

WANTS AND CAUSES

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Recent discussions in philosophical psychology have been marked by a concern with how best to characterize human actions. The kind of analysis found to be appropriate has important consequences. In particular if we could account for human actions causally we should have gone some way towards supporting the thesis of soft-determinism. Difficulties in assessing the claim that reasons or desires can be causes of actions arise often because a questionable view of the notion of cause is assumed or through doubts about what the concept entails. Hume, notwithstanding the view that citing a cause, whatever else it may mean, does refer to an antecedent that 'necessitated' the occurrence of the event, has always seemed to me to have had the strongest influence. The point is some reasonably clear working definition of cause is essential before claims about the causal nature of human actions can be assessed. Our first task, therefore, is to clarify a sense of 'cause' whose core meaning is common to both natural events and human actions, yet strong enough to make the thesis of determinism significant.

I

Some of the ways the word 'cause' is used are irrelevant to our present concern. We shall not, for example, be interested in such uses as "he fought for a noble cause". Nor will the rather special sense of 'cause' that occurs in law be included. As Hart and Honoré have pointed out the use of cause in the law is not fixed and rather different than that employed in other contexts ⁽¹⁾. Indeed there is no one sense used throughout.

⁽¹⁾ See HART and HONORÉ, *Causation in the Law*, New York, 1959.

Jurists (and laymen) often talk about a person being caused to do something by a threat. Sometimes it is said that a robbery was caused by (i.e., was due to) negligence, in the sense that, had the opportunity not presented itself (in the form, say, of a safe left open), the event would not have occurred. These various uses of 'cause' may or may not have a common meaning. We shall limit ourselves to dealing with 'cause' as it applies to straightforward cases in natural history, and, as I shall argue, to human actions; paradigm examples of each being, 'the flame caused the gasoline to ignite' and, on the other hand, 'the desire to get well caused him to drink the medicine.'

The statement that A causes B, seems at the very least to mean that, if A happens, then B will follow. This is to say that A is a sufficient condition for B. But as it stands this is clearly too loose and needs to be amplified.

First, it would seem necessary to specify that, conditions being what they were, the cause was sufficient for the effect, i.e. given those conditions that actually obtained, it could not have been the case that the cause occurred and the effect did not follow. But as stated this will not suffice. For all it says is that, given the conditions which necessitated that the event happen, it had to happen — which is empty. And if we wish to extend this to the general assertion 'A causes B' it is clear that a) antecedent conditions are never all the same from one event to another and b) even if they all were the same, we should never be in a position to confirm this fact. Hence we need a way to identify the cause, and to distinguish it from the 'other' conditions which form the antecedent.

For purposes of clarity we shall, following Ducasse, differentiate between 'conditions' and 'cause' ⁽²⁾. Antecedent circumstances which are unchanging (as, for example, pervasive features of the environment), or which change in familiar ways, are called 'conditions' of a phenomenon when they are necessary for the effect to occur when it does ⁽³⁾. The cause, on the

⁽²⁾ See *Nature Mind and Death*, pp. 106-113, and *Causation and Types of Necessity*, pp. 54-57.

⁽³⁾ Ducasse defines A being necessary for B as 'Unless A not B.'

other hand, is that change in the antecedent circumstances which (given the relatively unchanging conditions) is sufficient to bring about the phenomenon (effect). This distinction however does not enable us to identify the cause. For it may be asked how we determine, among the necessary conditions which serve as antecedents, which one is the sufficient change. Indeed there is no hard and fast rule for identifying or picking out *the* cause. But speaking generally, it is the change (or state of affairs) which is unusual, novel (i.e., departure from the norm), unexpected, or the antecedent which can be manipulated or controlled.

There are other considerations to be taken into account in selecting the cause. We call the cause the condition that a) we think the hearer does not know about and b) (usually) the one that is the last condition to occur before the effect takes place. (Admittedly there may on occasion be difficulty in applying this criterion.) What constitutes deviation from the norm depends on what we are inclined to expect, and this of course depends very much on the particular context of the inquiry ⁽⁴⁾.

