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On Essentially Intentional Actions

by

Armand Allen Babakhanian

Under the Direction of Juan S. Piñeros Glasscock, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts, Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Essentially intentional actions are kinds of action that can only be done intentionally.

Essentialism is the view that essentially intentional actions exist. Accidentalism is the view that essentialism is false. In my thesis, I develop and argue for *naïve essentialism*, a species of essentialism based on Michael Thompson's naïve action theory. First, I present key features of naïve action theory and the broader Anscombean tradition, distinguish between essentially and accidentally intentional actions, and provide an argument for the existence of essentially intentional actions. Second, I respond to three objections to my argument. Third, I argue that accidentalism is a reductive approach to action and faces some standard problems to such approaches. Fourth, I present three noteworthy implications of my defense of essentialism for the philosophy of mind and action.

INDEX WORDS: Philosophy of action, Naïve action theory, Essentially intentional action, Elizabeth Anscombe, Philosophy of mind, Naïve essentialism

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2024

On Essentially Intentional Actions

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my Master's Thesis to my parents who helped and supported me in many ways throughout my academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my friends and classmates who helped me grow and learn in my time at Georgia State University. I would also like to acknowledge the many philosophy professors at Georgia State, who are all great people and great philosophers. They have created a wonderful community that I greatly enjoyed being a part of. I wish the program were longer than two years! I would also like to thank Professor Juan and Professor Nahmias who have helped me grow immensely as a student of philosophy. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Tahlia for helping me throughout the final phases of this process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Essentially intentional actions are kinds of actions that can only be performed intentionally. Some putative examples of essentially intentional actions given by Elizabeth Anscombe are “marrying”, “greeting”, and “selling”.¹ Essentialism is the view that essentially intentional actions exist. Accidentalism is the view that essentialism is false. Historically, essentially intentional actions have received little attention since their inception in Anscombe’s *Intention*.² However, I believe that essentially intentional actions play an important role in the philosophy of mind and action. Here, I develop and argue for *naïve essentialism*, which is a new species of essentialism based on Michael Thompson’s naïve action theory.³ In the first part, I unpack naïve essentialism in three steps: (1) the key features of naïve action theory, (2) the distinction between essentially and accidentally intentional actions, and (3) the novel Grounding Argument for the existence of essentially intentional actions. In the second part, I respond to three objections to the Grounding Argument. In the third part, I claim that accidentalism entails a reductive approach to action and thereby faces some standard problems that naïve essentialism is able to answer. In the last part, I present three noteworthy implications of naïve essentialism and the Grounding Argument for the philosophy of action.

¹ Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, (Harvard University Press, 2000), §47.

² See the following for brief treatments of the subject since *Intention*: Jonathan Bennett, *Events and their Names*, (Hackett Publishing Co., 1988), 205-207; Michael S. Moore, *Act and Crime: The Philosophy of Action and its Implications for Criminal Law*, (Oxford University Press, 1993), 171-175; Bob Beddor & Carlotta Pavese, “Practical Knowledge without Luminosity,” *Mind* 131, no. 523, (2022), 928.

³ Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*, (Harvard University Press, 2012), 112; A development of some ideas discussed in Armand Babakhanian, “Naïve Action Theory and Essentially Intentional Actions,” *Southwest Philosophy Review: The Journal of the Southwestern Philosophical Society* 40, no. 1, (2024), 229-237.

1.1 Key Features of Naïve Action Theory

To begin, I will present some central concepts of naïve action theory and the broader Anscombean tradition. According to this tradition, an action is intentional in virtue of possessing a teleological means-end structure, or “intentional form”.⁴ Actions that possess the intentional form are capable of being described as being performed for the sake of some further end, or as having other actions described as being performed for the sake of their performance. As a result of this form, actions can be subject to Anscombe’s question “Why?” or, “for the sake of what is that for?” and the “How?” question or, “by what means is that action being performed?”⁵ The action’s teleological structure depends on an agent’s practical reasoning about what they ought to do, which specifies the action’s identity and particular role in a chain of practical reasoning. For example, an act of greeting is intentional if an agent practically reasons that they should be greeting by waving their hand in order to be making a good first impression. Thus, the act of greeting possesses a teleological means-end structure in being thought of as a means to an end, and as an end that other acts are a means for accomplishing. Thompson affirms this view as he writes that in his treatment of intentional action,

everything will depend on viewing action as something that has parts or runs through phases; a grasp of the nature of action will reside in a grasp of the specific type of unity [form] these phases exhibit. . . thus, I hope, we will lay our hands on the peculiar mode of dependence of (some) action on instrumental thought.⁶

⁴ Jennifer Frey, “Analytic Philosophy of Action: A Very Brief History,” *Philosophical News* 11, no. 7, (2013), 53.

⁵ Anscombe, §46 & §47; Michael Thompson, *Life and Action*, 112; Anton Ford, “The Arithmetic of Intention,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 2, (2015), 138.

⁶ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 11.

According to Thompson, an action is intentional because it possesses a distinct form of unity that it inherits from an agent's instrumental or practical reasoning.

A key characteristic of naïve action theory is that it stands against the dominant “standard story” of intentional action which claims that, “an action is a bodily movement caused in the right way by a belief and a desire.”⁷ The standard story has been described as a “reductive” or “decompositional” project that attempts to analyze intentional action in terms of more fundamental components, such as mental states and bodily movements.⁸ By contrast, naïve action theory endorses a *non-reductive* view of action that takes intentional actions to be fundamental with respect to other phenomena usually discussed in the philosophy of action, such as intentions and voluntariness. On a non-reductive account, intentional actions are taken to be metaphysically and explanatorily basic.⁹ Hence, naïve action theory can be understood as an instance of the “action first” research program in the philosophy of action, which is analogous to the “knowledge first” program in epistemology.¹⁰

Thompson notes that an intentional action can be resolvable into further smaller acts, or “sub-actions”, which are themselves intentional in virtue of being a part of the intentional action.¹¹ The relation of a sub-action to a larger intentional action is explained in terms of a metaphysical grounding relationship between parts and wholes.¹² Metaphysical grounding is a

⁷ Michael Smith, “The Structure of Orthonomy,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 55, (2004), 165-193.

⁸ Douglas Lavin, “Action as a form of temporal unity: on Anscombe’s “Intention,”” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 5/6 (2015), 609.

⁹ For an exploration of the sense in which actions are understood as “basic” in the action-first program, see; Lucy O’Brien, “Actions as Prime,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 80, (2017), 272.

