CHAPTER III

INTENTION AND ACTION
In emphasising the significance of rules in the study of actions, in the last chapter, it was not meant to suggest that rules govern human beings and their behaviour in the same manner in which things are governed by laws of nature. A distinction between 'rule-governed behaviour' and 'rule-guided behaviour' should be drawn to appreciate the proper import of rules in actions. To be governed by rules is like being an automaton in the sense that automata mechanically conform to the rules that govern them. Human beings, unlike rule-governed automata, are rule-guided in that they interpret and apply the rules for understanding and raising their situations, the possibilities that are open to them, and in formulating their purposes in view of their understanding of such appraisals. Had they been merely rule-governed, they would not face the kind of dilemmas that were obliquely referred to in the last chapter. Rules are a prerequisite for intentions in that the formation of intentions involves, besides other things, a definite visualisation (which is in principle communicable to others) of the future for the agent. A capacity to conceptualise is a pre-requisite for such visualisations.
In this chapter we shall make an attempt to understand the nature of intention and intentional action. The issues that we propose to raise in this chapter include questions such as "what is an intention?", "what is it to form an intention?" "How do we ascribe intentions to others?" "Is it possible to form an intention without recognising that one has done so?" when we consider the contexts in which questions like "whether a person has done something intentionally or not?" are raised, it seems that such questions are raised not in normal circumstances for it is usually assumed that when a person does something, he does it intentionally. e.g. If I am telling you that soe one bought a book, it would be redundant or mischievous, if not meaningless, to ask whether he bought the book intentionally. An explicit ascription of intentions to others and denial of intentions to ourselves is usually done in clarifying, appraising, justifying and explaining actions. whenever a claim is made that soe one acted intentionally, the main aim is to deny the possibility of soe one's being ignorant of or mistaken about, the characteristic elements of action under discussion. Similarly whenever a claim is made that someone acted unintentionally, the purpose is exactly the opposite, i.e. to affirm that action was done either in ignorance or the action was not performed to fulfill one's commitments. we shall argue that whenever we raise
the question "did x act intentionally?" we cannot characterize an action as intentional if the person to whom it is being ascribed is/was ignorant of doing it. But this does not imply that if the agent is aware of the action which is being ascribed to him then he must have done it intentionally, e.g. One may be taking a policy decision on the basis of some criterion, and may be aware that this decision is going to adversely affect the interests of his friends. But it cannot always be said in such a situation that one is intentionally harming one's friends even if one knows that such a policy decision is going to lead to this. It is not necessary that all the anticipated consequences of one's actions are also the intended consequences. I may intend to listen to a particular record often and may anticipate that this will lead to the early wearing of the record. However, it does not follow that while intending to listen to the record often I am also intending that the record should wear early. Keeping the above in view, we may say that though awareness of what one is doing is a necessary condition for an action to be characterized as intentional, awareness by itself is not a sufficient condition for the same.
Some philosophers, who analyse intentions in terms of beliefs and wants, have argued that "wanting to do an action" is a necessary condition for characterising an action as intentional. We shall try to argue that there may be actions which an agent may know that he is doing and also wants to do them and yet these may not be intentional. Some paratrooper may have been wanting to commit suicide and in one of his routine exercises his parachute fails to open. He knows that he is going to die and also wanted to die but this cannot be called a case of suicide because his death is a consequence of the parachute's failure to open rather than his deliberate decision not to open the parachute in order to die. We

1 An analysis of intentions in terms of wants and beliefs has been provided by Audi, Davidson, and Goldman besides many others. In contrast to this analysis, it has also been pointed out that intentions cannot be analysed in terms of wants and desires, e.g. According to Von Wright, "Having an intention is something more than having a wish or even a strong want to do something. An intention is a commitment to action. As long as I intend to do X, then I am committed to doing whatever is required of me if I am to do X."

Von Wright, "Replies," in Essays on Explanation And Understanding edited by Tummela and Manninen, p. 399. "Intending is not wishing or desiring or even wanting. It carries a practical commitment."


A similar position has been adopted by Dante in Analytical Philosophy of Action, and by Hampshire in Thought And Action.
wish to argue that having an intention to do something is more than having a mere wish or a want or a desire to do something.