The determination of the cause of an event may or may not involve one or another of these criteria in specific cases. We speak, for instance, of the causes of the explosion of distant stars, where clearly the cause is not something that can be manipulated or controlled. Furthermore, it is not the case that we necessarily look for causes only when there is a deviation from the norm. For we can and do ask what causes ice to melt — a quite ordinary phenomenon. No contrast is implied here with other things that don't melt, i.e. when I ask, 'what causes ice to melt?' it would be absurd to think that I mean 'what causes ice to melt and not sugar or wood'? Nevertheless, when a cause is given, it usually mentions a fact we did not previously know of or expect. For example, we could not normally accept as an answer to the question "What caused the fire?"

⁽⁴⁾ It will be clear that some of these remarks rely on the views of cause expounded by Collingwood, Hart and Honoré.

any specification of a normal necessary condition such as "the presence of air in the room".

A few additional remarks are in order. When we ask for the cause of an event we are not requesting a law or generalization relating all events of one type (similar to the cause) to events of another (similar to the effect), though conceivably such a law might be inferred. We are rather asking for that antecedent which made the difference between the consequent's occurrence or non-occurrence *at the moment* in question. Davidson, for example, distinguishes between the assertion (or implication) that there is a law 'covering' two events and knowing what the law is. It seems reasonable to suppose that a singular causal statement entails no particular law, but does imply that there is some law⁽⁵⁾. (Many people know numerous true causal relations, though they know of no laws relating similar events to similar effects, nor does it appear to be necessary that they would affirm such a law if it were asserted.) We might add that even when nonsingular statements are made a law need not be known, though a causal relationship is established, for we quite legitimately say, for example, that anxiety *often* causes indigestion.

A cause must be logically independent of its effect in the sense that 'A causes B' is incompatible with 'A (logically) entails B'. However there does not seem to be any reason why a cause cannot have some conceptual relation to its effect. Hume thought that any two events in the universe could conceivably be related as cause and effect. But this seems to be incorrect. As Hanson has pointed out, our language is often theory laden, so that the words we use to describe states of affairs cannot be combined arbitrarily to assert some possible causal relation⁽⁶⁾. A human scar (to use Hanson's example) can only be caused either by a wound or a surgeon's incision or a sore. The word 'elastic' implying as it does 'return to original shape after stretching', allows one to say that the fact

⁽⁵⁾ Donald DAVIDSON, "Causal Relations," *Journal of Philo*, volume LXVIV, 1967.

⁽⁶⁾ See N. R. HANSON, "Causal Chains," *Mind*, 1955.

that the elastic material had been stretched was the cause of the material's snapping back to its original shape. The relation between cause and effect is therefore more complex than Hume led us to believe. Explanation by causes is generally against the background of some theory, so that to say X is the cause of Y is not a matter of having seen X and Y temporally and spatially connected. Rather, "X being the kind of thing it is, Y is just what might have been expected to happen" (7). It may however be maintained that 'conceptual relation' is too vague, and that what we require specifically is that a cause must be describable independently of its effect, if there is to be a genuine causal relation. Such a claim has special significance so far as this paper is concerned, since it may be used to discredit the thesis that desires are causes. With this in mind we may put two questions. 1) Does every cause have to satisfy an independent describability condition? 2) Are desires never describable without mentioning their objects? Clearly a negative answer to either question would suffice to sustain the thesis that desires can be causes.

Bruce Goldberg has challenged the claim directly, arguing that from the fact that a cause cannot be described without reference to its effect, it does not follow that the *occurrence* of the cause entails the occurrence of the effect. Only if the latter entailment were established would a causal relation be impossible. Goldberg puts the matter this way:

...(If) the description of C is included in the description of A and B is an event which will result in C... (then) from the fact that B is an event which will result in C and the fact that the description of C is included in the description of A it does not follow that the occurrence of A entails the occurrence of B (8).

(7) HANSON, *op. cit.*

(8) B. GOLDBERG, "Can a Desire be a Cause?" *Analysis*, January, 1965, pp. 71-72.

Thus if the only way to describe A were by mentioning B, it does not seem that this would preclude A from being the cause of B. One might try to press for a more restricted claim however, namely that A cannot be the cause of B if the only way we can describe A is by mentioning the fact that it causes (or results in) B ⁽⁹⁾. But even this view seems dubious. For we cannot describe for instance an itch except in terms of the fact that it tends to make one scratch, yet the assertion that an itch caused Jones to scratch, is perfectly legitimate ⁽¹⁰⁾. In sum, independent describability seems to be a doubtful necessary condition for cause and effect.

