

ACTION CAUSE AND VOLITION

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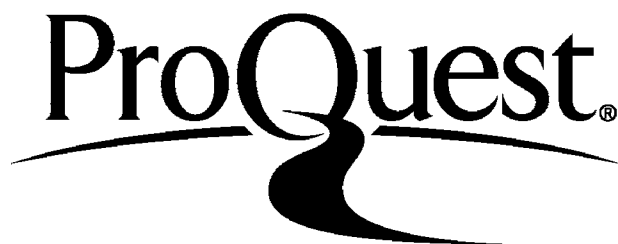
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I should like to thank Dr. A.R. Lacey, without whose patience, kind supervision and constant encouragement, this thesis would never have been possible.



## Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to defend the view that mental entities like wants, desires etc., can be the causes of actions.

In the introduction the problem of causal explanation of action is introduced, together with the main outline of the views of different philosophers who are opponents of the causal theory of action. It includes a short introduction to the arguments produced by the opponents of the causal theory of action, and an outline of the project of the thesis.

Chapter I is concerned with the question as to whether causal explanation is synonymous with mechanical explanation. In this connection R.S. Peters' view is discussed.

Chapter II is concerned with the traditional theory of volition as a causal explanation of action. In part I, the question of whether all actions are preceded by an act of will is discussed in the context of G. Ryle's criticism of the concept of volition. In part II, the question of the empirical identifiability of an act of will is discussed, together with the views of W. James, G.N.A. Vesey and R.A. Inlay on the matter.

Chapter III consists of the defence of the view that wants, desires etc., can be the causes of actions.

In Chapter IV the question of the indescribability of desires, wants etc., without reference to actions is discussed with special reference to A.I. Melden.

Chapters V and VI are concerned respectively with the Humean contention that a cause must be an event, and that a causal explanation needs a generalisation.

Chapter VII concentrates on the question whether reason-action statements are incorrigible and therefore not causal.

In conclusion, I have given a short summary of the outcome of the various arguments discussed in the thesis.

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## Introduction

### I Background of the problem

The problem of the causal explanation of human action is a vital problem of philosophy. Philosophers have seldom been able to take a detached metaphysical attitude towards the problem because of its significant ethical bearings. Formulation of any theory for the explanation of human action is almost impossible without getting over-cautious at every step lest we lose our notion of moral responsibility. Any one who deals with this problem works under the impact of two different influences. One is the evidences of modern scientific discoveries in the field of psychology and neurology, and the other is the concept of moral responsibility. The concept of cause and the concept of moral responsibility are taken to be so antagonistic that if something is caused it is considered to be outside moral jurisdiction. Therefore, to say that our actions can be caused is to put the whole concept of moral responsibility in jeopardy. In fact this means to put our whole social system in chaos as that essentially depends on the idea that men are free to act and therefore can be held responsible for their actions.

Some recent philosophers<sup>1</sup> have tried to give a non-causal interpretation of action. This attempt is very different from the reconciling attempts of philosophers like M. Schlick<sup>2</sup> and A.J. Ayer<sup>3</sup> who have tried to give a special meaning to the word 'free'. This reconciling attempt of Schlick and Ayer explains free action in terms of the absence of compulsion, not in terms of the absence of a cause. A free action is not a non-caused

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1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. 1961. London  
 R.S. Peters. Concept of Motivation. 1958  
 G.E.M. Anscombe. Intention. 1959  
 H.L.A. Hart & A.M. Honore'. Causation in the Law. 1959.  
 A. Kenny. Action, Emotion & Will. 1963  
 W. Dray. Laws and Explanation in History. 1957  
 S. Hampshire. Thought & Action. 1959
  2. M. Schlick. Problems of Ethics. 1939 p.143-156
  3. A.J. Ayer. Philosophical Essays. Ch.12 p.278. 1954

action, but a non-constrained or non-compelled action. They do not deny the possibility of a causal explanation of action as such and it is in this way that they try to mediate between determinism and the notion of moral responsibility.

Since then philosophers have started questioning the extensibility of the word 'cause'. The thesis which A.I. Melden, R.S. Peters etc., have put forward is that human action cannot intelligibly be given a causal account. They have said that there is a categorial difference between mental concepts and physical events. Because of this, the notion of cause can be fruitfully applied to the latter but not to the former. When action is explained in terms of mental concepts like intention, desire etc., we do not get a causal explanation. Hence, any question of reconciliation of causal determinism with the notions of freedom and responsibility just does not arise.

## II Forms of the causal explanation of action

There are two main forms in which the thesis that actions can have causes is usually expressed. One is the view of the various behaviourists who attempt to give a causal explanation of action in terms of stimulus and response, physical movements, or neurophysiology. This view usually tries to reduce action to movement and provides a physical or neurophysiological explanation for that.

Another variety of causal explanation can be found in the writings of traditional philosophers who instead of reducing action to movement, think that an explanation of action in terms of desire, want etc., is a causal explanation. According to them our actions are not caused by any external agency or force but by our own volitions. Because actions are so caused they can be differentiated from mere physical movements. The concept of volition is used by the traditionalists not only to explain action causally, but also as a criterion for distinguishing actions from movements or happenings.



### III The opponents of the causal theory

The opponents of the causal theory of action have attacked both these two types of causal theory. They have rejected the very notion that an action can be causally explained. According to Melden "Where we are concerned with causal explanations,....we are not concerned with human actions at all but, at best, with bodily movements or happenings;"<sup>1</sup> It has also been suggested that the causal question about human behaviour is appropriate only when there is something extraordinary or unusual - a "deviation from the purposive rule-following model"<sup>2</sup> of behaviour.

This approach towards the explanation of human action is very much Wittgensteinian in character and is designed to show that to say that an action is caused by certain internal mental states like wants, desires etc., is to express a conceptual confusion. Philosophers like Melden and Peters are not directly engaged in solving the problem of free-will and determinism but indirectly their theory is so fashioned as to save human action from causal determinism.

There are two aspects of this non-causal interpretation of action:

- (i) The notion of a cause as it is defined in the physical sciences and by Hume, involves certain set patterns and rules in which no explanation of action in terms of intention, motive or desire can be accommodated.
- (ii) Human action exhibits a clear and often self-imposed purposive tendency which cannot be explained in terms of blind, contingent, accidental happenings.

1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. Ch. XIII. p184. 1961

2. R.S. Peters. Concept of Motivation. p10. 1958

The first aspect is concerned with showing the difference between a causal explanation and an explanation in terms of motives, wants, desires etc. The second one is concerned with showing more positively that a purpose or a set of purposes can be identified in human behaviour which will collapse if mechanical explanation of human behaviour succeeds.

Philosophers have variously expressed their disapproval of the claim that human actions can be causally explained. I shall narrate briefly their main criticisms against the possibility of a causal explanation of action in the following paragraphs. I shall return to their arguments again in detail, in due course.

#### IV A short introduction to the arguments produced by the opponents of the causal theory of action

##### (i) Reasons for actions and the episodic nature of a cause

Prof. G. Ryle in his *Concept of Mind* has tried to show the difference between a causal explanation and an explanation in terms of a reason.<sup>1</sup> In the course of his elaborate discussion of the problem Ryle mentions a number of arguments against the causal theory of action. However, the one which Ryle emphasizes most is that mental things like desires, wants, motives etc., which people usually name as 'reasons' for their actions, are not 'episodes' or 'happenings' and therefore not causes of their actions.

Ryle says that there are two quite different senses in which an occurrence is said to be explained. One is the causal sense. "To ask why the glass broke is to ask what caused it to break, and we explain in this sense, the fracture of the glass when we report that a stone hit it. The 'because' clause in the explanation reports an event, namely the event which stood to the fracture of the glass as cause to effect".<sup>2</sup>

1. G. Ryle. Concept of Mind. Ch. IV. p88-89. 1949

2. Ibid p88

There is however another sense in which we can explain why the glass broke when struck and that is by saying that the glass broke because it was brittle. According to Ryle the because-clause in the latter case does not report a 'happening' or a 'cause'. "People commonly say of explanations of this second kind that they give the 'reason' for the glass breaking when struck"<sup>1</sup>. Ryle then applies this to the explanation of actions as issuing from specified motives, and says that explanations by motives are explanations of the second type and not causal explanations. To explain an action in this second way is to give the 'reason' for the action and not the 'cause'.

It should be noted here that Ryle uses the term 'reason' in a wide sense in which it is applicable both to the animate as well as to the inanimate things. According to him when an action is explained in terms of a reason a dispositional account is given. For instance to say that Jones acted in a particular way because he was jealous is to explain Jones' activity in dispositional terms, just as to say that the reason why the glass broke was its brittleness, is to give a dispositional account of the glass breaking. In this sense the reason why something happened may consist of either personal or non-personal reasons.

The distinction made by Ryle between reason and cause is based on a Humean supposition that a cause is an event or happening, whereas "motives are not happenings and are not therefore of the right type to be causes."<sup>2</sup> Not only Ryle but other philosophers who hold that causal explanation of action is inappropriate also work on the basis of this fundamental presupposition that a cause is an 'event'. Ryle does not pursue the distinction between reason and cause very far, but since then philosophers have tried to develop this conceptual difference between motives, desires, intentions etc., on the one hand, and causes as physical events on the other.

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1. Ibid p89

2. Ibid p113

(ii) Indescribability of a desire or want independent of the action desired or wanted

An important and powerful distinction has been drawn by A.I. Melden in his Free Action.<sup>1</sup> Melden has emphasized the difference and incompatibility between an explanation in terms of reason and an explanation in terms of cause. Melden uses the term 'reason' in<sup>a</sup> personal sense, i.e., in the sense of 'his reason'. To quote Melden, "...stating a reason for what one is doing is making it clear what it is that is wanted and what it is that one wants to do with the thing wanted."<sup>2</sup>

Melden's main argument is based on the presupposition that a cause, being an event, is logically distinguishable from the effect. According to him the radical disparity between these two types of explanations, viz. causal and rational, arises from the logical connection existing between intention, motive, desire, want, choice etc., and action. These mental entities cannot be adequately described without a reference to the action which is intended, motivated, desired, wanted or chosen. On the other hand a cause as an event is always describable without any reference to the effect of which it is a cause. It should be noted that Melden does not deny that human action as a series of movements is causally explicable; it is only as 'action' that it falls outside causal jurisdiction.

Melden thinks that to give a causal explanation of human action is to view conduct as overt behaviour which is "an ambiguous term that effectively obscures the all-important distinction between bodily movements or happenings and actions."<sup>3</sup> He further says that as bodily movement, a piece of behaviour is a physiological occurrence which can very well be causally

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1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. 1961

2. Ibid p147

3. Ibid p200

explained by another physiological occurrence. "In that case psychology reduces to physiology and the alleged explanations of human action have succeeded only in changing the subject, in substituting explanations of bodily movements for explanations of action."<sup>1</sup>

Melden does not commit himself on the question of free-will as such. He says that his argument "is designed to show the logical incoherence involved in the supposition that actions, desires, intentions, etc., stand in causal relations, either in the Humean sense or in any sense in which the term 'causal' is employed in the natural sciences."<sup>2</sup> But the rejection of the causal model of explanation for action does not imply indeterminism. Both determinism, and indeterminism and libertarianism are totally confused because they take the application of the causal model for granted. Thus for Meldén the question of causal explanation of human action is conceptually inappropriate.

(iii) The purposive rule-following nature of action and the mechanical type of causal explanation

A similar distinction between a causal explanation and an explanation in terms of reason is made by R.S. Peters in his Concept of Motivation. Peters says he does not want to deny that causal explanations are relevant to human action. They can state necessary conditions for human action to occur, but they cannot be sufficient explanations of human action.<sup>3</sup> There is a slight difference between Peters' object of criticism and that of Ryle and Meldén. While Ryle and Meldén make the traditional theory of volition the main target of criticism, Peters directs his criticisms at the mechanical interpretation of human action. By a causal explanation of action Peters means an explanation in terms of physical laws. His attack is in fact

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1. Ibid p200-201

2. Ibid p201-202

3. R.S. Peters. Concept of Motivation. pl6

directed against behaviourists like Hull or Hebb for trying to reduce psychological explanation to mechanical explanation. His main argument is that there are many different sorts of question which can be asked about human behaviour, which cannot be brought under an all embracing causal theory.

For Peters, an explanation of action involves concepts like intention, reason, purpose etc., whereas an explanation of bodily movement involves concepts like stimulus-response, nervous reactions, muscular contractions etc. He also says that because 'action' requires explanation in terms of reasons, causal explanation is inappropriate here. Human behaviour as 'happenings' can be causally explained, but behaviour as 'actions' involves a purposive rule-following model and is to be explained in terms of concepts like want, desire, intention etc.<sup>1</sup>

Similar points have been made by P.F. Strawson in 'Determinism'. According to him, explanation of action involves concepts radically different from those involved in the explanation of movement as such. These concepts involved in the explanation of actions "belong to a different kind of vocabulary and call for a place in a wholly different dimension of explanation."<sup>2</sup> Peters<sup>3</sup> and Strawson<sup>4</sup> also emphasize the point that causal explanation involves giving an explanation of action in terms of bodily movements or physiological occurrences. As such an explanation of action will need complete correlation between action and physical movement, and as the concept of action cannot be reduced to that of bodily movement without a residue, an overall causal explanation is not possible.

1. Ibid p3-16

2. P.F. Strawson. 'Determinism' Freedom and the Will. ed. D.F. Pears. p64

3. R.S. Peters. Op cit. p12

4. P.F. Strawson. Op cit. p66

Prof. Hamlyn in his article 'Behaviour'<sup>1</sup> has expressed similar views to Peters. His view however has changed considerably in his later article 'Causality and human behaviour'<sup>2</sup> where he says that the reason why the concept of action cannot be reduced to that of bodily movement is not merely that "...the bodily movements involved in the performance of a certain action are indefinitely various,"<sup>3</sup>; there is some underlying reason, which Hamlyn describes as "...the fact that in the cases of many actions at least, an intention is essential if the action is to be said to be performed at all (....). Hence, there is no possibility in these cases of formulating a principle to the effect that when certain bodily movements occur within a certain range then an action of a certain kind may be said to be performed."<sup>4</sup> According to Hamlyn "...an understanding of the notion of intention is a general prerequisite of an understanding of that of an action."<sup>5</sup> He finally concludes that "...there is no unified conceptual scheme available, as there is in different ways between decision and action on the one hand and movement and physiological processes on the other."<sup>6</sup>

(iv) General laws and reason-action explanations

The arguments mentioned above are reinforced by another strong argument present in the writings of Dray<sup>7</sup> and Hart and Honore<sup>8</sup>. This is: reasons do not presuppose any general law, which a cause does. This means that an explanation in terms of reasons is not of the covering-law type, which a causal explanation is. According to them a causal statement is supported by a general principle derived from experience, but a reason-action statement is a singular statement which does not refer to any general principle. When

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1. D.W. Hamlyn. 'Behaviour.' Philosophy 1953. p132
  2. D.W. Hamlyn. 'Causality and human behaviour.' PASSV XXXVIII 1964. p125
  3. Ibid p130
  4. Ibid, p130-131
  5. Ibid p132
  6. Ibid p136
  7. W. Dray. Laws and Explanation in history. 1957
  8. H.L.A. Hart & A.M. Honore'. Causation in the Law.

a person describes his action as issuing from certain reasons which he has for acting, he makes the statement immediately without the help of a general principle. But a person cannot make a causal statement without implying a general principle. Therefore Hart and Honore<sup>1</sup>, Dray and many other philosophers think that a statement which describes a reason-action relation cannot be a causal statement.

(v) Incorrigibility of reason-action statements

Opponents of the causal theory of action often cite another argument which is partially based on the above mentioned one. This is: a reason-action statement is incorrigible. Philosophers cite different reasons for this argument. Sometimes they say that a reason-action statement is incorrigible because of the privileged access one is thought to have to one's own reasons; sometimes they derive their support from Wittgenstein's comment on first person introspective reports, i.e., it does not make sense to say that one can be mistaken in identifying the reasons for one's action. On the other hand a causal statement is always corrigible. This leads some philosophers<sup>1</sup> to conclude that a reason-action statement cannot be a causal statement.

The arguments of the opponents of the causal theory of action can be summed up now as follows: an explanation of action cannot be given in terms of stimulus and response, or in terms of neuro-physiology, as the behaviourists have tried to do, because that will obliterate the distinction between action and movement. Action being purposive behaviour involves mental concepts for its explanation. In other words, an explanation of action involves concepts like motive, intentions, desires etc. Now, an explanation in terms of desire, motive or intention cannot be a causal explanation because of certain logical difficulties. These are:

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1. B.A.O. Williams. 'Pleasure and Belief.' PASSV Vol. XXXIII. 1959 P57



- (i) motives, intentions, desires for actions and actions are not adequately describable independently of one another which suggests that there may be a non-contingent relation between the two, whereas a contingent relation is essential for a causal connection;
- (ii) motives, intentions, desires etc. are not events, whereas a cause is regarded as an event in Humean philosophy;
- (iii) the covering-law model which is so essential for a causal explanation is absent in a reason-action situation;
- (iv) and lastly, because of the supposed privileged access to one's own reasons, one's reason-action statements are considered as incorrigible, but a causal statement is always corrigible by further experience.

I would like to add here that it would be a mistake to think that all of these arguments are equally shared by the opponents of the causal theory. It would also be a mistake to think that the philosophers mentioned in connection with a particular argument are its only supporters.

#### V The project

So far I have been trying to describe the views and arguments of the opponents of the causal theory of action. Now I shall try to describe the aim of this thesis. The aim of the thesis is to defend the view that an explanation of action in terms of wants, desires etc., is a causal explanation.

It must be pointed out that to define the features of a causal explanation is a notoriously difficult task. If there were one accepted form of causal explanation it would have been easier to decide whether an explanation

of action in terms of reasons is a causal explanation. In the absence of such a defining criterion, I would like to proceed as follows:

Sometimes by 'causal explanation' philosophers mean a mechanical form of explanation and then try to show that a causal explanation of action in this sense is not possible. So first of all I would like to show that causal explanations are not limited to mechanical explanations. Mechanical explanation is only a type of causal explanation. Therefore, causal explanations of actions need not be in mechanical terms. In this connection R.S. Peters' view will be discussed.

Secondly, I shall consider the traditional theory of volition as a causal theory of action and the adequacy of the concept of volition as a causal concept. I shall try to show that an act of will as it is conceived in the traditional theory fails to serve a logically coherent causal role for actions.

Thirdly, I shall argue that unless the reason-action relation is considered as a causal relation, the full implications of this relation cannot be brought out.

Lastly, I would consider the various arguments offered by the anti-causal theorists against the possibility of a causal explanation of action. I would like to point out that the arguments of the anti-causal theorists are sometimes based on a misconception as to what is involved in a causal explanation - that certain features which are thought to be essential for a causal explanation (particularly in the context of the Humean definition of causation), are not really essential for it. I admit that some anti-causal theorists (e.g. Melden) have drawn our attention to the specific peculiarity of the reason-action relation, but I shall venture to show that reason-action explanations can be considered as causal in spite of this peculiarity.

What I shall carefully leave aside is the question of freedom and responsibility, for I believe that this question should not be brought into the discussion of causal explanations of actions, though it is quite obvious that any decision about the causal explanation of action is bound to affect the notions of freedom and moral responsibility. This thesis however will be devoted only to describing and defending the view that explanations of actions in terms of reasons are in fact causal explanations.

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Chapter IExplanation in terms of reason and the mechanical form of causal explanation

In the introduction of this thesis I have mentioned that sometimes the opponents of the causal theory of action consider 'causal explanation as equivalent to mechanical explanation and think that to give a causal explanation of action means to explain an action as a piece of physical movement in terms of physical laws. Quite often they talk about the sense in which 'cause' is used in Humean philosophy and in physical sciences, implying that these two 'uses' are identical without clarifying at all why the concept of cause as described in Hume's philosophy should be restricted to physical changes only. Their use of the term 'physical' or 'mechanical' is also uncritical. A clear description of what they mean by mechanical or physical explanation cannot be found in their writings. This unclarity can be found in R.S. Peters' Concept of Motivation and also <sup>is</sup> traceable in A.I. Melden's Free Action. The belief that to give a causal <sup>is</sup> explanation is to give a mechanical explanation led philosophers like Peters and Strawson<sup>1</sup> to argue that since such an explanation requires complete reducibility of the concept of action to that of movement, which cannot be done without a residue, actions cannot be given a causal explanation.

This seems to me a confused argument resulting from a mistaken idea as to what is involved in a causal explanation. In this chapter I shall consider this argument with special<sup>1</sup> reference to R.S. Peters.

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1. P.F. Strawson. 'Determinism.' Freedom and the Will. ed. D.F. Pears. p66

I Causal explanation and mechanical explanation

There is no doubt that the most perplexing concept in this issue is the concept of cause and philosophers are hardly unanimous as to what they really mean by 'causal explanation'. The term 'causal explanation' has often been used in various senses. For the purpose of this thesis, I shall however take it to mean the deduction of an event or of an object or of a state of affairs from a general law and initial conditions. This description of a causal explanation comes closer to Hume's definition of a causal relation in emphasizing the need of a general law in causal explanation. Neither Hume's definition of a causal relation, nor this description in any way suggest that causation is applicable to physical changes only or should be described in physical terms only. If the description stated above is a correct description of causal explanation, all that can be derived from such a description is that any explanation which satisfies the stated requirements can be called a causal explanation. It need not necessarily be an explanation in terms of physical laws. The philosophers who consider 'causal explanation' as equivalent to 'physical or mechanical explanation' use the concept 'cause' in a very narrow sense. They start with certain preconceptions as to the requirements for a causal explanation and after finding that those requirements can be satisfactorily met by the mechanical form of explanation, identify causal explanation with mechanical explanation and conclude that the use of the term 'cause' in mechanical theories is its sole use. They overlook the possibility that denotatively the concept of cause may be wider than the concept of mechanical change and that the causal theorists may not insist on a mechanical pattern of action-explanation.

Here the notion 'physical' or 'mechanical' needs some elaboration. I have already mentioned that Peters and philosophers holding similar views to Peters' have used the term 'mechanical' uncritically without clarifying what they actually meant by a mechanical explanation.

By a mechanical explanation I shall understand an explanation given in terms of mechanical concepts, i.e., concepts involved in physical and chemical laws or in describing a mechanism. Such mechanical explanations we can find in the physical sciences where they are expressed in terms of matter, motion or energy, or in terms of chemical formulae. For instance, explanations of the formation of rust in terms of oxidation, of the formation of carbo-hydrate in terms of photo-synthesis, are mechanical explanations. They are also causal explanations as they satisfy the requirements for such an explanation. Attempts to give causal explanations of action in this mechanical sense can be found in the history of philosophy. Such a theory is often known as physical determinism, which views a human being as a complex machine, the function and structure of which are explicable in physico-chemical terms. To identify causal explanation with this sort of mechanical explanation means to take it for granted that any sort of change in the universe, if it is to be given a causal explanation, must be reduced to only one fundamental kind of change viz., the change of material particles. Whether such a reduction is logically possible is of course a different question. Even if the reductionist programme is possible, causation is still not limited to mechanical causation. There is nothing in the notion of causation which suggests such limitations.

I have already mentioned that it would be a mistake to think that all causal explanations are like mechanical explanations. There are causal explanations where completely different laws and concepts are involved. For instance physiological or neuro-physiological explanation is also considered as causal explanation, but it is not 'mechanical' in the sense mentioned above. When a neuro-physiological explanation of a situation is given, a causal explanation is given no doubt but not in terms of physico-chemical laws.<sup>1</sup> When we explain certain animal behavioural disturbances in terms of

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1. Physicalists would of course claim that here a reduction is possible. Sometimes within physical determinism, neuro-physiological explanations are included.

neuro-physiology, e.g., by saying that they are caused by a conflict between cortical processes of excitation and inhibition which under normal condition are kept in balance, we are providing a causal explanation thought not in physico-chemical terms.

Again explanations such as that a chronic state of over-stimulation and insufficient motor discharge causes fatigue, tension, dizziness, insomnia etc., are causal explanations but not mechanical. As we pass from neuro-physiological explanations to psychological and psycho-analytic explanations<sup>1</sup> we find less and less application of mechanical concepts; and more and more factors like socio-economic and cultural ones, heredity and environment, parental attitudes and childhood experiences, are taken into consideration. These factors are hardly mechanical and to deny their causal effectiveness because they are not mechanical is to fail to understand them properly.

What I want to emphasize here is this, that when we say a certain explanation is causal, what we refer to is its form. Thus both physiological and psycho-analytic explanations exhibit the causal form, i.e., a general law and initial conditions, - without involving any reference to physico-chemical laws.

## II R.S. Peters and the causal explanation of action

In his Concept of Motivation, as we have seen before, Peters holds the view that an explanation of action cannot be a causal explanation because the latter involves mechanical laws and concepts. It is not at all clear what Peters means by a 'causal explanation' and what he wants it to oppose. Sometimes it seems that he wants to equate causal explanation with mechanical explanation in the narrow sense of the term 'mechanical'; sometimes it seems that he equates causal explanation with mechanical explanation, using

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1. Some physicalists will claim that even in the case of psychological explanations reduction is possible.

'mechanical' in an over-wide sense which includes not only physico-chemical and neuro-physiological explanations, but also psycho-analytic explanations. This ambiguity becomes evident when Peters talks about "breakdowns in behaviour pattern." Within "breakdowns in behaviour pattern" he includes dissimilar cases like 'behaviour resulting from a brain-lesion', and 'making an advance to a choir-boy', and happily thinks that all of them can be provided with a mechanical type of causal explanation. But some of the explanations of the "breakdowns in behaviour pattern" could hardly be called explanations of movements. Nor do they involve mechanical concepts. Peters fails to see that the 'breakdowns' in behaviour pattern could be wider than what could be given a mechanical interpretation. I am not denying that all 'breakdowns' in behaviour pattern can be causally explained; what I am denying is that such causal explanations will always be of a mechanical type. The unclarity of the use of the term 'causal' also becomes evident from Peters' use of such expressions as "....some kind of causal explanation"<sup>1</sup> or "....some sort of causal explanation"<sup>2</sup> in the context of dreams, forgetting a familiar name, or knocking something over in a familiar room, without explaining what 'kind' or 'sort' of causal explanation they are.

Peters says "....a proper understanding of what is meant by a human action has very important logical consequences. It shows,.....that human actions cannot be sufficiently explained in terms of causal concepts like 'colourless movements'. Indeed to claim that we are confronted with an action is ipso facto to rule out such mechanical explanations!"<sup>3</sup> Here it seems that Peters equates causal explanations with mechanical explanations, but he overlooks the fact that psycho-analytic explanations are causal but they involve mental concepts.

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1. R.S. Peters. Op. cit. p56

2. Ibid P54

3. Ibid p7-8. also see pl5



It should be pointed out that in connection with his discussion of Freud's theory, Peters suggests that Freud was influenced by mechanical principles in formulating his psycho-analytic theories. "He (Freud) never abandoned Hobbes' hoary hypothesis, developed in detail in the Project /Project for a Scientific Psychology/ that psychical states were reflections of material elements subject to the laws of motion."<sup>1</sup> In continuation of this suggestion Peters says "So, if a man is unintentionally rude to his employer, the explanation might be that the sight or thought of a man who was emotionally equivalent to the father initiated tension which must persist until some kind of discharge is found. The discharge might take a hallucinatory form in dreams.....or it might be discharged through the motor apparatus by his being rude or treading on his toe 'by mistake'. The explanation is of a causal type; he is, as it were, pushed into being rude by the wish or current seeking some form of discharge".<sup>2</sup>

Peters' intention here is to show that Freud's psycho-analytic explanations are mechanical in disguise. Here I think Peters overlooks the point that though Freud may be deeply influenced by the mechanical theories, his theory does not suggest that the psycho-analytic concepts like Id, Ego, Super Ego, Repression, Hallucinatory wish-fulfilment, Dreams etc., are reducible to physico-chemical concepts, or to physiological concepts. Freud's use of a new set of concepts shows that for him the concepts used in mechanical sciences are inadequate for the purpose of explaining human behaviour. An explanation in terms of psycho-analytic concepts is causal not because the concepts involved in the explanation are reducible to mechanical concepts, but because the explanation itself fulfils the requirements of what we ordinarily understand by a causal explanation. An explanation in psycho-analytic terms is nothing like an explanation in terms of 'colourless movements'.

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1. Ibid p65

2. Ibid p68

Here perhaps Peters would like to argue that a causal explanation is mechanical, in the sense of being non-purposive. This point has its own difficulties. In the ordinary sense of being purposive i.e., goal directed, a physiological explanation can be called purposive for it often explains physiological changes in terms of functions, and functional explanations are goal-directed. Similarly psycho-analytic explanations being in terms of hidden subconscious motives, desires and wishes are also in a way purposive. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that certain causal explanations do contain purposive elements.

This shows that a causal explanation need not be non-purposive as a mechanical explanation is. Therefore a causal explanation is equivalent to a mechanical explanation neither in the sense of involving mechanical concepts, nor in the sense of being non-purposive.

There is however another sense of purpose in which Peters contrasts the mechanical type of causal explanation with explanation in terms of reason. The latter type of explanation is purposive in the anthropocentric sense of 'purpose' where 'purpose' means an end consciously desired or sought for. Thus to provide an explanation of action in terms of reason is to say that it is intended, desired or willed. Peters is of course right in contrasting this sort of explanation with mechanical explanation which does not involve any intentional concepts. But he is mistaken in thinking that the adjectives 'mechanical' and 'causal' are interchangeable, and that therefore if an explanation in terms of reason rules out mechanical explanation, it also rules out causal explanation.

Peters' contention that an explanation of action in terms of physical movement cannot be provided without obliterating the meaning of the term 'action' is a valid contention. But he is mistaken in thinking that this means that action as such cannot be given a causal explanation. As I have said before, the concept of cause is denotatively wider than the concept of physical movement.

The belief that causal explanations are mechanical in nature led Peters to argue that there is no specifiable movement required for a particular action, while a causal explanation requires such specification. He says "To give a causal explanation of an event involved at least showing that other conditions being presumed unchanged a change in one variable is a sufficient condition for a change in another. In the mechanical conception of 'cause' it is also demanded that there should be spatial and temporal contiguity between the movements involved. Now the trouble about giving this sort of explanation of human action is that we can never specify an action exhaustively in terms of movements of the body or within the body. (.....) It is therefore impossible to state sufficient conditions in terms of antecedent movements which may vary concomitantly with subsequent movements."<sup>1</sup>

This argument is based on the assumption that in order to be causally explained an action should be correlated with bodily movements. Peters shares this view with D.W. Hamlyn,<sup>2</sup> and he mentions the example of 'signing a contract'. He says that here all that we can do is to specify certain general outlines of the required movement but '....it would be impossible to stipulate exhaustively what the movements must be.'<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted here that although actions cannot be correlated with bodily movements, they are not always independent of bodily movements.