¹⁰ Yair Levy, “Intentional Action First,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 4 (2013), 706; Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-8; Timothy Williamson, “Acting on Knowledge-How,” *Synthese* 200, no. 479, (2022), 1. Some action-first philosophers are Yair Levy, Douglas Lavin, Michael Thompson, Lucy O’Brien, Sergio Tenenbaum, Anton Ford, and Devlin Russell.

¹¹ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 106.

¹² Anton Ford, “The Progress of the Deed,” in *Process, Action, & Experience*, ed. Rowland Stout (Oxford University Press, 2018), 169.

relation between facts that is analogous to causation, in that it ties what is more fundamental to what is less fundamental.¹³ If some fact f is grounded in fact g , then g makes it the case that f ; g is the foundation for f and is prior in reality to f . Thompson writes that, “an event, the building of a house, for example, is an intentional action just in case it is the ‘cause’ of its own parts - where, again, the intended notion of ‘cause’ is not pre-conceived, but is that captured by the ‘because’ of rationalization”.¹⁴ An intentional action is in some sense a metaphysically prior whole which grounds its parts. For example, an intentional action of “omelet-making” is a whole which grounds its parts such as “egg-mixing” and “egg-breaking”.¹⁵ Thus, “egg-mixing” and “egg-breaking” are proper parts of “omelet-making” and are grounded in “omelet-making”. Sub-actions are explained or “rationalized” by their relationship with the larger intentional action, just as the human heart is often explained by its role in the larger human organism.¹⁶ Sub-actions are akin to “organs” which are understood and intelligible because of their place in a larger action, which is akin to the “organism”. An intentional action is not a mere aggregate or heap, like a human artifact or pile of trash, whose parts are more basic than the whole. Instead, an intentional action is an integrated whole, like a syllable, a word, or an organism, whose whole is more basic than its parts.¹⁷

This form of practical explanation is termed “naïve rationalization”. In naïve action theory, naïve rationalization is the most fundamental kind of practical explanation.¹⁸ Other kinds

¹³ Jonathan Schaffer, “Grounding, Transitivity, & Contrastivity,” in *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*, ed. Fabrice Correia & Benjamin Schneider (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 122. It is not necessary for the success of the paper’s main claims that grounding is a species of causation or is analogous to causation. The paper is open to non-causal accounts of grounding.

¹⁴ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 112.

¹⁵ Thompson, 106.

¹⁶ Thompson, 107.

¹⁷ Jonathon Schaffer, “Monism: Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 1, (2010), 47.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 92.

of so-called “sophisticated” explanations, such as explanations of actions by “wanting”, “trying”, or “intending” are posterior in the level of explanation to naïve rationalization.¹⁹ Naïve rationalization is expressed in descriptions of the form, “I am doing x because I am doing y ”. An example of this kind of explanation is the explanation of “egg-breaking” by “omelet making” or “cake-making” in the descriptions, “I am egg-breaking because I am omelet-making” and “I am egg-breaking because I am cake-making”. The former act in these descriptions is a sub-action that is intentional in virtue of being a part that is metaphysically grounded in the latter act. Omelet-making and cake-making possesses the intentional form, and imparts the form to sub-actions like egg-breaking because of the grounding relationship between these sub-actions (parts) and the larger intentional action (the whole). This thought can be summarized in the following formula:

Naïve Rationalization Principle (NRP): An agent’s sub-action ϕ is an intentional action in virtue of being a grounded part of a larger intentional action Ψ

Some argue that naive rationalization is a form of “structural explanation”.²⁰ On this view, an action can explain another action in virtue of being a part of a shared structure, namely, a practical syllogism. The explaining action serves as the major premise in the syllogism, whereas the explained action is the conclusion of the syllogism. One may argue that my position about there being relationships of metaphysical dependence between smaller and larger actions are unnecessary, as the structural view can account for how actions are explanatory without

¹⁹ Thompson, 86-87.

²⁰ Megan Fritts, “Reasons Explanations (of Actions) as Structural Explanations,” *Synthese* 199, no. 5-6, (2021), 12683.

claiming that they metaphysically ground other actions. However, I believe that my position is both compatible and necessary for the view that naïve rationalization is a form of structural explanation. The reason why the larger action can explain its sub-action, is because the larger action grounds the sub-action. If the sub-actions are more basic than the larger action they form, then the larger actions ought to be explained by the sub-actions as the component parts of the heap explain the heap as a whole. This is so because in the order of explanation, the *explanandum* is supposed to be, in some sense, dependent upon the *explananda*. This is the reason why we take the height of a flagpole to be explanatory of the length of its shadow, as opposed to the length of the shadow to be explanatory of the height of a flagpole.²¹ If the larger action did not ground the sub-action, then the larger action would lack the metaphysical priority required to explain the sub-action.²² The larger action can function as the *explananda* in a structural explanation partly because it grounds the smaller action or *explanandum*. So, my claims about the metaphysical relationship between parts within an action are necessary for naïve rationalization to be a form of structural explanation or any other form of explanation.

Thompson offers a few reasons in support of his account of naïve rationalization.²³ First, he notes that people often explain their actions in terms of other actions. When one is asked, “why are you doing *x*?”, they usually answer with, “I am doing *x* because I am doing *y*.” For example, if a house-builder is asked “why are you carrying bricks?”, they are likely to answer with “I am carrying bricks because I am building a house”. Naïve rationalization is developmentally prior and our most commonly used form of practical explanation, and allows

²¹ Wesley C. Salmon, “Four Decades of Scientific Explanation”, *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 13, (1987), 47.

²² I owe this point to Megan Fritts Cabrera (p.c.).

²³ For a more detailed analysis of Thompson’s main arguments, see; Matteo Bianchin, “Intentions and Intentionality,” *Philosophy and Public Issues*, Supplementary Volume, (2015), 45.

naïve action theory to better integrate our ordinary view of practical life.²⁴ Second, Thompson argues that one can imagine a form of social life in which *only* naïve rationalization is used, and all other forms of practical explanation are not present. One can imagine a state of affairs in which actions are explained by other actions, and no actions are explained by states like “wanting”, “trying”, and “intending”. Therefore, naïve rationalization is more basic than all other forms of practical explanation.²⁵

1.2 The Distinction between Accidentally and Essentially Intentional Actions

In this section, I will formulate the distinction between accidentally and essentially intentional actions. An essentially intentional action is a kind of action that is necessarily performed intentionally. Anscombe provides some purported examples of essentially intentional actions in §47 of *Intention*, such as “marrying”, “hiring”, “selling”, “calling”, and “greeting”.²⁶ All of these acts are in the present progressive form. They are presently unfolding processes that may or may not be completed. All of these kinds of actions are such that they cannot be performed unintentionally, because it is a feature of their nature to be intentional. Essentially intentional actions are dependent on the intentional form, or means-end structure, for their identity.²⁷ To illustrate this sense of dependence, consider horses, which are a species of

²⁴ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 92-93; Jennifer Frey, “Happiness as the Constitutive Principle of Action in Thomas Aquinas,” *Philosophical Explorations* 22, no. 2, (2019), 215; Yair Levy, “The Priority of Intentional Action: From Developmental to Conceptual Priority,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming), 1-44.

