

Motivating Reasons and Purposes: Comments on *Authority, Cooperation, and Accountability*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bazargan-Forward's overall aim in the first half of the book, which is my main focus here, is to explain how agents may be held accountable for actions or outcomes that are beyond those agents' "causal reach" (Bazargan-Forward 2022, 2–3)¹. He wishes to explain how individual members of such groups as large national military organizations, proscribed military groups, or private corporations, can be held accountable for harms that are brought about by the groups of which they are members, but into whose harms these individuals have made little causal input. For examples, the "Wachbattalion" that patrolled the perimeter of Auschwitz contributed to causing the horrific deaths of thousands of prisoners, but individual soldiers did not themselves directly cause the deaths of prisoners. And individual ISIS militants participated in a group that stoned Aisha Duhulow to death, but some of these individuals, let's suppose, did not directly cause her death by

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1 Reference to Bazargan-Forward (2022) will be shortened to page number only throughout this paper.

their actions (1–2). In spite of these individuals' causal insignificance, we seem to be justified in holding them accountable for the gross harms that have been caused by the larger group of which they were a member. This assumption of justified accountability is a starting point for Bazargan-Forward's work and I grant it here. Let's call such *Causally Insignificant* agents who are liable to being held *Accountable* for gross harms "CIA agents." Bazargan-Forward's aim is to provide a general theory of why holding CIA agents to account is reasonable.

Bazargan-Forward maintains that their accountability can be explained in terms of authority relations that they stand in to members of the group that directly cause the harm. CIA agents affect the moral status of the actions that harm by having a certain kind of authority over the harm-causing agents. More specifically, CIA agents have the power to change the moral status of the actions by giving the actions a morally heinous purpose.

How do the CIA agents do this? Bazargan-Forward focuses on cases where CIA agents play the role of what he calls a "Deliberator." In dividing agential labour between two or more people, the Deliberator plays the role of deliberating about what to do and coming to a decision about what is to be done, while other agents are the Executors of the Deliberator's decisions. A simple example of how such a division of agential labour could come about is when E promises to serve as an Executor, and the Deliberator, D, accepts this promise. This gives E a protected reason (a kind of exclusionary reason (Raz, 1975)) to do what the Deliberator asks of them. In carrying out the Deliberator's decisions, the Executor may not be aware of the Deliberator's overall purpose in having the Executor do what they do. But the Deliberator, Bazargan-Forward argues, furnishes a purpose for the Executor's action all the same. This furnished purpose affects the action's moral status. Here is an example of Bazargan-Forward's that illuminates this relationship:

Olympic Sabotage. Contender is vying with Victim for first place in an upcoming marathon. Contender consequently hires Goon to maim Victim in a way that will put her out of the running, Goon promises to do so and Contender accepts the promise. (4)

Imagine that Goon goes on to maim Victim. Goon does not know that Contender is vying with Victim for first place and aims to put Victim out of the running. For all Goon knows Contender is doing Victim a favour by taking her out of harm's way by the only available means. Bazargan-Forward argues that, because of the authority that a Deliberator has over an Executor,

Contender furnishes a purpose for Goon's action. Goon's action has the morally heinous purpose it has² because of Contender and this is why Contender can be held accountable even though Contender does not engage directly in the maiming of Victim. Bazargan-Forward goes on to argue that this basic model can be extended to larger groups and to groups where each member serves as a deliberator for every other in the group. These relationships of authority allow us to explain the accountability of CIA agents in spite of the fact that their "causal reach" seems so limited in bringing about harm.

Bazargan-Forward's view of the relationship between Deliberator and Executor is not, he claims, significantly different from the relationship between deliberation and execution in an individual agent. In fact, a key argument against objections is that his characterization of the Deliberator-Executor relationship does not depart from the structure of individual agency, but is merely an extension of its structure to multi-agent contexts—e.g. (29–32).

