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24.120 Moral Psychology
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V Velleman on Intention

Intention as Belief

Bratman, as we saw, held that belief in one's success is not a requirement on intention. He cited various examples (the fallen tree; the bookstore visit) in support of this. But one problem with his view is that it is not obvious that it can explain how intentions can serve to enable coordination if we do not in general believe that we intend what we do intend; nor is it clear that it can explain why there is a consistency requirement on our intentions.

One response to these worries is to hold that intention does entail belief. Velleman's account goes even further: not only does intention entail belief, it actually *is* belief, though belief of a special kind: 'self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment, and that represent themselves as such'.

Why the motivation by desire?

Consider the insomniac who believes he will not go to sleep, and whose belief is what keeps him awake, and who realizes that this is so. We wouldn't say that he intends to stay awake. But if his belief is motivated by a desire to stay awake, that is much more plausible.

Langton's worries

Descriptive: is it possible to form a self-fulfilling belief as a result of one's confidence that it is self-fulfilling? James' rock leaping example. Or imagine that there is a box in the corner and I tell you that inside is a square of card that has whichever color you believe it to have. Can you form a belief about what color it has?

Normative: even if you can do this, are you right to do so? Doesn't this give belief the wrong direction of fit?

Keeping a belief requirement without equating intention with belief

We can get an agglomeration requirement just by insisting that intention entails, or presupposes, belief. (Or at least this will give us some agglomeration; it is controversial whether belief agglomerates completely: the lottery paradox.) And that will also give us the coordination benefits. What do we say about Bratman's examples though? They involve partial belief. So perhaps there is some corresponding notion of partial (uncertain) intention. All out belief agglomerates; partial belief doesn't. Similarly maybe all out intention agglomerates, and partial intention does not.