There is a strong point made by G.J. Warnock in this connection. He says, "....even if the account of how matter moved thus does not entail any specific designation of what Smith did, there still are, surely, some descriptions of what he did with which it is incompatible."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid p12

2. D.W. Hamlyn. 'Behaviour.' Philosophy 1953. p132. Hamlyn gave up this argument later on. Vide. PASSV XXXVIII 1964. p129

3. R.S. Peters. Op. cit. p13. The emphasis is <sup>the</sup> author's

4. G.J. Warnock. 'Action and Event! Freedom & the Will. ed. D.F. Pears. p77  
The emphasis is <sup>the</sup> author's

Following the line of Warnock's argument, one can say that when there is a particular movement, say the movement of the right leg, there is a limited range of possible actions which can be compatible with it. It rules out, as Warnock shows, the possibility of the happening of any other action which does not fall within the group of actions compatible with the movement of the leg. This proves at least that in some cases the performances of actions are not so independent of the occurrence of movements as one might think they are. But at the same time it is true that a neuro-physiological explanation of a movement, however complete it may be, will not be a description of action. It may be possible to give a neuro-physiological account of movement completely correlated with kicking but it will not say anything about the action 'kicking'. This is simply because the notion of action involves a notion of mentality.\*

I shall however deny the necessity of a one-to-one correlation between action and movement in a causal explanation of action. Such a necessity would arise only if causal explanations were taken as equivalent to mechanical explanations. Since I have denied such an equivalence I would like to point out that Peters is not only mistaken in demanding a complete correlation between action and movement but also mistaken in suggesting that such specification of exact movements is universally obtainable in the case of physical events. It is a mistake to think that whatever is causally explicable is neatly specifiable in terms of movement. This requirement is too strong even for physical events to satisfy. As G. Madell puts it, "....if this requirement were necessary, then a great many occurrences, as opposed to actions, would also be removed from the domain of causal explanation. For example falling off a cliff cannot be specified in this way: there is no set of movement which must take place if one is to be said to have fallen off a cliff...."<sup>1</sup>

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\* This point is discussed in Chapter III Sec. III

1. G. Madell: 'Action and Causal Explanation.' p36. Mind 1967. Also see D.W. Hamlyn. PASSV XXXVIII 1964. p129-130

Peters has not denied that causal explanation is applicable to what 'happens' to a man - when he 'suffers' passively and does not do anything actively. This means according to Peters, what 'happens' to a man is specifiable in terms of movements. Now let us take the ill-fated example from Peters' list of what 'happens' to a man, viz. making an advance to a choir boy. This is no more specifiable in terms of movements than 'signing a contract'. There is no specific movement which constitutes precisely what is called 'making an advance to a choir boy' just as there is no specific movement which constitutes Peters' paradigm case of an action viz., signing a contract. Yet Peters believes that the former can be provided with a causal explanation, but not the latter.

### III Happenings and doings

The distinction between what 'happens' to a man and what he 'does' occupies an important position in Peters' treatment of the problem of causal explanation of an action. Peters<sup>1</sup> continuously appeals to this distinction to show that the causal explanation of action is not possible, and I would like to show that this distinction does not in any way compel us to deny that causal explanation of action is possible. Peters presents the argument, and this he shares with J.O. Urmson<sup>1</sup>, that there are many different sorts of question which can be asked about human behaviour which cannot be brought under an "all embracing causal theory." He elucidates his point by saying that 'why did Jones do that?' is capable of being answered in a variety of different ways and the nature of the question "usually dictates the sort of answer which is expected and which counts as an explanation."<sup>2</sup>

One thing should be made clear here. It is true that the form of a question dictates the form of the explanation given in the sense that it tells us what form of explanation will satisfy the explanatory need of the

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1. J.O. Urmson. 'Motives and Causes.' Pl79. PASSV Vol. XXVI. 1952  
 2. R.S. Peters. Op. cit. pp3-4

inquirer. When the class-teacher asks, 'how did the window break', it will not be enough to say that 'it was struck by a stone', but that 'Jones broke it'. It is obvious that an explanation given in a particular situation does not, and is not meant to satisfy all explanatory needs which may possibly arise from the situation. Even in the case of physical events, different sorts of questions can be asked and answered in different ways, and the answer which will count as a relevant explanation depends on the nature of the question. In the case of a coal mine disaster, the explanation which will be relevant for the enquiring tribunal will not be relevant to the lecturer on mining engineering who is teaching how disasters happen inside a coal mine. But this, i.e. that the nature of the question dictates the sort of answer to be counted as an explanation, has got no connection with and does not rule out the possibility of a causal explanation - in the case of a physical event or in the case of an action.

It seems what Peters and Urmson want to mean is that in the case of a physical event we always ask about a 'happening', but in the case of human behaviour questions asked can be categorised under two distinct categories. Some questions refer to a 'doing' and some questions refer to a 'happening'. It has been suggested that the form of the question asked indicates whether it concerns a 'happening' or a 'doing'. For instance, when we ask 'what made Jones do that?' we describe the situation as a 'happening' - something which happens to Jones. Conversely, when we ask why Jones did that the situation is described as an 'action' - a case of doing.

It is said that these two types of question cannot be brought under the same explanatory causal principle. Obviously they cannot be brought under one kind of causal principle, but it is not clear why they cannot be covered by a more general form of causal principle which will include both mechanical and non-mechanical causal principles. I have already pointed out that to consider causal explanation as equivalent to mechanical explanation is to use it in a very narrow sense which excludes many explanations usually called causal.

Also it should be pointed out that in ordinary language, there is no systematic way to make the distinction between what a person 'does' and what 'happens' to him, and the form of the question asked hardly throws light on the matter. In ordinary language, quite often, by what a person 'does', one can refer to both actions and non-actions. For instance the question 'what did he do' can be answered by saying that 'he fell asleep', 'he jerked his knee', 'he sneezed', 'he shivered' or 'he broke his leg', though none of these examples can be called an action. It shows that the statement 'he did x' can be replaced by descriptions which are not necessarily descriptions of actions, and the question 'why did he do x' does not necessarily indicate that the situation concerned is a 'doing', and not a 'happening'.

Similar ambiguity can be found in the use of the description 'what happens to a person', in our ordinary language. Within this description we include not only cases like 'he fell down from the cliff', or 'he had a brain lesion' but also cases like 'he was forced to open the safe', which could easily be the description of an action. Thus the form of the question 'what made him do that' does not necessarily indicate in this case that the situation is a 'happening' and not a 'doing'. It seems to me that Peters' suggestion is that the 'doings' are where explanations in terms of reasons are in place, whereas causal explanations are in place with happenings. But he himself contradicts his point by his list of 'deviations' or 'break-downs' from purposive rule-following behaviour.

This breakdown in behaviour pattern appears to be a pretty mixed bag for Peters. It includes, as I have already mentioned, different kinds of deviations from the 'purposive rule following model', e.g. refusal to take the quickest route to one's destination, failing to remember one's name, running to work while one is not late, crawling and sniffing while listening to an essay, as well as making an advance to a choir boy, or behaving in a

particular way because of a brain lesion. In all these cases Peters is inclined to say that a man 'suffers' from something rather than that he 'does' something. Causal questions are, for Peters, quite appropriate in all these cases. The answers one provides here are explanations which may involve certain physiological descriptions but never the mention of reasons in the form of intentions, desires, wants, motives, etc. This seems to me a very hasty conclusion, for except perhaps the cases of behaviour resulting from a brain lesion and failure of memory, I wonder how many of these deviations can properly be described as something 'happening' to a person. Some of these are border line cases which should better be described as cases of action than of happening. For instance, making an advance to a choir boy. In this case it can quite properly be asked 'what made him do that?' and answered by naming a reason viz., a strong desire or want. Peters appears to have confused the various senses in which the word 'breakdown' can be used. A breakdown in behaviour may mean unusual behaviour or defective behaviour or wrong behaviour. An advance to a choir boy is neither unusual nor defective but may be considered as 'wrong' in a particular social context, whereas behaviour issuing from a brain lesion is a defective behaviour and crawling and sniffing while listening to an essay may be considered as unusual. Peters' treatment also suggests that causal explanations are relevant in the case of human behaviour only when there is a 'breakdown'. But one can give a causal explanation of a perfectly normal situation which may not involve any breakdown at all like the causal explanation of how does the human mind work in a given situation. The confusion in Peters' treatment arises because of his over-emphasis on the form of the questions asked in connection with human behaviour.

The important point is that a piece of behaviour cannot be identified as 'action' or 'happening' unless the distinction between action and happening is made quite clear. But this cannot be done on the basis of how a question is phrased. Such a distinction cannot be promoted to a logical



distinction. What I am denying here is not the distinction between a 'happening' and a 'doing', but that such a distinction can be drawn from the verbal form of the questions asked and answered in connection with human behaviour.

Therefore, the distinction between a 'happening' and a 'doing' when drawn on such a verbal basis cannot successfully establish the inappropriateness of the causal model of explanation in the case of human action. These questions presuppose the distinction and it is not the case that the distinction is drawn on their basis.

IV Are causal explanations appropriate only in the case of deviations?

It is clear that Peters (and also Urmson, as Peters shares the view with Urmson) assumes from the very beginning that there is a distinction between a cause and a reason for an action and that the latter can never be treated as a cause. This is why Peters says that when we ask 'what made Jones do that' we rule out the possibility of a reason-explanation. To ask such a question is, on his view, to ask for a causal explanation and causal explanation and reason explanation are incompatible.

No wonder that such an assumption has led Peters to argue that causal explanation is appropriate only when something happens to a man in the sense that there is a deviation from the normal rule-following pattern of behaviour. To put it more precisely, we look for causal explanation only when something is unusual in human behaviour. This argument of Peters seems to me quite unsupported and unconvincing and obviously false. As B. Williams puts it aptly, "...it rests on an idea of explanation which may serve the purposes of a jobbing electrician but is happily not shared by the natural scientists, or by children."<sup>1</sup> We ask 'why' not only for unusualness but also for interest.

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1. B.A.O. Williams. 'Postscript.' Freedom & the Will. p117. ed. D.F. Pears

For example, an apple falling from a tree is a perfectly normal situation, but it might arouse the interest of a scientist to ask 'why'. We very often ask for causes of actions even when they are perfect cases of action and not 'breakdowns' in behaviour e.g. why did you take up philosophy?

It can be argued that even in the case of physical events we usually ask for a cause when something unusual happens i.e. the normal process gets disrupted e.g. a machine stops working. This does not mean that a causal explanation of the machine's normal function cannot be given, or that such an explanation is inappropriate. Similarly, it cannot be said that the fact that we ask for causes of actions when they are deviations from the rule-following model means that actions which are not deviations cannot be causally explained. To summarize, in the words of Hamlyn, "...our tendency to ask for the causes of behaviour which is abnormal rather than normal, irrational rather than rational, is a function of the circumstances in which we demand explanations in this sphere, rather than indicative of something about the concept of cause."<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

The arguments I have been discussing can now be summed up. I started with Peters' argument that to give a causal explanation of action is to treat action as movement and since no specification of action in terms of movement is possible, action cannot be given a causal explanation.

By characterizing action as involving a purposive rule-following model Peters means that there are reasons for doing it. When it is said that an action can be explained from the standpoint of a 'norm' all that is meant is that the action is performed for certain reasons. I raised my hand because I wanted to signal; I turned the switch on because I wanted to have light. All these are explanations in terms of reasons and involve a

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1. D.W. Hamlyn. 'Causality and Human behaviour.' PASSV XXXVIII 1964. P125

purposive rule-following pattern. Peters did not ask the question whether these explanations could be causal, once he was satisfied that they excluded mechanical explanation.

I have tried to show that Peters was mistaken in taking causal explanation as equivalent to mechanical explanation. Causal explanation includes but is not identical with mechanical explanation. Once this is understood it becomes clear that in order to give a causal explanation one is not required to give an account in terms of movement. Hence Peters' argument that action cannot be causally explained because it cannot be specified in terms of movement is not conclusive.

We are now left with the position that the causal explanation of action need not be in terms of movement. I have mentioned before that the opponents of the causal theory of action sometimes overlook the possibility that a causal theorist may not want to give a causal explanation of action in terms of movements; there may be some other factors which he will prefer to consider as causes of actions.

One such consideration we find in the traditional theory of volition according to which an act of will is the cause of action. In the following chapter I shall consider and analyse the volition theory as an attempt to give a causal explanation of action. I shall try to show that the volition-theorists are part<sup>ly</sup> right and part<sup>ly</sup> wrong. What is right is their realisation that the causal explanation of action should be given in intentional terms. What is wrong is their failure to see that an 'act of will' does not serve the purpose. I shall criticise the volition theory so far as the notion of an act of will is concerned, but I shall defend the claim of the theory so far as it tries to give the causal explanation of action in terms of mental entities.

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Chapter IIThe theory of volition as a causal explanation of action

The theory of volition as a causal hypothesis has become subject to severe criticism within the last few years. The theory considers 'will' as a faculty of the human mind capable of producing action. This notion of will dominated the thoughts of philosophers from Hobbes to Prichard. Hobbes in Leviathan pointed out clearly two features of volition or will. First, that it is an act of will. "In deliberation, the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the will; the act, not the faculty, of willing." Secondly, "... a voluntary act is that, which proceedeth from the will and no other."<sup>1</sup> It is on these two points that the volition theory is particularly ostracised by its opponents.

The notion of an act of will is deeply embeded in our thought and language, but philosophically we doubt its very existence. It is dubious whether there is any such thing as an act of will, and this is one of the persisting questions that arise in the discussion of the notion of an act of will.

There are two main tenets of the volition theory, viz., (i) all actions are preceded and caused by an act of will; (ii) an empirical identification of such an act of will is possible. The claim of the volition-theorists that an action is causally explicable in terms of an act of will depends much on the conclusiveness of these two tenets. If it can be shown that actions are not universally preceded by an act of will, and that the empirical identifiability of an act of will is difficult to establish, then the claim that all actions are causally determined by an act of will cannot be maintained.

1. T. Hobbes. Leviathan. ed. M. Oakeshott. p38. 1957

The emphasis is <sup>the</sup> author's

## Part 1.

I Are all actions preceded by an act of will?

The volition-theorists have brought in the notion of an act of will to distinguish actions from movements. Human overt behaviour can be of various types ranging from the unconscious movement of a limb to the writing down of a logical argument. The notion of an act of will is used by the volition-theorists to differentiate one type of behaviour from another. According to them certain bodily movements are causally characterised by an act of will whereas the others are not. The former are called actions or voluntary actions. In the stock example of 'I raise my hand' and 'my hand goes up' the physical movement is the same in both cases. If there were a physical difference between them, it would have been easier for one to distinguish them without feeling the need for the notion of an act of will. Since there is no such discoverable physical difference between 'I raise my hand' and 'my hand goes up', it is thought that only the presence or absence of an act of will can make such a distinction possible. In 'I raise my hand', the overt movement is caused by an act of will, the presence of which distinguishes it from 'my hand goes up'. The concept of volition is thus brought in to demarcate actions from movements. The traditional volition theory holds that all actions, whatever their nature may be, are causally qualified, in contrast with movements, by the invariable presence of an act of will. Without this no physical movement can be called an action.

I shall consider this idea of an act of will in the light of the criticisms made by Prof. G. Ryle. A discussion of Ryle's view will be quite in place here as his view represents a common pattern of thought in recent philosophy.

II G. Ryle and the concept of volition

Ryle in his "Concept of Mind"<sup>1</sup> remarks that the doctrine of volition is thought to be a causal hypothesis because it is wrongly supposed that the question 'what makes a bodily movement voluntary?' is a causal question.

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1. G. Ryle. Concept of Mind p67 Ch.III 1949

Ryle attacks the traditional theory of volition on two points viz. (i) whether all actions are preceded by an act of will and (ii) whether these actions are caused by an act of will.

Ryle's campaign against the notion of volition is in fact a part of his more general project of demolishing Cartesian mind-body dualism. It is therefore not surprising that he considers the "language of volition" as a "para-mechanical theory of the mind" and comments, "If a theorist speaks without qualms of 'volitions', or 'acts of will', no further evidence is needed to show that he swallows whole the dogma that a mind is a secondary field of special causes"<sup>1</sup>.

Ryle presents several arguments to establish his contention that the whole idea of one's performing an 'act of will' is an absurd hypothesis. He says that ordinary men never report the occurrence of these acts. Nobody describes his own conduct in this idiom. Nobody can witness the volitions of another, nor can the agent himself know that an overt action of his follows from his volitions. Furthermore the notion that minds must exist to give causal explanations of intelligent behaviour contradicts the idea that the mind-body relation is mysterious and that mind has an existence outside the causal system of physical bodies. Lastly the theory that all actions are preceded by an act of will which itself is an act, involves an infinite regress.

The importance of Ryle's criticism lies in pointing out the untenability of the theory that all actions are preceded by an act of will, and in showing that such a theory involves an infinite regress, and I think Ryle is right in showing these two defects of the volition theory.

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1. Ibid p64

The thesis that all actions are preceded by an act of will is difficult to maintain for the following reasons. - First of all, as Ryle points out, it lacks empirical evidence. One must not forget that the volition-theorists conceive an 'act of will' as a conscious mental performance. In this sense hardly anybody performs a mental act before performing an action. Ryle is right in saying that nobody ever reports the occurrence of these acts. When I raise my hand, I do not also perform a separate mental act which is called an act of will.\* Besides, the thesis that all actions are preceded and caused by an act of will suffers from being all-inclusive. It is more easy to say what does not involve an act of will than to say what does. Quite obviously, movements like breathing, digesting, shivering, reflex movement, an epileptic fit do not involve any conscious act of will. But it would be a mistake to think that in contrast to this all actions (or any actions at all) are caused by specific acts of will. The volition-theorists overlook the point that within actions there are varieties of activities which cannot all be covered by the notion of 'being preceded by an act of will.'

In ordinary language as well as in philosophy the concept of action is used as a blanket term to cover heterogeneous activities. If an action is always preceded by an act of will these heterogeneous activities cannot all be called action. This becomes evident if one considers the various cases of behaviour we include within the notion of action. Within action we include cases like making a noise while eating soup, moving one's leg while reading, actions done under duress, actions of the maniac etc. These instances can hardly be called cases of behaviour caused by specific acts of will. The variegated nature of the concept of action shows how difficult it is to maintain that all actions are equally preceded and caused by an act of will and to differentiate actions from movements in terms of an act of will.

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\* This point will be discussed in detail in the next part in connection with James, Vesey and Imlay.

This becomes evident also from the way the adjectives 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' are used in ordinary language in connection with an action. Both voluntary and involuntary behaviour is called action, but involuntary behaviour like blowing up a nuclear power station by pressing the wrong button cannot be called a specifically willed action. If action is always caused by an 'act of will' which is a conscious mental performance, then involuntary actions fall out of 'action' and the notion of involuntary action becomes a contradiction.

It can be argued that although an act of will fails to distinguish properly actions from movements, it can at least serve as a distinguishing criterion for voluntary action in contrast with involuntary action. The difficulty of this argument is that if voluntary actions are willed actions and involuntary actions are not, then how should one differentiate between these two on the one hand and mere movement on the other. Certainly, there is a difference between my leaning on the door bell and ringing it unknowingly and the reflex movement of my knee. Besides, volition-theorists introduce the notion of an act of will to give a causal explanation of an action as such and not just voluntary actions. Even if for arguments' sake we say that a voluntary action is caused by an act of will, there will be no way to prove it, because, as Ryle points out, nobody is ever conscious of performing such an act of will. Thus, when used as a distinguishing characteristic of voluntary action in contrast with involuntary, an act of will fails to account for the difference between action and non-action, and when used as a characteristic of action in contrast with non-action or movement, it fails to account for the difference between voluntary and involuntary action.

### III Acts of Will and an Infinite Regress

The second defect of the volition-theory is that it involves an infinite regress. The theory conceives acts of will as 'actions' and all actions as being caused by acts of will. Therefore, the obvious conclusion is that acts of will being actions are caused by further acts of will and so on ad infinitum.



Ryle has made this point in his own ingenious way. He raises the question whether volition is a voluntary or involuntary act of mind and shows that either answer leads to absurdity. If it is involuntary in the sense that I cannot help willing such and such, then it is absurd to say that the action to which such willing gives rise is voluntary. On the other hand if it is voluntary then it requires a prior act of volition and so on ad infinitum.

It has been suggested by some philosophers, including Ryle himself, that one possible answer to the above-mentioned argument might be that the case of volition is a case where the adjectives 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' do not apply. If an action in order to be voluntary or involuntary presupposes the notion of volition, then these predicates cannot be applied to volition; to do otherwise is to argue in a circle. To this however Ryle's answer is that in that case adjectives like 'good' or 'bad' 'virtuous' or 'wicked' cannot be applied to an act of will. In Ryle's opinion if the volition theorists think that the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' can be meaningfully and sensibly applied to all actions there is no reason why it should not be applicable to an act of will as well. From this perspective Ryle is obviously right in showing the absurdity of either predicating or not predicating these notions of an act of will, though there is not any real necessity to bring in the notions of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' to establish the infinite regress. The infinite regress arises from the very description of volition as an 'act of will' and of action as being caused by an act of will. So long as volition is described as an 'act of will' there is no possibility of avoiding the fallacy of infinite regress.

Some philosophers have tried to reanalyse and redefine the notion of volition to avoid the infinite regress. For instance, A.C. Ewing, facing this difficulty of an infinite regress, proposes to reserve the

term 'volition' to cover phenomena where the volitional element is more conspicuous like 'efforts of will', 'choice', 'decisions' etc. and to keep the word 'conation' to indicate a general and wider sense of "aiming at" - "casual or vigorous". He says, "we must however still not think of volitions as single acts but rather as processes which may take up a long time."<sup>1</sup> In this account Ewing tries to avoid an infinite regress by treating volitions as processes rather than as actions. If volition is not an action then no question of its being caused by an act of will arises.

There is a recent attempt by D.M. Armstrong to solve the problem. He says, "We must in the first place distinguish between acts of the will and mere operations or motions of the will. An act is something that we do as opposed to something that merely happens. An act springs from our will. An act of the will is therefore something that is itself brought into existence by the will. An intention formed as a result of deliberation would be an example. It follows that not all our acts can spring from acts of will, but that we must in the end come to acts that spring from mere operations of the will. Operations of the will are mere happenings. They have causes, no doubt, but these causes do not lie in the will.

Now operations of the will are not purposive in the same sense that actions are. Actions are purposive in the sense that they are caused by the will. Operations of the will are purposive in the sense that they cause actions. Only acts of will are purposive in both senses. So there is no regress involved in saying that actions are caused by the operations of the will."<sup>2</sup>

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1. A.C. Ewing. 'Prof. Ryle's attack on dualism.' PAS 1952-53. Vol LIII. p67

2. D.M. Armstrong. A materialistic theory of Mind. p137. 1968.

The emphasis is <sup>is</sup> author's

I think this solution of Armstrong's gives rise to unnecessary complication. If operations of the will are causes of the acts of the will but they are not further caused by will, and if some actions are caused by an act of will, when in the long run all actions are caused by 'operations' of the will, then why bring 'acts of the will' on to the scene at all? Besides, what exactly Armstrong means by an 'act of the will' or by an 'operation of the will' is not very clear. He describes operations or motions of the will as 'happenings' and considers them as the source of everything we do, i.e., acts of the will and actions. But he does not sufficiently explain how operations of the will, which are mere happenings, could give rise to something like 'actions' or 'acts of the will' which obviously are not happenings but our performances. Here again, I think Ryle's criticism holds good. If operations of the will are things which happen to us and we cannot help having them, then it is absurd to suppose that the acts of the will, and actions, which such 'motions' or 'operations' produce, are voluntary performances. Thus Armstrong's attempt to avoid infinite regress by saying that actions are caused by the operations of the will whose cause lies elsewhere than in the will, only gives rise to further problems.

So far I have been criticising the traditional theory of volition from Ryle's point of view. The main target of Ryle's criticism is the notion of an act of will preceding every action, and I have agreed with Ryle that such a notion of an 'act of will' is difficult to maintain. The notion fails to serve the purpose for which it is postulated. As not all actions are preceded by an 'act of will', it fails to separate actions from movements on that ground. Furthermore, the view that every action needs an act of will and that<sup>an</sup> act of will itself is an action involves an infinite regress.

These are, however, the difficulties connected with the notion of an act of will. In the next part of this chapter I shall deal with the other tenet of the volition-theory viz., that the empirical identifiability of an act of will is possible. In this connection I shall discuss William James' experiment with an anaesthetized patient which philosophers often cite as a case where the performance of an act of will can be proved. In conjunction with this I shall also discuss two more answers to the problem which the experiment with the anaesthetized patient presents. These are answers given by G.N.A. Vesey and R.A. Inlay. The views of James, Vesey and Inlay will be discussed not because they advocate or oppose the idea of an act of will, but because their views have particular relevance to the question of the empirical identifiability of an act of will.

## Part 2.

I The empirical identifiability of an act of will

It has been sometimes said that in certain cases the presence of an act of will is likely to be recognizable. References are made to such items as 'efforts of will', 'resolving', 'deciding', 'choosing' etc. As Mary Warnock says, "There is a set of phenomena which, roughly speaking, involve the will. What they have in common is their relevance to situations of initiating and carrying on action and getting things done. To investigate these would be to investigate the will."<sup>1</sup>

It is not however very clear when one investigates will or an act of will through the investigations of 'efforts of will', 'deciding', 'resolving', 'choosing' etc., whether one is identifying an act of will by the use of these mental terms. The volition-theorists think that the presence of an act of will is a universal characteristic of action and in that sense it is hard to see how it can be so established by referring to an 'effort of will' or 'resolving', or 'deciding'. As Ryle puts it, ".... most voluntary actions do not issue out of conditions of indecision and are not therefore results of settlements of indecisions."<sup>2</sup> Effort of will, deciding, choosing etc., are certainly very different from a supposed universal characteristic of action.

A similar point is made by C.A. Campbell. He says that 'effort of will' and 'activity of will' should not be confused. "....these are quite distinct phenomena. No doubt there is an activity of a sort involved in all willing or choosing; but to be conscious of that activity is not necessarily to be conscious of exerting effort of will."<sup>3</sup>

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1. D.F. Pears. Freedom & the Will. Ch. 2. p15 1963

2. G. Ryle. Concept of Mind. p68

3. C.A. Campbell. 'The psychology of efforts of will.' PAS XL 1939-40 p49-50

One thing is certain that effort of will is always a conscious mental phenomenon and we cannot speak of unconscious effort of will. In most cases of action we are not conscious of such an effort. Therefore if an act of will is conceived as something that accompanies all cases of action, then certainly it cannot be identified with or investigated through an effort of will.

## II William James and the identification of an act of will

William James<sup>1</sup> in his discussion of volition has asked the question how to account for the surprise of the anaesthetised patient who thought that he had raised his hand, but without any effective physical result, and answered the question in terms of volition or willing. This experiment of James is often cited by philosophers to establish the performance of an act of will. The reason for this is, as it is often argued, that if the patient had not done anything there would be no reason for him to feel surprised. And it should be noted that the surprise of the patient cannot be explained away by saying that he has 'tried' to raise his hand. For the general consciousness of 'trying' or making any 'effort' is absent here; the patient is not really aware of any 'trying'.

Mary Warnock<sup>2</sup> however denies that James' experiment can supply us with an empirical reason for postulating acts of will. She suggests that the explanation might be that the patient was "in a set to obey and was aware of this." She compares the case with the general preparedness and expectation of a typist who gets equally surprised if the right letter does not come out as expected, and comments, "...it would be absurd to identify this preparedness or expectation or whatever we call it, with performing an act of will."<sup>3</sup>

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1. William James. Principles of Psychology Vol.II Ch.XXVI. p486, 1901

2. D.F. Pears. Op. cit. p23

3. Ibid

Mary Warnock is right in saying that James' experiment does not supply us with any reason for postulating acts of will and this I shall discuss later. But I do not think that one can explain the patient's surprise any better by saying that it is like the general awareness or expectation of a typist. First of all Mary Warnock does not explain what it is to be "in a set to obey", and secondly there is a difference between the patient's case of surprise and the typist's case of surprise. It is not clear whether the typist gets surprised because she is in a particular 'mental set' or because she has done something, i.e., pressed a key (in this case the wrong key). On the other hand, in James' experiment the patient has not done anything overt, though he feels that he has done something, i.e., raised his hand. The typist's case is a straight forward case of involuntary action, whereas the patient's case does not involve any action at all. The two cases are quite different, though it is quite natural to think that just as the typist has pressed the wrong key the patient has done something. This is because, so far as the experiment is concerned the patient actually thinks that he has done something and this 'something' appears to him as if he has raised his hand. Obviously, this 'doing' cannot be the raising of his hand. Nothing such has actually happened. We cannot say that the patient has moved his muscles. The reason for this is not that we cannot go behind our muscles and contract them; or that we have not enough knowledge of physiology and the nervous system to move the appropriate muscles; or that sometimes we move our muscles by raising our hands. But the reason is that such a movement would be an indirect movement and the question will remain equally pressing as to what we do when we move our muscles. It will not do, if we call the muscle movements and discharging electric currents the 'necessary intermediate steps' for raising one's hand. Even then the question will arise 'how do we do that?'

The answer which William James gives to the question is that we will that the movement should take place.

It ought to be mentioned that James does not use the expression 'an act of will', instead he uses only 'will' or 'willing'. His treatment of 'will' sometimes suggests that by it he means a mental occurrence, and sometimes a mental performance. Particularly in the example of 'willing to slide the distant table' he does postulate an act of will; whereas the first part of his analysis suggests that willing is nothing more than having an idea.

I would like to show that in neither of the senses of 'willing', is James successful in providing us with a clear account of what a person really 'does' when he moves his hand and why the patient is surprised.

Let us first see what happens, on James' view, when the patient 'wills' to move his hand. James says the idea of movement in the mind is a sufficient cue for the movement to follow. There need not be anything else in the mind except this idea. This is because consciousness is by nature impulsive and a movement immediately follows upon the idea of it. "We think of the act and it is done and that is all that introspection tells us of the matter."<sup>1</sup> Where an idea does not result in action other ideas simultaneously present inhibit it. An additional conscious element "in the shape of a fiat, mandate, or express consent has to intervene and precede the movement"<sup>2</sup> only in special cases. In ordinary cases, says James, "we do not have a sensation or a thought and then have to add something dynamic to it to get a movement."<sup>3</sup>

If this is what happens in the case of 'willing' to do something, this is what presumably has happened in the patient's case as well. This means he has an idea of the movement in his mind, he thinks about the movement, attends to the idea, but the action does not follow. It is hard to

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1. W. James. Principles of Psychology. Vol. II p522

2. Ibid

3. Ibid p526. The emphasis is <sup>the</sup> author's



see how this can constitute the patient's performing an 'act of will'. Thinking about an idea or attending to that idea does not really clarify what the person 'does'. This description of willing, i.e., having an idea in the mind and attending to it does not differentiate willing as a special ability from desiring, wishing, imagining or thinking of a movement. Mere recalling of the sensible qualities of a particular movement and attending to that idea is not enough to be called an 'act of will' or a 'doing' because such 'attending' is also involved in wishing or desiring, though we never talk of an 'act' of wish or desire. There is nothing special about this 'attending' to an idea which can make willing a particular type of performance.

This description of voluntary action, i.e., having an idea and attending to it which is immediately followed by a movement also obliterates the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary'. The description fits 'involuntary movement' very well. For instance if we think hard about an object and attend to its sensory qualities, certain physical movements of our body automatically follow; if we think about delicious food we start salivating. Thus if in willing the mind only attends to the idea of the movement without involving any element of desire or want to perform it, and the movement follows immediately, then voluntary action becomes analogous to involuntary movement.

James' idea that willing consists only of having an idea of movement and attending to it leads him to conclude that we can 'will' to slide a distant table.

Let us first mention the inconsistency of this striking conclusion of James with what he says in connection with the origin of voluntary movement.

James says that voluntary movements are secondary, not primary functions of our organism.<sup>1</sup> The movements are first performed involuntarily and we learn our potentialities of action from experience. The starting point of volition is a kinaesthetic idea of movement left in the memory by experience. For James, 'willing to slide a distant table' is as much a good case of willing as is 'willing to write' and he seems to have ignored completely the differences between these two cases. In the case of 'willing to write' one knows what 'writing' is, but not what actually 'sliding a distant table' is. One does not know what sort of idea one will have to 'attend to' in this latter case. In one's memory there is an impression of past successful cases of one's 'willing to write', but in the case of 'willing to slide a distant table' one does not really know what that can possibly mean. This is because the kinaesthetic idea formed from past experience to which the mind in willing is to attend is not present here. Our experience has never told us what 'sliding a distant table' is. Consequently, if voluntary movements are secondary functions of the organism, 'willing to slide a distant table' cannot be a case of willing. James' demand here is inconsistent with his earlier assertion that in willing the mind attends to an idea which is obtained from reflex or accidental experiences. The 'guiding sensation' as James calls it is absent here.

