CHAPTER V

REASONS FOR ACTION
Discussing the nature of action, personhood and human agency, it was argued that actions are performed in social contexts, constituted by institutions, norms and rules, which provide the framework within which human beings form their purposes in terms of appraisal of their situations. It was also maintained that human beings use their linguistic skills to identify articulate, and satisfy their needs, wants and desires by employing their faculty of reasoning in formulation and realisation of their projects. Reason enables human beings to transcend the given and withdraw from here and now through the use of generalisations, abstractions, plans and rules in drawing inferences, anticipating the future and adjusting their expectations in view of discrepant situations.

Reason which distinguishes us who possess it from the brutes, infants and idiots that lack it is a dual faculty. There is Theoretical Reason and there is Practical Reason. Theoretical Reason is our capacity, small or great, to think thoughts, that is, to operate from and with propositions. Practical reason is our capacity, small or great, to conduct ourselves according to moral principles in the warm world of action, and, therewith, our capacity also to feel the proper feelings towards the inhabitants and the furniture of this world. Only a creature possessing of practical reason can either cheat or play fair, either desert or keep the rank; but also only a creature with Practical Reason can feel contemptuous or emulous, proud or ashamed, guilty or guiltless."

It is a truism that we usually do not deliberate about most of our actions in advance, we often go about cocking our morning breakfast, polishing our shoes, driving to the university, smoking a cigarette, greeting a friend without caring to think about them.\(^2\) But the fact remains that there are occasions when the question "what should I do?" presents itself as a significant question in our lives. The question presupposes an awareness of availability of alternative courses of action on the part of the agent for in the absence of such an (awareness of) availability it seems absurd to suppose that acting for reasons always requires active prior deliberation. Many situations are recurrent, and our ends relatively constant, so that redeliberating each time is wasteful of valuable energies. Deliberation should be reserved for the novel and changing, where habitual decisions are inappropriate. Of course, it is quite possible to make a semantic decision here that the habitual is to be sharply opposed to reasoning, which is crucially related to the novel, a view which Kyle's concept of mind suggests and which Howell-Smith seems to accept explicitly. But such views seem obviously to distort the notion of acting for reasons which is quite intelligibly applied in cases of unreflective, habitual actions.\(^3\)


In a similar vein, Robert Brown also points out that "an agent need not have gone through a process of deliberation — the determining of relevant facts and grading of them as reasons — in order for him to have his reasons for a course of action."

there would be no sense in considering such a question. In fact, the question can also be formulated as "what is the best thing for me to do in this situation?" A consideration of the question involves an evaluation of appraisal of the relevant facts of the situation and the appropriateness of the alternatives available to the person in the given situation, as Keach has pointed out:

"Practical reasoning has to do with rational deliberation regarding the "things to be done" by us or others in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. At this general level of plausible things to do we find ourselves confronted with alternative courses of action which, if not abstractly incompatible, are at any rate circumstantially incapable in the face of finite resources of time, money, etc. The rational process of decision making involves the comparative assessment of these alternatives in the attempt to fix upon one alternative to determine a coherent pattern of action that represents "the best thing to do." At exactly this juncture of comparative assessment of alternative courses of action, the logic of the situation requires recourse to values as the requisite means for effecting the necessary choice among mutually incompatible alternatives. A recourse to values is indispensable for making this evaluation. In the logic of practical reasoning values thus play the key role of providing the means of arbitration between incompatible alternatives, alternatives which are not necessarily incompatible in themselves in abstract but mutually exclusive in the context of finite resources."

It is relevant here to point out that when one is considering the question "what should I do?" one is not

3Keach, Nicholas, Introduction To Value Theory, p. 46.
attempting a prediction about oneself but is trying to come to terms with one's situation and reaching a decision regarding what to do. In deciding the course of action to be adopted, one weighs the reasons for or against the various alternatives that are open before one. In this one takes into account a large number of factors such as the prevalent conventions and practices on the one hand and one's attitudes, beliefs and value-predilections on the other. At any given moment of time, there is a large number of alternative courses of action which are open before us but on consideration we decide not to perform them, e.g. at the moment, instead of writing this chapter I can go out for a walk, meet my friends, see a fast-binder film, attend a seminar on the issue of whether the policemen should be given a right to form unions or not, go to my hometown and spend a vacation with my parents, and so on.

