

# *Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language*

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The chairman of the board of a company has decided to implement a new program. He believes

(1) that the program will make a lot of money for his company  
and

(2) that the program will also produce some other effect  $x$ .

But the chairman doesn't care at all about effect  $x$ . His sole reason for implementing the new program is that he believes it will make a lot of money for the company. In the end, everything proceeds as anticipated: the program makes a lot of money for the company and also produces effect  $x$ .

Here it appears that, although the chairman foresaw that  $x$  would result from his behaviour, he did not care either way whether  $x$  actually occurred. Let us say, then, that  $x$  was a 'side effect' of his behaviour. The question I want to address here is: Shall we say that the chairman brought about this side effect *intentionally*?

This question goes to the heart of a major controversy regarding the proper analysis of the concept of intentional action. So, for example, on Alfred Mele's (2001) analysis, it is always wrong to say that a side effect was brought about intentionally.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, on Michael Bratman's (1984; 1987) analysis, there are circumstances under which side effects can truly be said to have been brought about intentionally. Numerous other authors have come down on one side or the other of this issue.

Now, when we encounter a controversy like this one, it can sometimes be helpful to ask ourselves what people would ordinarily say about the situation under discussion. Would people ordinarily say that the side effects of a behaviour were brought about intentionally? Clearly, ordinary language does not here constitute a court of final appeal. (Even if it turns out that people ordinarily call side effects 'intentional', we might conclude that they are truly unintentional.) Still, it does seem plausible that the examination of ordinary language might provide us with some useful guidance about difficult cases like this one.

In an earlier publication, the experimental psychologist Bertram Malle and I provided empirical support for the conclusion that people only con-

<sup>1</sup> Mele (2003) now retracts this view in response to an earlier version of the present paper.