Furthermore there is a fundamental difference between this sort of willing and the ordinary cases of willing. In this sort of extraordinary willing, there is no element of human agency involved; it is more appropriate to say here that 'I am willing the distant table to slide' than 'I am willing to slide the distant table'. In this connection, D.F. Pears has quite appropriately observed that here "...we will that something should happen," not that, "we will to do something" and this something which we will to happen we cannot in fact do.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid p487

2. D.F. Pears. Freedom & the Will. p35

James says that while people say that they cannot will the table to slide, the image of the stationary table inhibits volition. He says, "Only by abstracting from the thought of the impossibility am I able to imagine strongly the table sliding over the floor, to make the bodily 'effort' which I do, and to will it to come towards me."<sup>1</sup>

This seems to be James' answer to the question what one does when one wills to move the table without actually touching it, and if there is no difference between an ordinary case of willing and 'willing to slide a distant table', then this is also what one does in ordinary cases of willing. Now from what James says above, the 'doing' seems to consist of 'imagining' strongly, 'making bodily effort', 'willing the table to come forward' etc. But this doing does not seem very different from mere imagining that one is sliding the table oneself. The whole idea of 'sliding a distant table' is derived from the ordinary case of actually sliding a table oneself. Without this derivation we do not even know what 'imagining strongly etc., in this case means. If this is what one does in extraordinary cases of willing, then it does not help us to progress much on the matter. Instead of explicating the general ordinary cases of willing, as J.F. Thomson<sup>2</sup> has pointed out, this extraordinary case of willing is constructed on the analogy of the ordinary cases of willing and action. Besides, it does not throw any light on the case of the anaesthetized patient. The patient attends to the idea of raising his hand no doubt, but it cannot be said that he is aware of performing any 'bodily effort' or of 'imagining strongly' that his hand rises.

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1. W. James. Op. cit. p560. foot note

2. D.F. Pears. Freedom and the will. p36

It can be argued against James that if willing to write and willing to slide a distant table are equally good examples of volition, then why does the case of 'willing to write' when not followed by appropriate movement, cause surprise, but the case of 'willing to slide a distant table' does not? When we will to write and writing does not follow we tend to think that something has gone wrong, but when we 'will to slide the distant table' and the table does not move, we do not think that something has gone wrong. This shows the lack of resemblance between the two cases which James fails to notice.

James' description of willing also fails to explain the surprise of the patient. According to James the patient is surprised because his willing the movement to occur, i.e., his attending to the idea of the movement, is not followed by the expected result. But he contradicts this explanation of the patient's surprise by his example of 'willing to slide a distant table' where the failure of the expected result to occur does not cause any surprise.

We are now in a position to sum up James' view. We started with the question how to establish that in raising one's hand one performs an act of will. For this purpose we cited James' experiment with the anaesthetized patient. We assumed for the sake of argument that it is quite plausible that he has done something, otherwise the patient would not be surprised. We found that one possible answer to what he has done, is what James says i.e., he has performed an act of will. But unfortunately James' account of what happens when a person wills does not really show that there is a performance which can be described as an act of will. Besides in the context of his various examples of willing, willing fails to explain the surprise of the patient.

The belief that the patient must have done something, otherwise he would not be surprised, is so strong that an attempt has been made to introduce a sort of 'mental doing' instead of a 'real' doing to solve the problem. This is where the explanation given by G.N.A. Vesey comes in.

### III G.N.A. Vesey and Mental-bodily movement

In his article 'volition' and book the Embodied Mind, G.N.A. Vesey<sup>1</sup> has tried to give an answer to the question what a man really 'does' in a case like William James' experiment with the anaesthetized patient. The answer is: so far as the mental side of the patient is concerned he moves his hand.

This answer as it develops from Vesey's criticism of James' ideomotor theory, is designed to avoid the difficulties of the causal approach. The causal approach as made by William James and others, assumes that one's moving one's hand is not direct but indirect through doing something else. As such it postulates something in between us and our movement, while Vesey wants an account which will not put anything between us and our movement. His approach aims to be non-causal. It holds that when we move our hand we just move it, we do not do anything else to move our hand. As Wittgenstein says, "When I raise my arm 'voluntarily' I do not use any instrument to bring the movement about!"<sup>2</sup> Such an approach puts one in a difficulty when one faces situations like William James' anaesthetized patient. Vesey says that in such situations we do not do nothing at all, nor do we move our hand physically, yet so far as our mental aspect as an agent is concerned we move our hand. Vesey calls this mental bodily movement. It is essentially subjective. "Just as bodily sensation (a sensation in part of the body) seems to be both something of which I am aware,

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1. G.N.A. Vesey. (i) 'volition;' Philosophy p352 Vol. XXXVI, 1961  
(ii) Embodied Mind. Ch. III & Ch. V. 1965
  2. L. Wittgenstein. Philosophical Investigations. 1.614.160e  
Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. 1958 Oxford

and yet not an object of awareness, so a mental bodily movement seems to be both something I do, and yet not an action."<sup>1</sup>

In order to clarify the situation, Vesey compares this mental bodily movement with a parallel situation in perception. He says, "It may be pointed out that what colour a carpet looks to someone depends on the state of his nervous system. If he took certain drugs, it might look quite different to him. His awareness of the carpet is thus subject to certain conditions - there being light, his having eyes, an optic nerve, etc. Here just as in the case of voluntary action, a causal account can be given of a person's perception of a carpet as being, say, blue. And in the light of this causal account, we may be invited to talk of what the person is immediately aware of."<sup>2</sup> What he is immediately aware of, is truth-functionally independent of what the carpet is. But at the same time what he is immediately aware of' is not something other than what he is aware of, when he is aware of the carpet, and to say that he is immediately aware of how the carpet looks to him is also to say that he is aware of the carpet. "In saying 'He is immediately aware of how the carpet looks to him' we are not debarred from saying, concurrently, that he is aware of the carpet. We are not debarred from saying this because 'how it looks to him' is not another thing; and so it does not 'come between' the observer and the carpet. He is aware of the carpet and he is immediately aware of how it looks to him."<sup>3</sup> In a similar way, says Vesey, the mental bodily movement does not come between the agent and his bodily movement. It is something which the agent does and yet not an action.

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1. G.N.A. Vesey. Embodied Mind. p107. Emphasis is the author's.

2. Vesey. 'Volition.' Philosophy 1961. p362

3. Ibid. Emphasis is/author's.  
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In a recently published defence<sup>1</sup> of his theory Vesey tries to clarify his position more explicitly. He says "...our language as it stands does not provide the means of answering this question\*", and I proposed an innovation: the patient raises his arm, but only so far as the mental side of him as an agent is concerned. I proposed this as a way of talking whereby we were relieved of the embarrassment of having to say that the patient had no reason in what he had done, for being surprised to find that his arm had not moved. It was intended to be a therapeutic linguistic move".<sup>2</sup>

#### A critical analysis of Vesey's theory

Vesey distinguishes the mental bodily movement from the 'willing' of past philosophers. This mental bodily movement is not causally related to movement, as 'willing' is thought to be; nor is it characterizable independently of the movement willed. The mental bodily movement is parasitic on the idea of 'bodily movement'. It is merely the mental side of bodily movement. Vesey says that this concept we have only if "we understand something by the question 'how do you know, your hand is moving?' asked when a person is directly moving his hand, but can neither see it, nor feel it, moving."<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of introducing such a concept of mental bodily movement is clear enough. On the one hand, Vesey wants to avoid the instrumental explanation of simple actions. When I raise my hand I raise my hand directly. I do not do anything else to raise my hand. Thus he tries to avoid inserting the notion of an act of will between us and our actions and to save action from being an indirect performance. On the other hand, he

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1. Vesey. (Do I ever directly raise my arm?) Philosophy 1967. p148

\* Why James' patient is surprised to find that his arm has not moved.

2. Ibid p148

3. Vesey. Embodied Mind p108

wants to provide us with a means to explain the surprise of the anaesthetised patient without obliterating the notion of a 'direct action'.

The logic of the situation thus demands that a mental bodily movement cannot be a real action for in that case it will be equivalent to an 'act of will' which Vesey does not want it to be; nor it can be a completely pseudo action, for in that case the surprise of the patient will remain unexplained. Yet, I think Vesey's concept of a 'mental bodily movement' turns out to be what it should not be, i.e., either the equivalent of an act of will or a therapeutic linguistic device,<sup>1</sup> and thus fails to serve the purpose which it is meant to serve. Vesey says a mental bodily movement seems to be both something we do and yet not an action.<sup>2</sup> In his reply<sup>3</sup> to Imlay's criticism of his theory, he holds that the patient's surprise must be explained in terms of something he has done, though in his article 'volition' and in Embodied Mind he insists that the mental bodily movement is not a real doing. It is hard to attach any meaning to this. Either mental bodily movement is a proper 'doing' or not. If it is a proper doing then the surprise of the patient is explained but 'I raise my hand' becomes an indirect action. Moreover this explanation that the patient moves his hand mentally is more or less like the explanation given in terms of an act of will and consequently faces the same logical difficulties. On the other hand if it is not a proper doing but just a linguistic device, then the surprise of James' patient remains unexplained in return for the action of raising his hand being direct. If the patient has not really done anything, there is no need for him to be surprised. After all, he does not know anything about Vesey's therapeutic linguistic move!

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1. Vesey of course prefers 'therapeutic linguistic device'

2. Ibid. Embodied Mind p107

3. Ibid. Philosophy 1967. p149



In spite of Vesey's repeated insistence that a mental bodily movement is not something other than the bodily movement, but is just the mental side of it, it is quite evident that they can not be so intimately related as they are thought to be. Vesey says that it can be said truthfully of a person that so far as his mental aspect is concerned he moved his hand, even when physically his hand was at rest.<sup>1</sup> It is quite evident from this that a mental bodily movement is not the same thing as a bodily movement. The former is clearly independent of the latter. But it is a one-way independence. If the mental side does not occur, 'I moved my hand' cannot be true, and it cannot be distinguished from 'my hand moved'. But the mental side can occur without 'I moved my hand' being true. Thus the statements, 'so far as my mental side is concerned I moved my hand' and 'I moved my hand' are different. They describe different situations. The former can be true without the actual movement taking place, whereas the latter depends on the former as well as on the actual movement taking place. In short, 'he moved his hand mentally' does not imply anything about whether he has moved his hand or not. Thus the mental bodily movement is made independent of, and contingently connected with physical movement. But this is just what Vesey wants to avoid. Also, the analogy with perception does not throw light on the concept of a mental bodily movement. Vesey here mistakenly takes the relation between 'so far as my mental aspect is concerned, I moved my hand' and 'I moved my hand' as the same as that which exists between an 'immediate awareness of the carpet' and 'awareness of the carpet'. These two relations are far from being the same. Being 'Immediately aware of the carpet' and 'being aware of the carpet' are not two different kinds of awarenesses.<sup>2</sup> There is no difference between 'immediate awareness' and 'awareness' of the carpet. From this perspective a mental bodily movement and a bodily movement are two different kinds of movements.

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1. G.N.A. Vesey. (Volition.) Philosophy p363. 1961

2. See R.A. Imlay on this point. Philosophy 1967. p124

Performing a mental bodily movement does not mean performing a bodily movement, whereas in the case of perception if one is 'immediately aware' of something, one is also 'aware' of the same thing.

It is really hard to see how Vesey's account differs from an indirect causal account of action in terms of an act of will and how it succeeds in showing that the mental bodily movement is not something other than the bodily movement. Vesey carefully refrains from committing himself to saying that we move our hands by moving our hands mentally. But if there is no such connection there is no reason why the patient should be surprised when the bodily movement does not occur. Besides, if we are allowed to postulate the notion of a mental bodily movement between the patient and his moving his hand, in order to explain his surprise (which Vesey of course does not allow) then there is no reason why one should not extend such a notion even to cases where the patient succeeds in moving his hand.

#### IV R.A. Imlay and a special sense of 'trying'

In a recent criticism of Vesey's notion of a mental bodily movement, Imlay<sup>1</sup> has made a good point. He says "Vesey has mistakenly taken the identity in terms of kind of awareness underlying the expression 'immediate awareness' and 'awareness' when no reference is made to the object of awareness to indicate the same identity in the two kinds of actions mentioned".<sup>2</sup> Imlay's view is that, whereas awareness and immediate awareness are one and the same thing and distinguished only by their objects, there is no such common element of 'doing' in raising one's hand and mentally raising it (in the way the patient does).

With this argument of Imlay I agree, but the answer he gives to the question why the anaesthetized patient was surprised seems to me quite dubious.

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1. R.A. Imlay. 'Do I ever directly raise my arm?' Philosophy 1967. p119  
 2. Ibid p124

Imlay's answer to the question about the patient's surprise is that he has 'tried'. He says that in the patient's case there is no 'doing'; the only 'doing' occurs when we actually (i.e. physically) raise the hand. In the patient's case there is only a 'trying' and this sense of trying does not consist of any doing, unlike the other sense of 'trying' which involves doing, viz., trying to start the car by turning the ignition key. Imlay says that Vesey's argument<sup>1</sup> would be conclusive only if to try means to exert an effort of will. The patient cannot be said to have tried in that sense for he is not conscious of exerting any effort of will. But there is another sense of trying "where saying that some one has tried is just a more positive way of saying that he has not succeeded in doing what he set out to do.....on this model, the application of the term 'trying' can be seen as an ad hoc device for bridging the gap between what the person thinks he is doing and the fact that he is doing nothing."<sup>2</sup>

To a certain extent Imlay's comment reveals the crux of the whole issue i.e., that the patient's surprise is not to be explained in terms of any doing. But how far the patient's case should be described as 'trying' seems to be disputable.

Imlay says that 'trying' not only means exerting an effort of will in the face of obstacles, but is also a positive way of saying that someone has not succeeded in doing what he 'sets out to do'. I think Imlay fails to give us enough analysis of the phrase 'set out to do'. We often say 'he tried to get through the exam' or 'he tried to save the child from drowning', meaning that the person concerned here has failed to do what he set out to do. But by this, do we really mean that he has done nothing? On the contrary, in each of these cases, there is a range of different

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1. G.N.A. Vesey. Philosophy 1961. p353. also see Philosophy 1967. p149  
 2. R.A. Imlay. Philosophy 1967. p125

activities which the person concerned has done and which constitute his 'trying'. Otherwise we would not say that he 'has tried'. When we say that a person has tried to get through the examination, what we mean is that he concentrated in his studies and did not waste his time in doing other things. Similarly, when we say that a person has tried to save the child from drowning we mean that he jumped into the water, searched for the child etc. Hence, it is not true that to say that somebody 'has tried' is only a positive way of saying that 'he has failed....'. It means more than that. It also means that the person concerned has performed certain necessary activities which constitute his 'trying'. In this sense, the patient definitely cannot be said to have tried, for he has done nothing, nor he is conscious of doing anything (except of course raising his hand) which can be considered as his 'trying' or 'setting' out to move his hand. I doubt very much whether James' patient would ever describe himself as "having tried to raise his arm once he had discovered that he did not succeed in what he was intent upon doing."<sup>1</sup> The patient's experience does not really enable him to say that he was trying to raise his hand. Imlay's point can be proved only if there is a sense of trying where it can be said that he has tried, though his 'trying' clearly will not involve any 'doing' whatsoever. But there any such sense of trying where trying does not consist of any doing at all?

Let us take the example of a runner<sup>2</sup> who can run only five miles per hour, and is running at the rate of five miles per hour. As he cannot run more than five miles per hour, he is already doing whatever he can do, in running five miles per hour. Under such circumstances if he wants to try to run six miles per hour and says that now he is trying to run six miles per hour, probably his 'trying' will not consist of any doing, as he cannot do anything more than what he is already doing.

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1. Imlay. Op. cit. p125. Imlay emphasises the word 'discovered'

2. I owe this example to Dr. A.R. Lacey

However, this example does not really show that the runner's 'trying' does not consist of any doing. True, that his trying to run 6 miles per hour does not consist of anything extra i.e., more than what he is already doing. But it consists of what he is already doing viz. running 5 miles per hour. Of course he could be doing this without trying to run faster; but there is no reason why in this case what he is doing will not have two different descriptions viz., running 5 miles per hour and trying to run 6 miles per hour. What is really extra here is his desire to run 6 miles per hour. This case does not appear to me any different from a case where the agent exerts his efforts of will in the presence of obstacles.

Imlay's application of the term 'trying' is a very special application and perhaps it may be seen as an ad hoc device to bridge the gap between what a person thinks he is doing and the fact that he is doing nothing, or nothing extra. One can of course extend this notion of 'trying' to cover cases like James' patient's but that cannot be done without sacrificing what we ordinarily understand by 'trying'.

However it seems that James' patient cannot be said to have tried in any of the senses of 'trying' we have discussed so far. First of all, he has not tried in the sense of exerting an effort of will in the face of an obstacle. He has not been conscious of any such effort. Secondly, he has not tried in the sense where 'he has tried' means 'he has failed to do what he set out to do' and his trying consists of at least some form of doing. James' patient has not done anything at all. Lastly, he cannot be said to have tried in the sense the runner has tried. The difference between James' patient and the runner is that James' patient does not think that he is trying to do something. On the contrary he thinks that he is doing something i.e., raising his hand. He will never describe the situation as 'trying' to do something. The term 'trying' in any of these senses does not really explain James' patient's surprise.

V Why is the patient surprised?

In the rest of my discussion I shall try to give an answer to the question 'why is the patient surprised'. But before doing this some recapitulation is necessary.

In my opinion both Vesey and James are wrong in assuming that the patient's surprise should be explained in terms of a 'doing'; though I must admit that I would be mistaken if I ascribed this view to them without adding any further qualification. Let us take James first. We have seen that though he holds that what the patient does is willing the movement to take place, his use of the concept 'willing' does not differ much from 'wishing'. It lacks the active element of causal agency. It fails to provide sufficient reason for the patient to be surprised. James also confuses his point when he describes the 'willing to slide the distant table' as a proper case of willing. James is however right in recognizing that the cause of the patient's surprise must be sought in volitional states. If 'willing' in James' analysis could be taken as a positive 'act of will', then the patient's surprise perhaps would be explained, but that together with the idea that all actions are caused by an act of will would involve a regress. However, James' account does not show that any such act is performed by the patient when he 'wills' to move his hand.

So far as Vesey is concerned, he is right in recognizing that the patient's surprise cannot be explained in terms of any 'trying' for there is no awareness of 'trying' in any ordinary sense of 'trying', and he is also right in recognizing that what happens when the patient proceeds to move his hand cannot be described as a 'real' doing. Any description in terms of a real 'doing' will lead to an infinite regress as happens in the case of an act of will. But the solution which Vesey offers, i.e., his theory about the patient's performing a mental bodily movement, does not really solve the

problem satisfactorily. Vesey's insistence that the patient's surprise must be explained in terms of a 'doing' together with his refusal to accept it as a real doing confuses his point.

In this respect I think Imlay is right in showing that the surprise of the patient is not to be explained in terms of a 'doing', for there is really no 'doing' in the patient's case. But Imlay's special sense of 'trying' is also difficult to understand. As there is no evidence that such a special 'trying' has taken place, there is no reason why the patient's surprise should be explained by this special sense of 'trying'. To suppose this is to indulge in unintelligibility just as Vesey has done in using the phrase 'mental bodily movement'.

We are still left with the problem of why the patient gets surprised. There is no doubt that the case is an extraordinary case and any final explanation is difficult to find. It has however emerged from our discussion that the philosophers we have considered seem to think that the surprise of the patient cannot be explained unless it is assumed that he has done something. This 'doing' is sometimes described as an act of will, sometimes as a mental bodily movement - sometimes as a real action, sometimes as an action which is at the same time not an action. But one cannot proceed further than this. No further elaboration of such a 'doing' can be provided. Besides there is no empirical evidence that the patient has performed an act of will or a mental bodily movement, though the surprise of the patient shows that there is a reason for his getting surprised.

Here I suppose one can refer to what Imlay says about the 'positive attitude'<sup>1</sup> of the patient towards the experiment. I do agree with Imlay

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1. Ibid pl26

that the positive attitude of the patient, i.e., his willingness to co-operate with the experiment, distinguishes his case from the case of a person who remains indifferent towards the experiment. But Imlay does not give any further elaboration of this 'positive attitude' or 'willingness to co-operate'. It seems to me that the phrase 'willingness to co-operate' is rather vague; one may be willing to co-operate in various situations, but not all 'willingnesses to co-operate' can be called antecedents of actions. Here I think Vesey is right in pointing out in his reply to Imlay that unless this positive attitude of the patient is further explained the problem remains unresolved.

In my opinion the patient's positive attitude consists of his wanting to raise his hand which the unco-operative one does not want to do. The patient's case can thus be differentiated from the other person's case on the ground of his desire or want to raise his hand. Imlay omits any mention of the term 'desire or want' to explain the positive attitude of the patient, though I do not know what that positive attitude can be, except that the patient wants to raise his hand.

The solution, that the patient was surprised because he wanted to raise his hand but his want misfired because of the peculiarity of the circumstances which he was not aware of, has its own advantage. First of all, it avoids the logical difficulties involved in the notion of an act of will, because here want is not conceived as a performance. Secondly, as the solution does not consider wants or desires as necessarily conscious performances like an act of will, it leaves room for unconscious desires or wants to act as causes. Thirdly, the solution does not consider wants or desires of the patient as a passive occurrence of an idea to do something so that the case like 'sliding a distant table without touching it' can be described as a case of willing. The want or desire of the patient is not just a passive wish to do something. When the patient wants to raise his hand,



his want is ready to play its causal role. Under normal circumstances his want is sufficient to move his hand. But the patient's case is not a normal situation, and he is completely unaware of the situation. So he mistakenly thinks that he has raised his hand. Lastly, the explanation of the patient's surprise in terms of his desire or want has one more advantage which is: it does not introduce unfamiliar ideas like mental-bodily movement or 'trying' which does not consist of any doing.

I admit that the presence of the deceptive feelings makes the patient's case very peculiar. There might be a neuro-physiological explanation for the occurrence of such a deceptive feeling or thought, but that would not be the patient's reason for becoming surprised. He became surprised because what he thought happened was not compatible with what actually happened. The answer to the question why he thought that he raised his hand however lies with the fact that he wanted to raise his hand. The other person did not want to raise his hand and he did not have any deceptive experience. Thus the real cause of the surprise lies with the patient's desire or want to raise his hand.

James has not informed us whether the patient still feels as if he moves his hand when he wants to move it, once he comes to know that his hand is anaesthetized. It is unlikely that the deception will ever happen once the patient knows that he is under anaesthetic.

We are now in a position to see the relevance of the patient's case for the purpose of this chapter in general.

I started with the question of the empirical identifiability of an act of will. The phrase 'act of will' is used in the same sense in which the traditionalists have used it, i.e. as a performance. I evaluated the attempt to establish the empirical identifiability of an act of will through

the cases of will or volition which misfire. In this connection William James' experiment with the anaesthetized patient was introduced and various answers given to explain the surprise of the patient - particularly the answer given in terms of a performance - were considered.

I have tried to show that the whole question as to what the patient 'does' in such a case is wrongly posed. For, there is no 'doing' or action involved in the patient's case. The patient's case does not help to establish that an action i.e. an act of will is performed. His deceptive feeling viz. as if he has 'raised his hand', cannot be the act of will. If there is an act of will he must have performed it before he feels as if he raises his hand. But he has no consciousness of performing any such act. All that happens before he feels that he raises his hand is his desire or want to raise his hand.

Therefore the attempt to explain the patient's surprise in terms of an act of will and thereby to establish the performance of such an act does not prove anything. Hence, the traditional claim of the empirical identifiability of an act of will cannot really be established from this case of volition which misfires.

### Conclusion

We can now sum up the arguments of this chapter. I started with the traditional theory of volition as a causal theory of action. I considered the two tenets of the theory viz., that an action is always preceded by an act of will and that the empirical identifiability of an act of will can be established. I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the success of the traditional theory as a causal theory of action depends very much on the conclusiveness of these two tenets. In part 1 of this chapter, I tried to show the various inconsistencies involved in the idea of an action being always preceded by an act of will. In part 2 of this chapter, I tried to

show that the empirical identifiability of an act of will cannot be established. First of all such acts cannot be identified through efforts of will, resolving decisions etc. The agent has no consciousness of performing such an act before performing an action. Secondly, cases of volition which misfire, do not show that an act of will is performed. Thus the two tenets of the traditional theory are far from being conclusive and this makes the theory itself an unsatisfactory causal theory of action.

However James' experiment with the anaesthetized patient has thrown light on the possibility that a causal explanation of action can be provided in terms of something which is mental and not a physical phenomenon. I said before that the patient felt surprised because he wanted to raise his hand and mistakenly thought that he had raised his hand. Under ordinary circumstances such a want or desire is enough to produce the action and from this perspective the traditional theory and James' ideo-motor theory have relevance so far as they maintain that the explanation of the patient's surprise should be sought in volitional states. If 'volition' or 'willing' can be used as a blanket term to cover the different stages of wish, desire, want, intention, etc., then it can be said that what the patient did was that he 'willed' to raise his hand. But to use the locution 'what he did', is not to suggest that he performed an action. Here lies the difference between the traditional theory and the theory that desire or want is a cause of action.

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### Chapter III

#### Are Explanations of Actions in terms of reasons causal explanations?

In the introduction I remarked that I would try to show that full justice to the relation between the concept of action and the concept of reason can be done only by viewing it as causal. In this chapter I shall try to justify the thesis that explanations of actions in terms of reasons are in fact causal explanations.

Before proceeding further some recapitulation is necessary. In chapter I, in connection with R.S. Peters' treatment of the issue of the causal explanation of action, I tried to show that the opponents of the causal theory of action were mistaken in thinking that causal explanation is always mechanical explanation and that action cannot be causally explained unless it is reduced to movement. I put forward the idea that causal explanations include mechanical explanations but are not synonymous with them. To give a causal explanation of action one does not have to give an explanation in terms of physico-chemical or mechanical concepts, or to reduce actions to a series of movements.

Once this misconception about what sort of concepts and laws are involved in a causal explanation is removed, it is easy to see that the causal explanation of an action can be given in terms of concepts and laws other than mechanical ones.

In this respect the traditional theory of volition is an attempt to provide a causal explanation of action in terms of something other than mechanical concepts i.e., in terms of an act of will. In chapter II, I tried to show the insufficiencies of the traditional theory as a causal

theory of action which are as follows: first of all, a human action cannot be said to be preceded by an act of will; secondly, the empirical identifiability of an act of will is hard to establish; and thirdly the idea that all actions are caused by acts of will and acts of will are also actions, involves an infinite regress. I also mentioned that though confused and mistaken in their analysis of an act of will, the traditionalists are right to think that the explanation of action involves the concept of mentality.

The thesis which I intend to support is however not very different from the traditional theory of volition. It maintains that an explanation of action in terms of wants, desires etc., is a causal explanation. It resembles the traditional theory in the following respects. Like the traditional theory it considers that action needs an explanation in terms of mental concepts. Like the traditional theory it holds that explanations of actions given in terms of desires, wants etc., are in fact causal explanations. The point in which the thesis differs from the traditional theory is that it does not advocate the idea that actions are caused by acts of will or that desires or wants to perform an action are themselves performances.

#### I Desires or wants to perform actions are not themselves performances

In chapter II, I tried to show that the misconception on which the traditional theory rests is that that which causes the action is also an action. I want to maintain that though the causal explanation of an action is to be sought among the desires, wants etc., for the actions, these are not themselves performances.

In connection with the traditional theory of volition we have noted the logical and empirical difficulties connected with the idea of an act of will. The same sort of difficulties will arise if one tries to view desires, wants etc., as performances. But before going in to the detail

of these difficulties it is necessary to mention the difference which exists between the traditional notion of an act of will or volition and the concepts of desire, want etc. The traditional notion of an act of will suffers from being completely non-empirical. Its non-empiricality is two-fold. Firstly, we cannot empirically identify volition as a mental state or occurrence and secondly, we cannot offer empirical evidence for performing an act of will. In contrast with this, desires, wants etc., are common psychological experiences. No one will doubt the empirical nature of these psychological experiences. The doubt arises only when they are viewed as performances.

The primary defect of the contention that desires, wants etc., are performances, is its non-empirical character. There is no empirical evidence that when a person desires or wants to do something he is performing an action. There is nothing like an act of desiring or an act of wanting. When we desire to do x we just 'desire' and nothing else. If there is an act of desiring then one will obviously find that in performing an action one performs another action - an internal action. But there is no empirical evidence for the performing of this internal act of desiring. Just like an act of will, nobody has ever reported performing an act of desire or want.

The second defect of such a contention is that it involves an infinite regress. In connection with an act of will we have seen the difficulty of maintaining the contention that all actions are caused by an act of will which itself is an act. The infinite regress is involved because such an act needs another act of will and so on ad infinitum. A similar regress will arise if desires or wants are treated as performances and if performances or actions in general are explained in terms of desires and wants. If my behaviour is an action because it is desired or wanted by me, and if all

actions are so desired, and my desire or want in its turn is an action, then it will need another desire as its cause and so on ad infinitum. I am not denying however that there can be mental acts like forming an intention, but such acts are not the direct cause of actions. It is the intention which is so formed that is claimed to be the cause of an action.

## II Are actions movements caused by our desires?

Before proceeding further it is necessary to dissociate ourselves from the traditional theory that actions are movements caused by acts of will. The traditionalists' main concern is to show that the notion of an act of will is required to distinguish an action from a movement. The point which I want to make in this connection is that actions involve movements in most cases no doubt, but they are not just physical movements caused by our desires and wants.

If actions were movements caused by our desires etc., it would have been more natural to talk about desires to move certain parts of our bodies than desires to do certain actions. When an agent desires or wants to do something, the primary object of his desire or want is not to perform a particular set of specific movements; the object of his desire or want is an action. The performance of the movement is only secondary in the process of performing an action. For instance, in the desire to sign a contract, 'signing a contract' is more important to the agent than the physical movements of his hand muscles involved in such an action. This however does not mean that a physical movement can never be the object of a person's desire. In certain situations flexing one's biceps can very well be the object of one's desire or want. But such physical movements become objects of desires or wants only when the action itself is nothing more than performing such movements. In other words, the aim in the action is just to perform

that physical movement. But ordinarily when we want to do something like signalling, signing a contract, keeping an appointment, interviewing people etc., the movements involved in such actions are not objects of our desires. We never think about the movement aspects of the actions we do. If actions were movements caused by our desires, it would have been commonplace to talk about desires to move our muscles in such and such<sup>a</sup> way so that the movement thus caused can be an action described as signing a contract or interviewing an undergraduate.

Secondly, by holding the view that actions are movements caused by an act of will, the traditional theory also suggests that all actions have a specific movement aspect - and this is far from being the case. Simple actions like winking, kicking or raising one's hand have got a specific movement aspect but not all actions are like them. Sophisticated actions like organizing a meeting, conducting a seminar, judging a case, or even playing football are not limited to a particular type of movement, though they involve some sort of movements. Here the situation is not that a particular set of specific movements caused by a desire or want fulfils an action-description, but that a particular action caused by the agent's desire makes a set of specific movements relevant for the purpose.

Besides there is a whole range of mental performances which do not involve any physical movement, e.g., doing a sum mentally, solving a logical problem in one's head, or thinking about a line and deciding what it is going to be. These mental performances are not mere successions of mental happenings. On the contrary, just like physical action, the process starts with the desire, want or intention to do something mentally and ends up with the achievement of some results. This happens when one tries to rhyme a word in one's head. It starts with one's intending to do it and the intention



sustains the action until the result intended is achieved. Hence it would be a mistake to think that all actions have an overt movement-aspect.\*

In the light of this discussion we see that an action is not a movement caused by a desire or want and when we say reasons are causes of actions we are not using the term 'action' 'proleptically',<sup>1</sup> meaning that what is really caused is a piece of physical movement. In this connection, Yolton's comment is worth quoting: "We must keep in mind that what is done in cases of action is not the body moved but a debt repaid, a truth told, an attitude honoured. Because in most if not all actions the body moves, we are inclined to locate the mental cause between some mental event or the person and those bodily movements."<sup>2</sup>

Naturally the question will arise that if actions are not movements, then what are they? It will be naive to think that this question which is one of the difficult questions in philosophy, can be answered in a simple, straightforward, unambiguous way. Perhaps action can best be described as a change - mental or physical, causally produced by the desire or want of an agent - which almost always involves movement but is neither identical with movement nor is it movement caused in a special way.