"the 'factors' or 'considerations' which serve as 'reasons' for a man, can do so only if he recognizes them as 'carrying weight'; in fact such considerations can carry weight with him at all only to the extent that he does so recognize them. It is a necessary condition for a man's doing something 'for a reason' that he should recognize the consideration in question as being a possible reason for so acting."

and so forth. Though all these actions are possible in the sense that if I choose to do some of them I can do them. But they are circumstantially incompatible with my decision to complete this dissertation before the end of the vacation. The consideration of completing the dissertation overrules other considerations in that it gets a priority over them. There are also actions which some of us do not consider at all, not even as alternatives, e.g. when I pass across a tank I do not think of robbing it nor do I think of seducing every pretty female that I know of. The range of possibilities that we actually consider as alternative courses of actions is restricted by our values, purposes and our self-image.

As we are not born rational but come to acquire skills of reasoning in the process of growing up in society, we come to learn about the relevant factors which count as reasons for (or against) actions in learning about ourselves and the society and the world. In our deliberations about actions as much as in our communications to others regarding the reasons on which we acted, we assume shareability of our experiences in the sense that we expect others to understand us. We assume that due to a similarity of experiences they could make sense of our remarks, and the very same assumptions provide for the possibility of social life and interpersonal relationships.
While growing up in society, each one of us learns that our emotions, reflections, dreams and phantasies are known by others only indirectly, through various manifestations, each of which is open to diverse interpretations. We also learn that others also have emotions, reflections, dreams and phantasies which become known to us through their manifestations; we also learn that social life depends upon the possibility of some sort of rapport between our experiences and those of other people. This rapport is possible for we share the criterion of identity of an experience by learning the conventions that establish its sameness. The capacity to identify and describe our feelings presupposes the use of concepts which we share with other members of the community. The fact that expressions of feelings, emotions, thoughts, purposes and meanings are rooted in conventions allows for the possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpreting the outward expressions, gestures, utterances, etc. But this possibility should be construed as a reason for avoiding over-confident and hasty judgments about people rather than embracing a total skepticism. We can understand or comprehend the significance of an action and its relation with the other actions of the agent only when we place the action in its proper
content.\textsuperscript{5} The significance or meaning of an action cannot be observed as an immediately perceptible property of the agent's performance. It involves a reference beyond the mere present in that a person's involvement in an activity sometimes indicates the 'sense' he finds in his life. Whether we are considering "what should be done?" or we are performing an action, each one of us has a tacit and immediate awareness of the situation in which we are placed and of what we have done or mean to do under some or the other description. In these descriptions an oblique or explicit reference to future actions is indispensable or inevitable in that our knowledge of ourselves is constituted not only in terms of what we have done in the past but also in terms of what we are likely to do, what we are up to.

When we ask the question "why did he act like that?" the question is primarily a demand for an interpretation

\textsuperscript{5}"the actual behaviour of specific individuals towards one another is unintelligible unless one views their behaviour in terms of their status and roles, and the concept of status and role are devoid of meaning unless one interprets them in terms of the organisation of the society to which the individuals belong."

of the action as such a question usually arises in these circumstances where we fail to understand the behaviour of the person in question in the sense that we find it strange or pointless. A statement of person's reasons for his actions enables us to interpret the action and fit it into a familiar picture, as Davidson has pointed out:

"When we ask why someone acted as he did, we want to be provided with an interpretation. His behaviour seems strange, alien, outre, pointless, out of character, disconnected, or perhaps we cannot recognize an action in it. When we learn his reason, we have an interpretation, a new description of what he did which fits into a familiar picture. The picture certainly includes some of agent's beliefs and attitudes; perhaps also goals, ends, principles, general character traits, virtues or vices. Beyond this, the redescription of an action afforded by a reason may place the action in a wider social, economic, linguistic or evaluative context. To learn, through learning the reason, that the agent conceived his action as a lie, a repayment of a debt, an insult, the fulfilment of an avuncular obligation, or a knight's gambit is to grasp the point of an action in its setting of rules, practices, conventions and expectations."

