I said in chapter 1 that many mistakes in the discussion of practical reason derive from an adherence to a mistaken conception of rationality, a conception that I have called the "Classical Model." But there is a second reason for a number of mistakes: the authors in question seldom proceed from an adequate philosophy of intentionality and of action to start with. Trying to write about rationality without an adequate general conception of mind, language, and action is like trying to write about transportation without knowing about cars, buses, trains, and airplanes. For example, a question that is commonly asked is: what stands to action in the way that truth stands to belief? The idea is that if we could get clearer about the purpose of action the way that we can get clear about the relation of belief to truth, then somehow or other the subject of practical reason would become clearer. But the whole question is muddled. Nothing stands to action in the relation in which belief stands to truth, for reasons that will become, I hope, completely clear when I explain the intentional structure of actions.

In this chapter I present, in bare outline, a general theory of the intentional structure of human action, meaning, and
institutional facts. It is impossible to understand rational action if you do not understand what an intentional action is in the first place, and it is impossible to understand reasons for action if you do not understand how humans can create commitments and other meaningful entities and thereby create reasons. But it is impossible to understand these notions without first having some understanding of intentionality in general. Unless the reader is clear about such basic notions as psychological mode, intentional content, conditions of satisfaction, direction of fit, intentional causation, causal self-referentiality, status functions, etc., he or she will not understand the argument that follows. What I say in this chapter is almost entirely a repetition of material from my other books, especially *Intentionality*¹ and *The Construction of Social Reality*.² For a more detailed exposition of the points made in this chapter, as well as arguments for these conclusions, the reader should consult those books. Readers familiar with the arguments of those books can read through this chapter rapidly.

I do not know how to present the material of this chapter efficiently except by laying it out, Tractatus style, as a set of numbered propositions.

1. **The definition of intentionality: intentionality is directedness.**

"Intentionality," as philosophers use the word, refers to that aspect of mental states by which they are directed at, or about, or of states of affairs in the world beyond themselves. "Intentionality" has no special connection with

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"intending" in the ordinary English sense, in which, for example, I intend to go to the movies tonight. Intending is just one kind of intentionality among others. Thus, for example, beliefs, fears, hopes, desires, and intentions are all intentional states, as are the emotions such as love and hate, fear and joy, pride and shame. Any state that is directed at something beyond itself is an intentional state. So, for example, visual experiences are intentional but undirected anxieties are not.

2. **Intentional states consist in a content and a psychological mode, and often the content is a whole proposition.**

   Intentional states typically have a structure analogous to the structure of speech acts. Just as I can order you to leave the room, ask whether you will leave the room, and predict that you will leave the room, so I can hope that you will leave the room, fear that you will leave the room, or desire that you will leave the room. In each case there is a propositional content, that you will leave the room, which comes in one or another of the various linguistic or psychological modes. In the case of language it can, for example, come in the form of a question, prediction, promise, or order. In the case of the mind it can, for example, come in the form of beliefs, fears, and desires. For this reason I will represent the general structure of intentionality as of the form

   \[ S(p) \]

   The "S" in this formula marks the type of psychological state, and the "p" marks the propositional content of the state. It is essential to make this distinction because the same propositional content can occur in different
psychological modes. For example, I can both believe that it will rain, and hope that it will rain; and of course the same psychological mode, such as belief, can accommodate a potentially infinite number of different propositional contents. I can believe all sorts of things.

Not all intentional states have an entire proposition as their intentional content. Beliefs and desires have entire propositions, but love and hate do not necessarily. One can, for example, simply love Sally or hate Harry. For this reason, some philosophers refer to intentional states with an entire propositional content as "propositional attitudes." I think this terminology is confused, because it suggests that a belief or a desire is an attitude toward a proposition, but that is not the case. If I believe that Clinton is president, my attitude is toward Clinton, the man himself, not toward the proposition. The proposition is the content, not the object, of my belief. So I will avoid the terminology of "propositional attitudes," and just refer to intentional states, and make a distinction within intentional states between those that have entire propositions as their contents, and those that do not. Thus the difference between believing that Clinton is president and hating Harry will be represented as follows:

Bel (Clinton is president)

Hate (Harry)