²⁵ Thompson claims that sophisticated forms of rationalization arise out of the naïve form, in a manner analogous to how explanations by thoughts are supposed to arise from explanations of behavior in Wilfrid Sellars’ famous “Myth of Jones”. See, Thompson, 92 & 142-146. Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, (Harvard University Press, 1997), 102-103.

²⁶ Anscombe, *Intention*, §47; Some may make the interpretive point that Anscombe qualifies her claims by noting that these actions are always performed intentionally, “or at least voluntarily”. However, I adopt the traditional reading defended by Jonathan Bennett and Michael Moore. At the very least, my claims are inspired by Anscombe and some of her commentators.

²⁷ Anscombe, §47.

animal.²⁸ If “horseness”, or those essential features of being a horse, was removed from a horse, it seems difficult to imagine what would remain of the horse. It is not as though there would remain a pure animal which is neither a horse nor some other species. The horse as an integrated organism would be destroyed, and a mere corpse takes its place. The horse is reduced to a mere aggregate of biological matter that is not organized into a living being. Analogously, if the intentional form were removed from an essentially intentional action like marrying, then nothing would remain of it. The act of marrying is destroyed, and an unorganized collection of events takes its place.

Some philosophers argue that a few of Anscombe’s examples of essentially intentional actions suffer from counterexamples. Beddor and Pavase claim that it is possible to non-intentionally marry, hunt, and greet.²⁹ As a response, I will suggest a way to respond to Beddor and Pavese’s argument against essentialism. Then, I will gesture at one way of discerning which actions are essentially intentional that helps to preserve Anscombe’s aforementioned contentions. In so doing, I will formulate one sufficient condition for essentially intentional action. Beddor and Pavese’s argument against essentialism depends on the view that all intentional actions are necessarily in the “control” of the agent in virtue of her practical knowledge. With the control condition in play, one can create an indefinite amount of counterexamples to essentially intentional actions. For any putative essentially intentional action, one can generate cases that the act is performed unintentionally by introducing a sufficient amount of luck such that the agent lacks the necessary control for intentional action. For example, an agent may be able to successfully marry someone without being epistemically confident about exactly what words to

²⁸ This example is borrowed from Anton Ford, see; Anton Ford, “Action and Generality,” in *Essays on Anscombe’s Intention*, ed. Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby, & Frederick Stoutland, (Harvard University Press, 2011), 83.

²⁹ Beddor & Pavese, “Practical Knowledge without Luminosity,” 929-931.

utter during the marriage ceremony. Suppose the agent merely guesses that the right words to say are “I do” and, luckily, their guess is correct, and they successfully become a newly-wed. The agent marries without being in control of their marrying, thereby rendering their marrying unintentional.³⁰ However, some philosophers of action argue that control is not necessary for intentional action. These philosophers claim that intentional action only *normally* or *usually* entails control and practical knowledge of what one is doing.³¹ This more modest control condition allows for fringe cases of intentional action that do not involve a large degree of control. This condition could allow for cases of marrying, as the one above, to be both uncontrolled and intentional. The essentialist ought to adopt a modest control condition on intentional action in order to undercut Beddor and Pavese’s argument and to accommodate uncontrolled cases of Anscombe’s classic examples of essentially intentional acts.³²

Now, I will gesture at one way of discerning which kinds of actions are essentially intentional and offer a sufficient condition on essentially intentional action. Anscombe describes some essentially intentional actions as being such that, “someone who is doing it should think he is doing it.”³³ Essentially intentional actions are such that they must be “minded” and intelligent in virtue of the agent’s practical reason, but not necessarily consciously thought about through its entire duration.³⁴ Anscombe claims that the content of the thought of the action does not include the nature of the action, but instead the, “appropriate *expectations* and *calculations* in connexion

³⁰ This is not Beddor and Pavese’s exact example, but it matches in structure with their example of uncontrolled greeting.

³¹ For a defense of a modest control and practical knowledge condition, see J. Adam Carter & Joshua Shepherd, “Knowledge, Practical Knowledge, and Intentional Action,” *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 21, (2023), 556-579.

³² Ben Holguin and Harvey Lederman endorse a similar strategy in response to Beddor and Pavese’s argument. Ben Holguin & Harvey Lederman, “Trying without fail,” Manuscript, (2023), 23.

³³ Elizabeth Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice, and Whether it Needs to be Respected *in Foro Interno*,” *Critica* 3, (1969), 61.

³⁴ For more on mindedness and intelligence without explicit conscious thought in Anscombean action theory, see, Markos Valaris, “On the Instrumental Structure of Actions,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 258, (2015), 77.

with e.g. moving this [chess] piece from point A to point B.”³⁵ To illustrate this point, Anscombe discusses marrying and states that, “If someone seriously thought he was only rehearsing [marriage], he would not afterwards *act* as if he thought he was married: if he did so, his plea that he ‘thought it was only a rehearsal’ would not be heard.”³⁶ Marrying is essentially intentional partly because one cannot be performing the act without being aware of the practical significance of performing the act.³⁷ When one is marrying, one is aware of the practical implications of marriage and subsequently would behave accordingly as a married person. Thus, one manner of discerning which actions are essentially intentional is by discerning which actions are such that a condition of their performance is that one must grasp the practical implications of them as one performs them. Some other essentially intentional actions alongside Anscombe’s list may thereby include “promising”, “blessing”, “declaring war”, and “resigning”. To be clear, these acts are essentially intentional under the description of “promising”, “hiring”, and “blessing”. This view does not imply that, for example, more specific descriptions like “hiring *John*” or “hiring *quickly*” are descriptions of actions that can only be done intentionally. One may be intentionally acting under the description “hiring” and unintentionally acting under the description “hiring John”, perhaps because the agent confused the names of applicants.

Many of the examples of essentially intentional actions mentioned thus far are what John Searle would categorize as *commissives* or *declaratives*. Commissives and declaratives are speech acts that have a world-to-mind direction of fit and that aim at changing the world.³⁸

³⁵ Anscombe, “On Promising and its Justice,” 72.