Thus providing reasons for one's actions enables the other to understand and appreciate the point of an action for in learning about the reasons for an action, one also comes to learn about the considerations which guided the agent's conduct in that particular case. Providing reasons for one's actions involves an element of appraisal in that reasons spell out the rationale of the action by showing in what way an action was appropriate, that is to say, they show the calculations on the basis of which the agent regarded the action as the thing to be done in the circumstances. The fact that the agent usually states his reasons in order to defend or justify his actions makes it difficult to draw a clear-cut distinction between justificatory and explanatory reasons for the notions of justification and explanation often overlap in providing reasons for actions. This is due to the fact that in stating one's reasons for actions one does

7 Reasons are referred to in explaining, in evaluating, and in guiding people's behaviour. The concept of reason is used for various other purposes as well, but these three are primary and the rest are derived from or dependent on them... Reasons can be used for guiding and evaluating only because they can also be used in explanation, and their unique feature as a type of explanation is that they explain behaviour by reference to considerations which guided the agent's behaviour.

Kaz, Joseph, Practical Reason and Mor., pp. 15-16.
not merely show that the action was performed because of such-and-such considerations but that in the specific circumstances, given the agent's beliefs, preferences and expectations, the action was the "right thing to do".

Reasons for actions are normative in the sense that they appeal to principles of action rather than to empirical generalisations. The fact that reasons are stated in

8 The distinction between explanatory and justificatory reasons is usually made in the following manner. To give a good reason for an action is to justify it. Therefore all good reasons are justificatory reasons. To give the agent's real reason is to explain the action. Thus operative reasons are explanatory reasons, but now could an agent regard some consideration as a reason for an action without holding it as a good reason. This tempts one to maintain that from the agent's perspective, explanatory reasons must be a subset of justificatory reasons. For detailed discussion, see:

(i) Abelsohn, H., Person, chapters 3 and 4.

Following Kurt Zaehre, Richards strongly pleads for a distinction between the different notions of reasons for action in the justification and explanation of human actions. In this context, it is relevant to refer to Helden's following remarks:

"A reason for doing, then, may or may not be a justification. In many of the incidents of our lives, one's reasons for doing something (e.g. stopping at the restaurant, changing one's clothes etc.) is that this will enable one to do something one wants to do (get the food one wants to eat, potter in the garden, etc.), and the fact that 'I just feel like it' (so too with 'this is the "done" thing' and other 'stopper') brings us to
a variety of contexts and for different purposes, sometimes to explain an action and at other times to justify or defend it, gives rise to a considerable ambiguity in the use of the term 'reason for an action'. Sometimes, a 'reason for an action' is understood as a statement or a proposition which provides grounds for acting by making an assertion or by referring to a norm or a principle. At other times a 'reason for an action' is taken to be a belief, desire, want or the attitude of the agent on the basis of which he acts, according to Levinson:

"Whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterised as (a) having some sort of pro-attitude towards actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that his action is of that kind. Under (a) are to be included desires, wantings, urges, promptings and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent directed towards actions of a certain kind...."

the end of the line in the explanation of one's conduct by no means implies that in these everyday incidents one is irrational or unintelligent.... An intelligent, rational being need not be justified in everything he does, nor need he falling such justification lapse into eccentricity, madness, inattention or stupidity. On the contrary, there would be something forbidding about a human being who always felt it necessary to be justified in everything he did, or who was concerned with some good to be achieved in or by all of his doings."

Giving the reason why an agent did something is often a matter of naming the pre-attitude (a) or the related belief (b) or both.\footnote{Davidson, Donald, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in op. cit., pp. 79–90.}

In this paper, which was originally published in *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 60 (1963), pp. 655–700, Davidson had argued that reasons for actions are causes of action for the relation between a reason and an action is similar to that between a physical disposition such as brittleness of a glass and an event such as the breaking of a glass under pressure. Davidson had attacked the logical-connection argument between reasons and actions to defend a causal relationship between reasons and actions. Since then much ink has been spilt on the question whether reasons are causes or not. The answer to the question depends mainly upon the way in which we construe the relationship between causes and effects on the one hand and reasons and actions on the other. I do not wish to go into this dichotomy between reasons and causes but would like to refer to Davidson's remarks in another paper which was published a decade after the one mentioned above.