3. Propositional intentional states typically have conditions of satisfaction and a direction of fit.
Intentional states with a propositional content can either match or fail to match reality, and the way they are supposed to match reality is determined by the psychological mode. Beliefs, for example, are true or false, depending on
whether the content of the belief matches an independently existing reality. But desires are not true or false; they are fulfilled or frustrated, depending on whether reality matches or comes to match the content of the desire. Intentions, like desires, are not true or false but are carried out or not carried out, depending on whether the behavior of the person with the intention comes to match the content of the intention. To account for these facts, we need the notions of conditions of satisfaction and direction of fit. Intentional states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions have conditions of satisfaction and directions of fit. A belief is satisfied if true, not satisfied if false. A desire will be satisfied if fulfilled, not satisfied if frustrated. An intention will be satisfied if carried out, not satisfied if not carried out.

Furthermore, these conditions of satisfaction are represented with different directions of fit, or different responsibilities for fitting. Thus, for example, a belief can be true or false, depending on whether or not the propositional content of the belief actually matches the way things are in the world that exists independently of the belief. For example, if I believe that it is raining, my belief will be true, hence satisfied, if and only if it is raining. Because it is the responsibility of the belief to match an independently existing state of affairs in the world, we can say that the belief has the mind-to-world direction of fit. It is the task of the belief, as part of the mind, to represent or fit an independently existing reality, and it will succeed or fail depending on whether or not the content of the belief in the mind actually does fit the reality in the world. Desires, on the other hand, have the opposite direction of fit from beliefs. Desires represent not how things are in the world, but how we would like them to be. It is, so to speak, the
task of the world to fit the desire. Desires and intentions, unlike beliefs, have the world-to-mind direction of fit. If my belief is false, I can fix it up by changing the belief, but I do not in that way make things right if my desire is not satisfied by changing the desire. To fix things up, the world has to change to match the content of the desire. For that reason I say that desires and intentions, unlike beliefs, have the world-to-mind direction of fit.

This distinction is marked for us in ordinary language by the fact that we do not say of desires and intentions that they are true or false. We say rather that the desire is fulfilled or frustrated; and the intention is or is not carried out, depending on whether or not the world comes to match the content of the desire or the intention. The simplest rough and ready test for whether or not an intentional state has the mind-to-world direction of fit is whether or not you can literally say of it that it is true or false.

Some intentional states, such as many of the emotions, do not in this sense have a direction of fit, because they presuppose that the propositional content of the emotion is already satisfied. Thus if I am overjoyed that France won the World Cup, I simply take it for granted that France won the World Cup. My joy has as its propositional content that France won the World Cup, and I presuppose that the propositional content matches reality. It is not the point of the intentional state to represent either how I believe the world is in fact or how I want it to be; rather it is presupposed that the propositional content matches reality. In such cases I say that the intentional state has the null or zero direction of fit. We may then identify three directions of fit: mind-to-world, which is characteristic of beliefs and other cognitive states; world-
to-mind, which is characteristic of intentions and desires as well as other volitive and conative states; and the null direction of fit, which is characteristic of emotions such as pride and shame, joy and despair. Though many emotions do not have a direction of fit as such, they typically contain desires and beliefs and these do have directions of fit. Thus emotions such as love and hate can play a role in practical reason because they contain desires, and these desires do have a direction of fit and thus can motivate rational actions. This feature will prove important in our discussion of motivation.

The notions of conditions of satisfaction and direction of fit apply to both mental and linguistic entities. Indeed it was because of the parallels with speech acts that I was led to many of the conclusions I came to about the nature of the mind. Statements, like beliefs, represent their conditions of satisfaction with the word-to-world (like mind-to-world) direction of fit; orders and promises, like desires and intentions represent their conditions of satisfaction with the world-to-word (like world-to-mind) direction of fit.

4. Many entities in the world that are not, strictly speaking, parts of mind or language have conditions of satisfaction and direction of fit.

The map of a territory, for example, can be accurate or inaccurate; it has the map-to-world direction of fit. The blueprints for a house to be built will either be followed or not followed; they have the world-to-blueprint direction of fit. The contractor is supposed to build the building to match the blueprint. Needs, obligations, requirements, and duties are also not in any strict sense linguistic entities, but they also have propositional contents and directions of fit. They have the same direction of fit as desires,
intentions, orders, and promises. If for example I am under an obligation to pay some money, then my obligation will be discharged (satisfied) if and only if I pay the money. Thus the obligation is satisfied if and only if the world changes to match the content of the obligation. Needs, requirements, commitments, and duties, like obligations, have a direction of fit that requires the world to change to match the need, requirement, commitment, or duty, in order that they be satisfied.