One additional point. We sometimes talk of a contributing factor as a cause. Thus, we occasionally hear someone talk about the major and minor causes of an event. In the case of purposive behavior it seems fairly clear that a want or desire must always be considered as the major cause of the action. Furthermore, the question of plurality of causes, often discussed in connection with natural events, has its analogue in purposive behavior. For it is not unusual to have an action which is due to two or more wants, none of which alone would have been sufficient to bring about the action.

The primary meaning of 'cause', viz. a sufficient antecedent subject to the general requirement that it be the unexpected and/or controllable antecedent has the dual advantage of being relatively simple philosophically, as well as reflecting the way the term is used in ordinary discourse.

II

Since my aim is to defend the view that an account of purposive behavior in terms of wants is a causal explanation I focus next on the notion of 'want'.

⁽⁹⁾ Cf. D. PEARSON, "Desires as Causes of Actions" in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* Vol. I, New York, 1968.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Note one dictionary definition of itch. "To feel an irritation of the skin with inclination to scratch the part; to have a teasing inclination to do a thing."

Historically the sensationalist view of wants has been the most popular. Hume, Locke, Reid and Mill were all proponents of it in one form or another. On this view a desire is thought to be a felt urge or impulse to act, an uneasiness at the absence of the thing desired, or an association of the thing desired with a pleasant sensation. But though often such conscious states do occur when we want things they sometimes do not. We often act with no thought at all of desiring the thing which motivated us, so that the sensationalist view cannot be correct. A second view, much in vogue today, regards wants as dispositional. While it is not difficult to suggest the kinds of tendencies that are appropriate, given a particular want, it is far from easy to see just what conditions need to be specified so that there is reasonable likelihood that the agent will act in a specified way. The dispositional view assumes that any given want can be uniquely defined in terms of a set of hypothetical conditions under which the agent will act. But it is well known that an action may be done out of a variety of motives, and that the only thing that may distinguish one motive from the other is what the agent really wanted. The desire to help one's country, and the desire to gain honor, for example, may just happen to motivate the very same actions, (in some individual) but it would be wrong to assert, on that account, that the two desires are the same. There is no *prima facie* reason to suppose that two different wants *must* give rise to different actions. And we surely don't want to say that if they did involve the same actions they would therefore be identical.

The hypothetical construct view provides a way out of this last difficulty. It regards a want somewhat on the order of a theoretical entity in science. On this view a want is recognized through the behavior that it tends to generate, but is not identified with any specific tendencies⁽¹⁾. Chief among the objections to this thesis is the difficulty of reconciling it with the fact that we seem to have an (immediate) knowledge of our own wants which is not the result of inference. (Here the anal-

(1) These remarks rely on ALSTON, "Motives and Motivation," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. V.

ogy with theoretical entities in science breaks down, because we never directly experience theoretical entities⁽¹²⁾.

An adequate account of wants is still a matter of dispute. Nevertheless, there is a strong temptation to give some sort of analysis which claims to be definitive, and to do so, it is often thought, one must simply bring in a *ceteris paribus* clause. Thus a want is something which, given appropriate circumstances, results in an action. Or to put it another way, "X wants P" if, *ceteris paribus* he does what he believes is necessary to get P. But it is notoriously difficult to regard this as a definition of "X wants P" which is strictly analytic. The difficulty arises when one attempts to gain a more precise understanding of the *ceteris paribus* clause. For the moment one tries to establish what such a clause involves, one gets involved in circularity. (A full discussion of this point is given in Section IV).

