Action in Context

Contents

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On the Ways and Uses of Intending: Lessons from Velleman's Bratman Critique

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1. Introduction

The human will, David Velleman plausibly suggests, is best understood as the faculty of intention. If at least some non-human animals are equipped with a rudimentary belief-desire psychology, then one specific feature of the human life-form lies in our character as intenders. If that is correct, then one might wonder whether evolution has done us a favour in giving us a faculty that enables us to plan and intend. Michael Bratman has argued that it has, as intentions are attitudes that facilitate intra- and interpersonal coordination of action, as a result of which intenders are more likely to get what they want. Velleman sees this as an overly harmonious picture of the relationship between wanting and willing. An adequate characterisation of their relationship should, rather, show why they frequently pull in different directions, giving rise to what one might picturesquely label a rift in human agency. The reason for this constitutive tension lies in the fact that the will is not, as is frequently assumed—amongst others by Bratman—a conative faculty like desire, but is rather an essentially cognitive matter. According to Velleman, the will is a 'cognitive commitment' to what one is going to do, under favourable circumstances a form of knowledge that causes its own truth.

Velleman argues that this conception is, paradoxically, supported by Bratman's delineation of the characteristic functional and normative roles realised by intentions: if intention didn't involve a cognitive framing of one's future action, there could be no rational requirements on intenders to form subordinate intentions or to refrain from forming incompatible further intentions. Moreover, the cognitive conception fills a gap in Bratman's planning theory: because Bratman analyses intention as whatever fulfils certain functional or normative roles within an agent's future-directed planning practices, he is unable to make adequate sense of present-directed intentions, which appear to play none of the roles—and thus to bring none of the advantages that are characteristic of distal intentions. In contrast, Velleman's conception of intentions as understandings of one's behaviour-to-come offers both a unitary analysis of proximal and distal cases and a suggestion as to the general point of intending—that of satisfying the standing desire to know what one is doing. If the desire that motivates intention formation is only one amongst our many motivations, that may explain why our intentions need by no means dovetail unproblematically with the rest of our desires.

There are three points in Velleman's discussion which seem to me to raise genuine problems for Bratman. Firstly, the planning theory does indeed leave us pretty much in the dark as to the character of proximal intentions. Secondly, if Bratman is right that intentions characteristically fulfil certain causal and normative roles, the question is pertinent as to whether this is not so because of some feature of intentions in virtue of which they can generally play these roles. Thirdly, we require an explanation of why willing can not only enable, but also impede agents in the pursuit of their goals.

Velleman argues that the solution to each of these problems involves understanding intention as essentially a matter of 'cognitive commitment'. Here, I disagree.

2. Plan-Independent Intentions

Velleman's first challenge is summed up in his question as to why we bother forming intentions to do something here and now (197 f.). This question clothes an important objection to the planning theory in somewhat surprising garb. The objection is straightforward: a theory that analyses intentions as whatever fulfils certain functional and normative roles within an agent's future-directed planning practices has difficulties with those attitudes we take to be intentions that don't fulfil these roles, in particular with proximal intentions. Velleman doesn't phrase his objection in conceptual terms, but rather as a concern about the point of intending. Why, one wonders, does he put things this way? Velleman offers a justification for doing so, namely that asking this question enables him to criticise Bratman's theory by its own lights. I shall argue in a moment that this strategy is unsuccessful. After arguing this, I will go on to explain why Velleman's way of raising the issue nevertheless puts us onto an important feature of the concept of intention that is lost from view in Bratman's approach.