³⁶ Anscombe, 72.

³⁷ In this line of thought, an essentially intentional action is similar to a performative utterance that must succeed to be the kind of utterance it is; see. J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances,” in *Philosophical Papers*, (Oxford University Press, 1979), 237.

³⁸ Some declaratives also have a “dual direction of fit”; they have both a world-to-mind and mind-to-world direction of fit.

Searle argues that speech acts that impose obligations, such as “promising”, are able to impose obligations because they can only be performed within the bounds of some constitutive rules or “institutions”.³⁹ Barry Smith writes that,

where such [constitutive] rules obtain we can perform certain special types of activities (analogous to playing chess)... Promisings are utterances which count as falling under the institutional concept act of promise, a concept which is logically tied to further concepts such as obligation in such a way that wherever the one is exemplified then so too is the other. When I engage in the activity of promising, then I thereby subject myself in a quite specific way to the corresponding system of constitutive rules. In virtue of this I count as standing under an obligation.⁴⁰

It is a part of the nature of promising that it issues an obligation to those who promise. An obligation by promising cannot arise unless one partakes of a system of promising with constitutive rules, just as one cannot make a chess move unless one partakes of a chess game with its constitutive rules.⁴¹ An agent can act under the description “playing chess” if and only if they grasp the practical implications of playing chess and moving chess pieces. It is constitutive of the act of playing chess that one grasps the practical significance of potential chess maneuvers, or, in other words, grasps and accepts the rules of chess. Similarly, one cannot partake of a system with constitutive rules in a way that necessarily generates obligations unless they do so intentionally; an agent cannot render themselves and their activity subject to an institution by sheer accident.⁴² The obligations that are generated by the act of promising are partially grounded in the fact that one has knowingly consented to an institution. One must

³⁹ John Searle, *Speech Acts*, (Cambridge University Press, 1969), 56.

⁴⁰ Barry Smith, “John Searle: From Speech Acts to Social Theory,” in *John Searle*, ed. Barry Smith, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

⁴¹ Smith, “John Searle,” 10.

⁴² It remains possible to involuntarily subject oneself to rules, as in the case of one who is coerced by external powers to partake of a game or practice.

knowingly consent to an institution's norms about how to promise and subsequently guide their activity in accordance with these norms in order to make a promise. One cannot unintentionally adhere to an institution and guide their activity in accordance with its norms, just as one cannot unintentionally choose to play a game of chess and guide their chess moves in accordance with the rules of chess. The conceptual connection between the generation of an obligation in a promise and intentional action lies in the fact that one can only generate an obligation by doing some prior action, namely, by knowingly adhering to an institution. These obligation-generating acts are necessarily done by doing something else. Thus, Anscombe's "How?" question is necessarily applicable to them. The teleological means-end structure characteristic of intentional action is built into the nature of a kind of action that necessarily creates an obligation. Promising, marrying, and declaring war are all kinds of actions that can only be performed *by* doing some other action as a means.⁴³ Therefore, all declaratives that necessarily impose obligations, like marrying, promising, and declaring war, are essentially intentional. This point can be extended to further non-declarative actions that necessarily impose obligations of some kind. For example, "playing baseball" or "playing chess" are actions that require subjecting oneself to the constitutive rules of each game that impose certain obligations about how to behave (i.e., obligations that make certain acts "fair" or "proper" or "good" as opposed to "cheating" or "inappropriate" or "bad").⁴⁴

This sufficient condition for essentially intentional action can be formulated as the following:

⁴³ So, none of these actions are "basic actions", namely, actions that are done immediately and by no prior means.

⁴⁴ The fact that these broader actions are essentially intentional does not imply that every action done in a baseball game, a chess game, or a soccer game is an intentional action. For example, infractions and penalties are given to players for unintentional "hand-balls" in soccer games. Nonetheless, these penalties presuppose that the player is "playing soccer" intentionally.

Obligation Generation Condition (OGC): If an agent *S* is performing an action ϕ and the nature of ϕ is such that it necessarily generates an obligation upon *S* in virtue of requiring conformity to institutions, then ϕ is an essentially intentional action

In sum, all activities that necessarily generate obligations of some kind by requiring conformity to institutions (constitutive rules) involve essentially intentional actions. As Searle notes, the reality that many of these actions are possible because of human social institutions does not take away from the fact that these actions are a part of the fabric of human agency and human nature.⁴⁵ Alongside Searle, Anscombe herself argues that common human actions that generate obligations, such as “transactions”, are dependent on the existence of institutions.⁴⁶ To be clear, OGC does not imply that every act that necessitates an obligation on the performer thereby must require conformity to institutions. For example, suppose that a psychopathic serial killer disregards all social institutions and kills an innocent person. The killer is held responsible for his actions and obligated to perform certain duties regardless of whether they conform to certain institutions. People are held responsible for murder regardless of their conformity to institutions. However, people are held responsible for promising precisely because they promised by conforming to the institutions surrounding the practice of ‘promise-making’. OGC implies that the set of actions that necessarily generate obligations *because* they require conformity to institutions are essentially intentional.

⁴⁵ Searle, *Speech Acts*, 186.

⁴⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, “On Brute Facts,” *Analysis*, 18, no. 3, (1958), 69-72.

In contrast to essentially intentional actions, an accidentally intentional action is a kind of action that can be performed unintentionally. Some of these actions that Anscombe mentions are “intruding”, “offending”, “dropping”, and “kicking”.⁴⁷ All of these kinds of actions are such that they can be performed unintentionally because their intrinsic nature does not include the intentional form. For example, an accidentally intentional action, like “dropping”, can be performed unintentionally and therefore can exist without the intentional form. A particular instance of “dropping” can be performed by mere accident, such as when one trips and drops their drink, and thereby exist without being done by doing some prior action or without being done for the sake of some further action. Furthermore, given OGC, an accidentally intentional action does not necessarily generate an obligation upon the agent who performs it. One can perform an accidentally intentional action like “abandoning”, “switching”, “placing”, or “kicking” without imposing an obligation upon oneself to behave in some way. In sum, intentional cases of “dropping” are not intentional in virtue of some feature that is intrinsic to the nature of “dropping”, but in virtue of something other than itself.

If an accidentally intentional action is performed intentionally, its being performed intentionally is in need of explanation because these intentional actions are *contingently* or *accidentally* intentional. By contrast, if an essentially intentional action being performed intentionally is not in need of explanation because these intentional actions are *necessarily* or *essentially* intentional.⁴⁸ Since essentially intentional actions are intrinsically intentional, they do not have to possess the intentional form in virtue of something else. Thus, essentially intentional actions can be “final actions”, actions which are not sub-actions, since an essentially intentional

⁴⁷ Anscombe, *Intention*, §47.