It is usually agreed that a 'decision to do A' is similar to an intention to do A in the sense that "to decide is to form an intention." However, it is usually denied that "to intend is to decide" on the ground that 'deciding' involves deliberation while the same is not true of 'intending'.

It may be relevant to mention here that the question 'what is it to form an intention?' has not been given the consideration it deserves in the analysis of intention. A consideration of this question seems to suggest that formation of an

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2"Decision, I should say, is an aspect of the process which might be called forming an intention. (A theory of deciding is therefore a part of a 'general theory' of intention formation). If I have decided to do a certain thing I intend to do it." Von Wright, "Replies," in Tummala and Manninen (ed.) supra cit., p. 395. Also: Castaneda, Hampshire, Neilland and Has in this context.

3"The very same thought content that is a decision, or resolution, is also an intention: whether an intention is a decision or not, then, depends solely on whether a psychological process of deciding or deliberating has the intention as its ending element." Castaneda, E., Thinking and Being, p. 170.

Also "not every thing I intend to do have I also decided to do. To give an account of decisions is therefore to give an account of a way in which intentions originate. Of this way, deliberation is characteristic."

Von Wright, supra cit., p. 395.
intention very closely resembles the 'making of a decision'.

we propose to show that similarities between
'intending' and 'deciding' are far greater than it has
been usually accepted. The view that 'intending to do'
does not involve 'deciding to do' rests upon the assumption
that the concept of 'intention' resembles more with the
concepts of 'want' and 'desire' than that of 'decision'.

This assumption seems to have some connection with the
fact that human beings tend to profess to have intentions
which they, in fact, do not have. But if one appreciates
the distinction between a mere profession of an intention
and a genuine having of an intention, then one finds that

4 "Intending is like desiring, hoping, fearing, doubting and wondering."

Chisholm, R., "The Structure of Intention" in

5 "... another mark of the concept of intention
is that a man can lie about them."

Fleming, Bruce Noel, "On Intention" in

In his article "Can One Intend The Impossible",
Irving Thalberg says, "the intentions with which I shall
be concerned are not intentions for which one is entitled
to give one's words."


As if there are cases in which one could intend
to do something but the nature of intention is such that
one could not have a right to avow the intention to any
one.
'intending' does involve 'deciding'. What we propose to argue is that the grounds on which such a distinction is made between 'intending to do' and 'deciding to do' are not sufficient for the distinction.

Before proceeding towards an analysis of intention-formation, we shall consider two long passages, one from Chisholm and another from Haz, which are quite representative of the arguments that are usually offered for denying that intending involves deciding. We shall take up Chisholm's views first:

"Is having an intention a matter of having decided and then confidently believing? Has the man decided to kill the king - as distinguished from drawing the conclusion, or making the inference, that some day he will kill the king? The answer will not be helpful if by 'deciding to kill the king' we mean only "coming to have the intention of killing the king". And it will be false if by 'deciding to kill the king' we mean "concluding as a result of deliberation that it is good or desirable that one kill the king; or that one ought to kill the king, or that what one really wants involves killing the king." For (1) it is possible for a man to have the intention of killing the king without thus having decided to kill the king (he didn't need to deliberate). Moreover (2) it is possible for a man to have the intention

6 This is not to suggest, however, that intentions and decisions are synonymous or that there are no differences between them. (The objects of intention are actions (or some possible states of affairs that could be realised by performing some action or actions); the objects of decision are not actions alone. Besides practical decisions we also take theoretical decisions. The criteria of evaluation of intentions are not the same as that of decisions, we speak of good or evil intentions but never of wrong intentions whereas we do speak of wrong decisions.
of killing the king without believing that it is good or desirable that he kill the king, or believing that he ought to kill the king, or that what he really wants involved killing the king. And (3) it is possible for a man thus to have decided to kill the king without any longer having the intention of killing the king (he may simply be irresolute and yet believe that someday he will kill the king).

