USE OF THESES

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"Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts...... We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premises to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are for the most part true and with premises of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be received."

Aristotle.
This thesis is my own original work, except as indicated in the footnotes.

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Precis


I. INTENTION & PRACTICAL REASONING

What is he doing?: In any given case there are many possible answers to this question. There are many possible descriptions of any action and none is "the" simple or obvious answer.

Did he do it intentionally? The answer to this question will depend on which description is substituted for x. Someone may intentionally do something which is something else, and yet not do that other thing intentionally (though it is something he does). External indications may help us answer the question in practice but do not explain why the answer should be what it is. There must be something which can tell us not only whether an action is intentional, but also under what description it is so.

Knowing what one is doing: Knowledge seems likely to be involved in what performs this role.

Practical Reasoning: Practical reasoning is not a special argument form but a particular use of reasoning - to make the world conform to a "picture" rather than the reverse.

Practical Reasoning and Intention: Action done as a result of practical reasoning is intentional, practical reasoning meets the requirement formulated above. Objections to saying all intentional actions are done as a result of practical reasoning are based on two narrow a viewpoint of reasoning or an oversimplified view of certain types of action.

Limitations of this account: This account does not attempt to solve problems concerning responsibility or "freewill".
II. REASON & PASSION

The Intentionality of Reason: Some reasonings are intentional in the usual sense. From other points of view reasonings are not intentional, but not for the same reason as accidental or reflex actions.

Motives: A "dispositional" account is not really about motives but character traits and is quite inconsistent with the role for which motive words are used.

Emotion: Feelings (disturbances) may be the cause or the occasion of people doing things. In the former case these are not intentional actions, in the latter the feelings have no special role. Disturbances are part of what we refer to by emotion terms but an essential element is a certain construction of the situation in which the person finds himself.

Reason and Passion: Hume provides several arguments against his views on this subject, the basic weakness being a too limited view of passion. Many of his criticisms of the rationalist accounts of action are wellfounded - their view of reason was narrow and unrealistic.

III WANTING, CONCLUDING & WILLING

Any theory of intention must account for the failure to carry out intentions.

The Will: Common expressions such as "weak-willed" are not evidence for this doctrine. It is unnecessary unless we fail to account for unfulfilled intention. (In a loose sense it might be usable in ethical discussions).

The Elements of Practical Reasoning: There are three elements - wanting, beliefs about means and conclusion. This last may be an action or an expression of intention (decision).

Wanting: Strictly speaking one wants some proposition
to be true, rather than wants some object. It is possible to want unattainable objects.

Rejecting Conclusions: In both theoretical and practical reasoning it is impossible to see how someone can reject the conclusion of their reasoning if it is considered in isolation. Once other factors are admitted it is easy. There are senses in which a person may have incompatible wants - it depends on how wide is the field of consideration referred to! There are concrete and abstract uses of "want" the former is that in practical reasoning and in this someone cannot want incompatible things simultaneously.

When a person's viewpoint is widened or narrowed, e.g. by a conflict between his wants, what he wants or some other element in practical reasoning must change. In one sense this means that in each case of unfulfilled intention the person changes his mind, but in an important sense this is not true.

Akrasia: Aristotle's solution compared with that given here.

Conclusion: "The end of an action is relative to the occasion"; "it is particular acts that have to be done."
Introduction

In setting out to examine what it is to act intentionally I begin from the distinctions, classifications and relations made in common usage. While I believe that the ultimate test of the value of the account I put forward is the light it throws on those features of the world which concern us in ordinary discussion of human action the usages of such discussion cannot strictly dictate the limits of the account. Ordinary usage may be inconsistent or confused, failing to distinguish between different but similar things or using a variety of expressions for the same type of phenomena. There is a special difficulty in relation to several subjects which arise in the course of this enquiry – the once-technical usages of moral, political, philosophical, theological and juristic theories have often become embedded in the language by way of popular writings on these subjects, the pulpit and the courts.

We may find that some theory once grouped together a number of phenomena and gave a common explanation of them. After the theoretical context of the explanation has lost popularity or been forgotten the terms used in the explanation may survive as a convenient phrase under which to classify those phenomena.

Other problems of method arise in relation to the writings of some of the philosophers whose views I discuss. In the case of Miss Anscombe much of her writing is elliptical and suggestive and sometimes simply obscure. In the case of Aristotle the difficulties are numerous, not the least being that of translation. Obviously to present an accurate picture of his arguments it is necessary not only to have a linguistic ability but a grasp of his philosophy. Although my highschool
Greek scarcely qualifies me to speak on this matter. I cannot help feeling that most translators have tended to interpret Aristotle very much in the light of their own views. I know that I have done this too, because I began to see what I think are the points of several passages only after I had begun to formulate opinions on the subjects dealt with or related ones. I may well have misunderstood these authors, but I do not claim that the views I attribute to them are necessarily correct interpretations, but only that they are the points which their writings suggested to me and which seemed fruitful or interesting.