We must avoid getting into a position where saying 'X wants p' amounts to saying 'if there is no reason for X not to do P he'll do it', for this, while true, is empty. And certainly to say a man wants something is not to make a vacuous assertion. Saying that X wants something is being informative. When a man tells us he wants something, we don't regard his assertion as a truism. This of course, is not to say that subsequent behavior is irrelevant, either to one's assertion of a want, or to the fact that a man wants something. But from the fact that we do not have a definition of 'want' or a precise analysis of the concept, it does not follow that we cannot indicate generally what it signifies or how it is used. (The tendency to think of wants exclusively in terms of actions is strong. When a man says 'I really wanted to do X, I don't know why I didn't do it', we feel inclined to say — barring any reason to doubt his

(12) A view developed by Stephen Toulmin takes its point of departure from this last objection. Toulmin regards wants as performative in character. To say I want X, is, Toulmin maintains, to say that given the appropriate setting, I choose X. This view has been criticized by G. Ezorsky who contends that the individual does not have privileged knowledge of his own wants, and by R. Abelson on the grounds that wants are essentially descriptive, not performative. See S. Hook, ed. *Dimensions of Mind* N. Y. 1961.

sincerity — that a subconscious *desire* must have mitigated against the action. That is, we still hang on to the language of wants, though at this point it is far from clear that the same thing is being meant by the term.)

Attempts to support some kind of *ceteris paribus* view of wants are sometimes made by recourse to an offensive maneuver. This may take the form of the question, what kind of sense would it make to say that X wanted P, that there were no countervailing factors, yet he did nothing to get it? But though this thrust has force, it does not seem to prove what its proponents would like. It is logically just as senseless to ask 'Why do you want to get rid of your agonizing pain?' But this does not entitle one to *define* pain as something one wants to get rid of. The wiser course lies in not trying to pin down a definition of 'want' too precisely. So many expressions of preference are in use to express, however inaccurately, the degrees to which we desire or want certain things (e.g., to like, approve of, be interested in, love, enjoy) that it becomes clear that the concept of want ought not to be made to fit into the kind of definition proposed. It simply isn't that clear-cut a concept. (Even 'desire', 'wants', which are regarded as very similar, have their individual nuances. We say for example that a man is a slave to his desires, but not to his wants.) While 'want' is therefore a vague concept, it appears to involve both more than and less than the proposed definition. More, in the sense that it refers to something besides just possible action, and less, in the sense that it does not entail that the agent *must* act under some specifiable set of circumstances. These remarks will be given support in the subsequent discussion in this and the following sections.

Rather than define "want" explicitly, it seems best to admit first of all that 'want' is what Nowell Smith calls a Janus word, i.e. that it does more than one job at a time. It may describe something about the agent's feelings, yet at the same time indicate tendencies or dispositions to act. Furthermore, in the case of past actions, 'X wanted p' serves to explain the action in terms of a causal antecedent and to indicate that the action was not coerced.

Though the *ceteris paribus* definiton does not seem to be adequate, it had the merit of being informative. What, on our looser account of wants, can we say that is similarly enlightening? First, we consider the fact that a man wants something as implying that the probability of his doing something to get it is greater than had he not wanted it. We can in fact go a step further and maintain that the fact, that the agent believes that doing A will lead to P increases the probability that the action A will be performed, is an indication that X wants P⁽¹³⁾. Thus wants are the kinds of things that, together with beliefs, can and do affect what we do. It must be remarked however that even this last rather general statement is not applicalbe to all cases. I may want to strike my father but no conceivable belief would alter the fact that I will not do so. And it is conceivable that no belief would increase the probability of the action taking place. Nevertheless this indication (that the belief that A will lead to P increases the probability that A will de done) comes fairly close to being necessary and sufficient for attributing a want to an agent.

The second requirement is that the agent be inclined to avow (assuming no intention to deceive) his wants. It might at first seem that this indicator is in no way essential to wants. But there are two considerations which count in its favor. 1) If a man sincerely refuses to acknowledge a desire for X, we are not quite so willing to grant conclusively that he wanted it. The fact that we hesitate to make judgments in cases where an honest denial is made is at least a warning that avowals are not irrelevant to the concept of want. But this point can be strengthened. 2) The correlation between avowals of desires, actions, and beliefs which increase the likelihood of those actions cannot be a matter of coincidence. An essential element in discourse about wants is that there is a high degree of correlation between the way beliefs affect actions, and avowals of those beliefs, as well as of the appropriate desires. A world

(13) The point is due to ALSTON. See his paper "Wants, Action and Causal Explanations," in *Intentionality, Minds and Perception*, ed. H. N. CASTAÑEDA, Detroit, 1967.

in which men only occasionally avowed their desires when they voluntarily acted would be one in which we wouldn't know when to say that people wanted something.