⁴⁸ For a brief survey of recent treatments of the relationship between essence, necessity, and explanation, see Michael Wallner, “The Structure of Essentialist Explanations of Necessity,” *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1, (2020), 4-13.

action can have the intentional form without being grounded in another action. Nonetheless, an essentially intentional action may be a sub-action, just as something that is good in itself may also be good for the sake of something else. Hence, one can be marrying simply for the sake of marrying, or for the sake of appeasing one's parents, or for both simultaneously. So, an essentially intentional action can be done *without* being done for the sake of something else.⁴⁹

In light of these facts about how each category of action relates to the intentional form, it follows that all accidentally intentional actions, whenever performed intentionally, are sub-actions. Accidentally intentional actions are always dependent on something else for their intentional form, and thereby must be grounded in another action. So, an accidentally intentional action is always done for the sake of another action. We can formulate the following variation of NRP in acknowledgment of these differences as the following:

Naïve Rationalization Principle of Accidentally Intentional Actions (NRPA): If an agent's intentional action ϕ is an accidentally intentional action, then ϕ is a sub-action and is an intentional action in virtue of being a grounded part of a larger intentional action Ψ

To summarize, all accidentally intentional actions are sub-actions and are intentional in virtue of their grounding relationship with some larger intentional action. Additionally, essentially intentional actions can be final actions or sub-actions. Lastly, we can now see that all final

⁴⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas makes similar points in his distinction between essentially ordered and accidentally ordered ends in practical reasoning. Essentially intentional actions are to final ends as accidentally intentional actions are to intermediate ends. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. English Dominican Province, (Christian Classics, 1981), I-II, q. 1, art. 4.

actions are essentially intentional since no final actions are grounded in prior actions and thereby they must be intentional in virtue of themselves.

1.3 An Argument for Essentially Intentional Actions

With all the key concepts on the table, I will now present the *Grounding Argument* for the existence of essentially intentional actions.

- (1) All accidentally intentional actions are sub-actions and are intentional in virtue of being a grounded part of a larger intentional action. (*NRPA*)
- (2) If all intentional actions were accidentally intentional, then chains of dependence between intentional actions would proceed *ad infinitum*. (derived from 1)
- (3) Chains of dependence cannot proceed *ad infinitum*. (metaphysical foundationalism)
- (4) All intentional actions are not accidentally intentional. (*modus tollens* 2,3)
- (5) Therefore, essentially intentional actions exist. (derived from 4)

Premise (1) states NRPA, which is based on naïve action theory's central tenets and the contingent nature of accidentally intentional actions. Premise (2) is inferred from NRPA, since if all intentional actions are accidentally intentional and are thereby dependent on another action, then an infinite regress of dependence between actions would emerge. Premise (3) is a plausible principle that states that there cannot be infinite chains of metaphysical dependence. So, the above argument depends on whether some variety of metaphysical foundationalism is true.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For an overview of metaphysical foundationalism, see Thomas Oberle, "Metaphysical Foundationalism: Consensus and Controversy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 59, no. 1, (2022), 97.

Additionally, to be clear, the sort of dependence here is ontological dependence, and not *efficient causal* dependence. Essentially intentional actions do not efficiently cause accidentally intentional actions, in the way one billiard ball may push another billiard ball across a pool table. Instead, essentially intentional actions constitute the metaphysical foundation which helps to sustain the existence of accidentally intentional actions, as an Aristotelian natural substance helps to sustain the existence of its constituents.⁵¹ Aristotelian substances like acorns, dogs, and humans, are independent and fundamental entities, which all other entities, like cells, bones, and organs, inhere in and depend upon for their existence. Essentially intentional actions are similar to substances in that they are fundamental actions, which accidentally intentional actions inhere in and depend upon for their existence. Premise (4) straightforwardly follows from (2) and (3) through *modus tollens*. The conclusion (5) is derived from (4), since intentional actions are either accidentally or essentially intentional, and if not all intentional actions are accidentally intentional, then some intentional actions must be essentially intentional.

In broad strokes, the Grounding Argument demonstrates that given the nature of naïve rationalization and the impossibility of infinite regresses of dependence, essentially intentional actions must exist as the metaphysical foundations of accidentally intentional actions. In the wider metaphysical order, essentially intentional actions are dependent on the practical reasoning of agents, and accidentally intentional actions are dependent on essentially intentional actions.⁵² Given the transitivity of grounding, accidentally intentional actions remain grounded in the practical reasoning of agents. So, there is an important difference between two possible views of intentional action within naïve action theory. The first view is the original position described by

⁵¹ Phil Corkum, "Substance and Independence in Aristotle," in *Varieties of Dependence: Ontological Dependence, Supervenience, and Response-Dependence*, edited by Miguel Hoeltje, Benjamin Schnieder, & Alex Steinberg, (Philosophia Verlag, 2013), 36; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, (Hackett Publishing Co., 2016), 1069a16-28.

⁵² This statement does not imply that actions are not, in some sense, thoughts, as some Anscombeans claim.

Thompson, which states that all actions can be intentional by simply possessing the intentional form. Call this view *naïve formalism*. On this view, all kinds of intentional actions stand on the same metaphysical level and are not hierarchically grounded. The second view is the position of naïve essentialism, which states that all actions can be intentional by either possessing the intentional form, or by possessing the intentional form *and* by being grounded in an essentially intentional action. On naïve essentialism, the intentional form remains fundamental as that which makes an action intentional. However, for every accidentally intentional action, there must be an essentially intentional action which grounds it. Naïve essentialism ought to be endorsed over naïve formalism because of the Grounding Argument. This richer picture of the ontology of action appreciates the asymmetrical relationships of metaphysical dependence between essentially and accidentally intentional actions.

2 THREE OBJECTIONS TO THE GROUNDING ARGUMENT

In this part, I will focus on what I take to be the three most powerful objections to the Grounding Argument.