According to Chisholm there is no absurdity in the claim, at least in some cases, that "I have decided to do X but I do not intend to do X because I am irresolute." But in what sense one could be said to have decided to do X without in any way being committed to do X. Against Chisholm it may be further pointed out that when some one announces his intention, his expression is not a premise from which a conclusion is to be inferred. What one is doing in announcing an intention is informing that one views the facts from a certain perspective and is prepared to take account of them in a specific way. And if one is not prepared for the same then one does not have the intention even if one likes to believe otherwise. The other points made by Chisholm shall be considered along with his when we quote below:

"Four features characterise fully fledged decisions—

(1) To decide is to form an intention. A decision may or may not involve a mental act of deciding. But even in those cases in which the decision

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7 Chisholm, K., op. cit., p. 645.
is not crystallised in a mental act it is true that if a person decides at \( t_1 \) to do \( A \) than for some time immediately before \( t_1 \) he did not intend to do \( A \) and for some time after \( t_1 \) he does intend to do \( A \).

(2) Decisions are reached as a result of deliberations. \( X \) decides to do \( A \) only if he forms the intention to do \( A \) as a result of a process of deliberation whether to do \( A \) or how to solve a practical problem, where the doing of \( A \) is regarded by the agent as a solution to the problem. In most cases a decision results from deliberating on the reasons for or against the action. But a person may decide to perform an action without having first considered the reasons for it, if he has considered some alternative solutions to a practical problem and if the moment he thought of the action occurs to him it appears to him as the appropriate solution to that problem. Decision is sometimes used to apply to an intention formed without deliberation, usually when the agent is aware of conflicting pulls.... Not every intention to perform an action is a result of a decision. It is the process of deliberation as well as the fourth condition discussed below which distinguishes decision-based intentions from other intentions.

(3) Decisions are taken sometime before the action. Occasionally we speak of a decision which is immediately carried out. But normally one decides to perform an action sometime in the future. It is characteristic of decisions that one can change one's mind about them. In this decisions are similar to intentions and differ from straightforward cases of choosing....

(4) Decisions are reasons. The three features of decisions discussed above fail to account for some aspects of decisions. They do not explain why a decision is normally regarded as a stronger indication that the act will be done than an intention to do it which is not based on a decision. Nor do they explain why people often refuse to consider reasons for or against the action they have decided to take on the ground that the matter has already been (closed) settled by their decision. The explanation lies in fourth feature of decision: A decision is always for the agent a reason for performing
the act he decided to perform and for disregarding further reasons and arguments. It is always both a first order and an exclusionary reason. According to both Chisholm and Mac, deliberation is an essential part of decision whereas the same cannot be said of intention. At the same time it is also being conceded that there could be decisions which do not involve deliberation. I am, here, being reminded of a version of the hostal where I used to live, who often made the claim "I decide first and think later". Thus, the presence or absence of deliberation cannot be the criterion for drawing a distinction between intending and deciding. Similarly, one can change one's mind both about one's intentions and decisions. Therefore even firmness could not be the basis for a distinction. Mac has pointed out that in case of decision the matter is "closed" or "settled". But this is not a necessary consequence of decision, for the matter could, in principle, always be reopened depending upon the new information that may come to the disposal of an agent. Again it is true of both intentions and decisions that they may or may not be realised. Therefore, we may suggest that we shall have to look somewhere else for drawing a distinction between intention and decision.

we may begin by suggesting that to have an
intention is to be committed to perform a certain action. It is basic to the concept of intention that if some one intends that \( P \), then he intends to make happen that which will make \( P \) true. Intentions commit us to changing the world as beliefs commit us to the view that the world is as we represent it. The absurdities involved in saying that "I intend that \( P \) but I will not do that which is required for \( P \) to be realised." are the same as saying that "I believe that \( P \) which I believe not to be true." An intention, after all, refers to an action through which it is to be fulfilled or realised. It is for this reason that one is committed to some action through one's intention. That is why we find it odd if some one said he intended, say, to clean one's room, and when he did nothing about it, and on being asked why, he answered "Well, I said, I intended, didn't I, what else do you expect me to do?" It is not difficult to show that commitment to action is not necessary in case of wanting. It is understandable if some one makes the claim that "I want to help you but I cannot" (for rules may not permit, or one may not be in position to do so) but it sounds paradoxical if someone makes the claim "I intend to help you but I cannot". The oddity is due to the fact that having an intention involves a cognitive element in the sense of having an action plan. The objects of intention
primarily being action(s) or some possible state of affairs that could be realised by performing some action(s); it would be incorrect to say that I intend to perform an action when I am extremely sceptical about my ability to perform the action. Unlike expression of wants, expression of intentions in advance of action should not be taken as psychological reports or symptoms but as a performative act expressing one's commitment in respect of future actions. (Assigning intentions to oneself clearly does not depend upon witnessing anything). Whenever I honestly express an intention to perform an action, it allows others to ascribe an intention to me but except for making sure about my commitment to perform that action, my decision to express my intention does not require any introspection or witnessing of anything going on inside me. Assigning intentions to others, however, involves a great deal of observation and shrewd calculation.

