

PHIL 5983: Action Theory Seminar
Prof. Funkhouser
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Mele, *Motivation and Agency*, Chapters 7 & 8

Chapter 7

- Mele argued, in Chapter 6, that all desires provide an inclination to act. So, it is natural to conclude, as Mele does, that the strength of a desire just is the strength of this inclination.
- Mele corrects three common mistakes concerning motivational strength:
 1. Motivational strength does not equal phenomenological intensity.
 2. Motivational strength does not equal one's value/preference judgment.
 3. The strongest motivation is not necessarily provided by the prevailing desire.
- Vacuity Charge: There is no way to test the motivational strength of a desire but by seeing what action the agent actually performs. Mele argues against this in §7.2.
- Mele denies that we will always pursue those actions that we desire most, even if we are free to do so. See the basketball player example, on p. 166. Mele replaces Davidson's P1 with Mu. (172) The key notions in Mu are: *bias-free*, *untrumped*, and *proximal desire*. Mu can also be given a formulation in terms specific to physicalism — see CT, on p. 173.

Chapter 8

- How is self-control possible in a case like that of Ian?

For example, even if Ian's strongest *M*-motivation is to continue watching the tournament on television, he might also have a proximal desire to try a self-control technique that his therapist has

prescribed for just this sort of situation that is stronger than any desire he has not to try the technique. *While* he is watching television (as he is most strongly motivated to do), he might, consistently with *Mub*, try the technique. And the technique might work: Ian's attempt at self-control might bring it about that his strongest *M*-motivation is no longer to continue watching television and that he gets back to work. (179)

- Libet's studies seem to show that our conscious awareness of a decision to act comes after that decision, in some sense, has been made.

Mele holds that action begins with the acquisition of an intention. (181) Mele then questions whether the actions, in Libet's studies, begin with RP onset. That is, does RP onset signal the acquisition of an intention? Mele suggests that it does not; instead, it is the onset of a desire or urge. (Note the discussion of the vetoing power of conscious awareness.)

Mele also claims that we can form intentions that do not arise from *prior* desires — e.g., the example of slamming on the brakes to avoid hitting a dog. (185)

- The examples of Sam and Wilma, on pp. 189–191, extend the points Mele has already made about self-control and resisting (motivationally) stronger desires.