

Intentional Action and Intending: Recent Empirical Studies

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Abstract: Recent empirical work calls into question the so-called Simple View that an agent who A's intentionally intends to A. In experimental studies, ordinary speakers frequently assent to claims that, in certain cases, agents who knowingly behave wrongly intentionally bring about the harm they do; yet the speakers tend to deny that it was the intention of those agents to cause the harm. This paper reports two additional studies that at first appear to support the original ones, but argues that in fact, the evidence of all the studies considered is best understood in terms of the Simple View.

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It is natural to think that when an action is intentional, it is so because it arises out of an intention on the part of the agent to perform an action of that type. If this is right, then we should expect that whenever an agent *A*'s intentionally, he intends to *A*. Yet this principle, dubbed by Michael Bratman the Simple View (SV) of the relation between intentional action and intending, has proven controversial. Early discussions of it centered on epistemic issues—in particular Bratman's suggestion that, while it would be irrational for an agent to intend actions which, alone or in combination, he does not believe can be accomplished, yet should he attempt to perform such an action and succeed, the action will have been done intentionally (1987, ch. 3).ⁱ All but unnoticed in the debate over this claim was a second suggestion Bratman had made: namely, that when an intended action has foreseen but undesired side effects (e.g., the wearing down of a valued pair of shoes while running a race, or collateral damage to innocent noncombatants during wartime bombing), the agent can fairly be said to have brought about the effect intentionally, but not to have intended to bring it about (1987, pp. 123, 140 n.2). A form of this second suggestion has recently assumed center stage, due to the empirical work of Joshua Knobe, whose investigations strongly suggest that in certain cases of morally questionable behavior, everyday concepts of intentionality and intention do not abide by the SV. The first purpose of this paper is to describe a twofold extension of Knobe's work. On the surface, these experiments are significantly supportive. Underneath, however, the situation is far less clear. Hence my second purpose: to argue that these and Knobe's earlier results are not only compatible with the SV, but actually are best understood in terms of it.

I. The Setting

Knobe's experiments are designed to explore the intuitions of everyday speakers about intentionality in human action. One factor that appears to influence those intuitions is whether the action at issue is thought to constitute moral misconduct. Consider, for example, the

following story, which Knobe calls the *harm vignette*:

The vice-president of a company went to the chairman of the board and said, “We are thinking of starting a new program. It will help us increase profits, but it will also harm the environment.”

The chairman of the board answered, “I don’t care at all about harming the environment. I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let’s start the new program.”

They started the new program. Sure enough, the environment was harmed (Knobe 2003, p. 191).

This story is to be contrasted with the *help vignette*, which is word for word identical to the above, except that the word “harm” is replaced with “help.” Thus, the chairman is told the new program will help the environment, says he does not care and orders the institution of the program, which indeed does help the environment.

Knobe’s first experiment was conducted by presenting one or the other of these stories to people spending time in a Manhattan park. Among other things, the subjects were asked whether the chairman’s action of harming (helping) the environment was intentional. Their responses exhibited a dramatic contrast: fully 82% of those presented with the harm vignette responded that the chairman had harmed the environment intentionally, while only 23% of those given the help vignette said the chairman had helped the environment intentionally (2003, p. 192). Now perhaps the simplest way to interpret this result would be to conclude that, at least as ordinarily conceived, intentionality in behavior has a straightforward valuational component, so that part of what *constitutes* an action’s being intentional is whether it is praise- or blameworthy. That, however, would be an extraordinary claim to make.ⁱⁱ Philosophers, who after all are speakers of English too, routinely treat intentionality (or something akin to it) as a *prior* requirement for praise- or blameworthiness. The exception is cases of negligence—as when we hold a driver who

runs a stoplight responsible for killing an unnoticed pedestrian, notwithstanding the fact that the killing was unintentional. The situation of Knobe's chairman, however, is not one of negligence: in both vignettes, he knows perfectly well what he is doing. And where negligence is not the issue, intentionality has to count as a condition for blameworthiness, not vice versa.