"We assign intentions to others and sometimes to ourselves (1) by seeing an action in the light of a situation (and thus seeing it in the light, also, of some vaguely defined collection of human practices, institutions and rules), (2) by noting the tendency of actions in a situation, (3) by listening to avowals of intention and assessing the manner of utterance as well as the character of the avower, (4) by noticing the intensity or elaborateness of planning which appears to have an action of a certain sort as a consequence. In a further sense, like Austin, we can regard expressions of intention as performatives, made felicitous (in Austin's term) by the situation and the rules that
bear upon it, but *not* in any sense to be regarded as reports."

Not only this, sometimes it is possible to realise an intention in more than one way and more than one intention in the same way. This makes the task of providing identity-conditions and individuation conditions for intentions enormously difficult. This explains why it is easier to go wrong in ascribing intentions to others when one is studying actions in ambiguous or vague situations. If having an intention were merely a matter of having a mental blueprint or some combination of beliefs, wants and desires pertaining to what one was going to do then there would be no way to differentiate between intentional actions and compulsive behavior for given the mental blueprint or the combination of beliefs, wants and desires, one would be determined to do only one thing and there would be no reason for thinking that one could ever change one's mind, an essential requirement for acting intentionally as opposed to acting compulsively.

Having an intention is largely a matter of envisaging—or conceiving in a particular way—an action or a state of affairs which one is committed to realise.

In fact, having of an intention has been compared to the initial act of a play which foreshadows, leads up to and clarifies the subsequent acts of the play; the initial act at the most sets the stage for what is to follow. It is not necessary that the subsequent acts must have been the same as they are being presented and yet there is such a relationship between the initial act and the subsequent acts that the later would not have the same meaning had the initial act been different. Therefore, man's having an intention is one thing, and performing an action is another. However one may be committed to realize one's intention one could either go wrong in realizing one's intention or one may have lacked the capacity to realize it. The fact that we do have unrealized intentions and unintended actions tempts some philosophers to argue that:

"Intention is something which is not overt, not open to observation of others, which seems to be mental, in his mind or on his mind, like his thoughts, or in the way his thoughts are. For no matter how easily we can read off his intentions from what we observe him doing, we do not see him intending to do something as we see him, for example, picking up his pen, and there is always the possibility of our being mistaken about his intentions beyond the possibility of our being mistaken about what he is overtly doing." 10

However, it is wrong to maintain that knowing what one's intention is, and one's intention are different. Rather to intend to do X is to know that one intends to do X. Since the objects of intentions are primarily actions or some possible state of affairs that could be realised by performing some actions, one cannot make a claim to have an intention without stating the action which is the object of intention or the state of affair which one proposes to realise through some action. It is also possible that one may claim to have an intention which may depend upon the fulfilment of certain conditions e.g. I may intend to meet my old childhood friend if I go to my hometown. In this case the intention of meeting the old friend is dependent upon the fulfilment of the condition of my going to my hometown which may or may not be my intention at the moment. A conditional intention does not commit me to do anything unless the conditions to which it is bound are also fulfilled. On the other hand, in case of unconditional intentions I am committed to perform the action in the given circumstances unless I change my mind and cease to have the intention. To take the same old example, suppose I make the claim "I intend to meet my old childhood friend" then I could not truthfully make the claim unless I was committed to take steps to meet my old friend. In this case my going to my hometown would be a means to realise the intention
of meeting my old friend. Suppose I intend to go to my hometown in order to realise my intention of meeting my old friend; then my intention to go to my hometown is an indirect intention which fulfills the direct intention of meeting my old friend. The above example helps us to distinguish between conditional and unconditional intentions on the one hand and direct and indirect intentions on the other.\footnote{The distinctions between direct and indirect intention, and conditional and unconditional intention have been taken from Neilland and von Wright. Making these distinctions can be helpful in appraising the action as well as knowing the agent’s reasons for actions in the sense that a direct intention can itself be cited as a reason for an action (which involves indirect intention). A conditional intention may indicate a weak reason for an action whereas when an agent has an unconditional intention, the agent believes he has a very strong reason for the action in question. More about this when we consider reasons for actions.}