"Can we somehow give conditions that are not only necessary, but also sufficient, for an action to be intentional, using only such concepts as those of belief, desire and cause? I think not. The reason, very sketchily stated, is this. For a desire and belief to explain an action in the right way, perhaps through a chain of processes of reasoning that meets standards of rationality, I do not see how the right sort of causal process can be distinguished without, among other things, giving an account of how a decision is reached in the light of conflicting evidence and conflicting desires. I doubt whether it is possible to provide such an account at all,..."

"What prevents us from giving necessary and sufficient conditions for acting on a reason, also prevents us from giving serious laws connecting reasons and actions. To see this, suppose we had the sufficient conditions, then we could say: whenever a man has such-and-such beliefs and desires, and such-and-such further conditions are satisfied, he will act in such-and-such a way. There are no serious laws of this kind...."

"What is needed in the case of action, if we are to predict on the basis of desires and beliefs, is
Even if explanations of actions in terms of reasons are identified with explanations exclusively in terms of beliefs, wants and desires, these explanations are of a special type. It is necessary, though not sufficient, for such explanations that the agent must be aware of the reason in the sense that he should be in a position to avow it for his action. This feature of explanations in terms of reasons distinguishes them from all other types of explanations, including causal explanations in the natural realm. The agent’s point of view has to be given its due in reason-explanations for unless the agent could see something as a reason for an action he could not be said to have acted on it. This requirement is not applicable or relevant in case of causal explanations.

"Explanations by reasons avoids coping with the complexity of causal factors by singling out one, something it is able to do by omitting to provide, within the theory, a clear test of when the antecedent conditions hold. The simplest way of trying to improve matters is to substitute for desires and beliefs more directly observable events that may be assumed to cause them, such as flashing lights, punishments and rewards, through a quantitative calculus that brings all relevant beliefs and desires into the picture. There is no hope of refining the simple pattern of explanation on the basis of reasons into such a calculus." 

deprivations, or spoken commands and instructions. But perhaps it is now obvious to almost everyone that a theory of action inspired by this idea has no chance of explaining complex behaviour unless it succeeds in inferring or constructing the pattern of thoughts or emotions of the agent. 10

It is not difficult to see that for Davidson, reasons for actions are to be understood in terms of pro (or con) attitudes and beliefs of the agent. This analysis of reasons for action is grounded in a utilitarian conception of rationality according to which "all reasons for performing actions must ultimately be derivable from statements of human wants or desires or satisfactions." 11

10 ibid., p. 46.
11 Norman, Richard, Reasons for Action, p. 3.

Norman has provided a critique of utilitarian rationality by pointing out that all reasons for acting do not necessarily rest upon utilitarian foundations. Norman also challenges the empiricist distinction between man as a spectator or as a thinking being and man as an agent, criticizing the psychologistic and the teleological aspects of utilitarian rationality. Norman points out that while the former produces too permissive an account of practical rationality, the latter produces too restricted a view of practical rationality. He concedes that the teleological standpoint in ethics is in itself a perfectly possible and rational one, but it is not the only rational one. Norman rightly suggests that "the freedom of the abstract individual, divorced from a culture and therefore from a concrete rationality, is a totally empty freedom... the nature of human action and human reason cannot be properly understood unless it is seen primarily in social terms." (Ibid., p. 53).
This account of reasons for actions is psychologistic and results in subjectivism in that any 'why question' about actions could be responded to by replying 'I just wanted to' or 'I felt like', etc. It is important to remember that we employ reason to determine relevant facts about the situation, alternative courses of action that are open before us, to identify and anticipate the consequences of the different courses of action and to take a decision regarding the course of action that should be followed. It is true that different situations involve different degrees of risk, uncertainty, conflicts etc. but we try to take into account these factors as well. According to a view of reason:

"One can by the use of reason, derive a judgment that an action, characterised as of such-and-such a kind and having such-and-such consequences, is right (or wrong) from a more general principle that actions of a certain kind are right (or wrong). This principle in turn may be similarly derived from an even more general principle, and so on. But eventually this chain of reasoning must come to an end, when one reaches an ultimate