14 Parenthetical references in the text are to Velleman 2007 (in this volume).
Velleman sees his question as to the point of intending—or the good of willing—as appropriate within the variant of conceptual functionalism advanced by Bratman. Bratman’s methodology, Velleman claims, is based on the assumption that the analysis of intention should pick out functions “in the evolutionary sense that it confers some benefit on intention-forming creatures” (209). Velleman’s strategy, which aims at hoisting Bratman by his own methodological petard, is however unconvincing as a form of immanent criticism. This is because it conflates two different levels within Bratman’s theory that we ought to be at pains to keep separate. One is the level at which ‘functions’ means the causal and normative roles played by whatever we conceive as an intention. At this level, the notion of “function” is the tool of conceptual analysis. Bratman thinks of intentions as being defined by their characteristically fulfilling functions such as making rational, and typically leading to, means-ends reasoning on the part of their bearers.

The second level concerns what Bratman calls intention’s “pragmatic rationale”, namely to facilitate the process of intenders getting what they (rationally) want, a point he also puts in terms of intentions themselves being “universal means” (see Bratman 1987, 28, 53; Bratman 1999, 5–6). As far as I can see, the attributions at this second level aren’t meant to have conceptual status, but merely to clarify why we should, in general, be glad to be the bearers of those planning structures that are supposed to be definitive of intending. Whether the individual agent sees any point to forming an intention in a particular instance is therefore irrelevant for the question of whether Bratman’s conceptual functionalism can account for why the attitude thus formed counts as an intention. Moreover, the truth of Bratman’s plausible claim that intentions generally help us to realise our rational desires by means of inter- and intrapersonal coordination would not entail that agents either form or should form intentions with the explicit purpose of achieving this aim.

In other words, if one accepts Bratman’s methodological assumptions, one need not be worried by the lack of an answer to Velleman’s ‘why bother’ question. The question that should worry a Bratmanian is, rather, why certain attitudes concerning one’s actions here and now should count as intentions when they don’t fulfil the roles that are supposed to be definitive of the attitude. However, perhaps the Bratmanian need not be worried. He may point out that Bratman has in fact specified a function that is characteristically fulfilled by proximal intentions, namely that of conduct control (see Bratman 1987, 16). This is true, but it raises the question as to whether an attitude that fulfils this particular function should be seen as being of the same type as an attitude that exerts both causal and normative guidance over an agent’s planning. This point is particularly pertinent in view of the fact that the former function is widely thought to be fulfilled by motivationally predominant desires. Compare a case of spontaneous intention formation: someone is walking along the street and, on seeing an acquaintance, forms the intention to greet him and as a result does so. It seems perfectly plausible that this action is a result of the agent’s being more strongly motivated to do so than to perform any other action or omission that is incompatible with doing so. There is thus a good reason for seeing the spontaneously formed intention to greet as simply the conscious desire to utter the greeting, a desire that proves to be motivationally sufficient to cause the agent to greet.

The possibility that such spontaneously formed intentions might be nothing more than motivationally predominant, consciously occurring wants is given little consideration by the majority of the protagonists in contemporary debates about the nature of intention. The main reason for this, as far as I can see, is the desire for a unitary theory. Deliberatively formed intentions can clearly not be understood in this way, as they are compatible with stronger countervailing motivation. The question is whether a unitary theory is adequate to the whole range of phenomena that we refer to as intentions, a question to which I would reply in the affirmative.

16 Although Bratman argues against what he calls the “strategy of extension” from proximal to distal intentions at work in Anscombe, Davidson and Goldman (Bratman 1987, 7), his planning theory embodies a strategy of extension in the opposite direction.

17 The addition of the requirement that the desire be conscious is necessary if we assume that there are such things as unconscious desires that might take control of our action if they have sufficient motivational strength. There seem to be cases in which the greeting may be voiced unintentionally—say, in the face of a previous decision to ignore the particular person. The unintentional character of the greeting is plausibly explicable by the lack of a consciously occurring want to take the step.
negative. As it happens, this is a point on which Velleman and I are in agreement. In his earlier *Practical Reflection*, Velleman argues that "intention" is ambiguous, referring on the one hand to what an agent is "decided upon", on the other hand to "an agent's ultimate motivating desire" (Velleman 1989, 112). He adds that it is only the former he is interested in, a focus which carries over to "What Good is a Will?". His example of a proximal intention there, to take a cookie from a plate, is indeed presented as a case of an intention formed by 'making up ones mind' or deciding. Note that this need not be the case. Only an agent who is uncertain as to whether to take a cookie need make up his mind. People presumably sometimes form spontaneous, non-decisional intentions to do so and then act in the same way that they frequently greet on the street. Note further that it is only in the case as described by Velleman that the question as to why the agent bothers to form his intention is intelligible. The spontaneous cookie taker, like the spontaneous greeter on the street, doesn't bother. Neither of them performs any preparatory mental action at all. Only when the agent has gone through the process of decision does the 'why bother' question have application.