It may be pointed out here that when we consider the nature of intention-formation we ought not to ignore the crucial role of our beliefs, wants and values in the formation of intentions e.g. If I believe that the door is bolted then I cannot intend to bolt the door or if I regard truth-speaking as an absolute value then normally I cannot intend to tell a lie without dropping...
my commitment to truth-speaking as a value. In other words, the process of intention-formation is very intricately related to one's beliefs and values. To form an intention is to consider the various possibilities that are open before an agent and to be committed to realise some of these. Values perform a limiting function in intention-formation in the sense that an agent's being committed to some values closes some of the possibilities or make the realisation of some of the possibilities obligatory on his part.

Beliefs play a crucial role in the recognition of the possibilities that are open before an agent and it can happen that the agent may be mistaken in his beliefs. Intentions may remain unrealised either because of my false beliefs about my own capacities or my ignorance of the nature of situations in which I find myself. To illustrate the point, in a situation where an agent after deliberation does not, on the basis of a

12 Normally we are not such absolutist in values, and even some who claim to be, usually succeed in showing the act to be an instance of another value-realisation. The plurality of values, and the possibility of the same act being an instance of realisation of one value while violating another value to which the agent believes himself to be equally committed, provide for the possibilities of bad faith and self-deception.
reason $A$, in order to bring about some intended consequence $IC$. $A$ has a belief $B$ that doing of $D$ is necessary and sufficient to bring about $IC$. The following are some of the possibilities in such a situation:

(1) $A$’s belief $B$ is false and instead of $IC$ (intended consequences) some $UC$ (unintended consequences) come about.

(2) $A$’s belief $B$ is false but some other event $E$ takes place such that it is sufficient to bring about $IC$ conjointly with $D$, either with $UC$ or without $UC$.

(3) $A$’s belief $B$ is true but it also brings about $UC$ along with $IC$ such that unintended consequences could be either anticipated or unanticipated.

(4) $A$’s belief $B$ is true but $A$ could not anticipate that during the doing of $D$, an event $E$ will take place such that either $UC$ is brought about instead of $IC$, or $IC$ is brought about along with some $UC$.

(5) $A$ may realise that what he believed to be a reason was not a good reason in any of the cases from (1) to (4).

(6) $A$’s belief $B$ is true and $IC$ is brought about and $A$ continues to hold that $B$ was a good reason for bringing about $IC$.

In the above situation, before launching to do $D$, it is always within the capacity of $A$ to choose $D_1, \ldots, D_n$. 
(within the limits of the situation) instead of D or to intend different consequences or to have a different reason for the same consequences. But once A has started performing the activity, many unforeseen factors can intervene. It is always possible for A not to make public the consequences which he actually wishes to bring about or the reason R for which he is bringing about the consequences. Even if an observer O could come to know of A's intentions and reasons in advance, it is always possible for A, if he knows about O's knowledge, either to act counter-predictively or to redescribe S and restate R' instead of R as a reason for changing S into S'.

von Wright has made elaborate remarks regarding the distinction that should be made between the intended consequences and unintended consequences of action. von Wright suggests that the 'intended consequences' may be termed as 'results of the action' whereas the 'unintended consequences' may be termed 'consequences of the action'.

It is the results of action which are constitutive of the description of an action.