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\* Even if it is argued that the movements involved in mental performances are movements in the brain, it still cannot be claimed that a mental performance is equal to a brain process plus a desire to act mentally, because of the same reasons as mentioned in the case of a physical performance.

1. D.F. Pears. 'Desires as Causes of Actions'. Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures Vol. 1. 1966-7. p92
2. J.W. Yolton. 'My hand goes out to you'. Philosophy 1966. p151

### III Actions involve a reference to the agent's desires, wants etc.

It is important to note that in actions, in contrast with movements, there is always a causal reference, direct or indirect, to the agent's desires or wants. Sheer physical movements like a jerk, a spasm, are not referable to the desire or want of the agent. It is noticeable that where there is no reference to the agent's wants or desires we withhold the description of action altogether, as happens in the case of an epileptic fit or a spasm. On the other hand wherever there is the possibility of the agent's desire or want being involved there is the possibility of an action-description. In this sense full-blown actions involve a direct reference to the agent's desire or want. If in certain circumstances a physical movement is caused by the agent's desire or want, then it ceases to be a pure physical movement. For instance, if one can lower one's blood pressure at will, then that is a case of action and not merely of a movement.

Quite obviously the question will arise that if actions always involve a reference to the agent's desire or want, then how can one consider involuntary actions as actions? Involuntary actions like knocking down the flower vase while taking one's coat off, or blowing up the nuclear power station by pressing the wrong button, do not presuppose any desire or want of the agent.

The notion of an 'involuntary action' itself is an undefined notion and the concept of action is applicable to it only in a wider sense. Involuntary actions are not full blown actions and it is not so obvious that the agent's desires or wants are involved in them in the same sense as they are involved in a full-blown action.

However, though it is true that when someone knocks over the flower vase in the process of doing something else, he does not really mean to knock it over, still indirectly such involuntary actions are referable to what an agent wants to do. The description that he knocked over the flower vase in a sense seems to be another description of what he did viz., 'took off his coat'. Hence, the involuntary action of knocking over the flower vase is also describable by some other description i.e. 'taking his coat off' under which it is desired or intended. This is partly the reason why involuntary actions are regarded as actions though they involve only an indirect causal reference to the agent's desires or wants.

The contention that involuntary actions are referable to the agent's desires or wants because they are describable by some other descriptions under which they can be said to be desired or intended, however presents a problem.

The problem is: if causality is extensional, then if A is the cause of B, then it will remain the cause of B under any description of B. But, to quote Richman in this connection, "A given action has a number of different possible descriptions. What constitutes someone's reason for performing the action described in one way clearly need not constitute a reason for performing it when it is described in another way." ..... "....if the causal relation is extensional and if the primary reason\* for an action is its cause, then the primary reason for the action must remain the reason for the action under any description!"<sup>1</sup>

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\* According to Davidson "The primary reason for an action is its cause."  
D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Free Will and Determinism.  
ed. B. Berofsky. 1966. p222

1. R. J. Richman. 'Reasons and Causes: Some Puzzles'. Australasian Journal of Philosophy. 1969. p44

This argument is sometimes considered as strong evidence for the thesis that reasons are not causes. If reasons are causes and causes are extensional, then reasons should be extensional. Therefore, if a man's reason for taking his coat off is that he desires to do so and in the process of doing so he knocks down the flower vase, and if his knocking down the flower vase is another description of what he is doing, then one should be able to say that his reason for knocking down the flower vase is his desire to take the coat off. But this seems absurd. Naturally the question arises that if reasons are causes of actions, then how can a want or desire be a reason for action under one description and not a reason for doing it under another? Consequently it is suggested that reasons cannot be causes of actions. To quote Richman "...it is this feature of the description of events, namely, that the causal relation's holding is independent of the mode of description of its relata, while the relation of being a reason for (an action) is not similarly description-independent, that renders plausible the differentiation of causes and reasons".<sup>1</sup>

Richman's argument assumes that if reasons are causes then they must be synonymous. If they are synonymous, then a reason-action relation should be extensional like a causal relation. But to say that reasons are causes is not to say that reasons and causes are synonymous. If the concept of reason is not synonymous with the concept of cause, the former does not have to be extensional like the latter.

According to Davidson, towards whom Richman's criticism is mainly directed, rationalisation is a species of ordinary causal explanation. He does not think that reasons are synonymous with causes.<sup>2</sup> In a similar way,

1. Ibid. p47. The emphasis is the author's.

2. Davidson, as a matter of fact, recognizes the difference between rationalisations and other forms of causal explanations. "...our first condition for primary reasons (C1)\* is designed to help set rationalizations apart from other sorts of explanation. If rationalization is, as I want to argue, a species of causal explanation, then justification, in the sense given by C1, is at least one differentiating property." D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Free Will and Determinism. ed. B. Berofsky. p228

\* C1 - Ibid. p223

in this thesis, reasons are considered as a kind of cause, and it is also admitted that causal explanation, being wider than any of its sub-classes, can include both mechanical as well as reason-action explanation. The concept of cause is a genus in relation to reason, and therefore it is not illogical to say that as a sub-class of causal relations, a reason-action relation can have its specific difference, i.e., it can be non-extensional without being non-causal.

Besides, in view of the different types of reasons, it can be said that though someone's reason for performing the action described in one way may not be 'his reason' for performing the action when described in another way, it can still remain 'the reason' for his performing the action when described in this other way. Thus a person's desire to take his coat off may not be 'his reason' for knocking down the flower vase, but it can still be 'the reason' for his knocking down the flower vase. Hence, when an action is given alternative descriptions, the desire concerned does not necessarily lose its causal efficacy or its role as the reason for the action.

#### IV In what sense of the term are reasons causes of actions?

I have already mentioned that the concept of reason can be used and is used by philosophers in different senses. It is therefore necessary to explain in what sense of the term reasons are causes of actions.

Ordinarily when people cite reasons for their actions, they do not necessarily mention their wants, desires, intentions etc. They usually cite a fact, a situation, a circumstance, ends and ideals, or even beliefs and faiths. For instance, I took the coat off because it was too hot; I left Paris because I was broke, I voted labour because of its policy. None

of these reason-explanations actually mention the wants, desires or intentions of the agent though they are implicit in these reason-explanations. Thus when I say I voted Labour because of its policy. the policy of the Labour Party did not cause my act of voting. My desire or want to vote Labour caused my act of voting. Similarly my action of leaving Paris does not directly follow from the fact that I was broke, but from my desire or want to leave Paris. Statements of such reasons imply my belief in and what I think about certain things and consequently the desires or wants I have to perform certain actions.

Hence when I say reasons are causes of actions, by reason I do not mean whatever is mentioned by an agent as a reason for his action, I mean the desire or want or intention of the agent because of which the action is done. To say this is not to deny that facts, situations, circumstances, or other factors cited as reasons have a causal role to play in the explanation of action. They certainly influence the desires and wants of the agent to some extent and thus play the role of a distant factor in the causal chain. But the causal explanation of action is to be sought not in the situations or circumstances in which the agent happened to be placed, but in his desires or wants to perform the action.

A further point in this issue is that one should distinguish between the justificatory sense of 'reason' and its explanatory sense. Sometimes reasons are what we appeal to in supporting or justifying our actions. In a sense a reason for an action always justifies the action - at least from the agent's point of view. As Davidson puts it "...from the agent's point of view there was, when he acted, something to be said for the action."<sup>1</sup> From the observer's point of view however the reason given by the agent for

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1. Ibid. p228

his action may or may not justify his action, depending on the circumstances. There are two senses in which a reason can justify an action - the subjective sense and the objective sense. The same reason may be a justifying reason for the agent and not so for the others. Such a justifying reason is subjective. For instance, a person may cite his political or religious conviction as his reason for planting a bomb in a public place. Here the reason stated i.e., 'his reason', justifies the action from the person's subjective point of view. It may or may not justify the action from the perspective of others. There is another sense in which a reason can subjectively justify an action, though in that sense it need not be 'his reason'. For instance, an agent may perform an action because of some subconscious motives or desires though he may be completely unaware of their existence and sincerely believe that some other desire or motive is the cause of his action.

A justifying reason need not always be subjective. It may be objective. For instance, a person may cite the possibility of having cancer as the reason for his giving up smoking, but it need not necessarily be 'his reason' for giving up smoking. He may give it up to please his girlfriend. One can cite all sorts of justifying reasons for doing an action though they may not be one's reason for doing it. In such cases the reason cited justifies the action objectively but not subjectively.

However a reason in the justificatory sense - subjective or objective, need not necessarily be a real reason. A real reason is that which is operative in bringing forth the action and motivates the agent consciously or unconsciously to perform the action. It is also in this sense of 'real' that a reason can claim to be causal. So long as the reason offered is not

one of the real ones, it may or may not justify an action but it does not explain the action. It fails to connect the action with the reason. For instance, in some cases the reason sincerely cited by the agent as 'his reason' may not be the real reason for his action; the real reason may be a subconscious desire. In such cases 'his reason' may justify the action, but will fail to explain it causally. Similarly when one mentions justifying reasons for one's actions which are not one's reason for acting, the reasons mentioned may justify the action but do not explain it.

I do not mean that a justificatory reason can never be an explanatory one. Sometimes people cite a real reason to justify their actions. The reason why a person gave up smoking may be his fear of cancer, and that may be a 'real reason' for his giving up smoking. Such a reason not only justifies the action but also explains it. What a mere justificatory reason which is not a real reason fails to do, is to imply that the action it justifies is performed because of the reason. Hence however convincing a mere justificatory reason may be it does not imply that the action actually follows from the reason mentioned. Such a reason fails to explain the action causally.

Considering the various uses of the term 'reason' it is important to ascertain the candidates for being a real reason. I have already mentioned in the introduction the senses in which Ryle and Melden have used the term 'reason'. Ryle has used the term 'reason' in the sense of 'the reason'. In this sense 'the reason' is impersonal and is applicable to both human actions and physical changes. For Ryle, it is a disposition as opposed to an occurrent. When applied to human actions in this dispositional sense, the term 'reason' includes both 'the reason' and 'his reason'. But Melden



and philosophers having similar views, have used the term 'reason' in the narrower sense of 'his reason' and denied that in this sense reason can be a cause of action. In the Meldenian treatment of the issue reason means the reason one has for doing something. I have mentioned above that only a real reason can be the cause of an action. When we speak of a 'real reason' it is necessary to make clear whether we mean 'the reason' or 'his reason' or both.

The concept of 'the reason' includes various things. Sometimes 'the reason' may be a physical event e.g., the reason why he leapt forward was that he was pushed, though it is quite clear that once such an explanation is given the piece of behaviour involved can no more be considered as an action. The reason offered here is a physical event and the explanation given can easily count as a causal explanation. 'The reason' in this sense is a real reason or a cause.

However this type of 'the reason' explanation is not our concern. Our main concern is with those reason-explanations which mention 'the reason' for an action. In this list of 'the reasons' are included reasons which are 'his reasons' for an action and reasons which are not 'his reasons' for an action. The latter type of 'the reasons' are the sub-conscious motives, desires, etc., which are often cited as the sources of one's actions, e.g., the reason why he avoided her was his sub-conscious fear of a mother-figure. Most psycho-analytic explanations belong to this group. Here 'the reason' for an action is a real reason in the sense that it is operative in bringing forth the action, though the agent in most of the cases is unaware of its existence.

The causal character of such explanations is often doubted by philosophers - mainly on the grounds that they are not sufficiently predictive, and that they are purposive and not the mechanical type of causal explanations.<sup>1</sup>

It may be pointed out that the purposive nature of psycho-analytic explanations would be a weakness only if causal explanations are synonymous with mechanical explanations. I have already discarded such synonymity. So far as the lack of predictability is concerned the question of causation and the question of predictability are not the same thing. An event can be caused without being predictable.\*

Williams who brought these charges against psycho-analytic explanations admitted that these weaknesses had compensations as well; "...the theories do actually apply to complex forms of human conduct, and explanations of human conduct are actually produced, instead of being (...) hopes for the future of science." He also pointed out that "psycho-analytical explanations of certain sorts of aberrant behaviour carry conviction and modify the tendency to ascribe responsibility and blame"<sup>2</sup>. The questions whether all behaviour is psycho-analytically explicable - whether all our reasons for doing an action are rationalizations - whether such psycho-analytic explanations will destroy the citadel of our 'moral responsibility and blame' are unimportant here. The important thing is that where psycho-analytic explanations are relevant, they are relevant because they causally explain the behaviour.

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1. B.A.O. Williams. 'Postscript.' Freedom & the Will. Ed. D.F. Pears. p115

\* See Chapter 6 . P130

2. Ibid. p115-6

However, the real difficulty lies with the type where 'the reason' for an action coincides with 'his reason'. 'His reason' is the reason which an agent sincerely gives for his action and believes that his action follows from that particular reason, e.g., the reason why he did not employ the man was that he did not want to employ negroes; the reason why he left the room was his dislike for the upper class snobbery. Such reasons may not only be 'his reasons' they may also be 'the reasons', i.e., the real reasons for his action. It should be remembered that 'his reason' does not necessarily mean 'the reason' or a 'real' reason. In some cases 'his reason' may be a rationalisation. It is only when 'his reason' is also 'the reason' for an action that it can explain an action.

The discussion so far shows that a reason can claim to be causal only in the sense that it is a real reason, i.e. it is operative and not a mere justificatory one. It is not just a possible reason from which an action may follow but one because of which the action is performed. In this sense of 'real', reasons mentioned in psycho-analytic explanations and some reasons mentioned in 'his reason' explanations can both claim to be causal. We have seen before that the causal character of psycho-analytic explanations carries conviction and where such explanations are given they are considered as causal explanations. Our main concern will therefore be to show that 'his reason' explanations where his reason is also 'the reason' can count as causal explanations.

The discussion of this point will be two-fold. On the one hand, I shall try to show that an adequate explanation of action is not obtainable until the relation between desire, intention etc., and action is considered as causal and that without this consideration one fails to explicate the role a desire or want plays in the explanation of an action. On the other

hand, I shall try to refute the arguments which are designed to show that a reason-explanation cannot be a causal explanation or a reason cannot be a cause. This will be considered in the following chapters. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall limit myself to the discussion of the first point only.

#### V Reasons are Causes of Actions

We have seen before that actions are referable to the agent's wants, intentions, desires etc. When an action is performed the situation is not simply that the agent has a want or desire and the action follows. On the contrary the agent has a want or desire which brings forth the action. To have a desire or want is not enough to produce an action. The desire or want must be operative.

David Pears comments "...it is not sufficient that the idea of the project should occur to you; you must also have a favourable attitude towards it."<sup>1</sup> But to have a favourable attitude towards the project is not enough, just as it is not enough to want or desire to act. The desire or want must be operative. An action can be said to be performed only when the desire or want concerned is causally operative.

To elucidate this point it is better to start with a comment made by C. Taylor in his Explanation of Behaviour. Taylor comments that proper action is not only intended, but intention plays a specific role there. "...the distinction between action and non-action hangs not just on the presence or absence of the corresponding intention or purpose but on this intention or purpose having or not having a role in bringing about the behaviour."<sup>2</sup>

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1. D.F. Pears. 'Desires as Causes of Actions'. Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures. Vol. 1. 1966/7. p85
  2. C. Taylor. Explanations of Behaviour. p33

Though Taylor himself is an opponent of the causal theory of action, his comment brings out the crux of the whole issue. If the causal role of intention is rejected what sort of meaning can be attached to the phrase 'a role in bringing about the behaviour'? When an action is performed something more is involved in the situation than merely having an intention or desire to perform it. This is an important point, because this 'something more' explains the difference between two otherwise exactly similar situations, namely a piece of behaviour intended and performed by an agent, and a piece of behaviour which just happened to follow the agent's intention. For instance, it is the causal role of intention which distinguishes the case of my intending to move my hand and moving it, and my intending to move my hand and my hand's moving.

When I say that I moved my hand because I wanted to, I mean something more than that I happened to have a certain desire and my behaviour happened to follow my desire. I mean that I moved my hand because I wanted to, and this because is a 'causal because'. It should be pointed out that reference to what follows cannot differentiate the two cases. What follows in the physical world is more or less the same, i.e. my hand moved. Again a reference to the mere presence of a preceding intention or desire or a favourable attitude will not help, because in both the cases I have the intention to move my hand. It is only when my intention causes the movement of my hand in one case, and in another it does not, that the distinction between the two cases is possible. This is what I meant when I said before that in order to cause an action, an intention must be operative.

It might be argued that the distinction between 'I intended to move my hand and moved my hand', and 'I intended to move my hand and my hand moved' can be drawn on the basis of a physical cause. It might be said that

in the latter case a physical cause is in operation, say a sudden push or an electric shock, whereas in the former case it is not; so in order to make a distinction between the two above-mentioned cases one does not have to take recourse to the causal efficacy of an intention or want.

This argument can be answered by saying that such a distinction certainly can be drawn on the basis of observation and experiment by referring to a physical cause. But the difficulty is that not all actions are as simple as 'I moved my hand because I intended to'. Actions are often highly complex like conducting a seminar, making a speech etc., and it is not easy to comprehend in such cases of complex action what the phrase 'absence of a physical cause' will mean. In such cases reference to a physical cause will not be very helpful. How could the reference to a physical cause distinguish between a case where the solution of a riddle occurs to me and a case where I deliberately try to solve a riddle? Lastly one must not ignore the fact that long before an observational distinction with reference to a physical cause is made, the agent knows that in one case his intention was operative and in the other it was not. He makes this distinction on the basis of the operation of his own intention. By this I do not claim that in all cases of action the agent is conscious of the causal operation of his intention or desire, or that one cannot be mistaken about the causal efficacy of one's intention. All that I want to maintain is that in the case of full-blown actions the agent is conscious of the causal efficacy of his intention and usually is not mistaken about it.

So far I have been discussing cases where actions are obviously preceded by desires, intentions etc. It can be argued that in such cases where there is a clear-cut antecedent desire or want, one can talk about

desires causing actions. But in many cases of actions, the presence of the antecedent desires or intentions are not so obvious. Actions are sometimes merely done intentionally without any prior well-formed intention. For instance, I swerved the car to save the child. Here it seems I did not form an intention first and then swerve; I swerved intentionally. Similarly there are cases where I do things without even thinking about them - like moving my hands while talking, or swinging my legs while eating. In this case there is no deliberation whether to move one's hand or not; there is no conscious reasoning preceding one's swinging one's leg; there is no well-formed antecedent desire or want, no period of decision or indecision. Sometimes one is not even fully aware of the fact that one is moving one's hand. In such cases it seems odd to talk about a desire or want causing the performance.

One thing should be pointed out here, that our every-day normal behaviour-pattern is so systematic and follows, as Peters has said 'a purposive rule-following model', that it does not require to be stated explicitly that every action we perform is specifically willed or intended. We normally refer to intention or make an enquiry as to whether an action is deliberate, if there is some sort of interruption or unusualness about it. Thus if a person eats his breakfast every morning at eight regularly for twenty years no one will ask whether he intends to do it. But if he does not do it one morning and there is a break in his behaviour-pattern, the question whether he intends to have his breakfast arises. But this, i.e. we normally raise the question whether a piece of behaviour is deliberate when there is something unusual, does not rule out the possibility that where we do not raise such a question, the action can still be deliberate and specifically willed. To say this however, is not to deny that there is a difference between actions which are specifically intended and actions which are done intentionally or, to be more precise, voluntarily.

This difference certainly has some relevance to the thesis that actions are always caused by our desires, wants etc. If desires, wants etc. are considered as something of which the agent is always aware, then it will be difficult to maintain that all actions causally proceed from such conscious desires and wants. But we have seen in the course of our discussion that not all desires are necessarily conscious desires. A desire or want can be at work without the agent's being conscious of it. This happens in the case of sub-conscious motives and desires.

However, explanations in terms of subconscious motives and desires cover only a limited range of human behaviour. So far as our ordinary behaviour is concerned the question still remains, how we can causally explain actions which are done voluntarily without being preceded by a specific desire or intention. This question brings us back to the examples like swerving a car intentionally, moving hands while talking etc. One thing should be mentioned, that a desire, in order to cause an action, need not be a definite occurrent.<sup>1</sup> It may be a long term sustaining state or process from which the action emerges. Swerving a car intentionally can be causally explained in terms of a long-term sustaining desire e.g., a desire not to run over people. However it seems to me that in the case of swerving the car one cannot really rule out the possibility of making a quick split-second decision to swerve the car. Such split-second decision can cause the act of swerving the car.

Sometimes though there may not be a specific deliberation prior to each individual activity performed in connection with an action, the action as a whole may involve a desire or intention as its cause. For instance,

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1. This will be discussed in Chapter V



if one wants to eat one uses knife and fork without reflecting about using them, or forming a definite desire to use one's knife and fork, or deliberating each time before one moves one's knife and fork. The desire or the intention to eat, which causes one's act of eating can be said to be the cause of everything one performs in this connection. The same thing applies to swinging one's leg while eating or moving one's hand while talking.

Similarly, the cause of habitual actions can be traced back to desires or wants. Habitual actions are actions performed regularly, and because of that one does not have to think about their execution. They do not need any specific deliberation. But to say that an action is habitual is not to say that it is unintentional or involuntary. The regular precision with which a man eats his breakfast at eight every morning for twenty years, does not mean that his action is unintentional or that he has no want or desire to eat his breakfast. At some stage of his mental life in the past he definitely had formed an intention to eat his breakfast at eight.

One thing is certain that if we want to differentiate these actions from mere movements we have to invoke the notion of desire or want as their cause. Without this causal reference they cannot be separated from mere movements. They may not be specifically intended actions, but they can still be caused by the agent's desires or wants.

### Conclusion

We can now sum up the arguments of this chapter. I started with the contentions that desires or wants to perform actions are not themselves performances and that actions are not movements caused by desires or wants.

I maintained that actions in general involve a reference to the agent's desires or wants and such a reference is a causal reference. I tried to differentiate among the various senses in which the term 'reason' is used and to determine in what sense of the term reasons can be causes of actions. Lastly, I tried to show that unless the relation between reasons and actions are considered as causal, an adequate explanation of actions cannot be given.

In the remaining chapters I shall try to refute the various arguments designed to show that reasons cannot be causes.

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## Chapter IV

### The indescribability of volition without a reference to action

In this chapter I am going to consider one of the arguments mentioned in the introduction to this thesis - the arguments which philosophers often cite to support the contention that a causal explanation of action in terms of reasons is not possible.

The argument is: our desires, wants, intentions etc., cannot be described without involving a reference to the action desired, wanted or intended; whereas a cause can be described without involving any reference to its effect. Therefore, an explanation in terms of reasons cannot be a causal explanation. This argument is the strongest of all the arguments put forward by the opponents of the causal theory of action. As this argument is based on Hume's definition of cause, it will not be completely out of context to discuss that a little first.

#### I David Hume and volition as a cause

Hume has recognized the difficulty of forming a just definition of cause. He admits that it is not possible to find out 'that circumstance' in the cause which makes the cause a cause. From his definitions<sup>1</sup> and from the rules<sup>2</sup> by which to judge cause and effect, a cause appears to be as follows:

A cause is contiguous and precedent to its effect; the effect regularly follows the cause; and this regularity can be subsumed under a law-like generalisation, i.e., events of the cause-sort are followed by events of the

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1. David Hume. Treatise Bk 1 §111. Section XIV. p172 & Enquiry Sec. VII Part II. p76-77. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge
  2. David. Hume. Treatise. Bk 1. §111. Sec.XV. p173

effect-sort; so far as experience goes, if the cause had not been, the effect had never existed. These characteristics show that psycho-genetically the cause-idea is formed from the experience of contiguity, resemblance and regularity. But philosophically causation does not imply anything more than mere regular sequence. The effect can never be deduced apriori from the cause, or in other words that a particular cause has a particular effect is purely a contingent matter. The cause-effect relation is not a relation of logical necessity. Cause and effect are two separate events, connected in our minds by means of association.

It is a point of interest to note that for Hume, the problem of will and its influence on physical bodies is only one aspect of the more general problem of causal necessity. His aim is to show that the so-called necessary connection which will enable one to infer apriori the effect from the cause cannot be established from a consideration of the relation between will and action, though it is commonly thought that such an idea is derived from the operations of will on physical bodies. "...the will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more discoverable connection with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect."<sup>1</sup>

Hume however fails to mention the differences existing between an ordinary physical cause and an act of volition or will. He also fails to realise that his theory of causation, which implies that the cause and the effect are two distinct events and that the effect cannot be inferred from the cause, does not so obviously apply to an act of volition and its alleged consequence. But to say this is not in any way to suggest that volition cannot be a cause. It is only to recognise the difficulties that lie on the way to describing volition as a cause. Hume's contention of the non-inferrability of the effect from the cause has further implications. It

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1. D. Hume. Treatise. Appendix p632. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge

implies that cause and effect are not logically connected. It is on this implication of Hume's theory of causation that Melden bases his argument that volition, being describable only in terms of an action, has a logical relation with action and therefore cannot be the cause of action.

## II Melden and the indescribability of volition without a reference to action

A.I. Melden in his Free Action<sup>1</sup> has tried to find the nature of the relation between an act of will and its alleged effect. He intends to show that this is not a causal relation by an appeal to Hume. He has admitted that there might be different senses of 'cause' other than the Humean in which volition could be a cause, but his treatment is mainly confined to the question whether volition can be a cause in the sense in which the word 'cause' is used in the physical sciences and in Hume's philosophy.

Melden's argument is as follows: according to the Humean definition of cause, a cause is an event describable independently of its effect. But volition is not describable independently of its effect. An act of volition or will is describable only in terms of the action willed. Therefore volition cannot be a cause. Melden starts with a distinction between a mere happening and an action. According to the traditional theory the latter is performed by means of an act of will; the agent performs an act of will which results in an action. The difficulty arises, as Melden points out, with the description of an act of will. How can one describe one act of will as distinguished from another act of will? What characterization has one in mind in order to recognize an act of will? Melden then proceeds to show that the only way to describe an act of will is to do so in terms of the action willed; "...nothing can be an act of volition that is not logically connected with that which is willed - the act of willing is intelligible only as the act of willing whatever it is that is willed."<sup>2</sup>

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1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. 1963

2. Ibid. p53

This argument of Melden is not only directed to acts of will, but also to desires, wants, motives etc. He holds that an explanation in terms of desires, wants or motives cannot be a causal explanation because we cannot describe a desire, want or motive without linking it with action. This argument is traceable in different variations among other philosophers, representing the same pattern of thought. In this chapter I shall try to evaluate this argument in the context of Melden's analysis of the problem.

Melden argues that for a genuine Humean causal relation we need two distinct events logically independent of one another; but in the case of volition, want, desire etc., such logical independence is lacking. This is because they cannot be described without reference to their alleged consequences. As Melden puts it, "If in thinking of  $V_1$  (some particular act of volition) we are of necessity to think of it as the willing of  $M_1$  (some particular muscle movement), then  $V_1$  cannot be any occurrence, mental or physiological, which is causally related to  $M_1$ , since the very notion of a causal sequence logically implies that cause and effect are intelligible without any logically internal relation of the one to the other."<sup>1</sup>

The assumption behind Melden's argument is that if the description of one event involves the idea of another, they cannot be logically independent. The argument that volition cannot be described without reference to the action willed appears to be so forceful because of what Melden takes it to mean. For Melden it means that the relation between volition and action is non-contingent, whereas according to the Humean theory a cause and an effect are only contingently related.

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1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. p52

The contingent nature of the causal relation suggests many things. It suggests, obviously enough, that the relation between cause and effect is not a necessary logical relation; it suggests that cause and effect are distinct and separately identifiable and can be described independently of one another. To quote Melden, "...in general if A causes B, a description of A other than that it has the causal property of producing B must be forthcoming, otherwise 'A causes B' degenerates into 'the thing that produces B, produces B!'"<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to make clear how the Meldenian claim should be interpreted. Melden does not say simply that when a cause or an effect is described in terms of the other, the relation between them turns out to be non-contingent, but that the relation becomes a non-contingent one when the description 'A is the cause of B' is the sole description of A. The further implication of Melden's argument is that, the description of a volition\* in terms of an action being its only description, a volition can be identified only as the volition to perform an action. The same is true of other items of reasons like, desires, wants, motives etc. Thus in the cases of volitions, desires, wants, motives etc., the question of independent describability seems to be also a question of independent identifiability. But before we answer the questions, whether items of reasons are independently identifiable and whether the relation between them and their alleged consequences is a non-contingent relation, it will be worthwhile to discuss some of the attempts made by different philosophers to answer the Meldenian argument.

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1. Ibid. p46

\* I have used the term 'volition' in this chapter, because Melden has used it. I have discarded the concept of volition in the sense of an act of will, in chapter II

### III Some Answers to Melden's argument

(i) D. Davidson in his article 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' has tried to offer an independent description of a want without involving a reference to the action wanted. He says that a reason-statement can be expressed without involving any terms used in the description of an action-statement. According to Davidson it is not a mistake to take "'My reason for flipping the switch was that I wanted to turn on the light' as entailing, in part, 'I flipped the switch and this action is further describable as having been caused by my wanting to turn on the light.'" Then he comments that "The example serves also to refute the claim that we cannot describe the action without using words that link it to the alleged cause. Here the action is to be explained under the description: 'my flipping the switch', and the alleged cause is 'my wanting to turn on the light'. What possible logical relation is supposed to hold between these phrases?"<sup>1</sup>

It seems that what Davidson suggests is that 'I wanted to turn on the light' and 'I turned on the light' may seem to be logically connected, but 'I wanted to turn on the light' and 'I flipped the switch' do not seem to be logically connected. So far as this particular point is concerned Davidson's answer to the Meldenian argument does not seem to me very effective. This is simply because one cannot so easily replace 'I turned on the light' with 'I flipped the switch'; 'I turned on the light' and 'I flipped the switch' do not necessarily describe one and the same action. Flipping the switch does not necessarily mean turning the light on. Besides if the action-description 'I turned on the light' can be replaced by another action-description viz., 'I flipped the switch', there is no reason why the want-description 'I wanted to turn on the light' cannot be replaced by another want-description viz., 'I wanted to flip the switch', in which case the want-description again becomes dependent on the action-description.

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1. D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Free Will and Determinism. ed. B. Berofsky. p233



It may be argued here that the two want-statements are not related exactly in the same way as the two action-statements seem to be. Want being intensional, wanting to turn the light on cannot be replaced by wanting to flip the switch. For instance, to say that 'I want to shoot by mother-in-law' is not to say that 'I want to shoot the Education Minister'. I may not have any idea that my mother-in-law is also the Education Minister. Hence, though the action-description 'I turned on the light' may be replaced by 'I flipped the switch', the want-description 'I wanted to turn on the light' cannot be replaced by 'I wanted to flip the switch'.

It can be pointed out against this argument that the want-description viz., 'I wanted to turn on the light' in some sense involves 'I wanted to flip the switch'. The want or desire to turn on the light may be the cause of the want or desire to flip the switch, or the second desire may be a part of the former. So 'I wanted to turn on the light' does involve in some sense 'I wanted to flip the switch'. Hence it cannot really be claimed that in the want-action relation 'I wanted to turn on the light and I flipped the switch', the want-description is independent of the action-description.

It seems to me that mere replacement of a reason-action statement by another will not solve the problem of description-dependency. Davidson however has mentioned another important point to show that desires and actions are not conceptually related. To this point I shall return in due course.