I like to use very simple metaphors, and represent phenomena such as beliefs, statements, and maps as hovering above the world, pointing down at the world they represent. So I think of the language-to-world, mind-to-world direction of fit as going downward. And I sometimes represent that direction of fit with a downward arrow. Correspondingly, desires, intentions, orders, promises, obligations, and commitments have the world-to-mind, world-to-language direction of fit. I think of that direction of fit as pointing upward, and I represent it with an upward arrow. To avoid the cumbersome locutions I will sometimes just say “downward” and “upward” respectively, or sometimes just draw a downward or upward arrow.

I cannot overestimate the importance of this rather dry discussion for the understanding of rationality. The key to understanding rationality in action is to understand the relations of the gap to the upward direction of fit.

5. Intentional states often function causally by a special kind of causation, intentional causation, and some of them have causation built into their conditions of satisfaction. Such states are causally self-referential. The general notion of causation is the notion of something making something else happen. Thus in the classic exam-
ple, billiard ball A hits billiard ball B, causing it to move. It is sometimes said that this sort of causation is only one kind of causation, "efficient causation" after Aristotle; and there are supposed to be at least three other kinds, also using Aristotle's terminology: formal, final, and material. I think this whole discussion is confused. There is only one kind of causation, and it is efficient causation. However, within efficient causation, there is an important subcategory having to do with mental causation. These are cases where something causes a mental state, or where a mental state causes something else. And within the subcategory of mental causation, there is yet another subcategory, that of intentional causation. In the case of intentional causation an intentional state either causes its conditions of satisfaction, or the conditions of satisfaction of an intentional state cause it. To put this same point in slightly different terminology, in the case of intentional causation an intentional state causes the very state of affairs it represents, or the state of affairs it represents causes it. Thus if I want to drink water, my desire to drink water may cause me to drink water, and thus I have a case of intentional causation. The desire has the content that I drink water, and that desire causes it to be the case that I drink water (though we must remember of course that there is generally a gap in such cases of voluntary action). If I see that the cat is on the mat, then the fact that the cat is on the mat causes the very visual experience, part of whose conditions of satisfaction are that the cat is on the mat. Intentional causation is any causal relation between an intentional state and its conditions of satisfaction, where the intentional state causes its conditions of satisfaction, or its conditions of satisfaction cause it.

Just as we found the notion of direction of fit essential for understanding the ways in which intentionality and the
real world relate to each other, so it seems to me we also need the notion of direction of causation. If I am thirsty, and I drink water in order to satisfy my thirst, then my thirst, being among other things a desire to drink water, will have the world-to-mind (upward) direction of fit. The desire to drink, if satisfied, will be satisfied by a change in the world so that the world matches the content of the desire: the desire that I drink water. But if my desire causes me to drink the water, then the causal relation between my desire and my drinking is from mind-to-world. My desire in the mind causes me (modulo the gap, of course) to drink water in the world. The world-to-mind direction of fit, in this case, is paralleled by the mind-to-world direction of causation. In the case of visual perception, for example, the direction of fit and the direction of causation are different. If the visual experience is, as they say, veridical, then the visual experience will match the world, and we will have a successful mind-to-world direction of fit. But if the visual experience is truly satisfied, it must be the case that the state of affairs I am perceiving in the world causes the very visual experience by way of which I perceive that state of affairs. Thus, in this case, the mind-to-world direction of fit is paralleled by the world-to-mind direction of causation.