Much of the discussion and analysis of reasons for actions in this chapter is based onNorman's work. I think his analysis provides a way out of extreme subjectivism and arbitrary conventionalism by placing practical rationality in its socio-historical contexts while denying a deterministic relationship between rationality and social institutions.
But the difficulty involved in analysing reasons for actions exclusively in terms of principles or rules is that adoption of a merely rule-bound conduct fails to answer unpredictability of life-situations, and conflicts with spontaneous impulses. Rule-bound responses, as such, would atrophy the human capacity for spontaneous response which may steer one through a crisis. There are difficulties.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\text{Norman, Richard, \textit{ibid.}, p. 4.}\]

Such a view, with minor variations, is held by A. M. Hare in his \textit{Language of Morals} and \textit{Freedom and Law}. Norman points out that all that one can say about the ultimate principles is that one approves of them and would recommend these principles to others as well. According to Hare, ethical rationality involves 'prescriptivity and universalisability' in that actions must be such that one should agree that others should also perform them in similar circumstances. Gauthier has also analysed reasons for acting in terms of agent's pro-attitudes in his book \textit{Practical Reasoning}. Gauthier argues that practical reasoning can be classified into prudential reasoning and moral reasoning but maintains that both are grounded in wants, while prudential reasoning is grounded in agent's own wants, the same may not be true of moral reasoning.

Philippa Foot, in her paper "Moral beliefs", also takes a similar position when she says, "In general, anyone is given a reason for acting when he is shown the way to something he wants; but for some wants the question 'why do you want that?' will make sense, and for others it will not."

\[\text{Foot, Philippa, \textit{Moral beliefs}, in \textit{Theories of Ethics}, edited by Foot, p. 96.}\]
In applying utilitarian criteria of rationality for the consequences of actions are quite indefinite and unforeseeable. There are occasions when in offering reasons for actions, we are not trying to show that the action is rational but are just trying to make the action intelligible to the other. It is generally assumed that a rational action makes sense and perhaps a totally irrational action does not make sense. But the notion

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13 E. D. Salmon, in a paper entitled "Rational Action," in Mind, Vol. 76 (1967) pp. 537-547, suggests that an action is rational if and only if the action is likely to fulfill the agent's intended aims and/or likely to enhance his capacity to realize his intended aims. In other words, an action is rational if and only if the action is in accordance with the agent's aims, attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, Harvey Mullens in an article "Psychoanalytic Explanation and Rationality? in The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 68, No. 14 (1971), p. 421, states the conditions for rationality as follows:

(i) "for behaviour to be rational the agent's reasons must be conscious or preconscious; that is, either he is aware of them or he can become aware of them without any unusual effort — without for example undergoing psychotherapy." and (ii) "A piece of behavior is rational only if the agent is justified in believing that what he does (a) is likely to achieve, or (b) is one possible way (which in certain circumstances may be a very unlikely way) of achieving what he wants to achieve, or (c) and is not likely to arise about other consequences more undesirable than the prospective desirability of what it is intended to achieve."

It is interesting to note that these conceptions of rational action do not consider the question of rationality of ends but only of means for it is held that the ends are ultimately determined either by principles or wants and attitudes of the agents.
of intelligibility of actions, wants and desires etc. is much wider than that of their rationality. This should be evident from the fact that there is a fairly large number of actions over which the rationality/irrationality distinction simply does not apply. It would be quite inappropriate to ask whether chewing a blade of grass, watching a sun-rise or a sun-set, writing a poem, painting a picture or listening to a musical concert are rational or irrational acts. And yet within these activities too, one could give reasons for action. e.g. an artist striving towards perfection in his art may use the notions of beauty, form, texture, harmony etc. to give reasons for doing his creative work in one way rather than another. As Weston has pointed out:

"Having reasons for pursuing an activity, where this does not involve reference to external goals, is being able to give oneself to it; that is, to act solely for reasons intelligible within that activity. Giving reasons for one's involvement in it will be describing the activity in a particular way, which description will involve... the ability to apply certain terms to what one does."14