Can one give more than one answer to the question "what did S do?"? It is tempting to assume that there will always be more than one answer; e.g. "S moved his

\[1^3 \text{von Wright, } \textit{Explanation and Understanding.}\]
finger", "pulled the trigger," "fired a shot", "killed X" etc. But the question is whether S performed a single act or several different acts. The question arises because each of these descriptions means different things and how could these different descriptions be the descriptions of the same action? There are philosophers like Anscombe, Davidson and others who argue that the same action can have more than one description:

"A single action can have many different descriptions, e.g. "sawing a plank", "sawing oak", "sawing one of Smith's planks", "making a squeaky noise with the saw" "making a great deal of sawdust", and so on and so on..."

Similarly Davidson writes:

"I flip the switch, turn on the light, and illuminate the room. Unbeknownst to me I also alert a prowler to the effect that I am home. Here I do not do four things, but only one, of which four descriptions have been given."15

14 Anscombe, Intention, p. 11.


In the case cited by Davidson, I did one act — flipped the switch — which gave rise to a complex situation describable in several ways. First three descriptions (provided by Davidson) describe an intentional action and the fourth describes an unintentional action. In Anscombe's case, much depends upon the person's beliefs and intentions.
Anscambe and Davidson seem to suggest that many profoundly different descriptions can be given to the same action. The question to be asked is how anyone could find out that these different descriptions are descriptions of the same single action. But the claim that a single action can be given different descriptions encounters several difficulties.

The claim that a single action can have many different true descriptions may be taken to mean that a single action can have many partial descriptions which are separately true and which combine to form a single, full and true description. But if the claim is taken to mean simply this then the claim is unproblematic. What Anscambe and Davidson seem to be claiming is that "the relation between my pointing the gun and pulling the trigger and shooting the victim is that of identity." Davidson has also clearly formulated the identity-thesis:

"Examples provide endless examples of cases where we seem compelled to take talk of "alternative descriptions of actions" seriously i.e. literally, but there are plenty of other contexts in which the same need presses. Explaining an action

\[16\] Davidson, The Logical Form of Action Sentences, p. 84.

The relation between my pointing the gun, pulling the trigger and shooting the victim is in terms of their being constitutive elements in the plan for the realization of my intention. I could have pointed the gun but failed to move the trigger or moved the trigger but missed the target, and so on. In such cases, the pointing of the
by giving an intention with which it was done provides new descriptions of the action: I am writing my name on a piece of paper with the intention of paying a gambling debt. List all the different descriptions of my action. Here are a few for a start: I am writing my name, I am writing my name on a piece of paper, I am writing a cheque, I am paying my debt. It is hard to imagine how we can have a coherent theory of action unless we are allowed to say here; each of these sentences here describe the same action. 17

when we consider the question whether the same action can have more than one descriptions or not, we find that von wright’s distinction between “results of an action” and “consequences of an action” is very helpful. I may be saving a plank and may be doing so intentionally but may not know that I am saving smith’s plank. Therefore with respect to each of the alternative

gun would not have generated the shooting of the victim and thus the two would not have been identical. The descriptions referred to in these cases describe the same action in view of the intention of the action.

17Ibid., p. 65.

Davidson ignores that writing a cheque is not by itself paying a debt though sometimes it may be part of the project of paying a debt. The sole issue is whether we can univocally describe a situation which can be assimilated into more than one universe of meaning. Some of the actions in the absence of supporting contexts may even remain unactualised. I may think I have paid the debt by mailing a cheque and it may so happen that it does not reach my creditor. Similarly, alternative interpretations may be given to my actions as they may accord with two different rules.
descriptions I may respond by either affirming or denying that I am performing that action depending upon the context of the situation. Before we consider whether these alternative descriptions could be said to be descriptions of my action it will be useful to consider whether an action is characterised in terms of consequences that I intend to bring about or in terms of the consequences that are actually brought about by me. One may answer that consequences that are brought about by my action but are not intended by me could not be said to characterise my intentional action.

What is involved in an intentional action is that not only should it be possible for S to visualise these possibilities but also it should be within his capacities to choose to realise them or not to realise them. The following may be stated as the conditions for intentionality of an action:

(1) P knows he is doing A when he does A.