How, then, should we react to Knobe's results? One possible move is to appeal to the SV—according to which, if the chairman in the harm vignette damaged the environment intentionally, he must have intended to do so. By contrast, we need not claim the chair in the help story intended to do good, since most respondents did not deem his helping the environment intentional.ⁱⁱⁱ The disparity in subjects' responses to the two vignettes could then be explained in familiar terms. The action of the chairman in the harm case was intentional, we would say, simply because it arose out of an intention to harm the environment.^{iv} By contrast, on this account, the chairman in the help scenario would have had no corresponding intention, so that his beneficial action could not be intentional. Once again, however, empirical evidence points to a problem, and this time it is the SV that is brought into question. In a second experiment, Knobe again presented the harm and help vignettes to two groups of subjects. This time, however, the groups were subdivided. Half of those presented with each story were asked whether the chairman had harmed (or helped) the environment *intentionally*. The other was asked whether or not "it was the chairman's *intention*" to harm (or help) the environment. On the question about intentionality the results were as before: the great preponderance, this time 87%, said the chairman in the harm story had done the harm intentionally, whereas only 20% subscribed to the corresponding claim regarding the help vignette. On the matter of intention, the result was even more interesting. Of those asked whether it was the chair's intention to harm the environment, a mere 29% said it was; and of those asked the corresponding question about the help vignette, *none* said it was the chair's intention to help the environment (Knobe, 2004, p. 185).

II. Two Further Experiments

These results make it difficult to appeal to the SV as a way out of the problem presented by Knobe's original data. Indeed, taken at face value, they appear to sound the knell of the SV, at least as applied to actions with wrongful side effects recognized in advance by the agent. The great majority of ordinary speakers seem prepared to treat the bringing about of such effects as intentional, whereas only a relatively small number of those questioned are ready to attribute the corresponding intention to the agent; and although not many respondents are prepared to say the production of recognized (but not cared about) beneficial side effects is even intentional, there is still a disparity with attributions of intention. Defenders of the SV have reason, however, to call for further evidence. An interesting fact about the second of the above experiments is that none of the subjects was asked to pronounce on *both* the issue of intentionality and that of intention. That is, none were tested on their willingness to make the *pair* of statements that, according to the SV, would be implicitly contradictory: namely, that the chair in either vignette had acted intentionally, yet lacked the corresponding intention. Proponents of the SV have a right to cavil over this point. Perhaps if respondents had to face the alleged contradiction directly, they would be more inclined to treat intentionality and intention as going together, in which case SV defenders could claim at least some vindication.^v

A second issue concerns the way in which, in the second experiment, the issue about intention was framed for the subjects—that is, in the question, “Was it the chairman’s intention to harm (or help) the environment?” By employing the singular noun phrase, “the chairman’s intention,” the question invites the subject to think of the vignette strictly in terms of the chair’s chief intention—namely, to maximize profit—and thus to ignore any secondary or accompanying intention he may have had.^{vi} By contrast, the SV requires only that the agent of an intentional action of *A-ing* *intend* to *A*, which is fully compatible with some other objective being his main focus of endeavor. A better test of the SV, therefore, would be to ask, “Did the chairman *intend* to harm (or help) the environment?”

To cover these bases, Knobe and I devised a pair of experiments that were run simultaneously on a large introduction to philosophy class at Texas A&M University. Since

relatively few speakers appear to think the action of the chairman in the help vignette is even intentional, we decided to concentrate exclusively on the harm situation, which was presented to all of the students in both experiments. The idea was to ask some students to pronounce on the issues of intentionality and intention/intending separately, and others to speak to both issues together, so that any hesitancy in the latter case would be apparent. The two experiments differed only in that the first asked about “the chairman’s intention,” whereas the second asked, “Did he intend...?” In the first experiment, then, the questions were:

Did the chairman harm the environment intentionally?