(ii) Sometimes the following argument is put forward in support of mental items as causes, viz., that if two concepts are conceptually connected, that does not mean that the things falling under them are also internally connected. D.W. Hamlyn has used this argument to criticise Melden's position. He says, "To say that no independent description of the intention can be

given is to say that there is an internal connexion between the concepts of intention and related action. But it by no means follows that where two concepts are internally related the things to which the two concepts may be applied cannot be contingently related. Thus, although the intention to write a letter can be described only as that intention, whatever goes on in the mind when the person has that intention might, for that matter, be represented as the cause of writing the letter - provided, of course, that anything does go on in the mind."<sup>1</sup> Hamlyn has tried to prove this contention with the help of the particular instance of 'Intention to write a letter' and 'writing a letter'. His argument is that what goes on in the mind of a person, if anything does in forming an intention, may be describable in terms independent of the object of the intention, and hence can be its cause, although intention as intention is not so describable.<sup>2</sup> According to Hamlyn, what goes on in the mind of a person in forming an intention can be interpreted as something like an inner utterance 'I will write a letter'.<sup>3</sup>

Hamlyn is not at all clear as to what he means by 'forming an intention'. He also uses expressions like "...what goes on in the mind in having or forming an intention..."<sup>4</sup>, as if 'having an intention' and 'forming an intention' are interchangeable. It seems to me that 'forming an intention' and 'having an intention' are different. 'Forming an intention' is definitely not an intention whereas 'having an intention' and intention are not so different. It seems that Hamlyn has taken the occurrence of an inner utterance viz., 'I will write a letter' as equivalent to 'what goes on in the mind in forming the intention'.<sup>5</sup> Whatever it may be, it can be

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1. D.W. Hamlyn. 'Causality and Human Behaviour'. pp133-134. PASSV 1964. Emphasis is the author's. This point is also made by K. Baier. K. Baier 'Pains'. Australasian Journal of Philosophy. 1962. p20
  2. Ibid. p134
  3. Ibid
  4. Ibid. p135
  5. Ibid. p134

pointed out that this does not help in proving that an intention is the cause of writing a letter. 'What goes on in the mind in forming an intention' can be completely different from an intention itself. An intention can be the result of 'what goes on in the mind in forming an intention'. To say 'what goes on in the mind in forming an intention' is the cause of the action of 'writing a letter' is not to say that the intention is the cause of 'writing a letter'. For the intention to write a letter and 'what goes on in the mind in forming the intention to write a letter' may not be one and the same thing.

It appears that Hamlyn wants to apply the concept of intention to 'what goes on etc.' and thus to show that while the concept of intention and the concept of action are internally connected, the things to which these concepts apply, i.e. in this case 'what goes on etc.' (viz., an utterance 'I will write a letter') and the action of writing a letter may be causally connected. I am not denying that they may be causally connected, but I do not see how the concept of intention can be applied to 'what goes on in the mind (if anything does) in forming an intention'.

However, 'having an intention' is a completely different case from 'forming an intention'. If 'intention' is not used in an abstract sense, it cannot exist independently of 'having an intention' or of someone's having it. As an abstract concept it describes a state of mind and therefore can be shared by many. In that sense it cannot be a cause. It can be a cause only in a personalized sense, i.e., someone's having it. So 'having an intention' and intention in<sup>a</sup> personalised sense are not really two different things. From this perspective, one can of course say, after Hamlyn, that though intention and action are conceptually related, what goes on in the mind in having an intention, if anything does (like an utterance 'I will write a letter') and action of writing a letter may be causally connected.

(iii) D.F. Pears seems to offer us a solution of the problem we are discussing, in his article 'Desires as Causes of Actions'<sup>1</sup>, though one must admit that his analysis is opaque and it is difficult to understand what his own view on the matter is. However, from what he suggests in the form of various possibilities, it seems that the notion of an anticipatory feeling is the basis from which he starts.

Pears says that someone can claim against the objection [that A cannot cause B unless A can be specified in some way that does not mention the fact that it causes B] that it is not true that we have only "....one line attaching practical desires to public phenomenon", ...."....we have two different lines on to practical desires,"<sup>2</sup> though these two lines are not completely independent of one another. One of these lines is the usual way of identifying a desire or want in terms of its object, and the other is an anticipatory feeling."....to have a desire is to have an anticipatory feeling which is very like the feeling of satisfaction when the goal is achieved. People could use this similarity in order to establish the existence of practical desires instead of using the sequel".<sup>3</sup>

Pears however goes on criticising the above-mentioned position. What seems to be his own view on the matter is a slight modification of the claim mentioned above. According to him what helps us to identify our desires in advance is a degree of feeling which is like the feeling of satisfaction when the goal is achieved. To quote Pears, "....there is a degree of

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1. D.F. Pears. 'Desires as Causes of Actions'. The Human Agent. Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures vol. I 1966/7. p83. Pears has offered another solution in his recent article 'Are Reasons for Actions Causes?' in Epistemology, ed. A.Stroll. 1967. p219-220

2. Ibid. p89

3. Ibid. By 'Sequel' Pears means the set of alternatives one of which follows a practical desire.

feeling about a project which is causally connected with the sequel and which is identified in advance."<sup>1</sup>

Pears' answer to the Meldenian criticism has several disadvantages. Firstly, I am not sure how far Pears' description applies to all cases of desires, wants, intentions etc. What he says may be true in some cases - particularly in cases of desires, but it would be wrong to say that whenever we intend, want or will to do something we have this anticipatory feeling of satisfaction which we get when the action is performed. In many cases of desire we do not know what the feeling of satisfaction will be. We cannot even anticipate the feeling of satisfaction. For instance when a person desires to die, he cannot have an anticipatory feeling of satisfaction. He cannot even know what will count as fulfilment of his desire.

There are many things we desire or want to do, about which we feel absolutely no feelings. I want to put the book back, to push the chair, to stir my tea. I do recognize my desire or want in all these cases in terms of the action I desire or want to do, but not as a certain degree of feeling which is like the feeling of satisfaction which is obtained when the action is performed. In most of the cases I do not even have a visual image, e.g. the image of my getting up or stirring tea.

Secondly, even if we grant that sometimes we identify in our mind the anticipatory feelings of satisfaction which we get before we perform certain actions, will it be reasonable to identify such feelings with the desires to do such and such actions? For instance, if I am angry, I may have an intense feeling which I may recognize as the anticipatory feeling of satisfaction which I will get if I start throwing things, but can it be called the desire to throw things? I agree that sometimes our desires are

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1. Ibid. p95

closely related to such feelings. But a desire cannot be identified with such a feeling. It may be the result of such a feeling. I may desire to throw things if I am angry, because I may realize that the anticipatory feeling of satisfaction can be actualised only in that way. Again, sometimes even if I have such anticipatory feelings, I may not desire to act accordingly. Thirdly, Pears' contention is: I have a desire which I identify in terms of an anticipatory feeling which is very much like the feeling I will get if the desire is fulfilled. But this criterion with which I identify a desire viz., the feeling which resembles the feeling I will get if the desire is fulfilled, itself presupposes that I should have the desire and it must be fulfilled, otherwise I would not know what the feeling is. Hence, my desire cannot be identified in advance in terms of an anticipatory feeling which itself depends on the fulfilment of the desire.

Pears also mentions another possibility in this connection. He says that though the reference to action is the only available criterion at present that does not mean the possibilities are exhausted and there cannot be another criterion in future. Pears suggests that "...some independent identification of practical desires may become available later, perhaps through neurology."<sup>1</sup> The point here, however, is not whether a second criterion in terms of neuro-physiology is theoretically possible for the specification of desires, wants etc., the point is that such a specification, being in neuro-physiological terms, will not say anything about a desire or a want as such, just as a description of action in neuro-physiological terms would not say anything about an action as such.

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1. Ibid. p91. Pears goes on, however, to raise an objection to this as a solution.

Also see D.F. Pears. 'Are Reasons for Actions Causes?'  
Epistemology. ed. A. Stroll. p215. 1967

However, I think Pears is right in emphasizing the fact that we really do identify our desires in advance, but I would like to say that identification is not in terms of certain 'feelings', for we can intend, will or want without any anticipatory feelings.

So long I have been discussing the various answers given to the Meldenian criticism that items of reason are description-dependent on actions and that the description of a reason in terms of an action is its sole identifying criterion. Let us consider once again what are the apparent shortcomings of the reason-action relation as a causal relation.

The force of Melden's argument consists in attempting to show that the contention 'willing to act produces action' is vacuous because, this amounts to saying <sup>that</sup> the cause of action is what causes action. Therefore any statement expressing a causal relation between desires, wants, motives etc., and an action is empty.

Another stronghold of the Meldenian argument is that wants, desires, intentions, motives etc., are, as Pears puts it, in a peculiar way transparent. They are transparent in the sense that not only are they indescribable without referring to their effects, but this reference shows prior to experience what effect is going to follow. This is in direct conflict with Hume's notion of causation where what effect a cause will produce cannot be inferred from the notion of the cause itself; it can be known only through repeated experience of the situation, whereas to have a desire to perform an action already tells prior to experience what sort of action is going to follow. As Broad puts it, "It is perfectly plain that, in the case of volition and voluntary movement, there is a connection between the

cause and the effect which is not present in other cases of causation, and which does make it plausible to hold that in this one case the nature of the effect can be foreseen by merely reflecting on the nature of the cause."<sup>1</sup>

One thing should be pointed out here, that the Humean notion of a causal relation - that it can be known only through repeated experience of the situation - can be accepted only with qualification.<sup>2</sup> It is not necessarily true that we cannot know a cause directly - without going through a process of repeated observations. For instance, I can know immediately without any research that my headache is causing my distraction. But still one would not call the relation between my headache and my distraction non-contingent. However, there is one big difference between the case of the headache and distraction and the case of volition and an action. In the former case I can describe my headache as the cause of my distraction only after experiencing the effect happening. But in the latter case it seems that the cause actually tells us what effect is going to follow.\* This difference suggests that the argument that the relation between volition and action is non-contingent has some weight.

#### IV An attempt to answer Melden

I have already mentioned that in this particular issue of desires, wants etc., the question of independent indescribability seems to be also a question of independent identifiability.<sup>3</sup> These two questions are not necessarily the same question. To describe a cause in terms of its effect is not necessarily to identify it in terms of its effect. But in the case of a desire and an action it seems that there is no other way of identifying

1. C.D. Broad. The Mind and its place in Nature. p102. 1925. London

2. This point will be developed and discussed in Chapter VI

\* We shall see later on that this is not exactly the case

3. See p89



a desire than in terms of its object. Therefore, the Meldenian philosophers conclude that the relation between a desire and an action cannot be contingent and causal.

I shall now try to show that although the description of a desire or want may involve the description of an action, yet the relation between them is not a logical relation. Besides a desire or want can be identified in a way which does not make <sup>the</sup> relation necessary.

In Pears' analysis we have seen an attempt to identify a desire independent of its object. According to him one can identify the desire in advance in terms of a feeling without referring to the sequel. Although I do not agree with Pears in his claim to identify a desire in terms of an anticipatory feeling, I think Pears is right in pointing out that there is a way to specify a desire other than the way which involves reference to its objects; though these two ways are not completely independent of one another.

The opponent of the causal theory often overlooks the point that normally an agent can specify his intentions, desires, wants etc., independently of the actual occurrence of the action. To others the knowledge of his want or desire is circumstantial and requires external evidence; but to him the knowledge of his wants or desires is direct. If a person wants to do something, normally he knows that he wants to do something in advance of the actual happening of what he wants to do. Thus if I intend to go to the British Museum tomorrow morning I come to know my intention to do so long before the action actually takes place, if it ever does. This shows that the way the agent identifies his desires, wants, intentions etc., is independent of reference to the actual action. The reference such a desire involves is to a possibility of action which may or may not happen. It takes place and is identifiable in advance irrespective of whether the action

occurs or not. This shows that although some descriptions of desire involve the description of an action, desire as such is quite intelligible irrespective of whether the action occurs or not.

This point is more important than it appears to be. Therefore, it needs further clarification. The critics may argue that the identification of one's own intention may be independent of the reference to the actual action but that it is not independent of the reference to the notion of action as such. One still identifies one's intentions, desires etc., under a description which involves a reference to the action intended. But to say I recognize my desire, intention etc. under a description that involves a reference to a possible action is not the same thing as to say that I recognize my intention under a description that involves a reference to an actual action.

It should be pointed out that it is not always true that a desire or intention can never be described in terms other than those which involve reference to its object. For instance one can always describe a desire by reference to the time when it is formed without mentioning its object. Thus instead of saying that 'Cinderella left the palace because she wanted to leave', one can always say that 'she left the palace because of the want she had at five to twelve'. The only thing is that such a description will be empty, devoid of all content and therefore of very little explanatory value. But it is not impossible to describe desires, wants etc., in such a way. Hence, the Meldenian argument really means, in a more qualified way, that when a desire is described by mentioning its object, the description of the desire refers to the description of its object. Even this qualified statement of the argument cannot be accepted without further qualification.

It is true that the description of a desire to perform an action involves reference to its content but the description of the content hardly says anything definite about what sort of action is going to be performed. Consider the statement 'I want to insult her' or 'I want to be polite'. What sort of particular actions do these statements imply? They do imply some sort of actions no doubt, but they do it in an indefinite way. I admit that they eliminate the possibility of some sort of actions happening but they do not indicate definitely what sort of action is going to follow. Thus if I want to insult her, I may ignore her, or shout at her, or not answer her letter; similarly if I want to be polite, I may open the door for her, or pay her bill or shake hands and so on. Hence, we can say that in ordinary want-action statements the reference involved in the description of a want to its content is an indefinite generic reference. It does not say anything about what particular specific action is going to follow. If this is the case then what action is going to take place cannot be deduced from the description of the desire, whereas if A is logically related to B, then B can be deduced from the description of A, as happens for instance in Geometry. Melden's argument that a desire cannot be described in independent terms is designed to show that there is a logical relation between a desire and an action. But, as we have seen before, from the descriptions of desires, wants etc., one cannot really deduce the specific actions which are going to take place. Hence, the relation between desires and their alleged consequences cannot be a full-blooded logical relation.

I think the critics here would like to argue that the reference involved in the description of a desire is not always indefinite. Sometimes a desire-description definitely indicates what sort of action is going to follow. For instance, a desire-description like 'I wanted to be polite' can be further analysed and specified as 'I wanted to open the door for her'. The agent here believes that opening the door is an instance of politeness.

It seems that in such cases, the description of a want like 'I want to open the door for her' refers to a definite action viz., opening the door for her. But here also the definiteness of the action-description is only apparent. For the description that 'I want to open the door for her' does not guarantee that I will in fact open the door for her. One cannot deduce definitely from the description of the want whether or not the alleged action will follow.

Melden is of the opinion that one identifies one's desires in terms of actions. I think Davidson has an answer to Melden. To quote Davidson, "...the event whose occurrence makes 'I turned on the light' true cannot be called the object, however intensional, of 'I wanted to turn on the light'. If I turned on the light, then I must have done it at a precise moment, in a particular way - every detail is fixed. But it makes no sense to demand that my want be directed at an action performed at any one moment or done in some unique manner. Any one of an indefinitely large number of actions would satisfy the want, and can be considered as equally eligible as its object."<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me that Davidson is right in his criticism of Melden. The agent identifies his desire or want only in terms of an action whose details are not fixed, whereas the action which follows from such a desire is definite and determined. These two actions cannot be one and the same thing though they may not be completely different. Therefore, the description of an action which is definite and determined cannot be logically deduced from the description of an action whose details are not fixed and which is the object of a desire. Quite often this point is proved by ordinary expressions such as 'I had completely different ideas about doing it before I actually did it'. This shows that the relation between an action and the desire of which it is an object cannot be a logical relation.

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1. D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Free will and Determinism. ed. B. Berofsky. p224

V Could a person be said to intend X if he did not do X in the absence of countervailing factors?

A common argument, which the anti-causal theorists often put forward in support of the necessary connection between intention and action, is that one cannot speak of intending something unless either it results in an action or a countervailing factor is detected.<sup>1</sup> Given the opportunity, if a person does not do what he apparently intends to do, he does not really intend to do that. This applies to other items of reason as well. If a person desires to do something, and does not do it when there is nothing to prevent him, he does not really desire or want to do it.

This argument obviously needs qualifications. Let us first consider the phrase 'countervailing factor' which is so much emphasized in this argument. The phrase is an ambiguous expression in this issue. What should be counted as a countervailing factor? Should we consider both physical and mental factors? The argument overlooks the possibility that a person may really intend to do something and change his mind later on, but at the time of forming the intention may not foresee the possibility of changes. Even if he does foresee the possibility of changing his mind, he still may be said to be intending. Besides many things can happen after a person intends to do something. Not only may he encounter external obstacles to performing the action, he may also forget his intention, he may just stop intending before the time for action, or, he may form a new intention replacing the old one.

Again time plays an important role in assessing whether a person really intends to do something or not. It should be pointed out that when

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1. C. Taylor for instance remarks "I could not be said to intend X if even with no obstacle or other countervailing factors I still did not do it"  
C. Taylor. Explanation of Behaviour. p33. 1968

a person intends to do something in the future, or has intended to do something in the past, it makes quite good sense to say that he intends (or intended) to do an action even if no action followed afterwards. Thus if I said at 3 p.m. that I would have tea at 4 p.m., and if at 4 p.m. the event did not take place, it could still remain true that at 3 p.m. I intended to take tea at 4 p.m. Perhaps I changed my mind, or stopped intending to have a cup of tea or simply forgot it. Similarly, if a person really intends to do something in future then it will be true to say that he intends to do something though the action has not happened yet. He has an intention, though there is no action visible in the proximity.

The difficulty arises only with the immediate present. When a person intends to do something right now and the action does not follow, it is odd to talk about him as really intending to do something. We cannot explain such a situation in terms of countervailing factors because when one intends to do something right now there is little time to change one's mind or to forget or to get frustrated by a counter-desire or want. Hence here the question seems to be: could one intend to act now but not act now without any interfering factors occurring?

This is a difficult question to answer. It is hard to see what it means if I say that I intend to do X now and I don't do it. It is not only difficult for an observer, but also for the agent, to comprehend such a situation without presupposing certain countervailing factors. It seems to me that one should try to understand the question in the context of physical causation. In the first place the case of intention hardly differs from an ordinary case of physical causation where a thing cannot be called a cause unless it produces its alleged effect in the absence of countervailing factors. Could a physical event or object be described as a cause when it

failed to produce the effect without any of the interfering factors occurring? The answer is negative and so it seems in the case of intention.

However there is an important difference between a physical event or object and an intention. If a physical object fails to produce a certain effect it still remains itself to a certain extent in virtue of its other properties besides the causal one, whereas an intention has only the causal property viz., that it is an intention to do something. When this causal property is taken away the concept does not survive. Because so far as intentions are concerned, this causal property is also the identifying criterion. Of course an intention can be identified by reference to the time when it is formed. But as we have seen before such a description will be empty and of little explanatory value. Hence, if in the absence of interfering factors an intention does not produce the action intended, it does not remain an intention or anything at all. In such cases we say that the agent does not have any real intention. If a person intends to do X but occasionally does not do it, we shall refer to an interfering factor to explain the situation. But if it happens frequently we will have to say that the concept of intention is not applicable to such cases.

No doubt the difficulty one faces here arises from the so-called description-dependency of the intention-concept on the action-concept. However, the important question here is: does such dependency of the intention-concept on the action-concept show conclusively that the relation between these two concepts is one of logical entailment and not causal? I think it does not. Because, as I have already mentioned, the agent can identify his intention without waiting for the performance of the action, and from the description of the intention one cannot deduce with certainty

what sort of action (or which particular action) will follow. Lastly, if not the others, at least the agent can identify his intentions, desires etc., by reference to the time of their inception. It is not uncommon that sometimes one remembers one's intention to do something but forgets what it is that one intended to do. From this perspective, intentions, desires or wants are distinct enough to have a contingent, causal relation with the actions intended, desired or wanted, though their descriptions may involve some sort of generic descriptions of the actions concerned.

### Conclusion

We are now in a position to sum up the arguments. In this chapter I have been concerned with the argument that items of reason are indescribable apart from their alleged effects, with a special reference to Melden's view. Melden's argument aims to show that there is a logical connection between volition and action which arises from the indescribability of the former without the latter. He also tries to show that since the description of volition in terms of action is its only identifying criterion, the statement that volition causes action is vacuous.

I have tried to show that this description-dependency of volitional concepts does not really prove that the relation between them and action is a logical relation. The agent identifies his desires, intentions etc., in advance without waiting to see whether the action is going to follow. Besides it is difficult to deduce from the notion of desire or intention exactly what sort of action is going to follow. The action-reference which the notion of desire or intention involves is only a generic reference and not a specific one. Thus, although the description of volitional concepts involves the description of action, it does not refer to action in the same sense in which the description of a triangle involves a reference to a figure having three angles. Hence the relation between action and volition cannot be such a non-contingent relation as to stand in the way of volition being a cause of an action.

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## Chapter V

### Causes as Events

In the introduction I have already had occasion to say that some philosophers have denied the possibility of causal explanation of action in terms of reasons on the ground that such an explanation of action involves a conceptual mistake. Desires, intentions, wants etc., are not of the right logical type to be causes. The fundamental proposition on which these philosophers have built their defence is that a cause is an event. Reasons, being attitudes and dispositions, are not events and therefore cannot be causes. This is a general objection against a reason's being a cause and obviously is derived from the Humean notion of cause and reinforced by Ryle, Melden and others.

In this chapter I shall examine the Humean doctrine that a cause is an event and shall also consider the possibility of things other than events being causes, which will include the discussion of reasons as well.

#### I The argument

In the Humean philosophy a cause is an event or happening and a causal explanation takes the form of relating one event to another event or set of events according to some covering law. The word 'event' or 'happening' is used in a sense suitable to include cases like the impact of a billiard ball on another. The principle that every event has one or more events as its cause excludes things or entities other than events from the causal sphere. Ryle, Melden, etc., have emphasized this point and claimed that desires, wants, intentions, not being events, are not causes.

In general the thesis that the cause of an event must be an event seems untenable and I shall put forward the thesis that a cause need not always be an event.

## II Is cause always an event?

I shall begin with the thesis that the description of a cause as an event leaves out not only mental states, dispositions, beliefs and attitudes, but also many physical states and conditions usually considered as causes. Therefore the description of a cause as an event is a limited description and does not do full justice to the denotation of the term 'cause'.

The Humean conception of a cause as an event suggests strongly its duration in time. If events are occurrences in time what will be the necessary period of duration for such an occurrence? Do we count all sorts of changes as events? Do beginnings and endings count as events? Do we consider changes of any length of duration as events? Or, are only insoluble instantaneous happenings events? The atomistic empirical approach of the Humean philosophers towards the issue suggests that events, even if not instantaneous, are happenings of limited duration which are isolable from their context and can be treated as sufficient conditions for the occurrence of the effect. In this sense, however, there are very few 'events' which can be the cause of another event. Actual happenings in the physical world, sometimes even in experimental cases,\* are often continuous processes and a cause-event is only relatively isolable from this continuity with reference to the context. A drop of acid turning blue litmus paper red may be an isolable happening in the required Humean sense, but not all causal cases are simple like that. Sometimes happenings are gradual changes in situations. We often find causes which are persistent physical states like continuous sunshine darkening the skin, or which are the absence of a physical event, like the failure of the monsoon causing famine. Thus, to quote B. Blanshard, "...not only changes but the lack of change, not only the fall of the water over the cataract's edge, but the persistence of ice in the frozen river...."<sup>1</sup> are considered as happenings in ordinary language.

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\* e.g. the effect of smoke on rats

1. B. Blanshard. 'The case for determinism'. Determinism and Freedom in the age of Modern Science. ed. S. Hook. p3. 1958

Properly speaking it is erroneous to say that an event causes another event. This is because events never repeat. They are in a sense unique. Any insistence on the rigid description of an event as an event will fail to fulfil the regularity criterion of causal explanation. Thus in causal generalisation we usually use the phrase 'similar events' and not 'the same event'. Pointing to this feature of causation Susan Stebbing has said, "...We can speak of the same cause on different occasions only because the causal connection is primarily between the characters, and is derivatively between the events to which these characters belong."<sup>1</sup>

We often give causal explanations in terms of states, characters, etc., instead of in terms of a specific event. For instance the gravitation of the earth explains several facts, but the earth's gravitation is not an event. If the falling of an object is explained in terms of the earth's gravitation, we state what is the cause of the falling of an object. But this statement is not in terms of an event but in terms of the characteristic of a material body. This is a point to which Hume has not paid much attention in his philosophy. States and processes, like events, can be regarded as causes. For instance 'heating causes water to vaporise' is a good example of a causal relation, though the subject and the predicate in the example do not stand for events. They describe certain processes of material bodies. In a similar way, Hume has ignored completely countless other things which can be counted as causes and effects; changes, processes, permanent states, objects, failures, non-occurrence, absence - can all be considered as causes or effects. For instance we can causally explain the respiratory process and the digestive process which are effects but not events. In pointing this out Davidson has observed "...states, dispositions, and conditions are frequently named as the causes of events: the

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1. L.S. Stebbing. A modern Introduction to Logic. p284. 1933. London

bridge collapsed because of a structural defect; the plane crashed on take off because the air temperature was abnormally high; the plate broke because it had a crack."<sup>1</sup> These cases whatever they are, are not events in the Humean sense, yet they can be considered as causes.

### III Ryle and Melden on the notion of a cause as an event

I have already pointed out that the Rylean line of thinking has always presumed that a cause is an event, whereas explanations given in dispositional language being covertly hypothetical cannot be "construed as expressing categorical narratives of episodes".<sup>2</sup> In the introduction, I have mentioned that according to Ryle<sup>3</sup> there are two senses in which we can ask why did the glass of the window break? One is the causal sense, where the answer will be - 'it broke because it was struck by a stone'. The second is the sense where we give a reason, that 'it broke because it was brittle'. Ryle says that the because-clause in the latter answer does not report a happening or event and therefore is not a causal 'because'. Similarly, says Ryle, "When we ask 'Why did someone act in a certain way?' this question might, so far as its language goes, either be an inquiry into the cause of his acting in that way, or be an inquiry into the character of the agent which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion".<sup>4</sup>

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1. D. Davidson. 'Action, Reasons & Causes'. Free-Will and Determinism ed. B. Berofsky. p231. Davidson admits that "this reply does not, however, meet a closely related point. Mention of a causal condition for an event gives a cause only on the assumption that there was also a preceding event." To this question of 'a preceding event' I shall return later.

2. G. Ryle. Concept of Mind. p85. 1949

3. Ibid. p88

4. Ibid. p89

According to Ryle explanations by motives are explanations of the second type. Thus if we explain an action by saying 'because he was vain' then, Ryle thinks, that is not a causal 'because', and therefore the explanation cannot be a causal explanation. It is a statement of disposition and "Dispositional statements are neither reports of observed or observable states of affairs, nor yet reports of unobserved or unobservable states of affairs. They narrate no incidents. But their jobs are intimately connected with narratives of incidents, for, if they are true, they are satisfied by narrated incidents."<sup>1</sup>

Melden also appears to hold similar views to Ryle's. He suggests that if a motive is to be the cause of an action then it must be an 'interior mental event', but referring to the case of the signalling driver he asks "when the driver raised his arm what mental occurrence did in fact take place?"<sup>2</sup> Melden says that even if we suppose that something went on in the mind of the signalling driver - an event, which is the motive and the cause of the driver's raising his hand - the supposition that the motive is the cause of the driver's raising his hand is logically incoherent. Because "As the alleged cause of the action, it cannot serve further to characterize the action. As motive it must - for it tells us what in fact the person was doing."<sup>3</sup> Melden's point here is that a motive redescribes an action, but a cause does not. A cause only explains how the action came to be. If motive redescribes the action, there should be a logical connection between the motive and the action. But "This is impossible if the sequence motive-action is a causal relation. It is equally impossible if the motive is some interior mental event distinct from that event that is the action of raising the arm."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid. p125

2. A.I. Melden. Free Action. p86

3. Ibid. p88

4. Ibid. p89

I have already discussed Melden's argument, that there is a logical relation between motive and action, in the previous chapter. To the argument that motive redescribes action and therefore cannot have a causal relation with action, I shall return at the end of this chapter. For the present I shall try to show with reference to Ryle that mental entities like desires, wants etc., which are usually named as reasons for actions can be occurrents as well as dispositions.

In reply to Ryle's criticism that the items of reasons are dispositional and not episodic, I shall argue that there is a difference between dispositions as such and the items of reasons; and that in some cases dispositional verbs can have a non-dispositional use. And furthermore even as dispositions mental items like jealousy etc., can be causes of actions that follow.

#### IV Are items of reasons dispositions?

For Ryle, explanations in terms of motive, want, desire etc. are all explanations in terms of dispositions - in terms of possible and actual behaviour. They are law-like hypotheticals expressible in 'whenever' - sentences, i.e. people having those dispositions are prone to behave in a particular way whenever they get a change, just as glass is liable to break because it is brittle. Admittedly, when we give reasons for action in terms of dispositions we usually do not report a happening. But this may not always be the case, just as there is no need to think that since the reports of reasons sometimes are not reports of happenings they are not reports of causes either. The paradigm case of a disposition is 'knowing', which is not an 'act', and I do agree with this. But it would be a mistake to think that every mental act or item can more or less be analysed like this particular item.

Ryle says that the traditionalist's mistake was to take it for granted that a dispositional verb is also episodic. It seems to me that Ryle has committed the opposite mistake. He gives reasons for thinking that a dispositional verb can never be episodic. However, certain words in our language can be used in a dispositional as well as in a non-dispositional way. For instance, the word 'enjoy' in 'he enjoys the tribal dance' is used in a dispositional way; whereas if he is found watching a tribal dance quite engrossed, it will be true to say that at this particular moment he is enjoying a tribal dance, without implying the truth of the first proposition. The second case describes a temporary state in his mind which has caused him to stop and watch.

Let us take again the case of another mental item, e.g., remembering. Ryle has agreed that the verb 'to remember' can be used in two ways; one is more like the verb 'to know'; in this sense one can say that 'he remembers the multiplication-table'. This means he is capable of using it whenever and wherever it is necessary. But there is another way of using the verb 'to remember', in which sense it is more like narrating an occurrence or mental event. When, asked 'why are you going back', I answer, 'because I suddenly remember that I have left my key at home', it is not a report of a disposition or learning that I give, nor even of a physical happening, but the report of a mental occurrence which accounts for my going back.

It is true that terms like 'desire', 'want' etc. are sometimes dispositional, but they can also be used to narrate present mental states and occurrences. Thus to say that 'he has got a strong desire to return to his native country' may mean that he expresses his desire in various forms of behaviour including speech-acts. Similarly, my 'want for ghost stories' means that I am prone to read such stories wherever and whenever I get a chance. On the other hand it is equally true that often these

terms are used to narrate mental happenings which are not translatable into a series of actual and possible pieces of behaviour or into any sort of 'proneness'. For example, 'why are you staring like that?' can be answered and explained by 'because I want to draw his attention.' Again, 'why did you touch her elbow?' can be explained by 'because I felt a sudden desire to touch her elbow'. In none of these cases will it be true to say that the person is prone to stare at people to draw their attention, or that whenever he wants to draw attention he stares, or that whenever he sees a woman he feels like touching her elbow. This might very well be the first time in his life and does not imply at all that in future he will ever act in the same way. Not all desires and wants are descriptions of tendencies and modes of behaviour. A good many cases or desires and wants report occurrences. A very common experience of everyday life is to desire or want something as soon as one sees it. I saw a pretty object in the shop window, I wanted to buy it and bought it; whether this is a straightforward causal relation I am not going to discuss now. Quite obviously it will involve questions like whether it refers to any generalisation or regular sequence, to which I shall return in due course. For the time being it will be enough to say that any analysis of such a 'want' in terms of a steady pattern of behaviour seems to be absurd. From such a first person singular want-statement we do not get either a law-like description of a person's behaviour, or an 'inference-ticket' which will enable us to predict a person's future behaviour.

I have mentioned before that the items of reasons and dispositions are not exactly alike. There is a difficulty in describing wants, desires etc., in purely dispositional terms. Such a description will clash with the way an agent comes to know the relation of his wants to his actions. In cases of pure dispositions, descriptions of a thing as such and such



(e.g. glass is brittle, salt is soluble etc.) depends on repeated observation, whereas in the case of wants etc., one does not have to wait and observe a number of cases to know that one buys a thing because one wants to buy it. Conversely, from the observer's point of view, that a thing is soluble or brittle can be proved through a single experiment, but that an action follows from a particular desire, cannot be established from one single case.