I have three main objectives in these comments. The *first* is to question a claim that Bazargan-Forward seems to be committed to. This is the claim that motivating reasons determine the purposes of actions. The *second* aim is to briefly sketch a different way to think about how purposes of actions are determined. On this view, an "overall" purpose that is adopted by an agent determines the purpose of a "means-action" that the agent performs. *Finally*, I suggest that this approach to the determination of purposes, were it developed, would offer a challenge to how Bazargan-Forward characterizes the division of agential labour between a Deliberator and an Executor. This raises questions, in turn, about Bazargan-Forward's explanation of the accountability of CIA agents.

2. BAZARGAN-FORWARD ON MOTIVATING REASONS AND THE CONSTITUTIVE DETERMINATION OF PURPOSES

Bazargan-Forward understands motivating reasons as considerations that an agent takes to favour a particular course of action. He says:

[...] motivating reasons—i.e., the reasons (if any) that the wrongdoer took there to be in favor of the conduct in question. (37)

² One might question whether Goon's action really has the purpose. Goon's lack of awareness of the purpose precludes him from guiding his action in light of it. In the absence of such a guiding role, we might doubt that the action has the purpose. I set this line of questioning aside here.

He takes it that an agent's motivating reasons "constitutively determine" the purpose of the agent's action. Where the case is a two-person case, such as the case of *Olympic Sabotage*, a Deliberator's motivating reasons "constitutively determine" an Executor's purpose in action, such as Goon's purpose. Bazargan-Forward says:

[...] it's Contender—not Goon—that fixes the content of the purpose Goon has. Since the reasons Contender took there to be—the motivating reasons determining the purpose of Goon's conduct—are morally problematic, Contender [...] is accountable. (40)

In a helpful diagram illustrating the relationship between a Deliberator and an Executor, Bazargan-Forward says:

The executor's protected reason licenses attributing to him a purpose, the content of which is determined by the deliberator's motivating reasons. (41)

[...] a deliberator's motivating reasons determine the purpose of the executor's conduct. (50)

I take Bazargan-Forward to be committed to a claim along the following lines:

Which Purpose. A motivating reason(s), *M*, had by an agent, *S*, constitutively determines *S*'s purpose, *P*, in her intentional action, *A*, iff *M* makes it the case that *S* has *P* rather than another purpose, *P*₁, *P*₂, etc., in her *A*-ing.

Applying this to a case where there is a well-formed Interpersonal Division of Agential Labour (IDAL) between two agents, Deliberator and Executor, such as in the case of *Olympic Sabotage*, where Goon promises to do Contender's bidding, we get a claim along the following lines:

Which Purpose—IDAL. In a well-formed IDAL a motivating reason(s), *M*, had by a Deliberator, *D*, constitutively determines an Executor's, *E*'s, purpose, *P*, in *E*'s intentional action, *A*, iff *M* makes it the case that *E* has *P* rather than another purpose, *P*₁, *P*₂, etc., in her *A*-ing.

In the discussion below I will turn back to the simpler case of individual agency. Granting Bazargan-Forward's view that the individual and dyadic cases have the same basic structure, this will make the discussion a bit simpler, but the points made about the individual case should apply to the dyadic case as well.

3. WORRIES ABOUT WHICH PURPOSE

I think that *Which Purpose/Which Purpose—IDAL* is a problematic understanding of the relationship between motivating reasons (understood as Bazargan-Forward understands them) and purposes in action. Consider a simple case:

Two Cars. S is trying to decide whether to buy Car A or Car B. In deliberating about which one to buy, S takes the fact that Car A is cheaper and has lower mileage than B to be the considerations that decisively favour buying Car A. On the basis of these reasons, S buys A.

Although the considerations that S takes to favour A are S's motivating reasons for performing the intentional action of buying Car A, the motivating reasons do not seem to "constitutively determine" S's purpose in buying Car A. After all, S's purpose in performing the relevant actions—going to the dealer's, telling the dealer that she wants Car A, signing relevant forms, and so on—seems to be the purpose of getting a car, rather than getting a car that is cheaper than B, say.