14 Weston, Michael, Morality and The self, p. 47.

Weston points out that "in the case of practical reasoning within an activity, we can distinguish between those facts taken as 'reasons' for the actions concerned, and that which makes them 'reasons', or the action what it is. Consider an example, 'If the composition of the picture is to achieve balance, a darker colour is needed here' followed by an action specified by 'putting a
The point that is being made here is that the question of relation between reasons and actions or the question of what kind of considerations have a bearing on which kind of actions cannot be adequately answered without taking into account the concrete cultural practices in which individuals participate. The possibility of an action being seen as meaningful or intelligible depends on the availability of norms which are public and intersubjectively intelligible. It is due to the shareability of these norms that we do not need to ask people to explain their conduct when they engage in routine activities in a socio-cultural environment in which the behaviour is recognized as such. Thus, we do not ordinarily ask a university lecturer "why do you lecture to the students?" though we might ask him this question if he was going to address a private group outside the university. These questions are not asked for the answers to them are taken for granted and are indicated in the darker colour in this area and thereby as 'trying to achieve compositional balance', said and done by a particular individual, both 'reason' and 'action' require for their specification artistic terms, and hence presumptive practice of art.... Neither the practice of art nor the role artistic notions play for the individual enter themselves as facts constituting reasons, for that would require other forms of connection within which they could count as 'reasons'." (emphasis added), ibid., pp. 90-91.
very language of discourse, we learn the meaning of the term 'university lecturer' by knowing the functions that are performed by a university lecturer within the university when taken-for-granted phenomena are called into question, the questioner (if he happens to be a member of the same socio-cultural group) is regarded as queer or perhaps 'sick'. But such sharp reactions or the taken-for-grantedness of the phenomena are possible in a stable society only. In periods of quick transition or value-crisis, the sense of uncertainty dominates. The famous Cartesian example of moral dilemma of the young man who was in doubt whether to join the Free French resistance forces or to stay back and look after his ailing widowed mother is a dilemma which does not arise in ordinary or normal times but in extraordinary circumstances.


16 This is not to suggest that moral perplexities arise only in periods of transition or crisis of values in a society. There could be other sources, equally important, of moral perplexity. But that is not our concern here.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to emphasise that one need not support general scepticism about morals on account of the inapplicability of general moral standards to exceptional cases.
Normally we are guided by the prevalent practices and values of our culture. Even if we are dissenters, our new values emerge out of a critique of the existing cultural values and practices. As Norman has pointed out:

"Any human society will inevitably possess:

(i) concepts which serve to identify certain basic human needs. These needs in whatever light they are looked at, are bound to be recognized at least in the form of hypothetical imperatives: the necessity to find food and drink and shelter, to work and therefore to avoid injury and enjoy health, in order to live.

(ii) Concepts which are needed in order to determine how much importance is to be attached to these needs in relation to other human satisfactions and to the different satisfactions in relation to one another. Primarily these concepts would have to offer a view of man.

(iii) Concepts which are needed in order to determine how much importance is to be attached to human needs and satisfactions in general, in relation to the non-human world. Central among these are concepts which serve to distinguish between the humanistic attitude and the religious attitude.

(iv) Concepts which offer ways of seeing one's relationship to other human beings -- in our own culture, these include concepts such as 'honesty', 'justice', 'duty', 'respect', but also concepts such as 'independence', 'nobility', 'self-affirmation', as well as those which refer to more specific relationships: family relationships, sexual relationships, institutional roles, etc.

...Any human culture is bound to possess normative concepts belonging to the above four categories, as well as many other normative concepts which nevertheless will depend on these..."
basic concepts for their sense, the concepts will differ from one culture to another but since the categories will remain the same, it will always be possible to arrive at some degree of understanding of the concepts and norms of an alien culture. Within any one culture the normative concepts will not dictate a single ethical point of view. There will be divisions, the most fundamental of which will entitle us to speak of the existence of different ethical systems within the culture."**

It is within the framework of the above-mentioned normative concepts that human beings take note of the facts of the situation, frame alternative plans of action, work out the (probable) consequences of adopting these plans, the means needed to carry them out and the further effects of fulfilling them, and decide upon one of them after comparing the various alternative plans. There

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17Norman, Richard, Reasons For Actions, pp. 139-40.