Wants, desires etc., also differ from the mental dispositions like vanity etc. So far as the mental dispositions like vanity, jealousy or suspicion are concerned, it takes an agent a long time, as well as repeated observations and personal research to realize that his actions come from his jealous, vain or suspicious nature. Sometimes he fails to realize that he is vain or jealous; whereas in the case of a want or desire, the agent does not normally have to do personal research to learn that his action follows from his desire to act.

It has often been suggested that a desire can be an event only if it is identified with a bodily feeling, pleasant or unpleasant. But this is misleading, for we can have a desire without having any sort of bodily feelings, pleasant or unpleasant. For instance, I can have a strong desire to go to the Sorbonne to study French. What sort of bodily feelings could possibly be there? We often tend to confine our attention to a particular type of desire which gives rise to a strong urge connected with bodily feelings. But we can have all sorts of desires where such bodily feelings are either practically nil or do not exist. For instance, the desire to learn a language, to become an astronaut etc. It will be an over-simplification of the nature of desire if we connect it with bodily feelings so that we can describe a desire as an event. But this does not imply that desires cannot be episodic.

The difficulty with the notions of desire, want etc., is that they can sometimes be described as dispositions, and sometimes can be more appropriately described as occurrences. On the one hand I may have a strong desire for alcohol, and this desire can be a dispositional quality of my character. On the other hand I may start desiring to have a pint of beer for the first time in my life, as soon as I see it. In the latter case it would not be wrong to describe the desire as an occurrence. Again situations like coming to a decision, beginning to want, can better be described as occurrences rather than as dispositions.

We have already suggested that in the physical world we often find that states and dispositions are named as causes. If 'to cause' means to bring forth, to produce, to make something happen, then definitely in certain cases states and dispositions are contributory causes. I agree that ordinarily to explain an event in dispositional terms is to redescribe the situation e.g. the glass broke because it was brittle. Here the causal conditional is a redescription of the situation. Yet in certain situations brittleness of a thing being unexpected or unusual can causally explain what happens.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, dispositions of certain individuals in certain situations operate as causes. I agree that a man who is jealous by nature quite often behaves jealously. But to say this is not to imply that he is always in a state of jealousy. He may feel a sudden upsurge of jealousy if he finds his wife with another person and behave outrageously. In such

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1. Urmson provides an example for this "...it is a mere superstition to think that only an event may be properly named as a cause. It would indeed be absurd in ordinary circumstances to give the fact that a piece of glass has the (ordinary) brittleness of glass as the cause of its breaking, but in ordinary circumstances it would be very proper to mention the (unusual) brittleness of an aircraft's wing as the cause of the wing falling off, and quite ridiculous to mention the fact that the wind was pressing against the wing in quite a normal way, if investigating the cause of an accident."

J.O. Urmson. 'Motives and Causes'. PASSV  
Vol. XXVI 1952. p192

a situation it would be quite normal to say that he behaved like that because he suddenly felt jealous. We will not hesitate to consider the sudden upsurge of jealousy experienced by a man who has never been jealous in his life, as the cause of his behaviour (like committing a murder). If this is so, then I do not see why the behaviour of a person who has a jealous disposition, cannot be explained in terms of his jealousy. A person with a jealous disposition experiences jealousy more often than a person with a non-jealous disposition. If in the latter case a piece of behaviour could be causally explained in terms of jealousy, there is no reason why that could not be done in the former case as well.

One important necessary criterion of the cause is that without it, the effect would not have taken place. This criterion the Rylean philosophers often tend to overlook. We cannot apply the concept of cause to a certain entity without its fulfilling this criterion. Dispositions and states quite comfortably satisfy this criterion of causation. So far as states are concerned, a good example can be obtained from the cases of medical idiosyncrasy. Some people cannot take penicillin. Their physical constitution is such that penicillin makes them ill. It would be wrong to say that in situations like this the giving of penicillin is the actual cause of the particular illness. On the contrary, it is the physical state of the person which when he is given penicillin produces the illness. But such a state can hardly be described as an 'event'.

This seems to be the crux of the whole problem. A cause in the Humean philosophy has been regarded as an 'event', yet often we ascribe causal efficacy to things which are not 'events'. With Hume we can say that we still do not know what it is that makes a cause a cause. Constant

conjunction, repetition, a custom-bred expectation - nothing provides us with that magic wand which will help us to find a cause in every situation. The way the cause of an event is determined in a given situation may not be arbitrary, but is very much contextual and relative. That is why in some cases, the presence of oxygen is just a necessary condition for fire, whereas in another case, say inside a spaceship, it is the cause of fire. In every field, not only in the case of human conduct, it is difficult to ascertain whether, in the Humean sense, something is the cause of something else. Sometimes we ask counterfactual questions to select a cause - like whether A would have happened without B. Sometimes the condition by which we think we can control the occurrence of the effect is selected as the cause. Sometimes, which causal condition should be considered as the cause depends entirely upon the interest of the investigator. Thus a road accident may be causally accounted for in terms of bad weather, of the unusual bend of the road, of the drunken state of the driver, or of the negligence of the Ministry of Works to improve the road-condition. States and dispositions can pass any of these tests quite comfortably.

I have raised this well known difficulty of the selection of a cause because, I think, bearing in mind the contextual and relative nature of any particular cause, it will be a too narrow definition of cause, if we restrict it to events only.

In this connection Hart and Honoré quite correctly have drawn our attention to a 'shift' in the form of inquiry in Mill's account of causation. Mill's treatment of causation "...leaves open the possibility that the common notion of causation may have features which vary from context to context, that there may be different types of causal inquiry, and that there may not be a single concept of causation but rather a cluster of related concepts."<sup>1</sup>

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1. H.L.A. Hart and A.M. Honoré. Causation in the Law. p17. 1959. London

Mill has also pointed out that the reason why we associate "...the idea of causation with the proximate antecedent event rather than with any of the antecedent states or permanent facts, which may happen also to be conditions of the phenomenon," is that "...the event not only exists, but begins to exist immediately previous; while the other conditions may have pre-existed for an indefinite time."<sup>1</sup> These other conditions are not instantaneous changes or a succession of such changes but long-lasting states. In no uncertain terms, Mill concludes, "...though we may think proper to give the name of cause to that one condition, the fulfilment of which completes the tale, and brings about the effect without further delay; this condition has really no closer relation to the effect than any of the other conditions has. All the conditions were equally indispensable to the production of the consequent; and the statement of the cause is incomplete, unless in some shape or other we introduce them all."<sup>2</sup>

Mill's analysis shows that the philosophical way of referring to a preceding event as a cause is extremely vague and unclear. As a preceding event a cause is often a temporal section arbitrarily cut out from the total 'causal happenings' antecedent to the effect. But in this sense hardly any preceding event can properly be called a cause, i.e. if we take a cause to be a sufficient condition. As Mill and also Hart and Honore<sup>3</sup> have

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1. J.S. Mill. System of Logic. Vol. I. Bk.III. Ch.V. Sec.3. p382. 1872  
Emphasis is the author's.

2. Ibid. p379

3. H.L.A. Hart & A.M. Honore. Causation in the Law. p15-16. 1959. Oxford  
"We often speak of a single event as the cause of an occurrence, yet we never find that whenever a single event of one kind occurs it is 'invariably' followed by some occurrence of another kind. ....Our causal generalisation informs us only that an occurrence of a given kind regularly follows when a complex set of conditions is satisfied. So when we identify single events as causes it appears that we choose one element from such a set, although each of the members of the set is equally required for the production of the effect."

pointed out, it is quite unfair to call such a temporal section singled out from the total causal situation a cause. A preceding event in this sense is not enough to produce the effect. Besides it is always possible to find out for the sake of argument a 'preceding event' in the situation where an action is happening, as Davidson has attempted to show in the case of a signalling driver.<sup>1</sup> But if the meaning of 'preceding event' is not to be so trivial it is difficult to see what should count as a preceding event. Not only is it that a 'preceding event' mentioned as a cause (like a lighted match causing a bush fire) is often insufficient to produce the effect on its own, but also that things often happen without a clear-cut event or without any relevant preceding event at all. For instance 'the garment got torn because it was worn out.' Is gradual 'wearing out' a preceding event? Have we got any specific time as to when the garment starts wearing out? Again 'the wet road has caused an accident.' The condition of the road may be something preceding the accident, but is this an 'event'? If a cause is always an event this sort of explanation cannot be a causal explanation. Yet when an accident is explained in terms of the wet condition of the road, the explanation is taken to be causal. This shows that even in the physical world a cause need not necessarily be an event. Thus the Humean claim that the word 'cause' means an 'event' cannot be accepted without qualifications. Hence Ryle's and Melden's arguments which rely on this Humean dictum cannot be taken as conclusive.

V Are explanations of actions in terms of reasons redescriptions?

Closely connected with the contention that a cause is an event, and desires, intentions etc., are not events is another allied contention which is often put forward by the anti-causal theorists. This is: to give the

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1. D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons & Causes'. Free Will & Determinism ed. B. Berofsky. p232. "But of course there is a mental event; at some moment the driver notices (or thought he noticed) his turn coming up, and that is the moment he signaled."

reason for an action is to redescribe it and thus to place it in a pattern and in this way the action is explained, but the redescription of an action does not introduce a separate event which can be a cause.

This means when an action is explained in terms of the agent's wants, desires etc., the explanation does not state the cause of the action but states more explicitly what sort of action it is. Therefore in a reason-action explanation we do not get two separate entities related as cause and effect, but the same entity described in two different ways. To quote Melden "A causal explanation, in other words, does not give us a further characterization of the event thereby explained (....); rather, it offers us an account of how it is that an event, whose characteristics are already known is brought to pass." Whereas, "...citing the motive was giving a fuller characterization of the action; it was indeed providing a better understanding of what the driver was doing."<sup>1</sup>

One thing should be made clear, that there is a trivial sense in which an explanation of something in terms of something else is always a redescription. In this sense the causal explanation is also a redescription because it further characterises the effect by mentioning the cause. Melden himself recognises this point.<sup>2</sup> But if the meaning of redescription is not taken in this trivial sense I do not see how an explanation in terms of a reason can be called a redescription.

Let us consider some ordinary cases of redescrptions: the author of Ulysses is James Joyce; the aboriginal's physical movement is a ritual dance; the driver's raising his hand is signalling. These are cases of redescription and in none of these cases does the redescription mention a

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1. A.I. Melden. Free Action. p88

2. Ibid

separate factor which can be regarded as a cause. These redescrptions, obviously enough, are not causal explanations. They are only further characterisations of the event concerned. Thus performing a ritual dance is not the cause of certain physical movements; signalling is not the cause of raising one's hand; just as James Joyce is not the cause of 'the author of Ulysses'. On the contrary, performing a ritual dance is doing certain physical movements; signalling is raising one's hand and James Joyce is the author of Ulysses.

Are all reason-explanations exactly like these cases of redescrptions? Let us consider the case of the signalling driver. Here we are quite inclined to think that 'signalling' is a redescription of the driver's raising his hand and it is a redescription. But to redescrbe the driver's raising his hand as 'signalling' is only to characterize a piece of movement as a particular type of action. Even then, one cannot conclusively characterise it as an action because someone might have forced the driver's hand in a signalling gesture when the turn came. It is only when the notion of want is introduced in the redescription that the piece of behaviour can conclusively be called an action. Thus to redescrbe the driver's raising his hand as signalling is not to give the whole story. It does say what sort of thing the agent is doing, but does not say why the driver is signalling or raising his hand. If one stops here, Melden's claim that reason-explanations do not say how the action came to be as other causal explanations do, appears to be quite justifiable. But this is not what the causal-theorists have in mind when they say that a reason-explanation is a causal explanation. The redescription of the driver's raising his hand as signalling is not even a full-blooded reason-explanation. Once one mentions the want or the desire which explains why the driver is signalling or raising his hand, the difference between a reason-explanation



and a redescription becomes apparent. The driver raises his hand because he wants to signal and he wants to signal because he wants to make the others aware of the fact that he is about to turn. But what he wants to do, and his signalling or raising his hand are not one and the same thing. To say one wants to signal is not to say that one signals or one raises one's hand.

When the causal theorists say that reasons are causes of action they do not mean to say that a situation described as 'he signals' causes a situation described as 'he raises his hand'. On the contrary they maintain that the want or desire to signal can be the cause of the driver's raising his hand. There is a difference between what the causal theorists are taken to mean and what they actually mean. In the case of signalling and raising one's hand there is no extra factor which can be treated as a cause. In the case of one's want to signal and signalling there are two required factors which can stand in a cause-effect relation, viz. one's want to signal and one's actual signalling which consists of raising one's hand. Thus when raising one's hand is described as 'signalling' it is a redescription and tells us what sort of action is done. But when raising one's hand is described in terms of one's want or desire to signal, not only is it said what sort of action is done but also why the action is done and how it came to be. Hence, Melden's claim that a reason-explanation does not say how the action came to be is not justifiable. It cannot really be maintained that explanations of actions in terms of reasons are only redescriptions of actions.

### Conclusion

We are now in a position to sum up the arguments in this chapter. I have tried to show that the description of a cause as an event does not do

full justice to the denotation of the notion of cause. The description excludes things - both mental and physical - which are usually considered as causes. From this perspective Hume's definition of a cause as an event seems to be rather limited. Once it is shown that a cause need not be an event, the argument that reasons cannot be causes because they are not events seems to be untenable.

Closely associated with this argument is the argument that reason-explanations are redescriptions of actions and do not mention a separate event other than the action itself, which can be a cause. I have tried to show the untenability of this argument by pointing out the difference between a mere redescription and a reason-explanation given in terms of an agent's wants, desires etc. The latter type of explanation states an extra factor which can serve as a cause.

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## Chapter VI

### Generalisation and Reason-Action Statements

The argument of the previous chapter was mainly concerned with the examination of the question whether a cause must be an event. We reached a negative conclusion, and found that it is not really necessary that a cause must be an event. This is true of the physical as well as of the mental world.

In this chapter I shall be discussing the question how far an explanation in terms of reasons can be called a causal explanation in view of another criterion of causal explanation. This is the generality model involved in causal explanation.

An argument is quite often put forward that explanations in terms of reasons do not involve a generalisation of a covering-law type which is an essential feature of a causal explanation. This argument enables its advocates to draw one more distinction between reasons and causes. It is based on the assumption that whenever we give a causal explanation our explanation is guaranteed by a general principle derived from experience. All causal statements are either covertly general or imply a general proposition. There cannot be anything like a singular causal statement on its own. It is always supported by a general proposition.

Philosophers who are opponents of causal explanation of human action often find the application of this generality-model to human action not only impossible but also dangerous. According to them the theory, which assumes that human behaviour can be generalised, brought under law and predictable, leads to determinism and eradicates freedom and moral responsibility. Quite a number of philosophers have criticised the application of this generality model to human action. In connection with explanation in history - a

large field of human action - W. Dray<sup>1</sup> has commented "...whether or not it has a use in other fields, it is a dangerous model for the philosophy of history. For it commonly leads its advocates into talking about explanation in history in ways which are either radically incorrect or misleading in important respects."

Certain things which have been mentioned by Dray and other philosophers in connection with historical events are claimed to be true in the case of human action in general by the opponents of the causal theory of action. These are the peculiar nature of the subject concerned - its particularity and uniqueness. They say that to such a field the notions of cause and generalisation have got no application at all.

There appear to be two reasons for this attitude. Firstly, these philosophers maintain that due to the extreme complexity and the fluid nature of our motives, intentions, desires etc., formulation of any precise general law seems to be simply impossible. It is difficult to ascertain which particular motive or intention will cause which particular action in what context. Secondly, they say that there is a direct, immediate sense in which we know that our action results from an intention or motive. We do not know this in the same way in which we know that fire causes burning, i.e. through induction. To know that my catching the bus at a particular moment is explained by my intention to catch the bus at that particular moment is not to invoke any generalisation. It seems that in the case of mental items, we can say that our intention, desire etc., account for our action without having recourse to generalisation. But in ordinary causal situations we can say that one event explains another only after repeated observations.

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1. W. Dray. Laws and Explanation in History. pl. 1957. Oxford

What R.G. Collingwood has said in connection with historical events clarifies this argument very well. He has said that "For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it. To discover that thought is already to understand it."<sup>1</sup>

There are however, two ways of facing the question of the generality-model in the case of human action.

- (i) Firstly, by pointing out that laws connecting reasons and actions can be formed;
- (ii) secondly, by showing that a general law is not essential for a causal explanation; in other words that a valid singular causal statement can be formed without requiring the support of a general law.

In this chapter my concern will be the discussion of these two points. I shall try to show that generalisations concerning reasons and actions can be formed and that there is no logical difficulty in forming such generalisations. I will however reject the second point, that a singular causal statement can be formed without assuming any sort of generalisation. I shall maintain that generalisation is necessary for a causal explanation. But at the same time I shall try to show that such a necessity does not exclude the reason-action relation from the causal sphere.

I Can laws connecting reasons and actions be formed?

I have mentioned before that philosophers often cite the highly complex nature of human wants, intentions, desires etc., and actions as an obstacle to the formulation of a general law which is thought to be essential for a causal relation. This difficulty of formulating laws in the case of reason and action can be either logical or empirical.

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1. R.G. Collingwood. The Idea of History. p214. 1946. Oxford

(i) The logical difficulties can arise from the nature of the relation between reasons and actions. One such difficulty may arise from the indescribability of a reason without involving the notion of its alleged effect. This feature of reason-action relations, as Melden has argued<sup>1</sup>, may mean that the relation is non-contingent. If it is non-contingent, then the generalisation of such a relation will not be a causal generalisation. However, in chapter IV we have seen that though the descriptions of reasons involve descriptions of actions that does not really imply that the relation is non-contingent and therefore cannot be causal.

Another logical difficulty may arise from the suggestion that the apparent incorrigible and immediate nature of first person singular reason-action statements makes generalisation superfluous; here one does not have to appeal to general laws to find out that one's action follows from one's reason to perform such an action; nor does the falsification of the general law mean the falsification of the singular reason-action statement. To this point I shall return later. The question as to whether such statements are really incorrigible will be discussed in the last chapter. For the time being I shall concentrate first on the question of empirical difficulties, and then on whether generalisations are necessary for causal explanations. In connection with the latter I shall discuss the view of Hart and Honoré.

(ii) So far as the empirical difficulties are concerned it should be noted that the existence of empirical difficulties does not in any way suggest that generalisation is impossible. Nor does it suggest that one should explain human action without referring to generalisation. It is arguable that the empirical difficulties may be great enough to make generalisation impracticable. But such empirical impracticability of forming a generalisation sometimes exists even in the case of physical causes, particularly when we deal with unique systems especially in the field of astronomy or cosmology. For instance, generalisations are not possible in the case of the Universe.

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1. See Chapter IV

It is not true that we do not generalise about human behaviour and reasons for such behaviour. Quite often we infer from psychological laws; we assume generalisations of behaviour in order to predict or account for others' behaviour. Our everyday conduct is always based on rough laws and generalisations about others' behaviour. We often calculate and plan our own action on the basis of the knowledge of how others have acted under similar circumstances. Surprisingly enough we generalise more about human behaviour than we think we do. Such generalisations can be found in abundance in any field of human interactions and relations. In the field of psychology and the social sciences we find remarkable success in explaining any predicting human behaviour. Political prophecies and economic planning would have been impossible had we not accepted the general law that men are liable to act in a particular way in a particular situation. No question of manipulation, influencing and changing human behaviour could have arisen then. We can think of manipulating human behaviour because we know that certain antecedents produce certain kinds of behaviour on our part in certain circumstances. Different activities existing in human society like propaganda, indoctrination, social conditioning or techniques of advertisement, are based on the idea that human behaviour can be generalised and is predictable and changeable by the introduction or removal of antecedent factors.

#### Predication and reason-action explanation

Philosophers often try to deprive wants, desires etc., of causal efficacy on the ground of uncertainty of prediction. Their argument runs as follows: if anything is causally determined, it is predictable; action is not predictable; therefore action cannot be causally determined. They claim that the laws connecting reason and action are not accurate and precise enough for successful predictions to be made on the basis of them.

The major premise of this argument is wrongly conceived. For causal determination and predictability are not the same thing. They are not interchangeable and lack of predictability does not mean absence of causal determination. An event can be unpredictable because of empirical difficulties or it can be 'in principle' unpredictable. So far as the empirical difficulties are concerned, sometimes events are unpredictable because of lack of empirical evidence. Predicting an event means saying beforehand, with the help of some general laws, what is going to happen from the conditions which already exist. Sometimes there may be practical difficulties in understanding or collecting the initial conditions or in formulating a general law which will enable one to predict. A particular system may be so complex that it may be difficult to collect evidence for correct predictions. One can predict an event if its cause is known, but the cause of an event cannot always be known beforehand. As prediction is not guessing and follows a logical method, such scientific methods may be unavailable in particular cases or the use of a particular method or technique may interfere with the prediction. The most common example comes from the findings of quantum physics, that, to attempt to specify the position and the velocity of an electron simultaneously is impossible because the conditions under which such an attempt is carried on affect either the position or the velocity. However, the presence of such difficulties does not refute the existence of a causal relation though the example I cited above is often used in favour of Indeterminism.

There is also no need to think that a causal event cannot be 'in principle' unpredictable. As Dr. A.R. Lacey puts it, "...there is no reason why events which are determined should be even in principle predictable, because there might be no method by which the law governing the event in question could be known before its first instance. Some things, then, may be determined without being predictable."<sup>1</sup>

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1. A.R. Lacey. 'Free Will and Responsibility'. P.A.S. Vol. LVIII. 1957-58.  
p16



Sometimes the prediction itself can affect the situation and falsify itself. For instance it is not difficult to conceive a predicting machine which will predict its own movement and at the same time assimilate the prediction as a further piece of information and change its movement to the opposite to what is predicted. Hence, it can be concluded that the absence of predictability does not really mean the absence of causality.

The criticism that actions are difficult to predict can be raised in the case of physical causes as well. Predictive uncertainty cannot be completely eliminated from there. Even in a simple case like a storm's causing a bridge to collapse, we cannot predict with absolute certainty that the event is going to happen. Again take the instance of an earthquake. We can say what is the cause of an earthquake but cannot predict where or when it will happen. It can be argued that we cannot predict in the case of the earthquake because we do not know when the cause is present. But exactly the same thing can be said regarding reasons for actions. In the midst of various reasons which one often has for performing an action, it is difficult to ascertain the strongest reason or balance of reasons which will cause the action.

D.F. Pears mentions various sources of uncertainty in making true predictions in the case of human actions, like an external impediment, a change in the circumstances which produces a change of mind etc.<sup>1</sup> But such uncertainties are equally present in the case of physical causation. An external impediment, a change in the circumstances, can make true predictions in the case of physical causation equally difficult. These factors cannot bar us from saying that predictions of human behaviour from psychological generalisations are possible.

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1. D.F. Pears. 'Predicting and Deciding'. Proceedings of British Academy. p222. 1964

## II Predictions on the basis of character-traits

One important point to note concerning generalisations and predictions of human behaviour is that quite often predictions are made about other people's behaviour based on the knowledge of their characters. Such knowledge can be of the individual's personal character-traits, education, upbringing, aims, desires, ambitions etc., as well as of the group the individual belongs to. On the basis of such knowledge it is often possible to predict how a particular individual will behave in a particular situation.

### A.C. MacIntyre and predictions based on character-traits

A.C. MacIntyre in his article 'Determinism' suggests that predictions of human action based on character-traits are not causal predictions. He distinguishes between two sorts of predictions. "...we may predict successfully how a man will behave from knowledge of factors other than and antecedent to his own present and past decisions, preferences and consciously motivated behaviour. Such is the prediction that an infant deprived at a certain age of maternal care will prove in later life incapable of genuine love-relationships. But other predictions may be of a kind that can only be made on the basis of data that include knowledge of a man's decisions, preferences and so on."<sup>1</sup>

According to MacIntyre the prediction of a man's action from his decisions, preferences, character etc., is not a causal prediction. On the contrary, in his opinion, such predictability is compatible with and required by rational behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

1. A.C. MacIntyre. 'Determinism'. Mind. 1957. p37

2. Ibid

Like many other philosophers MacIntyre cannot get rid of the idea that there can be only one sort of cause of action viz., that which operates independently of our deliberation. And in this sense, MacIntyre holds 'free action' or 'rational behaviour' cannot be given a causal explanation. "...if a man's behaviour is rational it cannot be determined by the state of his glands or any other antecedent causal factor."<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre thinks that<sup>a</sup> certain alternative attempt to explain rational behaviour in causal terms will be a tautology. The tautology will consist in taking anything which influences behaviour as a cause of behaviour.<sup>2</sup> The causal theorists however do not claim in such an unqualified way that anything which influences behaviour is a cause of behaviour. What they claim is that wants, desires etc. are causes of actions. But as this leads on to the general issue of the thesis there is no need to discuss it separately.

I would like to argue that MacIntyre's criterion of rational behaviour on the one hand fails to distinguish between rational (i.e. free and uncaused) behaviour and non-rational (i.e. caused) behaviour and on the other hands fails to differentiate among various types of free behaviour, and therefore, his claim that predictions of rational behaviour are non-causal cannot be established on the basis of his distinction between rational and non-rational behaviour.

To understand MacIntyre's argument it is first necessary to understand what he means by 'rational behaviour', and here I believe he gives us a completely confused account. According to him, behaviour is rational, "...if, and only if, it can be influenced, or inhibited by the adducing of some logically relevant consideration."<sup>3</sup> He maintains that the 'can'

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1. Ibid. p35

2. Ibid. p38

3. Ibid. p34

in the definition of rational behaviour means 'can, in principle', and thinks that this definition of rational behaviour "does not lead to the paradox that a free act is never a foolish act." "To say that a man's behaviour is open to alteration by logically relevant considerations is not to say that he alters his behaviour in actual fact."<sup>1</sup> In this sense, according to MacIntyre, reflective or non-reflective and impulsive behaviour, sensible or foolish behaviour, can be equally rational behaviour because they are open to being affected by rational considerations.

MacIntyre holds that in contrast with rational behaviour non-rational behaviour is not open to logically relevant considerations. For non-rational behaviour he cites the example of the hypnotized man who walks out of the room ignoring the logically relevant considerations for staying in the room. "If no matter how good the reasons we offered him he persisted in leaving it, we shall have to say that his behaviour was causally determined."<sup>2</sup>

In the context of what MacIntyre says above it seems that though he brings in 'can in principle' to cater for actions where people may not accept good reasons and act foolishly, what he is really committed to saying is that a person acting rationally will in fact accept good reasons if offered. He suggests that where people acted foolishly, they would not have done so if reasons had been offered. "There may in fact be no time to adduce any considerations at all, but we can in principle distinguish the man who would leap in any way from the man who would be stopped by the information that what was in the water was a log...."<sup>3</sup> Such a criterion of rational behaviour confuses foolish actions with actions done from ignorance. It is true that when a man acts foolishly, if logically

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1. Ibid. p36

2. Ibid. p38

3. Ibid pp34-35

relevant considerations are offered he may change his behaviour. But it is equally true that he may completely ignore any such considerations - no matter how good the proffered reasons are. Yet, he may still be acting rationally i.e. his behaviour will not be determined by factors independent of his deliberation.

MacIntyre's definition can explain such an action as rational only if he sticks to his 'can in principle'. But if he thinks (as his remark suggests) that a man acting rationally will in fact accept the logically relevant considerations if offered, then his criterion of rational behaviour fails to distinguish between the case where a man ignoring proffered logical reasons acts foolishly, and the case of the hypnotic patient who walks out ignoring proffered good reasons for staying in a room. Similarly, the criterion also fails to include cases where some one acts foolishly though logical reasons are offered simply because he is not intelligent enough to appreciate them. Yet in the ordinary sense of the term 'free' such an action would be a free action.

Another important point in this connection is what should be counted as 'logically relevant considerations'? The phrase is not only vague but highly relative. In the words of MacIntyre "what is logically relevant will necessarily vary from case to case."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, an attempt to decide on the basis of this vague relative property whether a piece of behaviour is rational or non-rational and consequently free or caused, is highly dubious. This becomes apparant from MacIntyre's example of non-rational behaviour. He considers certain types of behaviour found in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (due to indoctrination, brain washing, mass propaganda etc.) as non-rational. But from another perspective such behaviour can well be described as rational or free behaviour. In situations like these what is counted as a logically relevant consideration depends on what we believe in.

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1. Ibid. p34

Like R.S. Peters' 'deviations from the purposive rule-following model', MacIntyre's 'non-rational behaviour' is also a pretty mixed bag. It includes behaviour caused by glandular states,<sup>1</sup> behaviour caused by the lack of a mother-figure in early childhood,<sup>2</sup> behaviour caused by brain-washing and indoctrination,<sup>3</sup> and the behaviour of a man who will spend "a great deal of time thinking about what he should do and yet refuse to entertain a great many logically relevant considerations."<sup>4</sup> According to MacIntyre these are all instances of non-rational behaviour because they are not open to logically relevant considerations.

It seems that what MacIntyre confuses here are the different meanings of the term 'rational'. He fails to see that in one sense rational behaviour means voluntary deliberate behaviour and this is the sense with which he starts; and in another sense it means sensible behaviour, and this is the sense with which he ends. He confuses these two meanings and classes the behaviour of the Nazis with the behaviour caused by hypnotic influence or glandular trouble. His definition of rational behaviour excludes the latter type of behaviour but does not exclude the former type, though he quite happily suggests that both these types are non-rational. If they are both non-rational, they are so in two different senses.

The behaviour of the Nazis is non-rational in the sense that they are prejudiced; the behaviour arising from glandular trouble is non-rational in the sense that it is not voluntary or deliberate behaviour. According to MacIntyre as both these two types of behaviour are non-rational, therefore they are causally explicable in terms of factors independent of one's deliberation. But he fails to see that the behaviour arising from glandular trouble may be explicable in terms of factors

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1. Ibid. p35  
 2. Ibid. p37  
 3. Ibid. p36  
 4. Ibid. p35

independent of one's deliberation but not the behaviour of the Nazis. The behaviour due to indoctrination and brain-washing or the behaviour due to the lack of a mother-figure at an early age cannot be given causal explanations in terms of factors completely independent of one's deliberation.

In the context of MacIntyre's remark that "...to show that behaviour is rational is enough to show that it is not causally determined in the sense of being the effect of a set of sufficient conditions operating independently of the agent's deliberation or possibility of deliberation."<sup>1</sup>, it is difficult to classify certain kinds of behaviour as rational or non-rational - free or caused. For instance, how one should classify the behaviour of a neurotic person who has been set free from his inner complexes by means of mechanical treatment like an operation in the brain, electric shocks, drugs etc. Such treatment makes a person's behaviour amenable to reasons, though not necessarily only to good reasons. From this perspective, his behaviour can be classified as rational or free. But from another perspective his behaviour is non-rational or caused because what makes such a piece of behaviour possible is something which operates independently of one's deliberation. Then again how should one classify a person's behaviour when desires and motives are manipulated not by mechanical devices but by psychological devices - as is done by advertisement techniques?

MacIntyre mentions 'giving of a reason' as being causally effective. "You may act as a result of my reasoning with you, but it may be on account of the passion in my tone or as a result of forgotten associations of the words that I used that you were moved to act." What is 'causally effective' in MacIntyre's example is not 'the giving of a reason' but 'the passion of tone' or 'the forgotten associations of the word'. Now, if these things

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1. Ibid. p35

are causally effective, then, following MacIntyre's line of argument, they operate independent of one's deliberation and therefore the behaviour or action induced by them is caused. But at the same time, it will be wrong to say that such actions, because they are so caused, are not open to logically relevant considerations. It is conceivable that even if a person acts on account of the passion in some one else's tone, his behaviour is still open to the influence of logically relevant considerations. Hence, on the one hand the actions seems to be caused and on the other hand free.