2.1 First Objection

The first objection states that the first premise is false because the principles of naïve action theory seem to entail that sub-actions cannot be accidentally intentional. As a result, it seems that accidentally intentional actions do not exist. Thompson may appear to portray sub-actions as not merely parts, but as *integral* parts of a larger intentional action. The doctrine of integral parts stretches back to Aristotle, who took organs and limbs like “hearts” and “hands” to

have their identity in virtue of their function in a kind of organism like the human body.⁵³ For example, a hand is defined as a hand because of its natural function in the human body as a “grasping instrument”. If the hand was removed from the body, then it loses its identity as a hand because it can no longer perform its proper function of “grasping”. A hand that is cut off from the body is merely a hand in name as opposed to a hand in reality. Thus, hands are defined in part by their natural function in the larger human body. If sub-actions are integral parts, then sub-actions do not have their own identity as “dropping” or “offending”, which can be contingently formed into “intentional dropping” or “intentional offending”. Instead, sub-actions are essentially intentional because their identity is inseparable from the intentional form they receive from the larger act. Therefore, the first premise of the argument is false because sub-actions cannot be accidentally intentional and therefore do not exist.

This objection fails because, unlike organs and limbs, actions do not have natural functions which they can be defined by. Although I may be egg-mixing because I am omelet-making, it is not as though egg-mixing is a kind of action which is defined by its function in larger the activity of omelet-making. It is possible for me to be egg-mixing because I am pancake-making, cake-making, bomb-making, or store-vandalizing. I could be egg-mixing because I am doing a wide array of different actions. Egg-mixing is not defined with respect to its function in the larger action of “omelet-making”, because egg-mixing does not have an intrinsic natural function that ties it to omelet-making. Furthermore, it seems that *no* sub-action is defined by its function in a larger action. For any sub-action, one can perform that sub-action because one is performing many different kinds of actions. There is nothing about sub-actions like “dropping”, “offending”, or “egg-mixing”, such that these kinds of actions are defined by

⁵³ Aristotle, *Politics*, (Hackett Publishing Inc., 2017), 1253a19-28; Robert Mayhew, “Part and Whole in Aristotle’s Political Philosophy,” *The Journal of Ethics* 1, (1997), 327-328.

being done for the sake of some specific kind of action like “example-illustrating”, “dominance-displaying”, or “omelet-making”. Unlike organs and limbs, actions do not have natural functions that they can be defined by.⁵⁴ Thompson’s account of naïve rationalization only implies that a particular sub-action can be explained by a particular larger act, not that *specific kinds* of sub-actions can only be explained by *specific kinds* of larger acts. Additionally, Thompson does not suggest that sub-actions can be rationalized by larger actions because sub-actions are defined by their natural function in the larger action. The function or “end” of a sub-action is determined by the agent herself through her power of practical reason, as opposed to being determined by the intrinsic nature of the sub-action. Thus, sub-actions cannot be integral parts defined by their natural function, and the first objection fails.⁵⁵

2.2 Second Objection

The second objection also states that the first premise of the Grounding Argument is false because all token intentional actions are essentially intentional and are thereby not intentional in virtue of anything. On this view, although not all *kinds* or *types* of action may be essentially intentional, all *particular* or *token* intentional actions are essentially intentional. For every intentional action, that particular intentional action is essentially intentional. Token intentional actions are such that their teleological means-end structure cannot be separated without the act being destroyed. This view is motivated by some interpretations of Anscombe’s *Intention* that suggest that intentional acts are *formally* intentional, just as numbers are *formally* countable.⁵⁶ As

⁵⁴ Hendrik Lorenz has argued that Aristotle believed that certain actions have natural goals. However, Lorenz’s view of natural goals is importantly different from the view of natural function involved in the integral parts view of sub-actions discussed above. See Hendrik Lorenz, “Natural Goals of Actions in Aristotle,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 4, (2015), 594.

⁵⁵ In an Aristotelian framework, sub-actions could be understood as “actual constituents” instead of integral parts. See Mayhew, “Part and Whole,” 328; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1023b32-35.

⁵⁶ See Ford, “Arithmetic of Intention,” 129 & 140.

a result of these facts, intentional actions are not intentional in virtue of anything apart from their essential nature. Thus, the first premise is false because actions are not intentional in virtue of being a grounded part of a larger action.

This objection fails for two reasons. First, on a plausible and broadly Aristotelian sortal essentialism, the essence of an object is that which makes an object the kind of object that it is.⁵⁷ The essence of “rational animality” is that which makes an object a human being and distinguishes it from non-rational creatures like dogs and whales. A particular instance of a kind has all of its essential properties in virtue of its essence, which it shares with all other instances of its kind. Thus, no two instances of a common kind have differing essential features; no two human beings can have differing essential properties. So, it is impossible for a kind of action that can be instantiated intentionally or unintentionally, to have instances that are essentially intentional. Furthermore, it seems evident that there are many kinds of actions that can be done unintentionally (e.g., “dropping”, “kicking”, and “offending”). Therefore, not all token intentional actions are essentially intentional. The objector must provide an account of what it means to be an essence and an essential property that allows for various instances of a common kind to have differing essential features.⁵⁸ Second, the fact that an act is essentially intentional does not entail that it cannot be intentional in virtue of something else. An essentially intentional action can be intentional in virtue of being performed for the sake of another intentional action, just as an intrinsically good object can also be good in virtue of being instrumentally good for attaining a further end. So, even if the antecedent of the conditional statement ‘if a token action is essentially intentional, then the action cannot be intentional in virtue of something else’

⁵⁷ Jacob Rosen, “Essence and End in Aristotle,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 46, (2014), 84; Penelope Mackie, “Sortal Concepts and Essential Properties,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 176, (1994), 311-312.

⁵⁸ This view would necessarily not be a species of sortal essentialism.

obtains, the consequent would not follow. Importantly, it is the consequent of the conditional that undercuts the first premise of the Grounding Argument. In sum, the second objection fails because instances of a common kind cannot have differing essential features and the conditional statement is invalid.

2.3 Third Objection

The third objection is that the Grounding Argument is invalid because it commits what Scott MacDonald calls “Anscombe’s fallacy”.⁵⁹ Anscombe’s fallacy is a quantifier shift and is the inference from the statement, “all chains must end somewhere” to the statement, “all chains must end in the same place”. Anscombe attributed this fallacy to Aristotle, who appears to infer that since chains of practical reasoning must terminate in an ultimate *telos*, that all chains of reasoning must terminate in one shared ultimate *telos*.⁶⁰ The objection says the Grounding Argument falls to this fallacy by inferring that since chains of naïve rationalization must end at some point, that they must end in some special category of action, namely, in essentially intentional actions.

This objection fails because the Grounding Argument does not make this kind of fallacious inference. The argument infers from NRPA *and* metaphysical foundationalism, that there must exist essentially intentional actions. Metaphysical foundationalism helps to justify the inference from the statement “all chains of dependence must end somewhere” to “all chains of dependence must end in an ungrounded ground”. Since only essentially intentional actions can fill this role, the conclusion follows in a valid manner. Therefore, the third objection fails.

