
 Bradford Books

- Edward C. T. Walker, Editor. Explorations in THE BIOLOGY OF LANGUAGE. 1979.
- Daniel C. Dennett. BRAINSTORMS. 1979.
- Charles E. Marks. COMMISSUROTOMY, CONSCIOUSNESS AND UNITY OF MIND. 1980.
- John Haugeland, Editor. MIND DESIGN. 1981.
- Fred I. Dretske. KNOWLEDGE AND THE FLOW OF INFORMATION. 1981.
- Jerry A. Fodor. REPRESENTATIONS. 1981.
- Ned Block, Editor. IMAGERY. 1981.
- Roger N. Shepard and Lynn A. Cooper. MENTAL IMAGES AND THEIR TRANSFORMATIONS. 1982.
- Hubert L. Dreyfus, Editor, in collaboration with Harrison Hall. HUSSERL, INTENTIONALITY AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE. 1982.
- John Macnamara. NAMES FOR THINGS. 1982.
- Natalie Abrams and Michael D. Buckner, Editors. MEDICAL ETHICS. 1982.
- Morris Halle and G. N. Clements. PROBLEM BOOK IN PHONOLOGY. 1983.
- George D. Romanos. QUINE AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY. 1983.
- Jerry A. Fodor. MODULARITY OF MIND. 1983.
- Robert Cummins. THE NATURE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATION. 1983.
- Stephen Stich. FOLK PSYCHOLOGY AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE. 1983.
- Irvin Rock. THE LOGIC OF PERCEPTION. 1983.
- Jon Barwise and John Perry. SITUATIONS AND ATTITUDES. 1983.
- Elliot Sober, Editor. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY. 1983.
- Norbert Hornstein. LOGIC AS GRAMMAR. 1984.
- Paul A. Churchland. MATTER AND CONSCIOUSNESS. 1984.
- Owen J. Flanagan. THE SCIENCE OF THE MIND. 1984.
- Myles Brand. INTENDING AND ACTING. 1984.

Intending and Acting

Toward a Naturalized Action Theory

Myles Brand

A Bradford Book
The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

© 1984 by The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Palatino by Village Typographers, Inc., and printed and bound by The Murray Printing Company in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Brand, Myles.

Intending and acting.

"A Bradford book."

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Act (Philosophy) 2. Intentionality (Philosophy)

I. Title.

B105.A35B73 1984 128'.4 83-24817

ISBN 0-262-02202-8

Contents

Preface ix

PART I

The Nature of Human Action

Chapter 1

Philosophical Action Theory 3

1. *Human Action* 3
2. *Four Types of Theories about the Nature of Human Action* 6
3. *The Oldtime Volitional Theory* 11
4. *The Mental Action Theory* 12
5. *The Causal Theory* 15
6. *Action and Antecedential Waywardness* 19
7. *Intentional Action and Consequential Waywardness* 23
8. *The Intentionality Thesis* 31

Chapter 2

A Fundamental Problem 33

1. *A Fundamental Problem in Philosophical Action Theory* 33
2. *Sellars on the Fundamental Problem* 37
3. *The Functionalistic Response* 39
4. *A Program for a Solution* 45

PART II

The Ontological Foundations for Action Theory

Chapter 3

Events as Spatiotemporal Particulars 51

1. *The Informal Picture* 51
2. *Identity Conditions* 59
3. *Identity Conditions for Events* 65
4. *The Semantical Interpretation of Identity Conditions for Events* 73
5. *Mental Events* 79

Chapter 4

The Objects of Mental Attitudes	85
1. Object-Assimilationism versus Attitude-Assimilationism	86
2. The Problem of Self-Referentiality	90
3. Action Initiation	94
4. Property Object-Assimilationism and Self-Referentiality	97
5. Property Object-Assimilationism and Other-Referentiality I	100
6. Property Object-Assimilationism and Other-Referentiality II	108

PART III

The Folk Psychology of Intending, Desiring, and Believing

Chapter 5

Desiring	121
1. Desiring Is Not a Necessary Condition for Intending	121
2. Desiring Is Not a Species of Intending	123
3. A Reconstructed Folk Psychological Model of the Act-Sequence	127
4. Some Preliminary Remarks about Desiring	131
5. A Preference Theory of Desire	135
6. Some Other Attitudes	140

Chapter 6

Intending and Believing	147
1. Intending and Believing	148
2. The Limits of Belief	153
3. Folk Psychology and Scientific Psychology	160
4. Conceptual Psychology	165

PART IV

Toward a Naturalized Action Theory

Chapter 7

Intention and Cognition	173
1. The Ideo-Motor Theory	174
2. The Program Theory	181
Appendix: James's Theory of Action	191