MacIntyre's primary mistake is his refusal to accept that causal explanation can be more extensive than explanation in terms of sufficient conditions independent of one's deliberations. He fails to see that behaviour could be causally determined in the sense of being the effect of a set of sufficient conditions which include the agent's deliberation - his wants, beliefs, desires etc. This is what happens in the case of an individual being deprived of maternal care in his infancy - or in the case of people who are instigated by a certain type of propaganda - religious, political or any other kind, though MacIntyre's analysis suggests that in such cases the role of the agent's wants, beliefs or deliberations is insignificant. He also thinks that the behaviour involved in such cases cannot be altered by logically relevant considerations. This seems to be an over-simplification of the situation. It is not inconceivable that the behaviour mentioned above can be altered by logically relevant considerations. This does not, however, mean that wants, desires etc. can be causes only in the absence of proffered logically relevant considerations. Wants, desires etc. can be causes even when logically relevant considerations are offered.



It can be concluded that certain kinds of behaviour which MacIntyre is willing to call 'causal' do not really emerge from conditions operating independently of the agent's deliberation. To say that a piece of behaviour is caused is not always to say that it is caused by something extraneous to one's own deliberation. On the contrary it can emerge from certain desires or wants of the agent which in their turn are again conditioned by some psychological, physical or physiological factors. If this is the case then the line between two sorts of predictions of human behaviour - as drawn by MacIntyre is certainly very hazy.

### III Are generalisations necessary for causal explanations?

I have mentioned before that one way of answering the anti-causal theorists would be by showing that a general law is not essential for a causal explanation. In the case of reason and action the causal question is more concerned with the difficulty of discovering generalisations than with applying generalisations in particular cases. We do apply general laws to explain human action and these general laws are in terms of reasons; but difficulty arises when we try to discover general laws from particular cases of human behaviour. This becomes especially acute when we try to generalise from cases like 'I bought the car because I wanted to.' It seems that there cannot be any generalisation either to the effect that in future I shall behave in a similar fashion or to the effect that in the past I have behaved in a similar fashion. If we consider statements like 'I bought x because I wanted to' as causal, then quite obviously the question will arise, are such statements known through induction or are they non-inferential?

The main characteristic of the Humean version of causality is its generality model. Both in the Treatise and in the Enquiry emphasis is put on 'regular sequence'. To Hume an event or an object is the cause of

another event or object when events of the first sort are regularly followed by events of the second sort. Thus a singular causal statement is not complete unless it is supported by a general law. An event is causally explained by showing that the singular statement which describes the event's relation with its antecedent can be supported by a general proposition to the same effect. The singular causal statement is usually a direct instance of the general law, as is in the example 'the blue litmus paper turned red when put into acid because all blue litmus paper turn red when put into acid.'

Basing themselves on this Humean version of causal regularity, anti-causal theorists argue that in the case of ordinary physical causation it is always possible to say that if the circumstances were repeated the same effect would follow; but that this cannot be said in the case of the reason-action relation. As Hart and Honore put it, "The statement that one person did something because, for example, another threatened him, carries no implication or covert assertion that if the circumstances were repeated the same action would follow;"<sup>1</sup>

It seems quite obvious that the sort of generalisation Hart and Honore mention above cannot easily be found in the case of action. Besides even if we are provided with such a generalisation, it will be superfluous in the sense that ordinarily one knows directly that one's action follows from one's want and it does not require any generalisation for the agent to know it except of course in the case of unconscious motivation.

I have already mentioned that one way of facing the question of generalisation in this particular issue is to claim that a singular causal statement does not necessarily entail a law. However I am not going to defend this claim. On the contrary, I would like to show that reason-action statements involve generalisations.

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1. H.L.A. Hart & A.M. Honore. Causation in the Law. p52. 1959. Oxford

Let us first discuss the point that in the case of reason and action we cannot say that if the circumstances were repeated the same action would follow. At first it seems completely improbable that in similar circumstances, given similar reasons, people will ever behave similarly. But this improbability is only apparent. The improbability arises only from the fact that in the case of physical causation we always take account of whether the *ceteris paribus* clause is satisfied, i.e., whether the circumstances are exactly the same as before, and this is what the anti-causal theorists often overlook in the case of reason and action. In the case of physical causation, we can say for instance that in all cases acid turns blue litmus paper red, if the *ceteris paribus* clause is satisfied. Thus if in a particular case a piece of blue litmus does not turn red when put into acid, we search for an interfering cause like the presence of a neutralizing agent. Whenever a physical cause fails to work we always assume that the circumstances are not exactly the same. When we say that the wet condition of the road caused an accident, we imply a general law that given the same circumstances the effect would occur, and if no other accident did happen we assume that the circumstances did not repeat. We never think that the general law in this case does not hold.

Now, 'the circumstances' in the case of reason and action are more extensive than mere physical conditions, and not only include the physical conditions in which the action takes place, but also the psychological and physiological conditions of the agent. Thus the repetition of the 'same circumstances' here means the repetition of the physical, physiological and psychological conditions in which the previous action took place. Thus, that a person acts in a particular way because some one threatens him carries the implication that if the circumstances were repeated he would behave exactly in the same way provided the relevant conditions as mentioned above remained exactly the same. In the case of human action

circumstances do not always repeat exactly in the same way. We tend to overlook the point that one's experience of a threat in one case acts as an added causal factor in the second case of threat. Therefore, when the circumstances repeat they do not repeat exactly in the same way. For instance in one case a person may yield to a threat because he is frightened. The situation occurs again but he does not yield to the threat though he may be just as frightened as before. This happens because his previous experience of threat in a similar situation acts as an extra causal factor and helps him to be on his guard. This extra causal element makes the circumstances different in the second case.

However, this does not mean that in the cases of reasons and actions circumstances never repeat. On the contrary most of our reason-action explanations carry the implication that if the circumstances were repeated the same action would follow. People do behave similarly in similar circumstances; a particular individual having similar reasons behaves repeatedly in the same way. Were this not the case it would have been impossible to carry on our everyday life. Thus exactly as in the cases of physical causation, and explanation like 'I did x because I wanted to do x' carries the implication that if the circumstances were repeated, I would behave exactly in the same way. If I do not that will mean that the case is different from the previous one.

One important question about reason and action is: what sort of generalisation do we really need here? Do we always need a general law of which the singular causal statement is a direct instance, as the statement 'the litmus paper turned red because it was put into acid' is a direct instance of the general law 'acid always turns blue litmus red'? It seems to me that in a causal explanation we do not need a straightforward general law like the acid-case where the singular causal statement is

a direct instance of the general law. Quite often a singular causal statement describing a physical event satisfies only a remote general law.

In this respect it is worth referring to Davidson. Davidson says that a weaker version of the generality model can be given to save singular causal statements. The weaker version of the generality model is "... 'A causes B' entails that there exists a causal law instantiated by some true descriptions of A and B'.<sup>1</sup> It is weaker in the sense that "... no particular law is entailed by a singular causal claim, and a singular causal claim can be defended, without defending any law."<sup>2</sup> Davidson claims that this version suits reason-action statements quite well.

Davidson seems to be quite right in claiming that singular causal statements do not necessarily indicate "... by the concepts they employ, the concepts that will occur in the entailed law."<sup>3</sup> This means that to state a singular causal proposition like 'C is the cause of E' does not involve suggesting that there exists a causal law like 'All C's cause E's'. All that such a singular causal statement needs is that there is a law, or a set of laws - it does not matter how remote from the case concerned they are - which can causally explain the situation in question.

Strictly speaking the generalisations we use in causal explanations are usually abstract and devoid of all particular details. Thus the law which supports the singular causal statement explaining the movement of one billiard ball in terms of its being struck by another, has got nothing to do with billiard balls in particular. On the contrary it is an abstract law of motion and energy. If this is the case with causal generalisation in the case of physical events, then there is every possibility that such a generalisation can be found to support a reason-action statement.

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1. D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Free will and Determinism. p236. ed. B. Berofsky.

2. Ibid. p237

3. Ibid.

In order to make a singular causal statement we must assume a law or we must have enough reasons to believe that there is such a law. To say this is to imply that a reason-action statement, if it is to be causal, must satisfy a general law. I think Davidson is right when he says that "Ignorance of competent predictive laws does not inhibit valid causal explanation...."<sup>1</sup> But one must be clear that ignorance does not mean absence. Even where we are ignorant of the right predictive laws we are in some sense vaguely aware of some predictive laws, perhaps distantly connected with the incident at hand. This means that in order to make a singular causal statement, one need not have to be in full possession of the supporting causal law; all that is required is that there should be reason to believe that there is a causal law covering the particular instance. If there is no such reason, one can not be so sure that the window broke because it was struck by a stone. For instance if it falls apart without any apparent visible cause and an explanation in terms of super-natural forces is given, we will refuse to accept it as a causal statement. This is simply because here we are not in command even of a vague distant law which can be associated with the happening in question; nor can we say that there is one; there is no regularity in any form which can connect the event concerned and a super-natural force (if any) as the effect and the cause. Thus a singular causal statement always needs the support of a general law, and a general law is essential for a causal relation.

#### IV Hart and Honore' on Generalisation in causation

Hart and Honore<sup>2</sup> in their elaborate discussion of the problem of causation in law, have rejected the Humean claim that motives, desires, wants, etc., can be causes on the ground of lack of generalisations in such cases. For them a motive-explanation cannot be a causal explanation

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1. Ibid. p236

2. H.L.A. Hart and A.M. Honore. Causation in the Law. 1959

because it does not involve generalisation. The causal relation "depends upon and implies the truth of one or more general propositions relating directly or indirectly events of these two kinds".<sup>1</sup>

They first discuss their view about the demand of an ordinary singular causal statement for generalisation and then they discuss the case of reason and action in the context of inter-personal transactions. Their opinion is that though the relations between reason and action are often intelligibly called causal connections, they do not depend upon regular connection or sequence as the causal relations between physical events do.<sup>2</sup> Generalisation has a place here but a less central one.

They say that in ordinary discourse and in legal procedure, it is enough to say that some one has done something because someone else threatened him or induced him to do that, and no one will be expected to produce a generalisation.

Later on, however, they try to specify the place of generalisation in the reason-action relations. They admit that some form of generalisation is used in the case of the reason-action relation. "Of course generalisations about the way in which either the person in question or other persons respond, e.g. to threats, or by what reasons they are or are not actuated have an important place in such cases."<sup>3</sup>

Again, "Roughly speaking, we recognise as a reason for action (and therefore as a given person's reason on a particular occasion) something which is relevant to the promotion of some purpose known to be pursued by

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1. The example under discussion is "A's blow caused B's death". Ibid. p9

2. Ibid. p48

3. Ibid. p53

human beings and so renders an action eligible by human beings as we know them. The concept of reasons therefore presupposes that, in general, human beings respond to certain situations in such ways as fleeing from danger, or conforming with social rules or conventions, etc."<sup>1</sup>

Yet at the same time Hart and Honore declare that by this one is not committed to any assertion that if the circumstances were repeated the same action would follow. "All that is required is that, if the case is to be one of a person acting for a reason, we must understand how it promoted some objective analogous at least in some way to those which human beings are known to pursue by action."<sup>2</sup> This last line, however, shows again that although Hart and Honore are more inclined to think that a reason-action statement does not involve any generalisation at all, yet they cannot avoid the notion of generalisation completely. They indirectly admit that some sort of generalisation is needed to say that an action follows from a particular reason.

Hart and Honore think that the difference between a physical cause-effect relation and a reason-action relation is that in the case of reason and action the instances (viz., that an individual had a reason for an action) from which the generalisation is built up are known independently of the generalisation; whereas in the case of physical events, it is on the strength of a generalisation that one can speak of one event as causally connected with another. Apart from such generalisation they are only "cases of succession between events".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid. The emphasis is the authors'
  2. Ibid. p53
  3. Ibid



Hart and Honore have not made it clear what exactly is known independently of the generalisation. Presumably they do not want to say that in the reason-action case what is known is that the agent had the reason and he acted. What they want to say seems to be that the agent acted because of the reason which is known independently of the generalisation. Therefore, generalisation is superfluous in the case of reason and action. Quite obviously this is the crux of the generality-question in the case of reason and action, and Hart's and Honore's mentioning this difference between generalisations in a reason-action case and in a physical case is quite justifiable, though it seems that what they say in this connection is in conflict with their previous admission quoted earlier that the concept of reason presupposes that, in general, human beings respond to certain situations in regular ways.

It seems to me that what Hart and Honore overlook here is the two sources of knowledge which are available in the case of reason and action - the source which is open to the agent and the source which is open to the observer. The agent usually does not wait for a generalisation to pronounce that his action has resulted from the reason he has. I say 'usually' because there are cases of unconscious motivation and cases where one takes the help of a generalisation to predict one's own behaviour. But the relation between reason and action is not only viewed by the agent from inside, it can also be viewed by an observer from outside. And here in order to explain an action in terms of reasons, there is only one source open to the observer and that is to appeal to generalisation.

An important point to note is that such generalisations are not neurological or physiological, but psychological. The observer relies on generalisations concerning the behaviour of ordinary people - that when ordinary human beings have a particular reason they act in a particular way.

If the observer is acquainted with the personal character of the agent, he relies on generalisations concerning the agent's behaviour in the past - that when the agent acts in a particular way he usually has a particular reason for acting. Relying on these two forms of generalisation he can even predict the agent's action. This is what actually happens in our daily experience. We always rely on generalisations in order to know what other people's reasons for acting are or to predict their action. The explanation of action in terms of our wants, motives, desires is intelligible to others because they are systematic and exhibit a general pattern. A comedian can work out his jokes when he relies on the general pattern of what causes amusement. The appeal to the generality-model is so subtle that we are not consciously aware of when we make such an appeal. Perhaps generalisation is not required to understand the behaviour of a man driving a car when he raises his hand, because we are so used to it. But in any alien state of affairs where we do not understand things so quickly, we need a generalisation quite explicitly. Our acceptance of some reasons as the reason for certain behaviour and rejection of others as rationalisations shows that quite often we depend on the fact that there is a general connection between certain reasons and certain actions.

The difficulty arises with the agent's way of knowing an action and there it seems the appeal to a generalisation is completely redundant, and this is where the question of the role of generalisation in the case of first person singular reason-action statements arises.

#### V First person singular statements and generalisations

Generalisations seems to be redundant so far as first person singular statements of reasons for actions are concerned. It has been argued that the immediate knowledge of the relation between a reason and an action shows that it cannot be causal for the causal relation between two events or

objects is known inferentially. It is important to note that the argument assumes that if a relation is known immediately it cannot be causal, i.e. whether a thing is a cause or not depends on how we come to know its relation to the alleged effect.

In the case of physical cause and effect we are always in the observer's position. Therefore, a causal relation is known inferentially through repeated experiences. But so far as our personal observation goes, it seems that we do not usually need such regularity of experience.

There are cases other than reasons and actions where one appears to know immediately that something is the cause of something else. For instance, I find that I cannot concentrate because of my headache. To know the causal relation between my headache and my lack of concentration I do not have to go through a process of research. I may not be aware of what is going on in my neuro-physiological make-up, still I can say that my headache is the cause of my feeling distracted, and perhaps taking a couple of aspirin will prove that I am right in my diagnosis of the cause.

The same sort of immediacy can be observed in cases like 'I fell down because he pushed me', or 'the liquid in the bowl burnt my finger'. Thus it seems that not only in the case of reason and action do we come to know a causal relation immediately, but sometimes in cases where reasons are not involved we can make a singular causal statement immediately. The singular statements mentioned here are not something that has been rejected from the observer's standpoint as not causal. On the contrary, they are considered from the observer's perspective as causal statements. Otherwise the statement 'my headache is causing my distraction' would have been completely incomprehensible to others.

However, the immediacy involved in these cases needs consideration. Are these singular causal statements completely independent of any generalisation whatsoever? Does their immediateness guarantee the relation they state? If the answer is affirmative then it will be true to say that even when the general statements corresponding to the singular statements are false the singular causal statements remain true. In other words the falsification of the general statement will not imply the falsification of the singular statement. This seems to be a violation of the Humean principle of causation according to which generalisation in causation means that under similar circumstances similar causes produce similar effects and if in any case a singular causal statement does not imply such a generalisation, it cannot be a causal statement. Things seem to be reversed in the case of reasons and actions. Here even if the generalisation turns out to be false, it is difficult to prove the falsity of the singular statement. If a person sincerely states that he did *x* because he wanted to and if no similar instance can be found in his past or future behaviour, still the truth of his statement appears to be beyond doubt. The absence or falsification of the generalisation does not seem to interfere with the truth of the singular statement.

Yet, can one be so sure that the truth or falsity of the singular statements about reasons for actions or of any other similar statements made immediately does not imply the truth or falsity of a generalisation? Are these singular statements self-sufficient and not needing the support of a general law or are they causal hypotheses entailing a general law?

Let us first consider the singular causal statements which do not involve reasons and actions but are made immediately by the agent and accepted by observers as causal statements e.g., statements like 'I cannot concentrate because of my headache' or 'the liquid in the bowl burnt my finger'. In both these two examples one can be mistaken quite easily in

stating the cause. It may not be the headache, but something else - perhaps the thought of something else which is in my mind or perhaps the noise of the drilling machine outside - that causes my distraction. Similarly it may not be the liquid in the bowl but perhaps some invisible electric wire which causes the burn.

Hence though these statements are made immediately they are not self-sufficient. The agent cannot be absolutely sure about their validity. Such statements for their truth or falsity depend on some sort of generalisations. They are immediate no doubt but are not incorrigible. Because they are corrigible in the ordinary Humean way i.e. through generalisations, they are only causal hypotheses entailing a general law. In such a case the falsification of the generalisation will mean the falsification of the singular statement.

In the case of reasons and actions it seems that normally we do not make mistakes in our introspective reports, and if we do it is usually difficult to find out such mistakes. This however does not mean that one cannot be mistaken in reporting one's desire or want and in assessing its causal role. If there is such a mistake, the only way to find it out will be through generalisation. Here I would like to cite Pears as my chief ally.

D.F. Pears has mentioned various ways of making mistakes in assessing the role of one's desire in producing an action. According to him there may not be one desire at work. "...there may be desires of whose operation he is unconscious, and, even when he is conscious of the operation of several desires, he may make a mistaken estimate of their contributions."<sup>1</sup>

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1. D.F. Pears. Are Reasons for Actions Causes? Epistemology ed. A. Stroll. 1967. p222

These possibilities of making mistakes obviously put doubts on the apparent incorrigibility of one's introspective assessment of the causal efficacy of one's desires and wants. In the context of the possibility of making such mistakes as those mentioned by Pears, it is logical to hold that although the reason-action statements are made immediately, they are not free from mistakes, and appeal to generalisations seems to be the only course to confirm or refute such mistakes. Therefore, in the case of reason-action statements it can be said that the falsification of the generalisation falsifies the singular statement in spite of its non-inferential character. In actual practice, as Pears has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> we quite often reject the singular reason-action statement on the ground that the general statement turns out to be false - and we do this not only from the observer's but also from the agent's perspective. Pears has however mentioned that "...the fact that we sometimes argue in this way is not enough to establish that singular statements of reasons carry this general entailment. Supporters of the thesis /that reasons for actions are causes/ need to establish that we have to argue in this way whenever the general statement is falsified."<sup>2</sup> Though this is difficult to establish a difficulty exists also on the side of the anti-causal theorists if they want to use the first argument\* against the thesis that reasons for actions are causes. To quote Pears, "For what they need to show is that any suggested general entailment might be false, and yet the singular statement of the reason for the action might still be true."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid. p224

2. Ibid

\* The first argument is: "...any general statement which supporters of the thesis might suggest as the entailment of a singular statement of a reason could turn out to be false, and yet it would not follow that the singular statement of the reason was false." Ibid. p207

3. Ibid. p227

Pear's analysis shows at least one thing which is that though the reason-action statements are immediate they are not incorrigible.<sup>1</sup> Since they are not incorrigible their immediateness does not interfere with their causal character. Though they are immediate in nature they need the support of a general law for their truth or falsity. Without the support of a generalisation they are only causal hypotheses.

A generalisation is also necessary to determine the truth or falsity of a first person reason-action statement when the agent himself is in doubt about his reason for his action. We have also seen before that we need generalisations to understand why a person behaves in a particular way. Thus a third person reason-action statement is causal if it entails that there is a law to support it. Therefore, it is logical to argue that a first person reason-action statement can be causal only if it entails that there is a general law to support it.

There is an important point which is particularly relevant in this issue of reason-action statements entailing a general law. The point is: if the reason-action relation like the ordinary causal relation involves a generalisation then can a reason be known by the agent on the basis of such a generalisation? In other words can a person know his desire or intention for acting inductively? Let us clarify the question. What the question actually means is whether an agent can ever come to know that a certain action will follow from a certain desire or intention on the basis of observation and generalisation in the same way in which he comes to learn that on a particular occasion acid will turn a piece of blue litmus paper red? The answer to this question is at a first glance negative, for one knows one's desire for acting immediately and to come to know one's own desire for acting involves desiring. This point is controversial. Without going into the details of the problem I would like to mention that though in most

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1. The question of incorrigibility will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

of the cases we know non-inferentially that a certain action follows from a certain desire, sometimes such knowledge is based on inductive foundations.

Two cases should be differentiated here: one where the person knows or predicts something about his reasons and actions immediately, but his immediate knowledge has an inductive foundation; two, where a person's knowledge of his own desire or want is really inductive.

Let us take a situation where the first contention holds good. A student wants to do research and decides he will do it provided there is no external or internal impediment. He then can say with certainty that he will do research. He can make this statement immediately in virtue of his intention to act in a certain way. But his assessment of the causal efficacy of his intention has an inductive foundation. He can say with certainty that he will do it only because his past experience of his own decisions, desires, and intentions, if not in exactly the same, yet in similar situations has taught him that he will not change his mind in moments of frustration; on the contrary he will reinforce his intention with newly formed intentions and desires; he will not be tempted by less strenuous projects of life and will carry on his project as intended. A person's self-knowledge is not a conglomeration only of immediate incorrigible personal statements, but also of inductive statements like 'whenever I had such and such an intention or desire I never failed to act accordingly'. Therefore, though a person can make a statement like 'I will do x because I want to' immediately his assessment of the causal efficacy of his want or desire is based on his experience and observation of his own self. I do not want to maintain that a personal intentional statement is always based on past experiences of similar intentions and actions; all that I want



to maintain is that sometimes such statements rest on an inductive foundation.

The second contention is that a person often comes to know his own intention and desires inductively and can predict them on that basis. He can consider the past experiences of his own mental states and feelings and his behaviour arising out of them and become certain that in a certain situation he will in fact behave in a certain way, though at the present moment he has no intention of behaving in that way. For instance a person may notice that in the past a certain human relationship though appearing pleasant and exciting at the beginning, made him feel bored later on, and he intended to break off the relation. If this has happened several times in his life, and if he becomes involved in a similar relation again, he cannot help to predict that he will feel bored once again and will break off the relation. Such a prediction will be purely inductive by nature. Here the man has certain knowledge (inductive certainty) of what he will do, though he has not formed any intention to do that. The role he has is more of an observer's than of an agent's. The forming of his intention depends on the experiences and feelings he will have at a particular point of time. And these experiences he has not experienced when he predicts his intention and action.

Such inductive predictions of our own decisions, intentions and desires we make more often than we might think. A large section of our self-knowledge is based on observation and experience of our own feelings and behaviour. For instance, I may find that though I often want to see intellectual thought-provoking serious films, I end up by selecting a flashy James Bond-type film; or, I want to go and see my boss, though I can predict almost with certainty that as soon as I am near his room, I shall have an intense desire not to go in, and that I shall give in to such a

desire. Much of our dispositional knowledge is in this sense observational. A person comes to know his dispositions, traits and characters almost in the same way in which he comes to know those of others. If this is so, to quote P.L. Gardiner, "...what...is to prevent him from utilizing such previous experience as a means of, or guide to, predicting what he will do, or try to do, when situations similar to those he has encountered in the past, present themselves to him in the future? In other words, can there be any objection in principle to such a man's saying that, knowing himself as he does, he 'expects' or 'foresees' that he will (or would) act in such and such a way in a certain contingency."<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the argument that generalisations are essential in causal explanation and no such generalisations can be provided in the case of reasons and actions. I have tried to refute it by showing that there is nothing in the argument which can show that the concept of generalisation is inapplicable to the reason-action relation.

First of all, I tried to show that behaviour can be generalised and that generalisations are often used in the case of reasons and actions on the basis of which predictions are made.

In the second half of the discussion I tried to show that the causal contention, that if the circumstances were repeated the same effect would follow, applies to the reason-action relation exactly in the same way as it does in the cases of ordinary physical causation. Besides, the sort of generalisations we require in ordinary causal cases are quite often remote generalisations of which particular cases are only indirect instances. This ensures the point that in providing a generalisation to support a singular

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1. P.L. Gardiner in (Freedom and Knowledge) Freedom and the Will. ed. D.F. Pears. p82

reason-action statement we do not have to look for a law which will be a generalisation of the agent's behaviour. Lastly, in the context of generalisation, I discussed the question of first person singular causal statements. I tried to show that the immediacy of knowledge in such cases does not contradict the idea that such first person singular causal statements entail that there is a law. Like other causal statements first-person singular statements also need the support of a general law.

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Chapter VIIThe incorrigibility of reason-action statements

In the previous chapter I referred to the point that a person directly knows that his action follows from his desire or want without going through a series of observations. Quite often another argument goes hand in hand with this argument, which is: reason-action statements are not only immediate, they are also incorrigible; in contrast with them ordinary causal statements are always corrigible by further experience, and therefore reason-action statements are not causal statements. In this chapter I shall consider this argument.

It is necessary to make sure at the beginning what the term 'incorrigible' means.\* Literally it means 'cannot be corrected'. But in this particular issue of reason-action statements the anti-causal theorists use the term in a more specified, though not necessarily the same, sense. Sometimes they argue that reason-action statements are incorrigible because it does not make sense to say that one can be mistaken in thinking that one's action follows because of a certain desire. Sometimes they say that when a person sincerely states that he went to Liverpool because he wanted to see his mother, he cannot possibly be mistaken and therefore his statement does not leave room for further correction. If the statement is like an ordinary causal statement, then it would make sense to say that he had been mistaken in thinking that he went to Liverpool because he wanted to see his mother. I shall try to show in this chapter that in whatever sense the term 'incorrigible' is used, reason-action statements cannot be claimed as incorrigible.

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\* I shall return to this point <sup>again</sup> in Sec. III of this chapter.

The question of incorrigibility comprises a wide area. Not only reason-action statements are claimed to be incorrigible, but any sincere avowal of our current sensations and feelings appears to be incorrigible. Personal reports of one's feeling sad or depressed or of having a pain, like the reports of reason-action relations, do not seem to be corrigible by further experience. The advocates of the incorrigibility thesis claim that one cannot make mistakes in reporting such feelings and sensations. In normal circumstances it is senseless to doubt whether the agent is having such feelings when he sincerely says that he is having them.

This line of argument (though not identical with) is derived from Wittgenstein's comment on the use of such expressions as 'I know I am in pain'. I shall not pursue the various questions concerning the Wittgensteinian view about the privacy of our sense-experiences and first-person reports of such experiences. I shall try to concentrate only on the limited field of the question of incorrigibility concerning reason-action statements, and statements the discussion of which will throw light on the nature of reason-action statements.

Philosophers have often talked about a number of statements which, though they are not exactly like reason-action statements, are quite relevant to this present issue. These statements concern pleasure, belief, depression, amusement etc. The relevance of these statements to this issue consists in the fact that like reason-action statements they are said to be incorrigible. Moreover, they present a strong causal element. The feelings described in the statements appear to be caused by the objects of the feelings. For instance 'I am depressed because of my unemployment', 'I am pleased because I have inherited a fortune'. The arguments which critics put forward against these statements is that they are incorrigible no doubt, but they are not causal. Hence nothing can be gained from their resemblance to reason-action statements.

Such a thesis has been put forward by Prof. B. Williams in his article 'Pleasure and Belief'.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I shall first discuss Williams' view that belief-statements cannot be causal because they are incorrigible. Then, in contrast to this view I shall discuss D.F. Pears' view that similar statements are causal and corrigible in the Humean way. I shall agree with Pears' main thesis in this matter without agreeing with some of his individual arguments. Lastly, I shall try to show that it is not meaningless to say that one can be mistaken in thinking that one's action follows from a particular desire, and therefore that a reason-action statement can be corrigible in the ordinary Humean way.

#### I B. Williams and belief-statements

Williams rejects the idea that belief-statements can be causal. He focuses his attention mainly on pleasure-statements where the object of pleasure appears to be the cause of pleasure and observes, "If anyone is tempted to think that the object of my pleasure - what I am pleased by, or at - is the cause of my pleasure this type of case<sup>2</sup> should discourage him".<sup>3</sup> This conclusion Williams generalises so that it becomes applicable to other statements of the same type. To quote Williams, "Statements of the form 'he did it because he believed that P' are, like comparable statements about pleasure, ultimately based on the man's own statement, taken to be sincere, of the form 'I did it because P'; and statements of the latter form are, again, not open to the charge of being straight-forwardly mistaken."<sup>4</sup>

The conclusion which Williams reaches in this article, that the relation between pleasure and its object is one of attention, does not concern us very much. We are more affected by the negative aspect of his conclusion, that the relation is not causal.

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1. B. Williams. 'Pleasure and Belief'. PASSV XXXIII. p57, 1959
  2. Cases of pleasure accompanying a false belief.
  3. Ibid. p57
  4. Ibid. p59

He presents several arguments including the argument arising from the element of incorrigibility. In the long run it is this last element that he emphasizes most to establish that the relation is not causal.

According to Williams the object of pleasure viz., an inheritance in the example 'I am pleased because I have inherited a fortune' (when I really have not) cannot be the cause of the pleasure because it does not exist. If it is said that I was pleased because I thought or believed that I had inherited a fortune, then also it cannot be a causal statement, for the thesis that belief can be a cause raises the following difficulties.

First of all, Williams says that if belief in an inheritance is to be the cause of pleasure then it must be so in virtue of some law. Then he asks "But what law? Evidently the belief in an inheritance is not the cause of any pleasure, but, at best, of pleasure at an inheritance; yet it is this last notion that the causal account was supposed to explain".<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to understand what exactly Williams wants to mean here. It seems to me that the circularity suggested above will be involved only if one emphasizes the necessity of a law in the form: a belief in an inheritance is the cause of pleasure at an inheritance. This sort of straight-forward general law, as we have seen before, is not really necessary in a causal relation. General laws used in a causal situation are often remotely connected with it. In order to say that my belief in an inheritance is the cause of my pleasure at an inheritance, I donot need the support of a law exactly in the form in which Williams suggests one does.

Another point which Williams suggests here is that pleasure at getting an inheritance cannot be identified separately from the belief which is supposed to cause it,<sup>2</sup> and if I substitute pleasure in general for pleasure

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1. Ibid. p57. Emphasis is the author's

2. This argument about separate identity has been discussed before (Chap.IV). The question of a separate identity can be avoided by describing the effect in general terms which Williams himself has suggested. But the point is this: that an effect is individuated together with its cause, may be due to various reasons and need not necessarily mean that the relation is a non-contingent one.

at an inheritance, I shall always have to start with a false belief (that it is the inheritance and not the belief in it that causes my present pleasure) for the true hypothesis that the belief caused my pleasure to be true. This point Williams presents in the form of a dilemma: either it is always belief that caused the pleasure or belief did not always cause the pleasure, and then he tries to show that both these two disjuncts are logically unacceptable.

Williams says that if belief is not always the cause of pleasure then there will be two incompatible causal hypotheses regarding the pleasure in question. One, I am pleased because I have inherited a fortune (I really have), and two, I am pleased because I believe I have inherited a fortune. Williams' argument is this, that at the time of believing in the inheritance we cannot make a distinction between these two causal hypotheses. However, the retrospective description of the situation in terms of a true belief-statement (I was pleased because I thought etc.) is based on one's sincerely thinking at the time "I am pleased because I have inherited a fortune". "...thus it appears that a necessary condition of the assertion of the true hypothesis would be my previous belief in or assertion of a false one, and this is absurd."<sup>1</sup>

The absurdity lies in the fact that one of the two incompatible causal-hypotheses, the false one, is made the condition of assertion for the other, the true one. Thus the condition of asserting a statement like "...because I believed such and such", is to assert first a statement which later on turns out to be false.