⁵⁹ Anscombe, §21; Scott MacDonald, “Ultimate Ends in Practical Reasoning: Aquinas’s Aristotelian Moral Psychology and Anscombe’s Fallacy,” *The Philosophical Review* 1, (1991), 31-32.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (Hackett Publishing Company, 2019), 1094a1-6.

3 ACCIDENTALISM AND STANDARD PROBLEMS FOR REDUCTIONISM

In this third part, I argue that accidentalism is a part of the reductionist research program in the philosophy of action, and thereby faces some well-known problems associated with the reductive approach. Additionally, I argue that naïve essentialism is able to address these problems in virtue of being an Anscombean formal-causal theory of action and because of the role it affords to essentially intentional actions.⁶¹ Accidentalism is a part of the reductive approach to action because it implies that all actions can have their identity and existence in virtue of facts that are independent of facts about practical reason and the intentional form; all actions are intrinsically mindless and brute physical events. As a result, an intentional action is a composite sum of an event and some mental states or “intentions”, which are metaphysically independent of each other. All intentional actions are thereby composed out of two more basic entities that are appropriately combined in order to make an intentional action, just as a mere heap is composed out of more basic elements that are appropriately related to one another.

Harry Frankfurt presents the famous “problem of action” in response to reductive approaches to action.⁶² The “problem of action” is the challenge to offer a principled account of the ontological difference between actions and mere bodily movements such as involuntary spasms and twitches. However, it seems difficult to see what this ontological difference can be. One well-known proposal to address this problem is offered by the reductive causal theory of action or “causalism”. Causalism claims that an event is an intentional action if it is caused by

⁶¹ This does not imply that naïve essentialism has unique reasons, such that no Anscombean non-causal theory of action cannot make similar moves against these well-known problems for reductionism.

⁶² Harry G. Frankfurt, “The Problem of Action,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 2, (1978), 157.

the appropriate mental states.⁶³ For example, if an action like “kicking a ball” is caused by the intention to kick the ball in order to score a goal, then the action is intentional. However, causalism faces the notable “problem of causal deviance”, where the appropriate mental states do cause actions to occur, and thereby ought to make an intentional action, but the mental states caused the action in the wrong or “deviant” way.⁶⁴ Thus, it does not seem as though an intentional action exists even though the causal theory implies that it does.

Donald Davidson offers the famous “nervous climber” example of causal deviance:

A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never *chose* to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally.⁶⁵

In this case, the right mental states cause the intended outcome to occur. However, due to the deviant manner by which the right mental states caused the intended outcome to occur, it seems inappropriate to assert that the action was performed intentionally.⁶⁶ Since Davidson’s initial discussion, causal theorists of action have been attempting to provide new and increasingly intricate ways of solving the problem of causal deviance without reaching a consensus.⁶⁷ This has led some to conclude that, “it does not seem that one can specify the right or non-deviant

⁶³ Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes,” in *Essays on Actions and Events*, ed. Donald Davidson (Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

⁶⁴ For an overview of the structure of the problem, see; Neil McDonnell, “The Deviance in Deviant Causal Chains,” *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 2, (2015), 162-170.

⁶⁵ Donald Davidson, “Freedom to Act,” in *Essays on Actions and Events*, ed. Donald Davidson (Oxford University Press, 2013), 79.

⁶⁶ For an overview of the structure of the problem, see; Neil McDonnell, “The Deviance in Deviant Causal Chains,” *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 2, (2015), 162-170.

⁶⁷ Della Rocca, *The Parmenidean Ascent*, 90; Juan S. Piñeros Glasscock & Sergio Tenenbaum, “Action,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, January 11, 2023, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/action/#ProbCausDevi>.

way for such states to occur other than in terms of the notion agency itself'.⁶⁸

However, naïve essentialism is able to avoid the problem of action and the problem of causal deviance. Naïve essentialism avoids the problem of action because it offers a principled account for the difference between actions and mere bodily movements by asserting that all actions are either essentially intentional or grounded in essentially intentional actions, and that no mere bodily movements are essentially intentional or grounded in an essentially intentional act. Mere bodily movements cannot be constituents of actions, since no mere bodily movement possesses the intentional form. Naïve essentialism also avoids the problem of causal deviance by holding that an action is intentional in virtue of its form as opposed to its causal history.⁶⁹ Actions are made intentional through their possession of a means-end structure, instead of their causal origin in mental states. So, naïve essentialism enjoys an advantage over accidentalism because of its ability to respond to these problems surrounding reductionism.

4 THREE NOTEWORTHY IMPLICATIONS OF NAÏVE ESSENTIALISM

Now, I will present three of naïve essentialism's auspicious implications for the philosophy of action.

4.1 First Implication

One implication is that essentially intentional actions are understood as "unrationalized rationalizers", which help to ultimately explain the existence and performance of all other

⁶⁸ Della Rocca, *Parmenidean Ascent*, 98.

⁶⁹ Sarah Paul, "Deviant Formal Causation," *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 5, no. 3, (2011), 8.

actions.⁷⁰ Interestingly, Thompson mentions that, “the proximate conclusion implicitly drawn by [David] Hume, that everything rationalized by anything is rationalized by something that isn’t rationalized by anything else, *might* nevertheless be right”.⁷¹ I believe that Hume’s conclusion that there are such unrationalized rationalizers is true, and is demonstrated as such by the Grounding Argument. Essentially intentional actions are understood to be unrationalized rationalizers in virtue of their position as the fundamental entity in the ontology of action. Practical reasoning expressed in descriptions of the form, “I am doing *x* because I am doing *y*”, is such that it requires essentially intentional actions as the terminus and unrationalized rationalizer of such chains of thought. Rational practical reasoning in the naïve form requires essentially intentional actions in order to be possible. This implication also extends to the realm of non-human animals. Naïve essentialism entails that since some animals can perform intentional actions, animals must also be able to perform essentially intentional actions.

This first implication may raise a concern that the aforementioned examples of essentially intentional acts and the scope of OGC cannot suffice to ground *all* the activities in the life of an animal. It seems as though not every action I perform is ultimately grounded in actions like “marrying”, “promising”, or those acts that generate obligations through conformity to institutions. Here, I non-committedly hypothesize another way to broaden the current set of essentially intentional acts. Perhaps some essentially intentional actions are those acts that animals perform because they are naturally inclined to in order to live a flourishing life.⁷² On this ‘natural goodness’ view, an animal may engage in “predator-fleeing”, “food-seeking”,

⁷⁰ For the sake of clarity, essentially intentional actions are not ultimate or first in the order of *execution*, such that they are all basic actions. Instead, what is first in the order of *intention* is always an essentially intentional action. Furthermore, these acts are called “unrationalized” rationalizers in the sense that they *can* be ungrounded final acts.