This example illustrates a special subclass of cases of intentional causation, where it is part of the conditions of satisfaction of the intentional state in question that it must itself function causally in producing its conditions of satisfaction, if it is to be satisfied. Thus, in the case of intentions, unlike desires, the intention is not actually carried out unless the intention itself causes the very action that is represented in the content of the intention. If the action has a different cause, then the intention is not carried out. We may say in such cases, then, that the conditions
of satisfaction of the intentional state are causally self-referential. The cases of intentional states that are causally self-referential are: perceptual experiences, memories, and intentions. Let us consider each of these in order. In the case of perceptual experience, the experience will be satisfied only if the very state of affairs that is purportedly perceived causes that very perceptual experience. Thus, for example, if I see that the cat is on the mat, the intentional content of the visual experience is

\[ \text{Vis. Exp. (that the cat is on the mat, and the fact that the cat is on the mat causes this Vis. Exp.).} \]

This formula is to be read as follows: I am now having a visual experience whose conditions of satisfaction are that the cat is on the mat, and the fact that the cat is on the mat is causing this visual experience. Notice that we need to distinguish what is actually seen from the total conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience. What is actually seen is the fact that the cat is on the mat, but the total conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience include a causally self-referential component. It is important to emphasize that I do not actually see causation—I see a cat and a mat, and I see the former on the latter. But in order that I should be able to do that, there must be a causal component to the total conditions of satisfaction of the visual experience, and it is this logical feature that I am trying to capture with the formula above.

Memories are similarly causally self-referential. If I remember that I went on a picnic yesterday, then the conditions of satisfaction are both that I went on a picnic

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3. Recognition of the phenomenon of causal self-referentiality goes back a long way. It was noticed, for example, by Kant in his discussion of the causality of the will. The terminology, as far as I know, was first used by Gilbert Harman, "Practical Reasoning," *Review of Metaphysics* 29, 1976, pp. 431–463.
yesterday, and that the fact that I went on a picnic yesterday causes this very memory. Notice that in the case of perception and memory we have the mind-to-world direction of fit and the world-to-mind direction of causation. In both the case of perception and memory, if I see how the world really is, or remember how it was, and thus achieve mind-to-world direction of fit, it can only be because the world’s being that way or having been that way causes me to have this perceptual experience and this memory, and thus achieve world-to-mind direction of causation. Mind-to-world direction of fit is achieved in virtue of successful world-to-mind direction of causation.

We also find causal self-referentiality in the structure of intention and action. In a very simple case here is how it works. I have a set of beliefs and desires, and by engaging in reasoning on these beliefs and desires, I arrive at an intention. Such intentions that are formed prior to an action I call prior intentions. Thus for example suppose that in a meeting I want to vote for a motion that has been put forward, and I believe that I can vote for the motion by raising my right arm. I thus form the prior intention that I raise my arm. The intentional content of the prior intention to raise my arm can be represented as follows:

\[ \text{p.i. (that I raise my arm and that this p.i. causes that I raise my arm).} \]

This formula is to be read as follows: I have a prior intention whose conditions of satisfaction are that I raise my arm, and that this very prior intention causes that I raise my arm.

The prior intention has to be distinguished from what I call the intention-in-action. The intention-in-action is the intention I have while I am actually performing an action. Thus in this case, when the moment to vote comes, and
the chair says “All those in favor raise your arm,” I will act on my prior intention, and thus have an intention in action whose conditions of satisfaction are that that very intention-in-action should cause the bodily movement of my arm going up. We can represent that as follows:

\[ \text{i.a. (my arm goes up and this i.a. causes that my arm goes up).} \]

This formula is to be read as follows: I have an intention-in-action whose conditions of satisfaction are that my arm goes up, and that this very intention-in-action causes that my arm go up.

In ordinary English the closest word for intention-in-action is “trying.” If you had an intention-in-action but failed to achieve its conditions of satisfaction, you did at least try. In a typical case, then, of a premeditated action where I act on a prior intention, such as this case where I raise my arm, the structure of the whole thing is that first I formed a prior intention (whose conditions of satisfaction are that it should cause the whole action) and then I perform the whole action, where the whole action consists of two components, the intention-in-action and the bodily movement (and the condition of satisfaction of the intention-in-action is that it should cause the bodily movement).

Of course, not all actions are premeditated. Many of the things I do, I do quite spontaneously. In such a case I have an intention-in-action but no prior intention. For example, I sometimes just get up and walk around the room when I am thinking about a philosophical problem. My walking around the room is done intentionally, even though I had no prior intention. My bodily movements in such a case are caused by an ongoing intention-in-action, but there was no prior intention.
6. The intentional structures of cognition and volition are mirror images of each other, with directions of fit and directions of causation running in opposite directions.