I agree with Williams that in certain cases of asserting a belief statement, particularly one expressed in the past tense, the difficulty mentioned above arises. In such a case it is true to say that the assertion of a true causal hypothesis is based on the assertion of a false one.

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1. Ibid. p58



But two things should be pointed out here: one, it is not the case just that a false statement is taken to be the condition for asserting a true one, but that a false statement regarded as true is taken to be the condition for asserting the true one; two, this is not universally the case. One can make a true causal hypothesis in terms of belief without making a false one the condition of assertion. For instance, a religious person who had gone through a period of doubts and argumentations could say 'I am pleased because (at last) I believe in God.'

A continuation of these arguments is used by Williams in connection with the first disjunct of the dilemma viz., that belief is always the cause of pleasure. Williams argues that here one is not in a position to arrive at the correct causal hypothesis and there are two incompatible causal hypotheses viz. (1)....because I believe I have inherited a property and (2)....because I have inherited a property. It should be noted that at the time of making the causal hypothesis, one does not face two incompatible causal hypotheses but one viz. ....because I have inherited a property. The incapacity of the person to distinguish between what he thinks is the case and what is the case, does not mean that he thought or belief cannot cause his pleasure. It is not difficult to imagine people with better powers of thinking and judgement who can easily distinguish between these two incompatible causal hypotheses right at the beginning. Williams himself has made this point when he says that the choice will require philosophical reflection which most people presumably don't indulge in.

Williams also argues that it is impossible to see what evidence one can have for the hypothesis that the belief caused the pleasure. I admit that here we are not dealing with an ordinary causal statement for which one can collect evidence through observation and experiment. This sort of causal statement is made immediately. The only evidence here is that

of one's own belief. One is in a position to know (though not incorrigibly) that the belief is the cause of pleasure because it is one's own belief. Compare this with the case of a headache and feeling distracted. What evidence do I have to say that 'I cannot concentrate because of my headache? Yet one can describe it as a causal statement.

Last, but not the least, the stronghold of Williams' position and the main point at issue in this discussion is the argument that the statement 'I am pleased because I believe I have inherited a fortune' cannot be causal for it is incorrigible. Williams says "...since the statement in question expresses, on this view, a causal hypothesis, it would be corrigible, and it would make sense to say that I had just been mistaken in thinking that it was a certain belief that caused my pleasure; but in general no sense can be attached to this."<sup>1</sup> Then he concludes "...the whole idea of a man's beliefs' being a cause in such cases is a fiction,, aided, though not inspired, by a misunderstanding of the form of words, "he was pleased because he believed...". Williams wishes to extend this thesis to cover other similar cases, particularly action. "...this form of words, and perhaps a similar misunderstanding, occurs also in another connection - that of a man's having mistaken grounds for action."<sup>2</sup> The point raised by Williams has been answered, to a certain extent, by D.F. Pears.

## II D.F. Pears and the incorrigibility of some psychological statements

D.F. Pears<sup>3</sup> holds that certain statements about our psychological feelings and reactions though they appear to be incorrigible are causal and corrigible in the ordinary Humean way. As Pears' theory is intended to be an answer to the question Williams has raised it will be worthwhile to discuss it.

1. Ibid. pp.58-59

2. Ibid. p59

3. D.F. Pears. 'Causes and objects of some feelings and psychological reactions'. Philosophy of Mind. ed. S. Hampshire. pl43. 1966. London

Pears points out that the specific question of corrigibility concerned here is "...whether it might be incorrect for a person to say that it was his lack of money that depressed him....".<sup>1</sup>

Pears says that an object-statement which is also a causal-statement (like 'I was depressed because of the lack of money') presents three alternatives before us:

1. We can take these statements as non-causal;
2. We can say that Hume was wrong in assuming that all causal statements are corrigible by negative instances;
3. We can claim them as causal and corrigible in the Humean way.

Pears favours this last alternative. He says that these statements lie at the intersection of two different conceptual schemes - the conceptual scheme of feeling and object and the conceptual scheme of ordinary causation, and they are causal and corrigible in the Humean way. Pears does not offer us one straight-forward answer to the question at issue. According to Pears the object-statements which are also causal-statements form a sort of spectrum to which the question of incorrigibility is applicable in different variations of strictness. Some are more incorrigible, some are less incorrigible. At one end of the spectrum are depression-statements as instantiated in the example 'I am depressed because of the lack of money'. Such statements are less strictly incorrigible. Here Pears points out the various possibilities of making mistakes about the object of depression.<sup>2</sup> One may be mistaken in identifying the object and therefore, the cause of depression. This makes the depression-statements open by correction by parallel negative instances. In this connection Pears mentions that if a person does not know what is the object of his depression, then he will not be so certain about the cause of his depression. Certainty about the cause comes from the certainty about the object.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid. pp144-145  
 2. Ibid. pp152-153  
 3. Ibid. p150

I do not quite agree with Pears on this point. Suppose that I took a drug knowing full well that it would cause me depression. When I became depressed, I was not sure about the object of depression, though I knew it was not my taking the drug. As a matter of fact I was depressed in a general way and not about any particular thing. I knew perfectly well what was the cause of my depression though I did not have any object of depression. Conversely, suppose that I came out from the Professor's room, quite depressed about my studies, but not so certain about the cause of it - which could be my philosophical naïveté or the brilliance of the Professor. Of course, Pears says that the depression-concept does allow a certain vagueness about the object of depression.

However the possibilities of mistaken identification in the case of depression, as mentioned by Pears, are quite significant in the sense that similar possibilities of mistaken identifications can be found in the case of reason and action. This establishes the closeness of these two types of statements. Just as one may be wrong in identifying the object and/or the cause of depression, in a similar way one may be wrong in identifying one's wants or desires as reasons for one's action. One may be wrong in believing that a particular want is one's reason for an action. For instance, one may think quite sincerely that the reason for one's regularly dropping into a particular pub is the desire for a pint of beer, while it can be pointed out that one can easily get a pint of beer in the local pub and need not walk a mile for this one, and the real reason is not beer but the glamorous bar-maid.

A man's reason for acting in a particular way need not necessarily be 'the reason' for the action. If there is not a complete mistake, there may be a partial mistake. The reason which a man gives for his action may

not be the sufficient reason for his action. But he may be quite unaware of this. It is not uncommon in experience that we are completely unaware of our real motive, intention, desire, want etc., until someone draws our attention to it; as soon as a person's attention is drawn to the real reason for his action, he gives up 'his reason' and ceases to mention it as 'the reason'. Thus although it sounds incredible at the beginning that a person may be mistaken in thinking that a certain desire has caused him to act in a particular way, it is not totally without sense to say that he can be mistaken in stating what his real desire, intention or motive for action is.

It is obvious that psycho-analysis has much to contribute to this effect. It can show that a person's alleged reason for an action has no real foundation, by bringing out the hidden motives and desires from the unconscious level. I agree that the conclusions reached by psycho-analysis cannot always be generalised. But the possibility of such psycho-analytic explanation at least shows that one can be mistaken in giving one's reason. In this connection it should be pointed out that one must not think that psycho-analysis always brings out the motives and the desires which the agent is otherwise incapable of knowing. Often it happens like this, that psycho-analysis makes the agent focus his attention on desires and wants, the existence of which he is aware of but he is not aware of the connection between a certain desire and a certain action.

At the other end of the spectrum according to Pears, are statements to which the notion of incorrigibility is fully applicable. These statements are immune from mistakes. They are statements like 'I am amused because of his remark', 'I feel pleased because the money has arrived' etc.

As we have seen before, Pears favours the Humean conception of cause and wants to adhere to the notion that if a statement is to be a causal statement it has to be corrigible by negative instances. As to the question how an object statement which is immune from mistakes can also be a causal statement, he says "...this problem can be evaded only when it can be shown that the identification of the object is liable to be mistaken",<sup>1</sup> and the attempt which he makes to resolve this problem, though a compromise, is quite novel.

According to Pears, so far as psychological feelings like pleasure, amusement, etc., are concerned, there are two different sorts of mental states; one, a momentary reaction and two, a steady and persistent feeling. In the latter case Pears says there is a possibility of making mistakes, but not in the former. Therefore a pleasure-statement or amusement-statement, so long as it describes a steady feeling, is not immune from mistakes. But at the furthest end of the spectrum, where lie statements which describe a momentary reaction, no mistaken identification is possible, because, to quote Pears, "...a momentary feeling or reaction does not get any chance to collect other things on other occasions which the person would then be equally ready to identify as its object." ...."Therefore, a momentary feeling or reaction, unlike a persistent one, lacks alternative candidates for this position."<sup>2</sup> This, according to Pears, explains the inconceivability that one can be mistaken in such cases. Hence, at one end of the spectrum we still get object-statements which are incorrigible. As Pears does not want to retract from the Humean notion that a causal statement is corrigible, he ascribes the inconceivability to a contingent fact, and here I believe his answer is a compromise - perhaps to some extent obscure too. He says, "For it is plausible to suggest that it [the contingent fact we are looking for] is the contingent fact that at one end of the spectrum the thing to

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1. Ibid. pl61

2. Ibid. pl63

which the feeling or reaction is linked by the connection signified by the weak sense of 'about'\* is always its cause". Thus "...though the possibility of a mistaken identification of the object is not allowed for by the conceptual scheme at this end of the spectrum, it still exists in the sub-structure of this conceptual scheme".<sup>1</sup>

It is quite evident that Pears' analysis of the problem and its solution rest to a large extent on a special meaning of the word 'about'. He says that "...there is a very weak sense of the word 'about', according to which, if a person is depressed, he is depressed about everything that he thinks about in a depressed way." It is weak because, "...it is very non-selective; it does not pick out one thing that is thought about in a depressed way rather than another."<sup>2</sup> It is on this weak sense of the word 'about' that Pears' defence of the thesis that some object-statements (which are also causal) are corrigible is built. But it seems to me that Pears' analysis of the meaning of the word 'about' is to some extent, confused.

It appears from Pears' analysis, though he himself has not explicitly distinguished them\*, that there is not just one weak sense of the word 'about', but two: the non-selective sense in which one does not have a definite object of depression, and the insufficiently selective sense<sup>3</sup> in which one does not pick out the most important object. Pears suggests that in both these senses correction of object-statements in the Humean way is possible. As we are concerned here with object statements the sort of mistake expected is a mistaken identification of the object. At the

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\* The weak sense of 'about' will be explained shortly

1. Ibid. p165

2. Ibid. p154

\* He does talk of variations in the selectivity of the word 'about' Ibid.p155

3. Ibid. p155

same time in this particular issue object-statements are also supposed to be causal statements, and therefore a mistaken identification of the object will mean a mistaken identification of the cause.

So far as the non-selective sense of the word 'about' is concerned Pears says that a statement like 'he is depressed about everything' can be corrected by a statement with a more specific object like 'he is depressed about money'. But does it really correct the statement concerning the cause?

In the non-selective sense a feeling or reaction is, as Pears describes it, 'free-floating', i.e. there is no definite object of feeling. Therefore, when it is said that a person is depressed about everything, it really means that the person is just depressed, period. The statement 'he is depressed' or 'he is depressed about everything' reports only a psychological feeling of the agent. The cause of such a psychological feeling sometimes can be, as Pears says, physiological like taking too much aspirin or non-physiological like having a period of excessive excitement. Hence in such cases the correction of the object-statement by specifying a definite object of depression will not really correct the statement concerning the cause. This is because, as Pears himself points out "....a statement that something is the object of a feeling does not seem to be reducible to a causal statement."<sup>1</sup> This irreducibility is more observable in cases where 'about' is used in a 'non-selective', 'free floating' sense.

I am not however denying that the causal statement here viz., his depression is caused by too much aspirin or excessive excitement can be corrected in the Humean way. What I am denying is that such a statement can be corrected by a more specific object-statement like 'he is depressed about money', because, even if he is depressed about money and not just depressed, his depression still may be caused by excessive aspirins or excitement.

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1. Ibid. p148



Secondly, there is a sense in which a statement in the non-selective sense of 'about' like 'I am depressed, or depressed about everything' cannot be corrected by a statement in the selective sense of 'about' like 'I am depressed about money'. The reason for this is that, in the non-selective sense of the word 'about' one cannot make a mistaken identification of the object as there is no object to be identified. How could a person make a mistaken identification of an object of depression when he is not depressed about anything particularly, but just depressed? To a certain extent, Pears admits this point. To quote Pears "...in this weak sense of the word it would almost certainly be true that the person was depressed about the object that he stated first, even if he later admitted that he was really depressed about something else, this time using a more selective sense of the word."<sup>1</sup>

This leaves us with the insufficiently selective sense of the word 'about'. Pears says one can be mistaken, in a partial way in identifying the object of one's feelings. It need not be a total mistake. One may not be able to pick out the most important aspect of the object. As a matter of fact the possibility of making a total mistake is ruled out altogether from the weak sense of the word 'about' in general. For in the non-selective sense no mistakes are possible; in the insufficiently selective sense only partial mistakes are possible. Thus the only mistake which Pears' analysis really allows is a partial mistake in the insufficiently selective sense of the word 'about'. But this means that even when we are partially mistaken in identifying the object of our depression, there is a sense in which the statement we make still remains incorrigible. I may be mistaken in describing which aspect of a particular joke amused me, but I am not mistaken in saying that the joke amused me. The element of incorrigibility cannot be completely ruled out from this weak sense of the word 'about'.

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1. Ibid. p155

It is interesting to note that Pears tries to explain the incorrigibility of some of the object-statements in terms of an element of duration. Pears' point made about 'duration' appears to me more effective for the defence of his thesis than that about the weak 'sense' of the word 'about'. The notion of the variations of duration plays an important role in the situation that some object statements are incorrigible. In the cases of feelings and reactions there are variations in duration. It is therefore quite reasonable to say, as Pears says, that the momentary feelings or reactions are never "free floating"; "the person himself can always claim to identify its object".<sup>1</sup> Here the connection between the object and the feeling is apprehended unmistakably because, to quote Pears, "...a momentary feeling or reaction does not get any chance to collect other things on other occasions which the person would then be equally ready to identify as its object."<sup>2</sup> This account, although it does not explain away the incorrigibility of the statements concerned, yet explains why the incorrigibility is there.

It is now possible to come to a conclusion so far as Pears is concerned. On the basis of Pears' analysis it can undoubtedly be claimed that some object-statements and similar other statements are not necessarily incorrigible. On the contrary they are corrigible in the ordinary Humean way. Pears is also right in emphasizing the role of 'duration' in this particular issue.

I think that this element of duration plays an important role (perhaps not exactly in the same way as Pears describes it) so far as the question of an incorrigible statement about our introspective states is concerned. When we raise the question of the incorrigibility of the statements

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1. Ibid. p163

2. Ibid

describing our introspective states, the answer to the question depends upon whether these statements are describing a past, present or future mental state. Theoretically, statements about our reactions, feelings, desires, wants, etc. can be mistaken if they describe something past or something future. I can be mistaken in making a statement such as that yesterday I was depressed about my studies. It might not be my studies but something else that made me depressed and my statement might be just an ordinary case of the failure of my memory. I might not have been depressed at all. Similarly I may be mistaken in making a statement about my future state of depression simply because I may not have sufficient data to make such a statement. This may happen in the case of reason and action as well. I can be mistaken in thinking that the cause of my action was the desire which I had yesterday while as a matter of fact it was caused by the one I had the day before yesterday. Similarly I have every possibility of making a mistake if I want to describe some future desire which I have not yet experienced and the action that will follow from it.

This rules out the question of incorrigibility so far as our past or future introspective states are concerned. This question arises only when we describe a present mental state. Truly speaking the word 'present' here means only instantaneous; when a feeling or desire is more than instantaneous, it has the possibility of being mistakenly identified. As D.M. Armstrong describes the situation "...during that instant we know indubitably what is going on in that instant: but past instants are only remembered and future instants are only foreseen, so that doubt would be at least meaningful".<sup>1</sup>

The problem with which we started has now become limited. The question of incorrigibility arises particularly with statements describing present introspective states. Our problem is even narrower than this. We

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1. D.M. Armstrong. A Materialistic Theory of the Mind. p105

are concerned with the problem that statements which describe the causal relation between a present introspective state and its result, are incorrigible. These statements can be descriptions of the relation between a belief or a thought and the subsequent feelings or reactions, or of a desire or a want and the action or behaviour that follows.

### III Various points raised by the Incorrigibility-thesis and Reason-action statements

So far I have been discussing two views held by an advocate and an opponent of the incorrigibility-thesis. One is the view of Williams who holds that certain statements (belief-statements and also reason-action statements) cannot be causal because they are incorrigible. The other is the view of Pears who holds that certain statements (object-statements which resemble reason-action statements), though they appear to be incorrigible, are causal and corrigible in the Humean way. The discussions of these various types of statements by Williams and Pears show that on the one hand both these kinds of statements are not as incorrigible as they are taken to be and on the other hand they are not as straightforwardly corrigible as an ordinary statement about physical causation. Though the discussions of these statements are quite relevant, yet each set of these statements must be examined separately. Therefore it will be helpful if we consider now the main arguments of the incorrigibility-thesis in the context of reason-action statements only.

I have mentioned before that the anti-causal theorists do not always use the term 'incorrigible' in the same sense. Therefore, they are not always unanimous as to what is meant by the incorrigibility-thesis. There are different versions of it. The strong version seems to be that of Wittgenstein's. According to this version, as Wittgenstein puts it, such locutions as 'I know', 'I doubt', 'I am mistaken' etc., are not applicable to first person reports of introspective states. It is meaningless to say

that 'I know I am in pain' or 'I doubt I am in pain'. The locution 'I know' or 'I doubt' does not perform its usual function here. Therefore it is also meaningless to say that they can be corrected. The notion of corrigibility applies only where there is a possibility of making a mistake or of being in doubt. In a way it may seem paradoxical to describe this version as the incorrigibility-thesis. Because, according to this version both the concept of corrigibility and that of incorrigibility do not apply to first person reports of current sensations.

The weak version of the incorrigibility thesis is: first person reports of sensations and feelings are incorrigible because they cannot be corrected, though such reports may or may not be true. For instance if I say that I have dreamt/<sup>about</sup>my aunt last night, I cannot be corrected though I may be mistaken in thinking that I have dreamt/<sup>about</sup>my aunt last night.

The version which is neither so weak nor so strong and is usually favoured by the anti-causal theorists is the one which suggests that the incorrigibility of first person reports of current sensations not only means that such reports cannot be corrected, it also means that one can never be wrong or mistaken in reporting one's current sensations, i.e. when a person sincerely says that he is in pain, he is in pain. In short, it means that such reports cannot be corrected and therefore, they are correct.\*

It must be noted that the incorrigibility argument is primarily concerned with reports of sensations and feelings, and a full consideration of the argument needs detailed analysis of reports like 'I am in pain'. However, as I said before, I shall restrict myself only to the question whether the main points raised by the various forms of the argument are applicable to reason-action statements.

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\* B. Williams has used 'incorrigibility' in this sense. See B. Williams. 'Pleasure and Belief'. PASSV XXXIII. 1959. p59

Let us first consider whether locutions like 'I know', 'I doubt' etc., are inapplicable to reason-action statements, i.e. whether in this particular case they perform their usual assertive function. In this connection certain general observations can be made. I think it is a gross oversimplification of the situation if it is said that in our language-game, because certain locutions are not used to describe certain sensations in certain circumstances, such locutions cannot be used to describe other sensations and feelings, or the same sensation in other circumstances. What seems plausible in the case of first person reports of pain does not seem so obvious and plausible in cases other than pain. It seems that in the case of reason-action statements it is not entirely meaningless to doubt or to question one's own reason for an action, and the claim of knowledge ('I know that' etc.) is quite well placed with such assertions. For instance, statements like 'I know that my reason for looking after my old aunt is not my love for her, but her money' or 'I am in doubt whether my reason for sacking him is his incompetence or his colour' are meaningful statements and the assertive function which locutions like 'I know' or 'I doubt' usually have, seems quite fulfilled here. This is also true about the use of such locutions in the case of statements concerning psychological feelings and reactions. As we have seen in Pears' example, it is quite appropriate to say that 'I doubt if it is money I am depressed about and not something else.'

The point made in the third version of the incorrigibility-thesis viz., that one cannot be mistaken in reporting one's current sensation, one is always correct, is often over-emphasized by its advocates. It is often claimed that whenever one sincerely states one's reason for an action, one cannot be mistaken. Thus if one sincerely says that one's reason for joining the army is to serve the country, it is not only senseless to doubt or to say that he might be mistaken, he cannot be mistaken.

This I think is utterly false.<sup>1</sup> One can sincerely state one's reason for an action and at the same time be mistaken. Psycho-analysis for instance provides evidence to the effect that sometimes people are mistaken in identifying the real reason for their actions. In chapter VI<sup>2</sup> in connection with first person singular statements of reasons for actions, we have seen various possibilities of making mistakes which show that the first person statement of a reason for an action cannot be used as evidence for the agent's having unmistakably that reason for that action. In ordinary life we accept such a reason-action report as evidence of one's having a particular reason for a particular action because under the circumstances it seems to be the best available evidence. But the best available evidence is not necessarily conclusive evidence. This criticism also applies to the weak version of the incorrigibility-thesis. Even the first person reports of dreams can be corrected by further evidence - as for instance provided by a sophisticated dream-detecting device. The difficulties one faces to correct cases like reports of one's own dreams are empirical difficulties.

Sometimes the supporters of the incorrigibility argument claim that utterances like 'I am in pain' do not report the occurrence of a sensation or a feeling, but are expressions of sensations and feelings - they are behaviour-substitutes. If we want to apply this argument to reason-action statements then they too should be considered as behaviour-substitutes.

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1. In this connection J.J.C.Smart's comment on sensation is worth quoting: "...the sincere reporting of a sensation is one thing and the sensation reported is another thing. Now as Hume said what is distinguishable is separable. It is therefore logically possible that someone should sincerely report an experience and yet the experience should not occur." J.J.C. Smart. 'Brain processes and Incorrigibility'. Australian Journal of Philosophy. p69. 1962  
A similar argument has also been put forward by D.M. Armstrong. D.M. Armstrong. 'Is Introspective Knowledge Incorrigible?'. The Philosophical Review. Vol. 72. 1963. p422
  2. See Chapter VI. Sec. V. p 148

I should like to point out here that there is an unmistakable difference between the reports of reason-action relations and the report of a pain. If the utterance 'I am in pain' is a behaviour-substitute then not only can a grimace, cry or groan be substituted by the utterance 'I am in pain', but also conversely 'I am in pain' can be substituted by a grimace, cry or groan. This condition for being a behaviour-substitute seems to be quite in place with utterances like 'I am in pain'. If I say 'I am in pain', or I groan both will express, though not exactly in the same way, the sort of sensation I am having. But this does not seem to be the case with reasons and actions. This is because what is in question here is not the report of just a want or desire but the report of a relation between a certain desire and a certain action, e.g., I look after my aunt because she is rich. It is difficult to see what sort of behaviour these reports or utterances could substitute for.

Even if it is a report of a desire or want and not of a relation between a desire and an action, it is still difficult to see how such a report can be a behaviour-substitute. What statements of desires or wants express are reasons for behaving in a particular way. Therefore, they themselves cannot be behaviour-substitutes.

I have mentioned before that the question of incorrigibility is more acute with the introspective reporting of the immediate present. In carrying out one's intention, it seems that one knows unmistakably that one's action is following from one's intention. For instance the statement 'I am going to Liverpool because I want to see my mother' seems to be irrefutably incorrigible.



However I think that there is no reason why such a reason-action statement should be incorrigible. The main argument against the incorrigibility-thesis are applicable to such a statement as well. The statement 'I am going to Liverpool to see my mother' can be doubted and questioned and be prefixed with locutions like 'I know' or 'I doubt'. Such statements when uttered are not behaviour-substitutes, nor are they expressions of particular sensation. Just as one can be mistaken in saying 'I have<sup>2</sup>/stomach ache because of that ham sandwich', one can be mistaken in saying 'I am going to Liverpool because I want to see my mother'.

### Conclusion

It is now possible to sum up the result of the arguments of this chapter. My aim here has been to show that reason-action statements are not incorrigible. What is claimed to be incorrigible here is an agent's sincere statement that his action follows from his desire or want.

In this connection I have introduced Williams' and Pears' analyses of certain types of statements which appear to be causal and incorrigible at the same time. I have tried to show that some of the possibilities of making mistakes, as mentioned by Pears in the case of some object-statements, are also true of reason-action statements.

It has appeared in the course of discussion that the first person reports of the instantaneous present seem to be irrefutably incorrigible, and that while a person may be mistaken in stating his past or future reasons for actions, he cannot be mistaken in knowing his reason while actually carrying it out. But I have tried to show that the various points raised by the advocates of the incorrigibility-thesis about first person reports of

the instantaneous present, do not apply to an immediate reason-action statement, just as they do not in other cases of reason-action statements.

The conclusion is that there are various possibilities of making a mistake in stating one's reason for an action, some of which I have discussed in this chapter and some in the previous chapter. A reason-action statement is not an incorrigible statement. Therefore it cannot be said that a reason-action statement cannot be causal because it is incorrigible.

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## Conclusion

The conclusion of a thesis on philosophical problems could be anything but conclusive. In philosophy it is difficult to give a final decisive answer to a question. There is always room for counter argument. However, in philosophy it is more important to ask a significant question than to offer a final solution. This is particularly true of the causal explanation of human actions in terms of reasons. It is more easy to argue that a reason cannot be a cause than to argue that it can be. The question whether a reason can be a cause is difficult to answer because of two reasons. On the one hand desires, wants, intentions etc., are not exactly like ordinary physical causes; on the other hand, it cannot be denied that an analysis in the Rylean or Meldenian line of the term 'because' in 'he did it because he wanted to' fails to explicate the full implication of the relation between a want and the subsequent action which follows from the want. As D.F. Pears puts it, "On the one hand, Wittgensteinian discussions of this problem fail to do justice to the force of the word 'because' in 'I did it because....'; and, on the other hand those who do justice to its force usually understate the differences between reasons for decisions or actions and other kinds of causes."<sup>1</sup>

The anti-causal theorists emphasize the difference between reasons and causes and claim that reasons cannot be causes. Their claim is based on a misconception<sup>2</sup> as to what sort of concepts and laws are involved in a causal explanation. If a causal explanation, as they think sometimes, is a mechanical explanation then obviously it cannot include reason-action explanations. But, as I have tried to show, causal explanations are not

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1. D.F. Pears. 'Predicting and Deciding'. Proceedings of the British Academy 1964. p215

2. This point is discussed in Chapter I

synonymous with mechanical explanations and cause as a generic concept includes more than what the concept of physical cause can denote. If this contention of mine is correct then the causal explanations of actions need not be mechanical explanations. In order to explain an action causally one does not have to reduce actions to movements. The causal explanation of actions can be given in terms of reasons. To say this, however, is not to invoke the traditional theory of an act of will. Desires, wants, intentions etc., are not performances, nor are actions movements caused by our desires, wants, intentions, etc. Actions almost always involve movements, but they are not movements. They are changes caused by our desires, wants etc.

The point I have tried to make in this thesis is that unless the relation between reasons and actions are considered as causal the full implication of the relation cannot be brought out and something important remains unexplained. To quote Davidson, "...the agent has certain beliefs and attitudes in the light of which the action is reasonable. But then something essential has certainly been left out, for a person can have a reason for an action, and perform the action, and yet this reason not be the reason why he did it. Central to the relation between a reason and an action it explains is the idea that the agent performed the action because he had the reason."<sup>1</sup>

If we want to do justice to the force of meaning of 'because' by taking it as causal, the first thing we clash with is the Humean notion of cause. I have tried to show that it is a mistake to suppose that because reasons cannot always satisfy the Humean criterion of a cause, the relation between reasons and actions cannot be causal. The arguments which philosophers often offer against this position, from the perspective of Hume's

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1. D. Davidson. 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes'. Free will and Determinism. ed. B. Berofsky. p228. The emphasis is the author's.

formulation of causal criteria, are not irrefutable. These arguments cannot show conclusively that there is an unsurmountable categorial difference between reasons and causes and that an explanation in terms of reason cannot be a causal explanation.

So far as the argument that the reason-action relation is non-contingent because a reason cannot be described without a reference to an action is concerned, I have tried to show that Melden is wrong in assessing the strength of this argument. This argument can be avoided by showing that the agent can identify his desires, wants etc., in advance. Besides, if reason-action relation is a logical relation, it will be possible to deduce the exact action from the description of the reason. But it is not always possible to deduce from the description of the desire or want what sort of action is going to follow, or whether it will follow at all. This shows that the relation between reason and action cannot be a non-contingent relation.

Melden's argument that all causal explanation is of events or happenings and items of reason are not events, is another hasty conclusion. The Humean argument that cause is an event is a too-restricted characterisation and I have tried to show that to be an event need not be a necessary criterion of a cause. Besides, wants, desires etc., can sometimes be treated as happenings.

The two other characteristics with which the notion of reason seems to clash are the generality and the corrigibility of a causal statement. So far as the question of generality is concerned I have maintained that a general law is essential for a causal relation and that like ordinary causal relations, reason-action relations can be generalised. This applies

also to the first-person singular statement of a reason for an action. The difficulties one faces in making valid predictions in the case of reason-action relations are empirical difficulties. Besides, a thing can be caused without being predictable. The question of causality and the question of predictability are not necessarily the same questions.

The problem really seems unresolvable so far as the incorrigible nature of a reason-action statement is concerned. The assumption here is that a man always has genuine incorrigible knowledge of his own wants, desires and intentions. He could not help knowing unmistakably what his introspective states are, because, it is assumed, they are exactly what they appear to be. This certainty of knowledge does not need any evidence.

This argument is one which philosophers often consider to be unquestionable. But there is absolutely no reason, as David Pears<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, why our knowledge of such a complex state of affairs should be incorrigible.

This argument assumes that an agent's awareness of such a mental state satisfying a certain description is a necessary and sufficient condition for the correct ascription of the description to his mental state. Such an argument obviously ignores many possibilities where an agent could be mistaken. We have seen that the agent's report of his introspective state is likely to be indubitable when he describes his present mental state. But when his description is not limited within his present mental state he is liable to make mistakes. There the possibility of making a mistake cannot be ruled out. There is also no reason to suppose that he cannot be mistaken about his present mental state. The hypothesis of the unconscious mind and the contribution of psycho-analysis support this position.

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1. D. Pears. 'Causes and objects of some feelings and psychological reactions'. Philosophy of Mind. ed. S. Hampshire. pl69

It has sometimes been suggested that psycho-analytic explanations cannot be causal (in the mechanical sense) because they contain purposive elements. But the purposive elements in psycho-analytic explanations are the unconscious motives and desires which instead of excluding causal explanation, support it. Besides there is no need to think that psycho-analysis only explains why a certain reason is a man's reason for acting; based on the same principle, it can also explain why a man's reason is his reason and not the reason for acting. The latter possibility shows that psycho-analysis can reveal an apparently incorrigible reason-action statement as corrigible.

In this thesis I have not discussed many aspects of the problem of action, which should be discussed before one reaches the conclusion that a piece of human behaviour can be causally explained in terms of reason. Again in this thesis I have treated want, desire, intention etc., as items of reasons without clarifying or mentioning their specific differences, and I believe that were such differences made, one or two of the items of reasons would have appeared as more causally effective than others. I also have not discussed the possibility of 'what goes on in the brain' being the cause of overt behaviour and what we describe as desire or want being a mere epiphenomenon of such brain-processes.

The point which I have tried to make in this thesis, is that human behaviour described as action can be understood only if it is caused by a certain intentional element. The causal explanation of human behaviour in terms of physical changes leaves out this element involved in action. This is the reason why such an explanation is often considered as contradicting teleological forms of explanation altogether. The advantage of a causal explanation of action in terms of reasons is that it does not exclude a

teleological explanation of action so long as the latter means nothing but that an action is desired, intended or wanted. On the contrary, being an explanation in terms of wants or desires it takes full care of the element of purpose involved in a purposive explanation of human action.

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\* The bibliography is incomplete because of the extensiveness of the available literature on the subject.

Abbreviations used in Bibliography and in the thesis:

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