Was it the chairman’s intention to harm the environment?

This experiment had a total of 106 subjects, divided at random into four groups. Subjects in the first two groups were asked to answer only one of the questions. The others were given both questions, one group receiving them in the order above, and the other in the opposite order. The results were as follows:

	One question	Both questions
Intentional	63%	80%
Intention	27%	12%

The part of this experiment that parallels Knobe’s earlier work is represented by the left hand column, and there the results are as expected. Asked only whether the chair’s act of doing harm was intentional, a distinct majority answered that it was; asked only whether it was the chair’s intention to do harm, relatively few took the affirmative position. The right hand column, by contrast, displays a completely unanticipated result. Surprisingly, and to the further apparent dismay of the SV, the contrast becomes even more pronounced when both questions are asked of the same subjects. Regardless of the order in which they were asked, fully 80% of the

respondents to both questions claimed the chairman's action of harming the environment was intentional, while only 12% allowed that this had been his intention.

The design of the second experiment was the same as the first, except that the second question asked what the chair had intended, not what had been his intention. So in this case the questions were:

Did the chairman harm the environment intentionally?

Did the chairman intend to harm the environment?

In this case there were 99 respondents, divided again into four groups, analogous to those in the first experiment. The results were:

	One question	Both questions
Intentional	64%	75%
Intend	42%	31%

If we look at the left hand column in this case, we can see that amending the second question does in fact mitigate the contrast between answers. Appropriately, the percentage of subjects claiming the chairman's action was intentional shows no significant change. By contrast, the switch to asking whether he intended to harm the environment elicits noticeably higher agreement—still, admittedly, a minority, but now approaching half. Yet in this experiment also, asking the questions together seemed further to reenforce the case against the SV. To be fair, the move to either end of the scale seems less pronounced. Nevertheless, among subjects who were asked both whether the chairman had acted intentionally in harming the environment and whether he had intended to do so, the number who were willing to say he had acted intentionally rose noticeably, whereas those prepared to say he had intended to do so showed a significant decline.

III. Interpretation

Defenders of the SV can take some immediate solace from the results described above. They indicate that ordinary speakers are more willing to say the chairman *intended* to harm the environment than that it was his intention to do so. The first is all that the SV calls for, and the results suggest that if we are careful not to prompt respondents to think in terms of a single or focal intention, they will exhibit greater willingness to say agents intend to bring about the harmful consequences of their actions, even when those consequences are not the point of the action. Indeed, it would not be surprising for the percentage of positive responses to the “intend” question alone to go still higher if respondents were reminded in advance that what is intended need not be what is *mainly* intended. Nevertheless, in all the data so far, those who impute to the chairman (in whatever words) an intention to harm the environment stand significantly fewer in number than those who pronounce his act intentional—a fact which, unless they wish to modify their view, defenders of the SV are forced to explain.

Doing so will not be a simple matter. Indeed, it might be thought impossible. For the really interesting thing about both these latest experiments is that subjects who were asked to pronounce on both the issue of intentionality and that of intending/intention were more than willing to say the first obtained in the harm vignette and the second did not. Indeed, they appeared to welcome the opportunity to understand the case in just this way, with those ascribing intentionality to the chairman increasing, and those imputing intending/intention decreasing. This appears to be the precise opposite of shying away from any contradiction implicit in such a pair of verdicts, and so may be thought to finish off the SV once and for all. But I don’t think we should move so quickly. At the risk of being considered a bad sport, I want to suggest that, perversely enough, it is in fact the SV that is behind this phenomenon.