Finally there is an indication that an agent wants to achieve a given aim which involves his 'general pattern of thought and discourse.' If he tends to return to the topic of the thing desired in free conversation, to notice that thing more than other things, to speak more animatedly and enthusiastically about it, we are likely to affirm that he wants it. (Sometimes these tendencies can be determined experimentally, for instance, in free association tests.) Because it is difficult to be precise about these manifestations, we must limit ourselves to labelling them as indications that a want exists. Yet they are important, and it does not seem an exaggeration to say that they come close to being a necessary condition for the ascription of wants. (My debt here to Alston's stimulating paper will be obvious.)

I have argued that wants are not to be defined explicitly, that they do numerous jobs, depending on the situation, that they are informative, and that we can pretty well establish conditions for the application of the term thereby giving some insight into its meaning. The account here outlined, while not a full fledged theory of wants (a theory we don't presently possess, if Kim and Brandt are right) has the merit of clarifying the way the concept is used in discourse, and pays more attention to the complexity of the term than does the contention that to want means "*ceteris paribus* the agent will act."

III

We are now in a position to make good the claim that a want can and does serve as a causal antecedent of an action. R. S. Peters has argued that such a move cannot be successful, he says,

To give a causal explanation of an event involves at least showing that, other conditions being presumed unchanged, a change in one variable is a sufficient condi-

tion for a change in another... Now the trouble about giving this sort of explanation of human actions is that we can never specify an action in terms of movements of the body or within the body ⁽¹⁴⁾.

But, as Shoemaker has pointed out, though being in pain cannot be specified exhaustively in terms of bodily movements, we can assert that a man's pain was caused, for example, by his decayed tooth ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Hence, the fact that an action cannot be translated into a bodily movement alone, does not *ipso facto* rule out a causal account.

In discussing causality earlier I argued that the requirement of independent describability was unnecessary. However, even if we grant that such a condition must be satisfied for an antecedent to be a genuine cause, it would seem that wants (as they apply to purposive behavior) conform. For if X wants to achieve P, what he wants need in no way mention or even hint at the action A which he intends in order to get P. So that on this ground there is no objection to a want being a cause.

In the standard situation, a want serves as the cause of the action, in the sense that it constitutes a sufficient condition for the action to occur — other things being equal. It might be thought that we must also specify as part of the cause, the belief that the action will yield the desired result. However there are good reasons for not doing so. To begin with, generally speaking, the belief consists of one of the assumed or known features of the situation and therefore qualifies as a 'condition' rather than a cause. If the fact that X wants to take Y to the concert is given as an explanation of why X bought the tickets, it is understood that he believed his action was necessary to achieve the goal. Thus the belief does not satisfy the requirement that the cause be the factor that is unknown or unexpected. Most of us hold beliefs, such as the fact that tickets are necessary to gain entrance to concerts, that particular

⁽¹⁴⁾ PETERS, *The Concept of Motivation*, p. 12.

⁽¹⁵⁾ "Review of Peters *The Concept of Motivation*," *Philo. Review*, 1960.

stores sell certain items, etc., and these do not constitute features of any situation which are surprising or unexpected. (A belief is "a disposition to affirm something to oneself and to use the proposition [which affirms] when reasoning..."⁽¹⁶⁾). The desire or want however is the factor that "makes the difference" (Hart and Honoré) — it is the change which results in the action happening when it does, while the belief is held and brought into play in practical deliberation when and as required.

Yet our assessment of the role of belief ought not to overlook an important qualification. There seem to be cases where beliefs do play a more active role. We may want something and not know how to get it, when at some moment we suddenly realize how its achievement is possible. The belief seems then to trigger or arouse a latent desire which causes the action. It might be supposed that the belief here functions in a causal chain of which the desire is the proximate cause and the belief the mediate one, or vice versa. In order to clear this matter up we need to distinguish between having a belief, which is essentially dispositional, on the one hand, and acquiring a belief, realizing a belief, or a belief springing to mind, all of which are episodic. It is the latter that are possible candidates for a cause, or at any rate part of a cause. In those instances where a belief arouses or triggers a particular want, we would be inclined to say that both belief and want enter into the causal antecedent. If I am sitting at home trying to figure out where the key to my mailbox is, the sudden realization that I left it in my drawer seems as much a causal antecedent of my subsequent action as is the desire (to get my mail). Here I think we would say that it was not the belief but the realization or recognition of the belief which serves (partially) as cause⁽¹⁷⁾.