Chapter 8

Intentional Action and Cognition	201
1. Schank and Abelson's 1977 Script Theory	202
2. Self-Referentiality	209
3. Goals	212
4. Intentional Action	215

5. The Representational Language	218
6. The Constituents of Scripts and Plans	222
7. Schank's Revised Model	227
8. The Scope of Scientific Psychology	229

Chapter 9

Intention and Conation	237
1. The Folk Psychology of Conation	238
2. Drive Theory	242
3. Expectancy Theory	249
4. Production Systems	256
5. Motivation Systems	264

Notes 269

Bibliography 279

Index 289

Preface

Philosophers have long been concerned with human action. Some of the most penetrating remarks, for example, are to be found in Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*. But to a very significant degree this concern has been subservient to concerns with other philosophical issues, such as the nature of moral and legal responsibility, the apparent conflict between human freedom and causal determinism, and the possibility of a physicalistic explanation for all that there is. In the modern era Locke, Hume, Kant, and Bentham, to name a few, developed views about human action, but only in the service of broader metaphysical, epistemological, and moral concerns.

In the first half of this century philosophers dealing with action tended to follow the traditional pattern. For instance, Prichard developed an influential account, within the context of his moral theory, that identified actions with a species of mental events. However, Gilbert Ryle's *Concept of Mind* (1949) and J. L. Austin's papers of the same period altered the pattern. Although there was continued interest in using the results of action theory to resolve (or dissolve) long-standing philosophical problems, the focus shifted to the nature of action itself. With this shift attention to problems about action grew rapidly. In the three decades following the publication of the *Concept of Mind*, a spate of books and a deluge of articles on action theory appeared.

Philosophical action theory has evolved through several stages since the early 1950s. The first stage, which lasted until approximately 1970, was in some ways a continuation of earlier work. It was piecemeal; there was little attempt to provide a systematic theory. And although human action itself was the focus, action theory was still seen as an instrument to deal with other issues. Characteristic of this stage is that many of the best efforts were contained in articles. These have been collected in several anthologies: Brand (1970), Care and Landesman (1968), Lehrer (1966), and White (1968). Among the more influential books of this period are Anscombe's *Intention* (1963), Melden's *Free Action* (1961), Charles Taylor's *The Explanation*

of *Behavior* (1964), Richard Taylor's *Action and Purpose* (1966), and von Wright's *Norm and Action* (1963). The most influential and the most significant work of this period was Davidson's, especially his "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" (1963) and "The Logical Form of Action Sentences" (1966).

The second stage in the recent development of philosophical action theory is characterized by systematization and a relative lack of concern with associated issues. Goldman's *A Theory of Human Action* (1970) marked the emergence of this stage. Action theory began to flourish and achieve the status of an independent area of investigation. Among the more important books, in addition to Goldman's, are: Castañeda's *Thinking and Doing* (1975), Chisholm's *Person and Object* (1976b), Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of Action* (1973), Davis's *Theory of Action* (1979), Hornsby's *Actions* (1980), Thalberg's *Enigmas of Agency* (1972), and Thomson's *Acts and Other Events* (1977).

But stagnation set in. The philosophical lines were drawn: positions hardened, epicycles were added, and progress was slowed. Interest waned. Work on action theory derivative of that begun in the 1970's continues, but, it seems, without enthusiasm. To be sure, these projects are worthy ones and ought not to be abandoned. But it has become clear that their ability to explain the nature of human action is limited.

The goal of this book is to usher in the next—and third—stage of philosophical action theory. This stage is similar to the second in that the focus is systematic theorizing about human action. But it differs from its predecessors in being continuous with *nonphilosophical* work on human action. Through the second stage philosophers generally ignored the scientific study of action. Of course, passing mention of related psychological theories was made; but there was no serious attempt to integrate philosophical action theory with the relevant scientific theories. My contention is that future progress in action theory depends on the integration of the philosophical with the scientific. Put another way, I advocate the naturalization of philosophical action theory.

This idea is not new. William James's view in the *Principles* (1890) was that philosophical and psychological concerns about action are intermingled. But James seemed to have held this position inadvertently, since he tended to confuse the philosophical with the psychological. There is nothing inadvertent about the position advocated here: I want to argue that philosophical and scientific theories about action are continuous. This line of development for action theory, it is well to note, coheres with some recent developments in epistemology, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language,

and value theory. It is no longer heresy to see the philosophical enterprise as continuous with the scientific one: one dogma of empiricism is finally giving way. Probably the most significant work of this type has dealt with the philosophical foundations of psychology (see, especially, Fodor (1975, 1981b, 1983), Dennett (1969, 1978)). Those efforts have focused on cognitive psychology, on the input and central systems, as it were. One of my goals is to focus attention on the philosophical foundations of the human output system.