⁷¹ Thompson, *Life and Action*, 114.

⁷² This would be an Aristotelian-Thomistic proposal in spirit. See, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-I, q. 94, art. 1-6.

“socializing”, or “knowledge-seeking” because these activities are necessary for living a flourishing life as that kind of animal. Since these activities involve the pursuit of an end, one may argue that these acts are essentially intentional. Acts like “food-seeking” or “socializing” may be intrinsically end-directed such that they can only be done intentionally. With these “natural” essentially intentional acts in view, the formal sketch of the structure of practical life provided hereto enjoys more content and becomes more concrete.

4.2 Second Implication

Second, the Grounding Argument lends support to Juan S. Piñeros Glasscock’s “anti-Luminosity” argument against the epistemic condition for intentional action. The epistemic condition for intentional action states that, “Whenever an agent ϕ s intentionally, they know that they are ϕ -ing, and they have this knowledge in virtue of their knowledge of how to ϕ .”⁷³ As some critics have noted, one version of Piñeros Glasscock’s argument depends on the premise that essentially intentional actions exist.⁷⁴ The argument demonstrates that given the “Margin for Error for Action Principle” (MARA), the epistemic condition, and essentialism, one can generate a *reductio ad absurdum* in which agents are performing intentional actions when it should be impossible. MARA states, “If [agent] S knows that S is ϕ ing [acting] intentionally at t [a moment of time], then S is ϕ ing intentionally at $t+1$.”⁷⁵ If the epistemic condition is true and intentional act requires knowledge, then, given MARA, agents performing intentional acts are also performing those acts in temporally nearby cases. However, if an act is essentially intentional, then those nearby acts are also intentional. Thus, an infinite regress of acts being performed into

⁷³ Beddor & Pavase, 922.

⁷⁴ Beddor & Pavese, “Practical Knowledge without Luminosity,” 928; Piñeros Glasscock, “Practical Knowledge and Luminosity,” 1240.

⁷⁵ Beddor & Pavese, 924.

the indefinite future is generated.⁷⁶ This has led critics to say that, “the real upshot of the argument is that, given Margin for Error, we must choose between two claims that have been widely endorsed by action theorists: an epistemic condition on intentional action and the doctrine of essentially intentional actions.”⁷⁷ The Grounding Argument offers support for the doctrine of essentially intentional actions, and thereby offers support for Piñeros Glasscock’s argument that knowledge is not necessary for intentional action.

4.3 Third Implication

Third, naive essentialism is able to offer a response to Sarah Paul’s problem of deviant formal causation for Anscombean theories of action. Paul argues that Anscombean theories of action are not able to explain the metaphysical difference between cases where an agent performs an action as their aim or merely as a voluntarily accepted side effect. She presents the case of a Murderous Gardener who is knowingly pumping poisoned water into a house filled with people with the aim of killing its inhabitants in order to effect political change. Then, she presents a similar case of an Indifferent Gardener who is knowingly performing the same physical movements with awareness of the deaths that it will inflict, while merely doing so with the aim of completing his job and making money. Here, the Murderous Gardener acts with the aim of killing the inhabitants, whereas the Indifferent Gardener acts with the aim of making money. According to Paul, these two actions are metaphysically distinct, yet, the Anscombean view cannot account for this difference because both actions possess the same teleological means-end structure in virtue of the agent’s practical cognition; both Gardeners have practical cognition of

⁷⁶ Piñeros Glasscock’s argument may be adjusted to say that practical knowledge of one’s action entails that one has knowledge of one’s action as an *intentional* action. This rests on a thesis about the nature of practical cognition that is distinct from the metaphysical thesis of essentialism. Nonetheless, it is true that naive essentialism lends support to *one version* of Piñeros Glasscock’s argument that has been critiqued in recent literature.

⁷⁷ Beddor & Pavese, 927.

what they are doing and how they are doing it.⁷⁸ Thus, Paul argues, Anscombean view imply that both Gardeners are performing the same action whereas, intuitively, they are not.

Naive essentialism, in conjunction with “intentionalism”, is able to account for this metaphysical difference in the following way.⁷⁹ Intentionalism states that an agent can perform an intentional action without having an intention to do so. Here, both Gardeners are intentionally killing the house’s inhabitants since the “How?” question is applicable to their acts. Both Gardeners are killing the house’s inhabitants *by* pumping water into the house by moving their arms up and down. However, the intention with which the Murderous Gardener acts is to kill the inhabitants, whereas the intention with which the Indifferent Gardener acts is to make money. Thus, in the case of the Murderous Gardener, the action of “killing the house’s inhabitants” grounds and rationalizes the actions of “moving arms up and down” and “pumping water into the house”. However, in the case of the Indifferent Gardener, the action of “killing the house’s inhabitants” is grounded by the action of “making money”, but itself does not *ground* any sub-actions involved in “making money”. So, the action of “killing the house’s inhabitants” does not explain why the Indifferent Gardener is pumping water into the house. The two agents’ respective actions are metaphysically distinct because there are distinct relationships of grounding exhibited within each action’s structure. The distinct relationships of grounding are themselves explained by each agent’s practical reasoning, namely, the Murderous Gardner takes the act of killing to be their aim while the Indifferent Gardner takes the act of killing to be a foreseen side effect.

⁷⁸ Paul, “Deviant Formal Causation,” 10-12.

⁷⁹ Stephen Davey, “How to Respond to the Problem of Deviant Formal Causation,” *Philosophia* 41, no. 3, (2013), 704.

5 CONCLUSION

Naïve essentialism unpacks the nature of essentially intentional actions in light of naïve action theory and the Anscombean tradition. The Grounding Argument for the existence of essentially intentional actions flows out of naïve action theory and has important consequences for how one should view the structure of practical reasoning and the metaphysics of action. Accidentalism is a part of the reductive research program in the philosophy of action, and thereby faces some standard problems associated with reductionism about action. Since naïve essentialism is able to address these issues, this fact serves as further support for naïve essentialism over accidentalism. My development of naïve essentialism has auspicious implications for, and illuminates the indispensable metaphysical and explanatory role of essentially intentional actions in, the philosophy of mind and action.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ As an aside, some Gricean philosophers of language believe that all communicative acts are necessarily intentional. See, Ray Buchanan, “Intention and the Basis of Meaning,” *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 23, (2018), 642. Naïve essentialism may offer support for this view of linguistic communication.

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