If we start with action and perception we can see these symmetries and asymmetries. Perceptions consist of two components. In the case of vision, for example, a perception consists of a conscious visual experience, together with a state of affairs perceived. So if I see that the cat is on the mat, then I both have the visual experience, and there is a corresponding state of affairs in the world, that the cat is on the mat. Furthermore, if the visual experience is to be satisfied, its causally self-referential component must be satisfied: the state of affairs in the world that I am perceiving must cause the very experience of perceiving. Human action is exactly parallel but with opposite directions of fit and causation. Thus a successfully performed intentional action consists of two components, an intention-in-action, and, typically, a bodily movement. So if I raise my arm in the performance of a human action, then there is an intention-in-action; and it has as its conditions of satisfaction that my arm goes up, and that that very intention-in-action causes that my arm goes up. Thus the two components of the successfully performed intentional action are the intention-in-action and the bodily movement.

The symmetries and asymmetries of the relations between perception and action are typical of cognition and volition generally. We saw above that the cognitive states of perception and memory have mind-to-world direction of fit, and world-to-mind direction of causation. But the prior intention and the intention-in-action have opposite directions of fit and of causation. They have world-to-mind direction of fit and mind-to-world direc-
tion of causation. That is just another way of saying that the intention is carried out only if the world comes to be the way the intention represents it, and the intention causes it to be that way. Thus, in order to be satisfied, the intention must achieve world-to-mind direction of fit and mind-to-world direction of causation. The intention will be satisfied only if the intention itself functions causally in achieving the world-to-mind direction of fit. In such a case we achieve upward direction of fit only in virtue of downward direction of causation. A typical pattern, then, of premeditated action, is that on the basis of beliefs and desires you form a prior intention. The prior intention is a representation of a whole action, and the whole action consists of two components—the intention-in-action and the bodily movement. If the prior intention is carried out, it will cause the intention-in-action, which in turn will cause the bodily movement. The entire formal structure of the relationships between cognition and volition is depicted in table 1.

Intentions in action may or may not be conscious. When they are conscious experiences, I call them “experiences of acting,” and I believe that what I call experiences of acting is what William James called the feeling of “effort.”

7. Deliberation typically leads to intentional action by way of prior intentions.

In a simple case where the only reasons are beliefs and desires, we can say: reflection on beliefs and desires, with their different directions of fit, leads to a decision, that is, the formation of a prior intention, which has upward direction of fit and downward direction of causation. The

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prior intention has the condition of satisfaction that it cause an action. The action consists of two components, the intention-in-action and the bodily movement, and the intention-in-action has as its condition of satisfaction that it cause the bodily movement. Thus the sequence in the case of premeditated action is:

Deliberation causes prior intention, which causes intention-in-action, which in turn causes bodily movement. The total action consists of the intention-in-action and the bodily movement. The pattern, then, can be represented as follows, letting the arrows stand for the causal relation:

Deliberation on beliefs and desires → prior intention → intention-in-action → bodily movement (action = intention-in-action + bodily movement)

In the case of volition, the direction of fit of the causally self-referential states is always world-to-mind, and the direction of causation, mind-to-world. In the case of cognition, the direction of fit of the causally self-referential states is always mind-to-world, and the direction of causation is always world-to-mind. The intention will be satisfied, and thus achieve world-to-mind direction of fit, only if the intention itself functions causally to bring about that fit. Perceptions and memories will be satisfied, and thus achieve mind-to-world direction of fit, only if the world itself causes those very perceptions and memories. Thus we achieve mind-to-world direction of fit only in virtue of world-to-mind direction of causation.