This seems to me to be important not merely because it indicates substantial self-imposed restrictions on the subject matter of Velleman's article. It also points to what one might see as a proto-analysis of the notion of intention in focus: intentions of the non-spontaneous type are at core the products of decisions about what to do. Moreover, if I have explained correctly how to distinguish between the two cookie takers, we also have an answer to the question as to why the non-spontaneous cookie taker forms an intention: prior to doing so, he is uncertain as to what to do and, as long as that is the case, he is unable to act. If he doesn't want to just let the opportunity pass, he needs to decide one way or another. That is exactly what distinguishes him from the spontaneous cookie taker, whose activated wants immediately control his action.  

I agree, then, with Velleman that in the case of the decisional cookie taker the answer to the 'why bother' question is rooted in the concept of (decisional) intention. The controversial feature of Velleman's position at this stage is his equation of uncertainty about what to do with uncertainty about what one is going to do, and his corresponding conception of decision as cognitive commitment. He sees a disposition to commit ourselves cognitively prior to action as the effect of a standing desire to understand what we are doing. This has the consequence that the formation of (decisional) intentions is uniformly motivated, something he attempts to show by means of a further example of plan-independent intending, that of the voter who forms his intention to vote well in advance (198). According to Velleman, the voter has a special reason to satisfy his standing desire for self-understanding, namely that the matter at hand is of particular importance for who he is. This, Velleman says, should lead voters to want to get clear on the important question as early as possible. In the light of the fact that there are otherwise only costs, but no benefits of advance commitment in such cases, our tendency to decide in advance speaks, he claims, for a cognitive interpretation of intention backed by the desire for self-understanding.

Certainly, one reason why voters spend time in advance thinking through who to vote for is that they take political matters to be important. We generally think of our political evaluations as sensibly developed over longer periods of engagement with the relevant issues. Where this is so, when we are called on to give institutional expression to those value judgments, the contents of the intentions to do so are usually fixed by the contents of such stable evaluations. That is one good reason why "everyone [doesn't] show up in the 'undecided' column of pre-elections polls" (198). Another is that, even when the relevant evaluations aren't stable, there obviously are benefits to deciding in advance. One such benefit is that one thereby unburdens ones mental capacities for other matters. There is thus little plausibility to the idea that the answer to the 'why bother' question here can be derived from conceptual considerations. The electoral case thus does nothing to support a cognitive conception of decision.