But isn't S's purpose in acting to get a car that is cheaper than B and that has lower mileage than B has? Consider S's take on things were we to attribute such a purpose to her. We can easily imagine her resisting this view of her purpose. S may point out that she did not set out to get a car that is cheaper than, or has lower mileage than, B. After all, she didn't even know of B's existence when she set out to buy a car. In saying such a thing S indicates that the purpose that she set out with is still the same purpose that she has when she indicates to the dealer that she wants A, signs the papers, etc.

On her self-interpretation, which surely matters when we are trying to better understand agents' purposes in action, S's encounter with cars A and B does not determine what her purpose is, it gives her, rather, practical options concerning how to concretely fulfill the prior and independent purpose. If this is correct, in this case a purpose is a relatively abstract guiding idea for an agent that can be fulfilled in a number of ways and the consideration of reasons in practical deliberation allows the agent to find and choose among those ways. But the reasons taken into consideration in that deliberation don't determine what the purpose is.

An objector might insist that S's purpose was the purpose of buying a cheap and low mileage car, thereby reflecting something about the motivating reasons while omitting any reference to car B. But we can suppose that the case was one in which S would have been willing to buy a more expensive car with

higher mileage had there been one with features F1 and F2, but there was none such available. And it was only in the absence of such an alternative that she focused on A and B. In such a case, S might still reasonably resist the objector's characterization of her purpose. And so, it still seems plausible to characterize S's purpose in her action as one of getting a car. And this purpose does not seem to be determined by S's motivating reasons.

When we deliberate about whether to take one means or another (as in a case like *Two Cars*) we are trying to decide whether or not to take a course of action (e.g. buying car B) that already has a determinate purpose (acquiring one's own car). And the reasons that we go on to consider in our practical deliberation favour or disfavour fulfilling that overall purpose in one way rather than another. But this deliberative process seems to require that a determinate purpose is conceived of independently from our mulling over the reasons that speak for or against taking one means or another. This precludes that the motivating reasons determine what was, to begin with, a purpose in the course of action that this deliberation gives rise to.

This also seems to be the case when we are deliberating about whether or not to adopt a purpose, such as whether or not to adopt the purpose of getting one's own car. In deliberating about whether to adopt the purpose, I consider whether the balance of reasons favours that, such as whether public transport obviates the need for a car, or whether a car is something that I can afford. Such reasons favour or disfavour adopting the purpose, but again, these reasons do not seem to determine what the purpose is.

Before closing this section, let me briefly mention two ways in which motivating reasons may be understood to affect or even determine the purpose of a course of intentional action. First, motivating reasons may shape the trajectory of intentional actions by becoming, say, weightier or by coming to be outweighed as a result of changing conditions as the agent acts. If an agent is rational and appreciates these changes in her motivating reasons, this will, in turn, affect the course of her intentional action: she may change course or stop acting as a result. This is causal guidance that might, at least loosely, be thought of as motivating reasons "determining the purpose" of intentional action. But this kind of causal guidance is not what Bazargan-Forward has in mind when he talks of motivating reasons "constitutively determining" the purpose of an action.

Second, sometimes "motivating reason" is used in the philosophy of action literature to refer to psychological states, such as desires, or desire-belief pairs—see e.g. (Davidson, 1963)—that motivate the performance of an intentional action. A desire that motivates action may be understood as

determining the purpose of the action insofar as the action's purpose is fixed by the content of the desire together with the fact that the desire initiates and guides the action so that it satisfies the desire. But Bazargan-Forward is clear throughout that in his discussion "motivating reason" does not refer to such psychological states and their relationship to an action. Given the inadequacy for Bazargan-Forward's purposes of these proposals, Which Purpose remains problematic.

4. DETERMINING THE PURPOSE OF A MEANS-ACTION

If motivating reasons do not, in general, determine the purpose of an action, what would determine it? Here I will consider an alternative view to Which Purpose. At first, I will confine my attention to a key determinant of the purpose of a means-action. A means-action is performed as a part of a larger action-plan, which has an overall purpose. I will return to the question of how an overall purpose is determined in §5.