In most cases of purposive behavior beliefs don't play such an active role but are important factors in the explanation

⁽¹⁶⁾ B. AUNE, *Knowledge, Mind and Nature*, p. 214. (My italics.)

⁽¹⁷⁾ Note that this realization is a perfectly straightforward event, whereas the belief is not.

of the action. A belief as such is never a cause, though it is central in explanations in which desires play a causal role. On occasion the event of consciously becoming aware of a certain fact (acquiring a belief) may be part of the cause. When the explanation of a certain event is sufficiently expanded the status of beliefs is made clearer. Beliefs then function to fill in the missing facts that make the act intelligible, when simply mentioning the desire as a causal antecedent will not suffice to explain. An example will illustrate what I mean. Peasant farmers in Poland believed that any one who counted all their teeth would have the power of life over them. During the war, a Jewish boy captured by one of them was subjected to all kinds of terror. One night he sneaked up on his captor in an attempt to count his teeth. The act was caused by the boy's desire to frighten his captor into letting him go⁽¹⁸⁾. A full explanation of this purposive act would have to include an account of the superstitious belief, for otherwise the act makes no sense and the ascription of it to a desire which functions as a cause is of little use. The desire *is* the 'trigger' element, but it alone does not suffice to explain.

The foregoing allows us to contrast causes in natural events with those in human actions and thereby to gain an insight into purposive explanation.

A purposive explanation of an action must do two things. First, it must make the act intelligible. It does this by spelling out the reasoning that led up to it, based on information assumed to be had by the agent, and on inferences that he was supposed to have made. It retraces in effect the practical deliberation that took place. This implies that a pattern of behavior must have been discernible in the action. Second, the explanation must account for the dynamic aspect. That is, it must account for the fact that the agent did the act, that he was not coerced, or that he was not (for some other reason) not in control of his movements. It does this by relating the action to desire. Just as in the case of natural events one accounts for why an event occurs by relating it to an antecedent cause,

(18) This example is taken from KOSINSKY's *The Painted Bird*.

so too, I have argued, we understand why an action took place when we relate it to an antecedent causal factor — namely the agent's desire. This is necessary. For to say that a goal is desired, and that therefore acting to achieve it is rational, or sensible, is not to account for its being done. It is not enough to provide the agent with a reason for acting, it must have been *the* reason — what we need therefore is a *causal connection* — where desire is sufficient for action. To say that the want is responsible for the action is just a roundabout way of saying what can be said straightforwardly — that the want is the cause. One distinction on which I shall not elaborate should be made. Unlike natural events, where causes that explain are not subject to further conditions, in human actions causes are subject to a criterion of intelligibility before they are acceptable as part of a purposive account. For this reason the restrictions on causes in human behavior are unique to this class of events. Since explaining an action is not just a matter of explaining how it is produced, but making it intelligible, it is a mistake to equate causal explanations of natural events with purposive explanations of actions.

IV

The greatest emphasis in the controversy over whether desires or wants can be causes has been placed on the so called logical connection argument. (In numerous discussions examined where a number of reasons are given to support the contention that desires cannot be causes, it turns out that the additional arguments presented are either reducible to, or corollaries of, the logical connection argument.)

The argument rests on the generally accepted supposition that if A is to be the cause of B, then A cannot be logically connected to B. But, the reasoning continues, wants are logically connected to actions, since I cannot be said to want without specifying what it is that I want. Moreover, that wanting to do X should never under any circumstances be the impetus for doing X is not, it is claimed, empirically improbable but rather

a logical impossibility. It is inconceivable, so the argument runs, that wants should never issue in actions. Thus my wanting to do X entails that I will do X under some conceivable set of circumstances. We should note that nothing less than logical entailment will do. It is not enough, for example, to argue that a conceptual relation between A and B rules out a causal relation, for it does not. As earlier noted, any number of examples can be given in which causes and effects are conceptually related, yet they enter into causal relations which are perfectly legitimate. We do sometimes classify effects by their causes without any danger of their being any the less effects. Hence the argument that motives cannot be causes because a motive makes a particular action the action it is, is invalid⁽¹⁹⁾.