Norman's claim gets support from what Richard Peters has to say in a related context:

"We are prepared to rank 'Jealousy', 'ambition', etc., as 'motives' because of their explanatory status in our culture. They are ways of appraising situations of an interpersonal sort issuing in generalised tendencies to act in typical ways which most people tend to acquire in varying degrees as part of their initiation into our culture.... We do not learn what such motives are by consulting psychological text-books. Rather we learn them by acquiring them in our personal relationships with others who already act out of them. Our learning to act in the light of such considerations develops pari passu with our learning to interpret the behaviour of others."

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are occasions when the agents have to deliberate before performing the action and there are occasions when prior deliberation is not so important. In any case, an agent can have reasons for his actions even in circumstances where he had not carefully considered (or deliberated) the reasons for and against before performing the action.

Nominally we are asked to account for our actions only when the action is regarded as either wrong, untoward, inept, or unwelcome, or odd etc. We understand such request as a demand for justification or defense of the action. In responding to a question of the sort "why did you do X?" we either take recourse to justifications or to excuses. Depending upon the context, these justifications or excuses may be of several different kinds. We have to recognize the moral, legal, intellectual or other imports of the question before giving our reasons for the action. 18 In offering justifications, we accept

18 "In ordinary conversation we almost never make a full and complete statement of our reasons. We state only a part of them, our choice of which part to state being determined by pragmatic considerations, what we say and how much we say depends on our assessment of how much the hearer already knows, what he wants to know, to what extent we are willing to take him into our confidence, what it would not be polite to say, etc."

Max, Joseph, Practical Reasons and Norms, p. 22.

These remarks also indicate that a distinction should be made between having reasons for action and giving reasons for action. One may give reasons for one's action which are altogether different from the reasons which one actually had for the action.
the responsibility for the act but deny the pejorative quality associated with it. On the other hand, in offering excuses we usually admit that the act is wrong or inappropriate but disown full responsibility for the act. 19

In the earlier chapters, it was suggested that intentions and rules function as reasons for actions. We shall now make an attempt to clarify the ways in which intentions and rules are involved in practical reasoning. To recall the distinction between constitutive rules and regulative rules, we may say that the constitutive rules function as reason for actions in the sense that in order to be seen as performing an action of a certain sort, one has to take recourse to following the rules which constitute that specific activity. For example, in order to greet a friend one has to follow the rules which define greeting-behaviour in the community. The behaviour of a person is explicated and seen as meaningful, appropriate or inappropriate, in terms of the constitutive rules. This

19 For a detailed discussion, see: Austin, J.L., "A Plea for Excuses," in Austin, Philosophical Papers, pp. 175-204.

Whether the account offered by a person is accepted or rejected would depend upon the person's status in the context in which the account was demanded/offered.
is particularly so in case of the roles which are performed in the institutional contexts for the role-behaviour is intelligible only in terms of the rules that constitute the role. The alternative interpretations of actions in such contexts arise due to the open-ended character of the rules. The regulative rules play a slightly different role in practical reasoning in that they function as normative pressures on the person by either making certain actions obligatory or prohibited for the person. To use the terminology of Joseph Raz, regulative rules function as mandatory or exclusionary reasons for actions in that the agents consider them as reasons for or reasons against certain kind of actions.

Intentions also function as reasons for action in that the agent's commitment to realise certain ends make him consider the means for achieving those ends. It would be relevant here to recall the distinction between the direct and indirect intentions to appreciate the way in which intentions function as reasons for actions. The direct intention to meet my friend is a reason for the formation and realisation of the indirect intention of going to my home town. Nevertheless, it may be pointed out that the direct intention of meeting my friend by itself is not a reason for meeting my friend but it certainly is a reason for going to my home town. The
point is that all intentions are not necessarily reasons for actions, only some of them are. Similarly the reasons for conditional intentions are less strong than the reasons for unconditional intentions.

If we do not succeed in providing reasons for all our actions that is due to the fact that we do not keep on deliberating indefinitely but terminate our reasoning at some stage -- a stage beyond which we do not provide or look for further reasons. Nevertheless, the avowals of our reasons, purposes, intentions, norms and values enable others to understand and interpret our actions. In demanding and providing reasons for actions, we assume the agent to be rational; and whenever the rationality of the agent is suspect we usually take recourse to quasi-rational explanations.