There are, I think, two dominant considerations that motivate the subjects in all of these experiments. One is disclosed in Knobe’s first experiment, and runs throughout the others: that when an agent knowingly does wrong, we view the wrongdoing as *somehow* falling within the

scope of his aims. Thus the tendency to say it is “intentional.” The second consideration is manifested in the contrast between the two experiments described above: that we tend to reserve the terms “intend” and “intention” to describe the agent’s main purpose in acting, i.e., the goal or goals that guided his behavior. Consider, then, the position of a subject who is asked only whether the chairman’s act is intentional. The overriding tendency will be to answer yes, since he knowingly performed a wrong action. By the SV, however, to say the action was intentional is to imply that it was intended—an uncomfortable implication, since it tempts us to conclude that the chairman’s main purpose in giving the order was to harm the environment. Accordingly, we can expect that fewer respondents will declare the chair’s action to have been intentional if that is the only question they are asked. More will answer in the affirmative if at the same time they are able to exclude the false suggestion, by denying that the chair intended the harm. On the other side of the issue, consider those who are asked only whether the chairman intended to do harm, or had that as his intention. The tendency here is to answer no, since that was not his focal objective. By the SV, however, this is to imply that the chair’s act was not intentional—which, since the case is not one of negligence, implies in turn that he is not blameworthy. Yet we would certainly blame him for harming the environment. Accordingly, more respondents will answer yes on the matter of intending/intention if only asked to pronounce on that issue.^{vii} By contrast, those given the luxury of denying the act was intended while insisting it was intentional will opt for that solution, so that fewer will say the act was intended.

If this is correct, then despite the first-blush negative implications of these experiments for the SV, we ought to conclude that the SV is after all one of the factors that influence the subjects’ responses in them.^{viii} Still, the fundamental issue remains: in all experiments so far, the percentage of respondents prepared to attribute intention/intending to the chairman is significantly smaller than the percentage who say his act is intentional. An opponent of the SV can still claim that this disparity is decisive. In itself, he might argue, it shows that the SV fails in cases like that of the chairman, thus forcing us to conclude that the folk conception of intentionality does not, after all, require that what is done intentionally be intended. I think,

however, that this argument is misguided. It would be a mistake, first of all, to treat experiments like these as a kind of election: for example, to declare that since, among respondents to both questions in our second experiment, the number saying the chairman's action was intentional was more than twice that of those who said it was intended, speakers who behave as though the SV fails in this case must be taken to represent "the" ordinary conception of intention. All of the respondents in these experiments are speakers of English. Admittedly, that is no guarantee against error or idiosyncrasy. If the disparity had been a truly whopping one—say, 97% to 3%—it might be safe to dismiss the dissident few as either mistaken in their understanding of the vignette or conceptually misguided. But when it is only 75% to 31% this is not a wise course, especially when the latter figure rises to 42% when subjects are asked only whether the chairman intended to do his evil deed. These figures are far too high to support the contention that those who say the chair intended to do what he did are simply confused; and we have no independent reason to think that when it comes to intentional action, the English language actually displays two dialects, one inimical to the SV and another friendly to it. Something more subtle has to be going on.

Obviously, that something has partly to do with the pragmatics of the situation—with the fact that to deny the chairman's action was intentional is to suggest it was not blameworthy, whereas to affirm it was intended is to suggest damaging the environment was the point of his order. Both suggestions are false; and if the interpretation I have suggested above is correct, it is the tension between these false suggestions that accounts for the unexpected results of our new experiments—that is, for the fact that in both tests, speakers are more willing to set aside the SV when presented with both questions than when presented with only one. But if pragmatic considerations affect the answers of speakers presented with both questions, it is a very reasonable supposition that they also affect the answers of those presented with only one. That is, it is reasonable to think that among subjects asked only whether the chairman harmed the environment intentionally, some who said yes did so at least in part to avoid the suggestion that he was not responsible; similarly, among those asked to pronounce on whether the chair's act

was intended, it is plausible to think that some who said no did so at least in part to avoid the suggestion that this was his main objective. If this is right, then the factors that appear to tip the results of our experiments against the SV may for the most part be pragmatic, rather than anything to do with the semantics of the terms “intentional” and “intend.”^{ix} Moreover, these pragmatic factors would not obtain but for the fact that when ordinary speakers address cases like the harm vignette, the SV is one principle at work in their thinking.^x