First, let us dispose of one counter-instance. It will be argued that wanting to do X and doing X are clearly not independent, so that the former cannot be the cause of the latter. This does not however present a genuine difficulty. Our primary objective is to analyze situations in which the agent wants to perform some action *in order to* achieve a given goal. Very few actions fall into the class of those where the motive for doing the action is just to do the action itself. Such actions e.g., humming a tune for no special reason, are small compared with the vast number of our day to day actions and present no real support for the logical connection argument. To show generally that a logical connection exists between motive and act we must spell out what we mean by 'X wants Y' in such a way that it *entails* that X does some action Z. For from the fact that X has a tendency to do an act it does not follow that he will do it. Indeed a man may want to do something yet not have the slightest tendency to do it, for example, it goes against his deeply held moral convictions. Under what conditions then must a man do what he wants? The following definition of wants may serve as an answer⁽²⁰⁾.

Dw: X wants Y means, if X doesn't want anything more than Y, that is incompatible with Y, believes doing

⁽¹⁹⁾ See J. Fodor, *Psychological Explanation*, New York, 1968.

⁽²⁰⁾ This is a paraphrase of one given by ALSTON, *op. cit.*

Z will achieve Y, has the ability and the opportunity to do Z, is not too emotionally upset to do Z, and hasn't forgotten about doing Z, then X will do Z.

While there may be different formulations, it would seem that something very near to **Dw** is required to support a logical connection argument. There may be other conditions which would make the definition more elaborate, but a wide interpretation of the qualifiers mentioned in **Dw** should prove sufficient. For instance, the requirement that X has no scruples against doing Z could be included in the fact that X doesn't want anything more than Y that is incompatible with Y, that is, he wants to adhere to his standards more than he wants to achieve Y. Something very close to the conditions stipulated in **Dw** would be necessary to spell out the *ceteris paribus* clause. But it is just when this is done that the definition breaks down, and this for the following reasons. To make the logical connection argument stick, the hypothetical in **Dw** must be analytically true of wants. But this cannot be so on pain of circularity. To begin with there is circularity in the very first qualifying phrase. For if we are to *define* what is meant by 'X wants Y', we can hardly expect to do so by asserting that (among other things) X doesn't have other more pressing *wants* — a qualification that certainly seems to be necessary. A second difficulty arises in connection with the condition that X must have the ability to do the action (Z). How are we to understand ability? This not so harmless word turns out on inspection to be treacherous indeed. For either it involves some form of causality (ability = X *can* make Y happen) which destroys logical connection at its source. Or it runs the risk of circularity with want once again, as when we try to define 'A is able to do B' as 'A does B if he wants to', for it seems very difficult to get an understanding of ability without the concept of wanting. So that rather than show a logical connection between wanting and doing, at best we could only establish one between wanting and choosing.

Next we turn to the requirement that X have the opportunity to do Z. This introduces a complexity into the definition

that is not so much a logical matter as one of semantics. For if we are to take this requirement at face value we should have to include all "the factors that might conceivably prevent a want from issuing into an action into a specification of the meaning of 'want' ". This, as Alston rightly point out, "would be a coherence theory of meaning with a vengeance" ⁽²¹⁾.

Definition **Dw** is essentially dispositional in form. It would seem safe to suppose that those inclined to accept such a view of wants, would be equally inclined to a similar position on beliefs — at least it would be difficult for them to escape the behavioral view. The point is, some position must be taken on beliefs, an if wants are defined as in **Dw**, then it is quite natural to assume that beliefs would be similarly defined. But then again it is difficult to escape circularity. For the test that a man believes something would then be his readiness to act on his belief. Yet if we try to spell this out it would appear that we cannot avoid a statement like X believes Z is a means to Y means if ... and if X wants Y, he will do Z. (This is unavoidable, because if beliefs are to be regarded as in any way related to behavior they must be related to the *voluntary* actions of agents). It is open to anyone to oppose this view of belief (originally set forth by Bain, and more recently defended by Braithwaite) and to adopt a mentalist definition such as one proposed by H. H. Price, while retaining **Dw** for wants, thus avoiding a conflict between the two concepts. But the same kind of criticisms that have been made against the dispositional view of beliefs would apply to the current definition [**Dw**] of wants. Generally speaking, beliefs and wants are so intertwined that it is difficult to see how one could be defined other than in terms of the other, as in **Dw**.