It seems that what determines the purpose of a means-action, like Goon's maiming, is the overall purpose of the action. A simple example helps to support this idea:

Lunch. S agrees to meet a friend for lunch. She walks to the bus-stop and gets on the bus. She gets off at the stop nearest to the restaurant and walks the rest of the way to restaurant. Once at the restaurant, she takes a table and waits for her friend.

As S performs any one of the means-actions (e.g. walking to the bus-stop, getting on the bus), we can ask what purpose she has in doing what she is doing. What is the purpose of her walking along the street? What makes it the case that she is walking to the bus-stop rather than that she is taking a stroll? Plausibly, the purpose of this means-action is explained by appeal to, and is determined by, its role in fulfilling the overall purpose that S has in her course of action. (Anscombe, 1957/2000)

This view of individual means-actions that are embedded in larger courses of action seems to fit an example like Olympic Sabotage. Goon's action of running over Victim's leg with her car has the purpose of maiming Victim. And it has the purpose of maiming her, rather than, say, frightening her, or even protecting her, because maiming fulfills the overall purpose of preventing Victim from competing in the marathon.

And yet we say things like "The *reason that* Contender has for having Goon maim Victim is that it prevents Victim from running in the marathon."

Doesn't this indicate that preventing Victim from running in the marathon is a motivating reason? But even if we say such things, reasons and overall purposes behave differently in deliberation and action, and so, it is problematic to treat them as if they are interchangeable with one another, or to treat one as reducible to the other. To see this, consider that S's overall purpose of meeting her friend for lunch does not seem to stand in the relation of a consideration that favours her taking the bus, as a reason would. Rather, S is *rationally required* to take the bus—to take this necessary means, let's suppose—*given that* she has adopted the overall purpose of meeting her friend for lunch (Broome, 2001). If the overall purpose was just a consideration in favour of taking the bus, the purpose should be assigned a weight by S and taken into account as one consideration among others that favours or disfavors taking the bus. And the purpose could be outweighed by a consideration that speaks against it. But were S to regard taking the bus in that way, it would be rationally problematic: given that S has the overall purpose of meeting her friend for lunch, and that taking the bus is (by her lights) a necessary means to doing this, S should treat taking the bus as something that she is rationally required to do. Echoing what Michael Bratman says about intentions (Bratman, 1987/1999), but using the language of purpose, once a purpose is adopted by an agent, it exerts "rational pressure" on the agent to find means and to take them. And the rational pressure is not the pressure of a reason—a mere consideration that favours the course of action. If this is right, it does not seem correct to regard Contender's overall purpose as a reason that they take to favour Goon's maiming. Although we say things like, "my *reason for* taking the bus is that I am going to meet my friend," it does not follow that *considerations that I take to favour an action* are being spoken about. Reasons language abounds and is notoriously slippery, sometimes referring to motivating reasons, but sometimes not.

To return to Bazargan-Forward's view, let's grant that Contender's overall purpose of preventing Victim from running the marathon is what determines the purpose of Goon's action of running over Victim's leg—Goon is maiming and not just frightening Victim—but we should resist characterizing the relationship in terms of a motivating reason's being taken by the agent to favour their maiming. The alternative approach to *Which Purpose/Which Purpose—IDAL* that I am suggesting here might be formulated as follows:

Which Purpose*. An overall purpose, P, adopted by an agent S, in her A-ing, contributes to determining S's purpose in any action that S performs as a means to fulfilling A.

Which Purpose—IDAL*. In a well-formed IDAL any overall purpose, P, had by a Deliberator, D, contributes to determining an Executor's, E's, purpose in any action that E performs as a means to fulfilling P.