IV. Meaning It

But that is not all there is to the matter. We have still to account for the phenomenon displayed in Knobe’s first experiment, and from which this entire discussion stems: namely, the readiness of speakers to describe the chairman’s action as intentional in the harm vignette, but not (for the most part) in the help vignette. The problem here is that in both stories, the impact on the environment is presented as a side effect of the new program, one that is foreseen but not sought after, and in ordinary discourse the bringing about of such effects tends usually to be treated as neither intentional nor intended. We can, of course, carve out a special category for such actions. For example, we might adopt Bentham’s language for dealing with such cases, and say that the chairman’s action of harming the environment was *obliquely* rather than *directly* intended (1982, ch. 8). This, however, while it is a natural enough extension of everyday language about intention, will not get us the distinction we want. For Bentham’s concept of oblique intention applies also to the chair’s action in the help vignette, which relatively few respondents were prepared to describe as intentional.^{xi} Nor will it do to say that what “intentional” comes to in the harm story is simply that the chairman brought about foreseeable harm *and* was blameworthy for so doing. As was said earlier, that gets the cart before the horse. The question is, why was the chairman blameworthy? And the answer cannot be simply that he knowingly did something wrong. To be sure, harming the environment knowingly would usually be considered blameworthy, and blameworthiness ordinarily implies intentionality; but it is also true that helping the environment knowingly would in more typical circumstances be considered praiseworthy, and praiseworthiness too implies intentionality. Yet the chairman in

the help vignette does not appear praiseworthy, and few describe his action as intentional. What, then, is the crucial difference between the two cases?

It has to do with the chairman's will. The objective rightness or wrongness of an action arises from the nature of the act itself: with the good or harm wrought in it, and with whether such actions are commanded or forbidden. The praise- or blameworthiness of the agent, by contrast, is a matter of his attitude in performing the action, and the stance toward right and wrong that attitude represents. That is why morally forbidden acts done in ignorance are usually excused, whereas we are blameworthy if we even try to perform an action we know is morally forbidden, whether or not the effort succeeds. Consider first, then, the situation of the chair in the help vignette. There is, no doubt, a broad-ranging duty we all have to help the environment. But it has the character of a Kantian imperfect duty: we need not all be constantly addressing this project, nor need we avail ourselves of every opportunity for environmental enhancement that comes along. In the help vignette, therefore, it is permissible that in his conduct, the chairman "not care" about the environment. We may not approve of this attitude, and we should not approve if it constitutes his general policy in conducting company affairs. But the chairman does no wrong in evincing disinterest in helping the environment on this one occasion, even though someone else might consider the help a very salient part of the project. And once the chair disavows this interest, we have no reason to consider him praiseworthy for helping the environment. Nor have we reason to call his doing so intentional, unless we are disposed to treat the case along Benthamite lines.

The situation of the chairman in the harm vignette is entirely different, for here we are dealing with what most would take to be a perfect duty. It is always wrong to harm the environment without overriding justification, and the aim of increasing corporate profits is not overriding. Here, then, is a duty that cannot be postponed or set aside, and of course the whole point of duty is that when it applies, it does so regardless of what we care about. Yet when presented with this responsibility the chairman simply dismisses it, resolving to go forward with the new program anyway. And the key to understanding the case is: he means it. There is, that

is to say, an additional dimension of intending in the harm vignette. In setting aside the requirements of morality the chairman resolves—that is, forms the intention—to put his own and his company’s projects above moral principle, and in moving ahead with the new program he carries out that intention. He defies duty for the sake of profit, and he intends to do exactly that. It is, however, impossible to defy one’s duty not to harm the environment except by setting out to harm it. It follows, since the chairman does intend to defy his duty, then he also intends to harm the environment, just as the SV requires, and just as 42% of the respondents in the Texas A&M study said when asked only this question.

