

**Di Maio, Caterina, 2024, *Il concetto di intenzione nella filosofia analitica*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli.**

Caterina Di Maio's recent book is a rich, profound, and detailed study of the way the concept of intention has been analyzed, over several decades, by a number of important philosophers in their work on human action. These include Elizabeth Anscombe, Donald Davidson, Michael Bratman, and Gilbert Harman. The critical expositions of these authors are preceded by comments on the central insights provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Di Maio shows how the anti-Cartesian and anti-mentalist stance towards intention and other mental concepts adopted by Wittgenstein helped to structure the path-breaking contribution made by Anscombe to our understanding of intention and other related notions in her pioneering book, *Intention* (1957). Though the remarks Di Maio makes about Wittgenstein are helpful and accurate, I think it would have been worth referring to his arguments that intentions to act, unlike sensations, are not "mental states" or experiences, in that they have no genuine duration. Di Maio emphasizes, rightly, the anti-causalist stance adopted by Anscombe when it comes to the relationship between reasons and actions in her analysis of intentional action and intention. The grounding role that Anscombe's work plays in the rise of the modern philosophy of action can clearly be perceived in Di Maio's book. Despite the differences between Anscombe and Davidson, especially the causalist position of the latter, in contrast to the anti-

causalist perspective of the former, it seems clear that Davidson's crucial contribution to the philosophy of action would not have been possible without Anscombe's investigations into the connection between intentional action and reasons. However, though Di Maio does not say this explicitly, my impression after reading her book is that, among the authors she deals with, she considers Davidson to be the most important contributor to the philosophy of action and to our understanding of intentional action, action explanation and the concept of intention. For Davidson, an action is intentional only if it has a true explanation in terms of the agent's reasons for performing it, where a true explanation requires that the reasons provide a rational justification of the agent's behavior. Justification by reasons as a necessary condition of intentional action and of its true explanation is also defended by Anscombe. Crucially, however, Davidson adds at least two significant elements to Anscombe's requirements. First, he specifies that for a reason to justify an action it must be what he calls a primary reason, with a primary reason consisting of a pair formed by a conative pro attitude (typically a desire for actions with a certain property) and a cognitive attitude (typically a belief that a certain way of acting has that property). However, Davidson contends, an agent can have a reason of that sort, and perform the corresponding action, without the reason providing a true explanation of the action. Therefore – and this is the second and more important element – Davidson holds that, to truly explain an action, the primary reason must be the reason *why* the agent acted, which, in Davidson's view, means that it must *cause* the action. This is the main tenet of Davidson's causalism regarding action explanation and intentional action. An important part of Davidson's defense of causalism is his response to certain influential arguments

against it, especially the so-called “logical connection argument”, a response that Di Maio presents clearly and competently. A notable contribution that Di Maio’s book makes is its presentation of the evolution of Davidson’s thought about intention and action explanation, from his initial and famous “Actions, reasons, and causes” (1963) to “How is weakness of the will possible?” (1970) and “Intending” (1978). In the first paper, Davidson argues that intention is not an independent element in the explanation of action; it is rather “syncategorematic” and can be reduced to the beliefs and desires that cause and explain the action. Once we know these beliefs and desires, he contends, we also know the intention with which the action is carried out. Progressively, however, Davidson perceives that this model is too simple to account for cases of *akrasia* or weakness of the will, where an agent acts intentionally against her best judgment, or for such frequent cases where an agent has two or more sets of beliefs and desires that favor different and incompatible ways of acting. Accordingly, besides desires and beliefs, Davidson argues, we also need conditional (*all-things-considered*) and unconditional (*all-out*) judgments. The latter correspond, according to Davidson, to (future) intentions, which cannot be reduced to beliefs and desires. In the third and last chapter of her book, Di Maio deals usefully with the contributions of Michael Bratman and Gilbert Harman to a theory of intention, practical reasoning, and action explanation. Both endorse the view that intention is an essential ingredient in practical reasoning and cannot be dispensed with or reduced to other mental states. This view, as we have seen, was first adopted by Davidson. Moreover, as Di Maio argues, both Bratman and Harman accept Davidson’s causalism. This does not mean that, for her, they did not make original and important contributions to the

philosophy of action. Bratman extends Davidson’s views and insists rightly on the functional role of intention in planning and coordination of behavior, and Harman goes usefully beyond Davidson’s conception of practical reasoning. However, I imagine that Di Maio assumes in her book, at least implicitly, that in the end they work within the foundational framework provided by Davidson. I am inclined to agree with her on this account. As a critical remark, I think that in the section about Harman the quotations Di Maio includes are too long and too frequent. To conclude, I think Di Maio’s book will be very helpful indeed to those interested in the philosophy of action in general, the nature of intention, and the work of the philosophers that she focuses on.

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