions whose answer requires an explanation of a central aspect of being resolved. The matter has been explored by many, and my take on it is no more than a variant.¹⁷ The central idea, as we saw at the beginning of the paper, is that intentions constitute being set to act, in that they do not require revisiting the conditions that led to them, or that may have replaced them. Intending to do something in the future would lead one to doing so upon realisation that the occasion for the action is now, without reconsidering the case for doing so. Being able to have intentions has advantages; relying on one's intentions on any particular occasion (i.e, without reconsidering the case for them) may be wise or foolish etc. If one becomes convinced that there is no longer a point to the intended action one would abandon the intention. Though sometimes one may, without fault, abandon it even if the case for it is unchanged – simply because one's heart is no longer in it. Can one believe that the point in having the intention disappeared and yet maintain it? One could if one also could, irrationally, also believe that there still is a case for it. – we are back with matters discussed earlier.

Given this understanding of intentions, especially future intentions, as being set to act, we can see that what motivate one to act are the background believed and motivating points the action is taken to have, while the intention is none-the-less also a causal factor leading to the action through the fact that it releases one from the need for further steps before performing the action.

¹⁷ See, Bratman, McLennan, Holton, Owens, ... They all take resolve to block revision, to be closer to commitments than I do. I do not deny that there are forms of strong, resistant to change, resolutions, see my discussion of decisions in *Practical Reason and Norms* (1975, 3rd ed. OUP 1999). Intentions, however, are more transient, less resistant to change than they suppose.