8. The structure of volition contains three gaps. Once we allow for the differences in direction of fit and direction of causation, the chief asymmetry between the
formal structure of cognition, on the one hand, and volition on the other, is that volition has gaps. “The gap” is the general name that I have introduced for the phenomenon that we do not normally experience the stages of our deliberations and voluntary actions as having causally sufficient conditions or as setting causally sufficient conditions for the next stage. We can segment the continuous experience of the gap, for the purposes of this book, as follows. In the structure of deliberation and action, there is first the gap between the deliberations and the prior intentions that are the result of the deliberations. Thus if I am deliberating about whether or not to vote for the motion, there is a gap between the reasons that I have for and against voting for the motion, and the actual decision, the actual formation of a prior intention, to vote for the motion. Furthermore there is a gap between the prior intention and the intention-in-action, that is, the gap between deciding to do something and actually trying to do it. There is no such gap between the intention-in-action and the bodily movement. If I am actually trying to do something, and if I succeed, my trying has to be causally sufficient for the success. The third gap is in the structure of temporally extended intentions-in-action. Where I have an intention-in-action to engage in some complex pattern of activity such as writing a book or swimming the English Channel, the initiation of the original intention-in-action is not by itself sufficient to guarantee the continuation of that intention-in-action through the completion of the activity. Thus at any stage of the carrying out of an intention-in-action there is a third gap. Furthermore, if it is some lengthy act such as swimming the English Channel or writing a book, my prior intention continues to be causally effective throughout the entire operation. That is,
I have to keep making an effort to carry out to completion the pattern of action that I originally planned in the formation of the prior intention.\(^5\)

9. Complex actions have an internal structure whereby the agent intends to do one thing by means of doing something else, or he intends to do one thing by way of doing something else. These two relations are causal and constitutive, respectively.

I have been talking as if one simply performed an action, so to speak, just like that. But except for such simple actions as raising one’s arm, human actions are more complex and have a complex internal structure. Normally one does one thing by-way-of or by-means-of doing something else. One turns on the light by means of moving the switch, one fires the gun by means of pulling the trigger, for example. Even in the simple example I gave, one votes by way of raising one’s arm. There are not two actions, raising one’s arm and voting, but only one action: voting by way of raising one’s arm. The internal structure of action is very important for the topic of practical reason, because often the decision is a matter of choosing the by-means-of relation or the by-way-of relation for achieving one’s goal. In the simple ape example that we discussed in chapter 1, the ape got the bananas by means of poking at them with the stick. The two most important structural forms in the internal structure of actions are the causal by-means-of relation and the constitutive by-way-

\(^5\) I did not see this point when I wrote *Intentionality*. In that book I represent the prior intention as ceasing to exist once the intention-in-action begins. But that is a mistake. The prior intention can continue to be effective throughout the performance of an act. This mistake was pointed out to me by Brian O’Shaughnessy.
of relation. If I fire the gun by means of pulling the trigger, the relationship is causal. Pulling the trigger causes the gun to fire. If I vote by way of raising my arm, the relation is constitutive. In that context raising my arm constitutes voting. In the case of the by-means-of relation, the relation between the components of the action is one of causation: flipping the switch causes the light to go on, and when I turned on the light by means of flipping the switch, I had a complex intention-in-action, that this intention-in-action should cause the flipping of the switch, which in turn would cause the light to go on. But when I raised my arm in order to vote, my arm's going up did not cause me to vote; rather my arm going up constituted my voting. In that context the bodily movement constituted or counted as the action in question. For complex actions, extending over long periods of time, these relations become quite complex. Consider writing this book. I work on it by sitting at my computer and typing my thoughts. These acts do not cause the writing of the book, but they are constitutive of its stages. When I hit the keys of the computer, on the other hand, my actions cause the text of the book to appear on the screen.

Another idealization I have been employing is to talk as if all actions were cases of intentions-in-action causing bodily movements. But of course there are also mental actions, for example, doing addition in one's head. And there are negative actions, for example, refraining from smoking. There are also, as I mentioned above, extended actions such as writing a book or training for a ski race. I believe the account I have given, with its distinctions between prior intentions and intentions-in-action, and its distinction between the causal by-means-of relations and the constitutive by-way-of relations in the inner structure, will account for all of these cases as well.
10. **Meaning is a matter of the intentional imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction.**

If, for example, a speaker says, "It is raining," and means by that utterance that it is raining, then the conditions of satisfaction of his intention-in-action are first, that the intention-in-action should cause the utterance of a sentence, "It is raining," and second, that the utterance should itself have the condition of satisfaction with downward direction of fit, that it is raining. In the case of speaker meaning, the speaker creates a form of intentionality by intentionally imposing conditions of satisfaction on something that he has produced intentionally, such as sounds from his mouth or marks on paper. He produces an utterance intentionally, and he produces the utterance with the additional intention that that utterance should itself have conditions of satisfaction.