There are, I think, two things that conceal this fact. The first is that the intention to harm the environment is not part of the *content* of the chair’s decision in the harm vignette. The content of this decision, and the intention thereby formed, is simply what is reflected in his order to the vice-president: to go ahead with the new program. The intention to do harm is, however, present. It is formed earlier, when the chairman dismisses environmental concerns; and it counts as an intention *with which* the decision to go forward is made and carried out. The fact that active operations of the will can fulfill intentions as well as form them is often overlooked. Indeed, active willing is rather complex when it comes to intentionality. I have argued elsewhere that decision and volition are intrinsically intentional. It is not possible to decide to do something without meaning to decide, and to decide exactly as we do; nor is it possible to engage in whatever willing is needed to get our intentions executed without meaning intending to do so (1998, 140-42). But in addition to being intentional in themselves, decision and volition can represent the fulfillment of other, prior intentions, and some of these can arise during the same deliberation that issues in the agent’s primary act of intention formation. That is what happens in the case of the harm vignette. In the course of considering whether to enact the new program, the chairman resolves first that he will not be dissuaded from so doing by ethical concerns, that he will put profit above principle.^{xii} This purpose is then carried out when he decides to go ahead with the program and gives the order to do so. But it is only momentarily the focus of his deliberative attention, and it is not the central issue in his discussion with the

vice-president. Thus it can very easily go unnoticed.

The second factor that helps hide the chairman's nefarious purpose is that it bespeaks a certain malice that attends all wrongful decision making, and that we find troubling. It is rare at best that we think of people as doing evil for its own sake, and if we accept the idea at all we are likely to have in mind actions that display a truly vicious or malevolent streak—things like torturing others just to see them suffer, or setting fire to a forest for the excitement of watching it burn. The chairman's behavior in the harm vignette doesn't have this character, hence we may be hesitant to impute a harmful intention to him. There is, however, an obvious arrogance: a willingness to consider himself above the rules. And it is important to realize that to the extent we have it as our end to place ourselves above the rules, we also have it as our end to do harm. That is why we are all taught as children that when you have knowingly done wrong, you don't get to not mean it. Just the opposite: you did wrong on purpose, because you intentionally ignored what you were morally required to do. And so it is with the chairman. He too means to do wrong; consequently, the harm he does to the environment is done on purpose. It is intended, not as a free-standing, self-sufficient end, but as part and parcel—and in fact the concrete realization—of his determination to put himself first. It need hardly be added that the same kind of thing occurs whenever we engage in intentional wrongdoing. We may not wish to admit it, but it is true.

I submit, then, that the difference between the help and harm vignettes is after all to be understood in terms of the SV. Unlike the help situation, where the chairman need attach no special value to helping the environment, the harm vignette is one where he does have to value the harm, as part of his enterprise of showing that he will not be deterred by the wrongness of his action. It is to be expected, therefore, that more respondents will attribute both intentionality and intending to the chair in the latter story. This is not, however, the only consideration. The respondents' answers are also influenced by fact that when we speak of an agent's intention, we usually have in mind the agent's main purpose in acting, as well as by the relatively less conspicuous character of the intention to do harm. Still, the latter intention is one we are able

enough to recognize that most respondents see clearly that the chair's behavior in the harm vignette is intentional, and a healthy percentage are willing to pronounce it intended—despite the pragmatic considerations that discourage doing so.