Moreover, if we need a special reason to activate our standing desire to understand what we are going to do in the electoral case, one wonders why that desire should be thought to be activated before our performance of such trivial actions as cookie taking. According to Velleman, our desire to understand what we are doing restrains us from behaving in ways that would "baffle" us (Velleman 1989, 35). But neither the spontaneous cookie taker nor the spontaneous greeter on the street are in the least bit baffled by what they do. Their tokening a conscious want prior to action guarantees under normal conditions that they would be able to answer the question as to what they were doing, were they to be interrupted in the course of their action and asked. This is, I think, the sense in which we
Velleman, I have been arguing, is right that Bratman’s planning theory has problems with proximal intentions. One way Bratman could respond would be to go disjunctive, preserving the planning theory for distal intentions and equating at least spontaneous proximal intentions with the predominantly motivating conscious wants that characteristically control immediate intentional conduct. Another response would be to rethink what functionalism claims is the conceptual status of intention’s roles in planning. The connection of paradigmatic intentions to decision, which looks like an excellent candidate for a conceptual relation, is sidelined by the planning theory, although the connection suggests a form of unity among paradigmatic cases of proximal and distal intending. For Velleman, the unity among non-spontaneous intentions is provided by their cognitive core. This, he argues, is revealed not only by focussing on generally ‘know what we are doing’, one of the everyday ideas out of which philosophers attempt to distil a technical concept of intentional action.19 If this is correct, then the everyday expression is not to be taken literally, marking rather the capacity of agents to immediately acquire such knowledge should it be required. But if the spontaneous cookie taker is in no need of a substantial cognitive stand, why should his hesitant counterpart require one? I can see no good reason. Moreover, the phenomenology of such cases is surely that the agent brings his uncertainty to an end by simply opting to take the cookie, where “opting” has the sense explicated by Anthony Kenny: the agent takes an optative stand of the form “Let me take the cookie” (Kenny 1994, 218–221).

3. Plan-Facilitating Intentions

Velleman, I have been arguing, is right that Bratman’s planning theory has problems with proximal intentions. One way Bratman could respond would be to go disjunctive, preserving the planning theory for distal intentions and equating at least spontaneous proximal intentions with the predominantly motivating conscious wants that characteristically control immediate intentional conduct.20 Another response would be to rethink what functionalism claims is the conceptual status of intention’s roles in planning. The connection of paradigmatic intentions to decision, which looks like an excellent candidate for a conceptual relation, is sidelined by the planning theory, although the connection suggests a form of unity among paradigmatic cases of proximal and distal intending. For Velleman, the unity among non-spontaneous intentions is provided by their cognitive core. This, he argues, is revealed not only by focussing on

19 Another is “doing something on purpose”. The fact that the two phrases are clearly not equivalent is one reason why there is such divergence between the proposed explications of “intentional action”.

20 There is a disjunctive element in Bratman’s theory, namely the distinction between intentions and guiding desires (Bratman 1987, 137–8). But this distinction ignores the fact that we understand our spontaneous proximal guiding desires as intentions.

21 In his application of the planning theory to cases of so-called double effect, Bratman explicitly rejects ‘the intention-choice principle’, according to which one intends to do whatever one chooses to do (Bratman 1987, 145 and 152–155). His grounds are that choosing a package deal that includes side effects does not commit the agent to intending those side effects. I explain why this reasoning is unconvincing in Roughley (in press).

22 This assumption is shared, for instance, by Jay Wallace, for whom the rationality of instrumental reasoning depends not on the putatively cognitive character of intending, but on two connections that he claims hold between intention and belief: firstly, that intending to φ entails believing one can φ and secondly, that ‘minimally self-aware’ agents will generally, and should rationally develop true, and only true beliefs about their intentions. Given these connections, Wallace claims, the core principle of instrumental reasoning is merely a special case of the requirement of belief consistency. See Wallace 2001, 20–23.
commitment to truth-taking (205). Why he thinks no such attitude can do the job is not clear to me. One way of showing that it can would involve seeing the requirement as derived from the unique, person-constitutive role of the optative stands with which agents terminate episodes of practical deliberation. According to such a view, the agent's termination of optative uncertainty as to what to do is criterial for where he or she stands on that question. It is, I think, because we take it that such episodes of opting belong essentially to their bearers that the metaphysics of agent causality, where it focuses on the power of decision (see O'Connor 1995, 200 Fn 36), has a certain intuitive plausibility. Obviously, a suggestion along these lines would need to be argued for in detail. But if something of this kind is plausible, then Velleman's cognitivist suggestion is not the only candidate for an explanation of the intention-centred norms of practical rationality. It is only if one assumes that the commitment component of decision must be cognitive that one might think, as Velleman does, that someone who is not sure if she will φ must be "still entertaining the possibility" of φ-ing or not φ-ing (205). Of course, for someone still in such a state of deliberation, opting for ways to make φ-ing possible would indeed be premature. But on an optative understanding of intention, not believing that one will φ is not equivalent to being unsure whether to φ or not. The former, but not the latter is perfectly compatible with being settled on φ-ing.