5. FURTHER CHALLENGES ARISING FROM *WHICH PURPOSE*/WHICH PURPOSE IDAL**

If these alternatives to *Which Purpose/Which Purpose—IDAL* are on the right track, the purpose of Goon's attack on Victim (i.e. putting Victim out of the running) is not determined by Contender's motivating reasons, but by the overall purpose in the action. But how is an overall purpose determined? A natural answer is that an agent has adopted the overall purpose in action. How is that done? A widely accepted view is that it is done by the agent's forming an intention with the relevant content. But if we assume that the overall purpose of putting Victim out of the running really is in the process of being fulfilled by Goon's maiming, as Bazargan-Forward supposes, it must be the case that some agent has adopted the overall purpose of preventing Victim from running in the marathon. Note that in the case of *Olympic Sabotage* Goon has not adopted that overall purpose. But if some agent must have adopted the relevant purpose, the only reasonable option is to suppose that Contender has formed the relevant intention herself. If Goon's action has the overall purpose of putting Victim out of the running, then Contender must herself intend to put Victim out of the running.

The kind of thought that is involved in adopting a purpose—forming an intention—is not a deliberative thought, the kind of practical thought that is involved in weighing reasons, say. Nor is it a thought of practical inquiry, such as asking and seeking the answer to a question such as What should I do? It is a different subspecies of practical thought: an executive thought.

But if we assume with Bazargan-Forward that Goon's action has the overall purpose of putting Victim out of the running, and if this requires that Contender has adopted the relevant intention, this disrupts the rather neat way of thinking about the division of agential labour that Bazargan-Forward argues for. Recall that Bazargan-Forward's view is that agential labour in a case like *Olympic Sabotage* is divided into the deliberative and the executive functions, with Deliberators like Contender deliberating, but not executing, while Executors like Goon execute without deliberating. The authority relations between such agents play, Bazargan-Forward goes on to argue, a key role in explaining the accountability of CIA agents in other cases. But if a Deliberator like Contender must form an intention for it to be the

case that her heinous overall purpose is being fulfilled by the action of an Executor like Goon, then she seems to function more like a kind of Co-Executor than a mere Deliberator. After all, if Contender is rationally well-functioning, and if intending involves a rational agent in committing to taking the relevant practical steps to executing their intention (Bratman, 1987/1999), it seems reasonable to see Contender as having practical dispositions to ensure the fulfilment of the intention through their own action, should that prove necessary. If Contender has such dispositions, it seems that Goon and Contender are involved in some kind of Co-Executive relationship.

But if this is correct, it also becomes less clear that Contender qualifies as a *CIA* agent, one who is causally removed from direct harm. For even if Contender does not have to actually intervene to ensure that Goon's maiming has the effect of putting Victim out of the running, Contender should be, rationally speaking, disposed to intervene should that be necessary. And it would be rationally problematic for Contender not to seek and take opportunities to ensure that Goon's maiming goes according to Contender's plan. If Contender does not intervene directly to harm Victim, it may only be a matter of luck that this is so. This raises the question of whether Contender should be held accountable for her readiness to intervene, rather than, or in addition to, her determination of the purpose of Goon's action.

In addition, if Contender and Goon are involved in a co-executive relationship, this raises the question of whether their relationship will be a suitable model for understanding the accountability of *CIA* agents, more generally. It may be that there are *CIA* agents who lack Contender's intentions and her rational practical dispositions. For example, it is not clear that SS guards at Auschwitz or the ISIS militants have such executive states, states that are directed upon other group members. Nor is it clear that they have the attendant practical dispositions to intervene should the other group members fail to act as is required by a relevant overall purpose. It remains to be seen whether the co-executive model that we find, I believe, in Olympic Sabotage is a fruitful one for understanding the accountability of *CIA* agents.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having argued against the view that motivating reasons determine the purpose of a means-action, I offered a rough sketch of how things would look if we accept the idea that the purpose of a means-action is determined by an overall purpose in action, and that an overall purpose is adopted when an agent adopts an intention with relevant content. Such an approach may ultimately

be found wanting and rejected. However, if one denies that motivating reasons determine the overall purpose of Goon's action, then some alternative account of how Goon's action could have the overall purpose of putting Victim out of the running must be given. If we end up re-drawing the lines in the division of labour, the causal and moral roles of agents like Contender and Goon will be different, and with it the basis for their accountability. It remains to be seen whether this case can be used as a model for understanding the accountability of CIA agents more generally.

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