

PHIL 5983: Action Theory Seminar

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2/14/07

Mele, "Motivation: Essentially Motivation-Constituting Attitudes"

- Mele is here concerned with the questions: "What is a motivation-constituting state?" and "What is an essentially motivation-constituting state?".
- Mele makes his most basic assumptions about intentional action explicit on p. 388, in terms of 2 theses. First, intentional actions are caused. Second, some of these causes are mental states that include motivation-constituting attitudes.
- On p. 390 Mele reminds us of Davidson's argument for the conclusion that reasons are causes. Note the skeptical position mentioned in footnote 5, though.
- Mele obviously wants his account of motivation to meet or explain most of the theses that are commonly held regarding motivation. Six such theses are listed on pp. 391–392.
- Mele argues that not all desires are motivation-constituting. One reason for this is that someone might desire something that they believe they are incapable of promoting. (393)

Mele then uses this point to object to "direction of fit" accounts of desires (such as Smith's account). Connie desires that the Giants win, but this gives her no motivation (since she's on her spaceship, faraway). Connie is such that she doesn't even give the game a thought, since she knows she cannot effect it or even find out about it. This is supposed to be an example of a motivationally inert desire.

- Note the distinction between standing and occurrent desires, as discussed on pp. 396–397.
- §4 begins with Mele marking a distinction between essentially and contingently motivation-constituting attitudes:

Essentially and *contingently* motivation-constituting attitudes may be distinguished as follows. An attitude of an agent *S* is *essentially* motivation-constituting if and only if it is motivation-constituting not only in *S*'s actual situation but also in all possible scenarios in which *S* has it. An attitude of an agent *S* is *contingently* motivation-constituting if and only if although it is motivation-constituting in *S*'s actual situation, it is not so in some possible scenarios in which *S* has it. (398)

○ Mele articulates three theses concerning EMC attitudes, T1–T3. (399)

○ action-desire: “. . . an agent's desire regarding how she herself will act; desires for *others* to act in certain ways are not “action desires,” in this sense.” (399)

Claim: All action-desires are EMC attitudes.

○ T2 claims that all EMC attitudes are action-desires. So, the desire for the welfare of one's children is not an EMC attitude — the example of A1, p. 400.

● I will skip the stuff on intentions.

● Q: But are there cognitivist beliefs that are EMC attitudes? (403) If so, they would undermine T3.

Mele raises “the problem of listlessness” against this possibility (Stocker (1979) presents many other objections). The story of Eve, and her clinical depression, is a specific instance of such listlessness.

● Contrast the problem of listlessness with “the problem of toothlessness”.

It may be alleged that to reject the idea that there are *EMC* cognitivist moral ought-beliefs is to drive a wedge between moral judgments and intentional conduct, thus taking the practical bite out of morality. (406–407)

Mele responds that agents might have a standing, and quite general, desire to do what they morally ought to do. (407)

○ Someone might object that perhaps not even action-desires are EMC attitudes. Mele responds as follows:

It may be claimed, for example, that a jogger might desire to run another lap but be too tired even to try, so that this desire is not motivation-constituting. Again, an agent who takes his *A*-ing to

be physically impossible might hope or wish that he could *A*, but does not *desire* to *A*. (408)

- Mele then adds and defends versions of T4 and T5. Central to T5 is the notion of a desire as contributing to its own satisfaction (this is like saying desires have world-to-mind direction of fit).

As I put it, we see desires to *A* as having a more precise function than merely contributing to their own satisfaction; we view them as having the function of doing this by way of their contribution to *intentional* conduct *directed toward A-ing*. (419)

T5 is then modified to T5* — see p. 420.

Conclusion: “If T5* is true, we now have an account of an important species of motivation in real human beings: essentially motivation-constituting attitudes.” (420)