In fact, the claim that intending is essentially a cognitive matter itself raises a 'why bother' question: if intending to φ really did involve a cognitive commitment to the proposition that one will φ, it would be unclear why an intender should concern herself with making sure that she φ-s. Sometimes realising an intention's content can turn out to be a strenuous affair. Where this is the case, an agent has to work at making that content true. But if she believes all along that the proposition that she will φ is true anyway, why should she bother to make the effort? Velleman's answer is that such effort is itself the effect of the belief in conjunction with the agent's desire to know what she is doing (Velleman 1989, 44–51). This basic desire will be satisfied if the belief that she will φ turns out to be true. But if the requirement that one realise ones intentions is entirely dependent on the desire to know what one is doing, it looks to be more rational for an agent to revise her 'cognitive

23 This idea is prominent, for instance, in Broome 1999, 406–410.

commitments'^ as soon as they look endangered than to stick to them at the risk of getting things wrong. However, we generally believe that rationality recommends us to stick to our intentions unless we take it that we have a good reason to re-enter deliberation (see Bratman 1989, chap. 5–6).

Velleman supports his position with a further argument that begins not with the requirements of instrumental reasoning, but with a piece of linguistic analysis. Following Anscombe, he argues that the sentence "I am going to φ", which is clearly one of our main ways of expressing an intention, has assertoric force (206). For the non-cognitivist about intentions, the assertoric form simply indicates the parallel between optative and cognitive commitment without speaking for their identity. This parallelism between non-identicals is illustrated by the sentence "I am going to see X tonight, but I don't intend to", which is Moore-paradoxical if the first conjoin is read as the expression of an intention, but is not if it is read assertorically. What, then, of Velleman's own Moore-paradoxical sentence "I'm going to φ, but I don't believe it"? Assuming that the first conjoin is indeed the expression of an intention and not a prediction, we need to pay attention to a grammatical peculiarity of the English language that is apt to mess up our conceptual intuitions. "I don't believe it", like "I don't want to" and "I don't think so", involves a surface grammatical transfer of the negative particle from the subordinate clause, where it semantically belongs, to the main clause, where it looks as though it governs the attitudinal verb. This is what grammarians call "transferred negation". Where we say "I don't believe I will φ", we normally mean "I believe I will not φ". That, however, is obviously not an expression of agnosticism, but of a positive belief concerning ones not φ-ing. To intend to do something whilst believing one will not do it is indeed only possible for an agent characterised by a degree of irrationality that suggests a dual personality syndrome. To set yourself to make true some proposition whilst believing you won't (or can't) make it true would be an eminently pointless exercise. The non-cognitivist about intention does not need to deny this.

Note, further, that Velleman's switch to the second-person perspective, claiming that a "credulous listener" is licensed to expect action on
hearing the expression of an intention (207), does not provide him with the support he believes it does. It is simply not true that intention's facilitation of interpersonal coordination depends on there being a conceptual connection between intending to φ and believing one will φ. To pick up Velleman's formulation: the doxastic attitude 'warranted' on the part of a listener is not fixed by the doxastic attitude putatively 'required' on the part of the speaker. People are, of course, generally justified in expecting that other agents will realise their intentions. But only generally. Whether I should expect a certain person to do what she intends to do will depend on what I know about the person, as well as about the circumstances under which she is planning to act. Agents who are realistic in forming their expectations and strong-willed in carrying out their plans should rationally be relied on more than people who are not. Moreover, in this respect, the difference between intending and hoping to φ (207) is far less drastic than is often claimed. Someone who intends to φ may well believe that she will φ and someone who hopes to φ may well believe that her chances of φ-ing are fairly minimal. But someone hoping to φ cannot possibly believe that she has no chance of φ-ing: hoping is not mere wishful thinking. Indeed, she might well think that she has extremely good chances of φ-ing, and someone who knows her, her abilities and motivational capacities, might be more justified in believing that she will φ than in believing that another, motivationally unstable person who intends to φ will end up φ-ing.