V. Conclusion

If all this is true, of course, defenders of the SV may take heart. But the important thing is not to defend the SV against any and all challenges, especially when it is considered only as a thesis about relationships among folk psychological concepts. As with most adjectives ending in the letters *-al*, the definition dictionaries give as most common for “intentional” is simply, “of or pertaining to intention or purpose”^{xiii}—not much of a mouthful at all, and certainly weaker than what philosophers, regardless of their views about the SV, tend to have in mind when they call an action intentional. Philosophers can relax, then, if at the level of folk concepts the principle is found to have exceptions. The situation is much different, however, when it comes to concrete reality—that is, when it comes to figuring out and describing what actually goes on in behavior we call “intentional.” There, the Simple View deserves to be treated as the default position, if only because it is simple. And the problem with the exceptions usually claimed is that when, in addressing them, we reject the SV, we risk misrepresenting practical reason. In the disputes over epistemic matters mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the danger was that we would fail to appreciate the fact that a rational intention should be aimed not at what we think we can achieve but at what is worth pursuing, which may be something quite different. In the present case, the danger is that we will fail to understand the nature of willful wrongdoing: its complexity, and the fact that it involves purposes we would often rather not admit we have. I am convinced that empirical evidence about everyday discourse can be very helpful for understanding these things. But I also think a proper appreciation of the present evidence will be greatly facilitated if we hang on to the SV instead of laying it aside.^{xiv}

ENDNOTES

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ⁱ See also Mele (1989). I defend the opposite view in my (1986 and (1991).

ⁱⁱ Alfred Mele and Steven Sverdlik (1996) have criticized a claim of Bratman's along these lines, on the ground that the concept of intentionality does not in itself have an evaluative component. I am disposed to agree, though I find their argument less than fully convincing.

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- iii “Need not” rather than “must not,” because the SV makes intending to *A* necessary for *A*-ing intentionally, not sufficient.
- iv For a related suggestion see Fred Adams and Annie Steadman (2004a, p. 180).
- v The same idea is proposed by Adams and Steadman (2004b, p. 276).
- vi It is worth adding that the use of the definite article strengthens the invitation, since the phrase “the chairman’s intention” could be parsed (somewhat amphibolously) as “the intention of the chairman.”
- vii Cf. Adams and Steadman (2004a, p. 177).
- viii An additional factor was suggested by the editor of this journal: it may be that in each experiment, the subjects presented with both questions tended to assume, since there were two, that different answers were expected, and so were inclined to view the case in such a light. I am inclined to agree. Even so, I think the explanation I have suggested provides a rationale for the contrasting answers.
- ix This suggestion is reinforced by the results of another of Knobe’s experiments, which instead of focusing on intentionality and intention, addressed the closely related question of whether the chairman in the two vignettes had harmed (or helped) the environment “in order to” make a profit. Each claim was presented separately to half the subjects, who were then asked to rate the claim on a scale of -3 to +3, with negative numbers indicating “sounds wrong,” and positive “sounds right.” The statement that the chair in the help vignette had helped the environment in order to increase profits was thought to sound wrong, the average rating being -1; that which said the chair in the harm vignette had harmed the environment to increase profits got a “sounds right” rating of +.6. (Knobe, 2004, p. 184). This result is in line with the other experiments described, as should be expected. What leaps to the eye, however, is the relative

tepidity of both averages, which suggests that in fact the respondents were not all that happy with either claim. I would be surprised if the same were not true of the subjects in the other experiments also.

^x For more on the importance of pragmatics for understanding Knobe's results, see the papers by Adams and Steadman cited earlier, to which the discussion here is indebted.

^{xi} But enough (13%) to indicate that Bentham's suggestion is at least not very far removed from everyday discourse; it appears some ordinary speakers are disposed to treat any foreseen consequence of action as intended in some weaker sense.

^{xii} The chair might, of course, have a policy of ignoring environmental concern. If so, then the intention to put profit above principle is of long standing, and is only being reaffirmed in the harm vignette.

^{xiii} The words here are from Random House (1996).

^{xiv} An earlier version of this paper was presented at the University of Siena in May, 2004. I am grateful for the comments received then; also to Christoph Lumer and Robert Audi for helpful discussion, as well as to the referees and editor of this Journal for their advice and comments. Finally, I am especially thankful to Joshua Knobe, first for prompting me to think about these matters again, but much more for his patient assistance with the design and interpretation of the experiments described herein. He is not to be blamed for the interpretation I have given, but it has benefitted greatly from his comments and suggestions.