Let me say at the outset that this book is limited in scope. And that in two ways. It is not the definitive statement on the naturalization of action theory. I view it, rather, as the first—tentative—steps in this direction. It is intended to make a contribution to the resolution (or dissolution) of certain conceptual problems about human action. It is a part of an ongoing literature, not the last word. It is a step in the dialectic. Second, I have not attempted to provide an exhaustive account of human action. For example, I have said nothing helpful about the affective influences on action. My target is intention. But even here there are lacunae. I do not discuss conditional intentions, nor the way in which intentions can be reasons. It is not because these topics are unimportant or philosophically uninteresting. They are important and interesting. Rather I have focused my arguments on one crucial, central claim: an understanding of human action depends on a scientific reading of intention. If I have succeeded, the next step will be to take up these additional problems.

I have used two methodological guidelines. First, approach from philosophy. I am attempting to move *philosophical* action theory toward the scientific study of action. Philosophical action theory is the foundation on which I build. Thus, I have taken pains to be thorough and careful on this part of the project. For the tastes of some I might have been too thorough. Naturalized action theory can be approached from, say, psychology, artificial intelligence, or even robotics. In those cases there would be less emphasis on conceptual issues and more emphasis on empirical ones. Readers whose interests are primarily scientific might want to skim part II, in which detailed conceptual analysis dominates. It is my considered opinion, however, that this philosophical spadework is essential and must be done thoroughly and with care. My goal is to build from the bottom up.

Second, point directions on empirical issues. I contend that philosophical action theory is continuous with the scientific study of action. As we move from philosophical foundations to empirical issues, the account depends more and more on results in psychology and related disciplines. Since the models used in these disciplines

are evolving and, sometimes, changing radically, it would be a mistake to inexorably tie an account of action to specific models. Rather, it should be shown how the most promising lines of current research in the cognate scientific disciplines interface with the results of conceptual analysis. It is also vital to see that research within its recent historical context. I make some attempt to do this in part IV.

There is one difficulty about which the reader should be warned. An account of human action, I will argue, must make contact with both cognitive psychology and motivational psychology. Cognitive psychology, broadly understood to include some work in artificial intelligence, has undergone rapid recent development. Promising lines of research are emerging. But motivational psychology, once the focus of attention and pride, is currently in disarray. The best that can be done at this time is review the major contributions to the motivational literature that bear on human action, assess the degree to which plausible empirical models are being proposed, and suggest, briefly at least, future directions for research.

That part of the project that discusses the cognate scientific disciplines is programmatic and incomplete. But that is as it should be. I am not arguing that some extant empirical models are entrenched to the extent that disconfirmation is unlikely, nor am I proposing any new empirical models. Rather, I am attempting to ascertain the extent to which empirical models increase our understanding of human action.

Richard Taylor introduced me to the problems and puzzles about human action almost twenty years ago. For that, I am indebted to him. Our solutions, however, have tended to go in different directions. I began thinking about the continuity of philosophical action theory and the scientific study of action a number of years ago. I am not, though, the only one to have recently thought along these lines; Bach (1978) and Brandt (1979), for instance, hold programmatic views that are not altogether different.

I have tried my proposals on many colleagues, colloquia audiences, and students. I thank them all sincerely for their patience and efforts to correct my errors; I have certainly benefited from this help. I hope that I will be forgiven for not mentioning these many, many people by name. I must, however, mention Daniel Berger, with whom I discussed the first parts of this manuscript, Mike Harnish, with whom I discussed much of the book, and Kent Bach, who gave the penultimate draft a thorough and helpful reading. I have learned from Hector Castañeda and his work, and I owe various philosophical debts to Donald Davidson, Roderick Chisholm, and Wilfrid Sel-

lars. I also want to thank J-C. Smith who prepared the index and made suggestions for a final revision, and Ann Hickman who expertly word-processed several versions of the manuscript. Last, but certainly not least, I want to express my overwhelming gratitude to my wife, Peggy, and my son, Josh, who picked up the slack when I worked on this book and did not do my chores, and who tolerated my moods when all did not go well.

Earlier versions of some of the material in this volume have appeared previously. In a number of instances the views defended here are contrary to those in the earlier papers. Chapters 1 and 2 derive from "The Fundamental Question in Action Theory" (1979c). Chapter 3 is based on "Particulars, Events, and Actions" (1976) and "Identity Conditions for Events" (1977). Chapter 4 is a development of "Intending and Believing" (1983b). Parts of chapters 6, 7, and 8 are based on "Cognition and Intention" (1982)[†] and "The Human Output System" (forthcoming). And parts of chapter 9 are derived from "Philosophical Action Theory and the Foundations of Motivational Psychology" (1980b).