The evidence that Velleman marshals against Bratman's planning theory should thus not persuade us to adopt the cognitivist conception of intention. Nevertheless, Velleman has pinpointed a second problem in the planning theory of intention that is rooted in Bratman's conceptual functionalism. The functionalist assumes that there is no informative answer to the question as to what it is about intentions that confers on them their characteristic causal and normative roles. Velleman's argument that only cognitive commitment could make sense of intending's characteristic normative roles doesn't only presuppose that the functionalist story is incomplete, it also indicates that such an account is pitched at the wrong level: specifying characteristic roles is not conceptually decisive, but sets an explanatory task for conceptual analysis. Velleman broaches that task, but offers what I have argued is an unconvincing answer.

Velleman concludes his article by arguing that two forms of tension between wanting and intending are best understood as symptoms of the divide that separates an agent's conative attitudes from her cognitive commitments to her behaviour-to-come. It is the second of these, the phenomenon of 'flow', which I want to conclude by discussing. According to the psychologist Csikszentmihaly, the 'optimal' character of 'flow', experienced during successful performances involving bodily skills, derives in part from the absence of occurrence self-awareness on the part of the agent. Velleman presents this datum as supporting his claim that willing is essentially a cognitive matter (213–214).

It is certainly plausible that experience of 'being one with' ones activity and ones environment in such cases positively requires the absence of perpetually intervening acts of will. However, it is anything but clear that the concept of the will that gives this claim its plausibility is cognitive in character. Velleman quotes Csikszentmihaly as saying that the flow experience involves "loss of consciousness of self", but omits to add that for Csikszentmihaly 'the self' is "the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are" (Csikszentmihaly 1990, 64). In other words, according to Csikszentmihaly, the cognitive features that go missing in flow are general features of the agent's self-understanding, what he also calls "the image we have of ourselves" (ibid., 63). Moreover, Csikszentmihaly is explicit that the kind of self-awareness absent is not a cognitive relation to ones behaviour-to-come. Quite to the contrary: "To enter flow, goals should be set clearly in advance, so that the athlete knows what he is to do. As the activity progresses, the athlete then knows moment-by-moment what to do next." (Jackson/Csikszentmihaly 1999, 21) The athlete's complete involvement with the activity excludes any thoughts about who he is or how others might see him; what it positively requires is "knowing in advance what he is going to do", both "at the immediate level" and "in long-range terms" (ibid., 22).

Far from supporting the claim that the will is essentially a cognitive matter, flow is in fact an excellent counter-example: in flow, the will is absent, but a doubt-free cognitive relation to ones behaviour-to-come is present. Indeed, it is precisely the clarity for the agent of what he is going to do next that enables him to get along without the intervention of the will. What is decisive for flow is the lack of uncertainty and the corresponding lack of the need for deliberation as to what to do next. In other words, the claim for which the phenomenon of flow provides
support ex negativo is the claim that willing requires a genetic component, a decision. Whether decisions are essentially cognitive, as Velleman believes, or essentially optative, as I think, is a matter into which the phenomenon of flow provides no insight.

Note however that, in spite of the absence of willing, flow phenomena need by no means involve the complete suspension of intention. The professional cyclist in flow who responds to attempts of others to pass him (see Jackson/Csikszentmihaly 1999, 21) surely intends to do so, forming a spontaneous or routine intention to respond appropriately. What he doesn't need to do is to make a decision, forming an intention that is even minimally deliberative. An understanding of the conditions of flow thus supports the claim on which Velleman and I agree: that a unitary theory of intending may be a hindrance to clarifying the phenomena we see in everyday life as appropriately referred to by the term and its cognates. It also points to the fact that we should not equate the will with a faculty for producing intentions of all kinds. On the evidence offered by flow phenomena, it seems that we will where we have formed decisional intentions, whilst intentions with no such decisional pedigree involve no willing.