Any attempt to establish a formal definition of want which can serve as a basis for a logical connection argument is faced with serious obstacles. Yet a countermove might be made as follows: If we remove all countervailing factors and the agent still does not act, what is the point of saying that he wants the thing in question? This turns the tables on the defen-

⁽²¹⁾ See ALSTON in TILLMAN et al, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

der of the causal thesis, but let it be noted that in doing so one has not vindicated the logical connection argument. For if the criticisms again **Dw** are valid, as I believe they are, this is sufficient to cast doubt on the logical connection argument. The fact that no alternative fully *analytic* definition is available does not increase the plausibility of **Dw**. We use and recognize concepts like fact and truth though no fully adequate analysis or definition is available. Nevertheless I think we can give an account of wants which is plausible and makes sense of inaction even when the antecedent clause (i.e., X desires Y) is satisfied.

These remarks are general, and to some extent have been anticipated in my earlier discussion. It is not my intention to give a theory of wants — perhaps this cannot be done — but I do think one can indicate where the alternative to an approach like that embodied in **Dw** lies. There is a sense to wanting which is independent of any action. When a man wants something he is not indifferent to whether or not it occurs, he has a pro-attitude towards it, he has an interest in it. (On occasion he may have a liking for it, or experience a pleasant sensation when it occurs.) He generally experiences some sort of satisfaction when the thing desired happens, even if not through his action. The desire may be reflected in many ways therefore, and these do not *necessarily* imply an action, or even attempted action. A person may have a desire for something, yet it may be part of his character or beliefs that it must be fulfilled without any effort on his part (e.g., divine grace). It might be said that this is not a desire but a mere idle wish, but this would be legislating a use rather than presenting an argument why desires cannot function this way. We can go further. A want simply need not be very strong, it may be so weak that no particular set of circumstances can be conceived which would be such that the agent *must* act. Perhaps this is merely a hope for the event to occur, rather than a want, it will be said. Again this seems to be specifying a use. Against this kind of attack there is no possible response. For whatever the situation, it is always possible to reclassify the want.

Finally, we can give a hypothetical sense to wants which

covers one important aspect of the term. We say that if X wants Y, though it does not follow that he must do Y even if there are no countervailing factors, it does mean (in part) that *if* he were to act he would cease his activity when the goal was reached, and (as a rule) while performing the action his behavior would indicate some sort of 'pursuit' of the goal, thereby confirming his desire. Which is to say that wanting supports a special sort of hypothetical. If X wants Y then *if* he were to act in accordance with his desire, certain patterns of behavior would be forthcoming. Wants are identified by such patterns of behavior (among other factors) but are not identical with a disposition to act in any given way.

If we want to make the conceptual connection between want and action stronger than is indicated above, we can do so and still not have to resort to logical entailment. Following suggestions by Nowell Smith and Abelson we can regard the relation as one of contextually limited implication⁽²²⁾. In place of self contradiction we settle for logical oddness. Thus, for example, from the fact that Jones says it is raining, Smith can infer that Jones believes it is raining, contextually (i.e., under suitable conditions). But the first statement does not *entail* the second, even though it would be logically odd for Jones to say 'it is raining but I don't believe it'. I have argued that it may not be possible to make such a contextual statement. The point to bear in mind is that even if we were able to make a similar judgment regarding wants and actions, it would not damage the causal thesis since there remains the logical possibility of the antecedent want occurring without the consequent action. Thus whatever it is that makes human actions unique or different (and I do not wish to prejudge that difficult issue) there seems to be no basis for placing them outside the causal realm.

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⁽²²⁾ Nowell SMITH in *ETHICS*, and ABELSON in "Persons, Predicates, and Robots," *Amer. Philo. Quat.*, October, 1966.