(2) The description D under which we describe P's doing A as intentional is the same as P's description D' of P's doing A.

On the basis of the above we may say that the identity of an act cannot be decided without taking the agent's perspective in view. The beliefs of the agent...
about his situation and the project that he was undertaking would be very significant, for without taking them into account it will not be possible to decide what the agent is doing. Since it is possible for individuals to revise their beliefs and consequently even their intentions in the process of realizing them, sometimes it becomes rather difficult to determine exactly the character of the action that an individual is performing; e.g. A government officer joins a revolutionary movement in order to sabotage the movement by providing information to the government agencies. But in his interaction with the revolutionaries he becomes sympathetic to their cause and starts helping them. Now in such a case, not only has the agent abandoned his original intention but even his other beliefs (will have) changed during the performance which was undertaken to fulfill the original intention. In other words, the intention to perform an action may not lead to the action and the bringing about of the intended state of affairs may not necessarily be intentional. In such circumstances, it cannot be maintained that without taking into consideration the context of the situation we can argue whether there can be more than one descriptions of an action or not.

It may be tempting to ask whether by knowing more about the circumstances shall we be in a position to make correct judgments regarding the actions and
intentions of an agent? If we accept that an agent is the ultimate authority with regard to his own intentions then we shall have to concede that we can never infer with certainty a man's intentions. And if we reject this option, we are back to the problem of correlations (between the mental and physical) that we wish to avoid for we would have to correlate the physical set-up with justified action/intention descriptions. However, we should not forget that 'intention' is a word used by humans about fellow human beings, and we know what it is for a person to form an intention only in so far as we know what it is to form an intention in our own case. This is overlooked by theories which rely exclusively on how we decide that some one has an intention, and proceed to analyse 'having an intention' in terms of behaviour that leads us to believe that he has one. When we have learnt to speak, we know, as human beings, what it is to pretend, to be in pain, to form an intention and so on. We also learn not to apply these concepts to inanimate objects and not wholly to animals. We also learn that knowledge of intention influences our description of the agent as well as of his action and so to reveal one's action is to reveal something about oneself. At this stage it would be useful to ask: what is involved in being a person and relating to others as persons? The attitude between two persons is one in which each regards the
other as a subject and in which each has a readiness for the experiencing of new facets of the other; an essential feature of this relationship is the recognition of the possibility of some entirely fresh understanding, or misunderstanding between the persons concerned. These are the characteristics of inter-personal relationship in which we attribute intentions to each other. But there is something further to note to which attention has been drawn by Wittgenstein.

"My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul."18

The contrast that is being drawn here is between having an attitude and having an opinion. It is part of being human to manifest the attitude of being a person and recognising other human beings as persons. That some one is a person (is a soul, as Wittgenstein puts it) is not an issue concerning which we deliberate in order to arrive at an opinion. We might say that in the human situation we are all persons honorifically. Because we are able to suspend or withhold this attitude towards each other and because there is a wide range of circumstances which can inhibit us in the expression of

18 Wittgenstein, op. cit., p. 178.
this attitude, we tend to overlook its deep-seated and fundamental nature. But the fundamental nature of this attitude may perhaps be brought out by referring to another remark of Wittgenstein:

"what we are supplying are Really Remarks on the natural history of man: not curiosities however, but rather observations on facts which no one has doubted and which have only gone unremarked because they are always before our eyes."

It is not even possible for us to visualise what it would be like to be an object among objects. We regard ourselves and other human beings as persons who are not only sources of their actions but also aware of what is being done. It is this awareness which gives us a sense of responsibility for our actions in the sense that we believe that we can refrain from doing certain actions that we are otherwise capable of doing. There would be no point in being told or telling others to do that which cannot be done or to prohibit them from doing what would be impossible for them to refrain from doing. The fact that we follow rules of our own making (formulated not necessarily by the individual himself) gives us a sense of freedom, and constraint as well. We ascribe actions only to persons.

Action never merely occurs. It is assumed to be done by a person. We shall consider, in the next chapter, the relationship between an agent and his actions and how it differs from that between an event and its causes or its effects.