5. Three Lessons

I have been arguing that there are three lessons to be learnt from Velleman's Bratman critique. Firstly, conceptual functionalism, including its normative variant, should be rejected as a comprehensive analytic methodology in philosophical psychology. The platitudeous truths about intending with which it works themselves set an explanatory task on the psychological, not just on the neurological level. Although Velleman doesn't claim this, his arguments are, I think, best understood as presupposing it. Secondly, intention should be seen as a disjunctive concept, picking out either the attitudinal product of a decision or an agent's motivationally strongest conscious want. The intentions at work within flow phenomena are of the latter kind, as are a great many spontaneously formed proximal intentions, whose genesis is not a response to uncertainty as to what to do. Much of what Velleman presents as supporting cognitivism about intentions actually speaks for

...25 The authors talk explicitly of "clarity of intention" (Jackson/Csikszentmihaly 1999, 21).

the claim that paradigmatic intentions derive from conscious mental steps to dissolve uncertainty about what to do. What is constitutive of this second type of intention is not primarily its characteristic consequences, but its genesis.

If these first two lessons are by and large consistent with what Velleman explicitly says in "What Good is a Will?", the third isn't. The third lesson to be learnt is that there is nowhere near sufficient evidence to convince the person on the street (or, presumably, Michael Bratman) to abandon the natural understanding of decisional intention formation as an optative—or conative—mode of committing oneself. Certainly, neither proximal intentions nor the phenomenon of flow provide the cognitivist with strong arguments. However, as Velleman's paper shows, the cognitivist can offer a coherent answer to Kant's question as to how the means-ends principle comes to exert normative force. Nevertheless, that answer—in short: that we want to have been right about what we thought we were going to do—is highly implausible as an explanation of why we generally do, and should, adopt the means to our ends. Rather, what we seem to strive for, and tend to believe we ought to strive for, is optative or motivational consistency. A consequence of the third lesson from Velleman's critique is that the non-cognitivist needs to make clearer what the optative commitment consists in that anchors the striving for such consistency. The non-cognitivist therefore still has work to do here. Perhaps this is something on which David Velleman might agree.26

Bibliography


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I claim that there is something deeply wrong with the standard debate between materialist empiricists—defending the bundle theory—, and dualist metaphysicians—defending the ego theory—about personal identity through time. After introducing the problem of personal identity as I see it and diagnosing the influential impersonal solution of Parfit and Perry, I outline a third, innovative theoretical approach—which I call 'analytical personalism'—to the problem, pointing towards a satisfactory theory both of the nature and the importance of personal identity.

2. The Aporetic Standard Debate

If we can compare philosophical debates to the game of chess, then we could say that the standard debate on personal identity leads to a stalemate. The match between empiricists (notably Anthony Quinton and Sydney Shoemaker) and metaphysicians (notably Roderick Chisholm and Richard Swinburne) in analytical philosophy ends in a draw since

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1 I restrict myself here to the standard debate between the adherents of the two most prominent theories. This restriction means that various non-standard theories will not be discussed. The underlying reason for this restriction is my belief that the non-standard theories either do not provide a clear alternative to the bundle theory or the ego theory, or else they can in some sense be reduced to one of these two. For an excellent introduction to the state of the art of the standard debate, see Shoemaker and Swinburne 1984. Also very helpful are Perry 1975; Oksenberg Rorty 1976; Noonan 2004. Among the non-standard theories of personal identity in contemporary analytical philosophy, one could mention the body theory put forward by Williams 1973, 1—81 and the brain theory put forward by Mackie 1976, 173—203 and by Nagel 1986, 43—45.