This procedure in a natural human language is made possible by the fact that the words in the sentences of the language have a form of intentionality that is itself derived from the intrinsic or observer-independent intentionality of human agents. And that leads to my next point:

11. **We need to distinguish between observer-independent and observer-dependent intentionality.**

I have been talking about the intentionality of the human mind. But there are intentional ascriptions to things other than the mind that are literally true, where the intentionality depends on the intrinsic or observer-independent intentionality of the mind. Most obviously in the case of language, words and sentences can be said to have meaning, and meaning is a form of intentionality. This is the difference between my saying "I am hungry," which liter-
ally ascribes intentionality to me, and my saying, “The French sentence ‘J’ai faim’ means I am hungry.” By ascribing meaning to the sentence, I have ascribed a form of intentionality to it. But the intentionality of the French sentence is not, so to speak, intrinsic; it is derived from the intentionality of French speakers. Thus I will say that there is a distinction between the observer-independent intentionality of my mental state of hunger, and the observer-dependent or observer-relative intentionality of words and sentences in French, English, and other languages. There is a third form of intentional ascriptions, which is neither observer-independent nor observer-relative, and which is not literal at all. I am thinking of such things as when we ascribe memory to a computer or desire to a plant. This is a harmless manner of speaking. If I say, “My plants are thirsty for water,” no one will be confused into thinking that I am literally ascribing intentionality to them. These ascriptions I will call metaphorical or “as-if” ascriptions of intentionality. But I am not ascribing a third kind of intentionality; rather plants, computers, and lots of other things behave as if they had intentionality; and thus we can make these metaphorical, as-if ascriptions to them, even though they do not, literally speaking, have any intentionality.

12. The distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is really a conflation of two distinctions, one ontological, and one epistemic.
We can use the distinction between observer-relative and observer-independent forms of intentionality to make a further distinction that is important for the subsequent argument of this book. The notion of objectivity and the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity figure large
in our intellectual culture. We seek scientific truths that are "objective." But there is a massive confusion in these notions, which we need to sort out. We need to distinguish between ontological objectivity and subjectivity on the one hand, and epistemic objectivity and subjectivity on the other. Examples will make the distinction clear. If I say I have a pain, I ascribe to myself a subjective experience. That subjective experience has a subjective ontology because it exists only when it is experienced by a conscious subject. In that respect pains, tickles, and itches differ from mountains, molecules, and glaciers; because mountains, etc. have an objective existence, or an objective ontology. The distinction between ontological subjectivity and objectivity is not at all the same as the distinction between epistemic subjectivity and objectivity. If I say, "Rembrandt spent his entire life in the Netherlands," that statement is epistemically objective because we can ascertain its truth or falsity without reference to the attitudes and feelings of observers. But if I say, "Rembrandt was the greatest painter that ever lived in Amsterdam"; well, that is, as they say, a matter of opinion. It is epistemically subjective because its truth cannot be settled independently of the subjective attitudes of the admirers and detractors of the works of Rembrandt and other Amsterdam painters. We can say, in light of this distinction, that all observer-relative phenomena contain an element of ontological subjectivity. The fact that something means something as a sentence of French is dependent on the ontologically subjective attitudes of French speakers. But, and this is the crucial point, ontological subjectivity does not necessarily imply epistemic subjectivity. We can have epistemically objective knowledge about the meanings of sentences in French and other languages, even though those meanings
are ontologically subjective. This distinction will prove crucial to us later on when we discover that many of the features of the world that motivate rational actions are similarly ontologically subjective but epistemically objective.

13. Collective intentionality enables the creation of institutional facts. Institutional facts are created in accordance with constitutive rules of the form “X counts as Y in C.”

Intentionality can be not only individual, as in “I intend to go to the movies,” but also collective, as in “We intend to go to the movies.” Collective intentionality enables groups of people to create common institutional facts, such as those involving money, property, marriage, government, and above all, language. In such cases, the existence of the institution enables individuals or groups of individuals to impose on objects functions that the objects cannot perform in virtue of their physical structure alone, but only in virtue of the collective recognition of the object as having a certain status, and with that status, a special function. I call these status functions, and they typically take the form “X counts as Y in C.” Thus, such and such a sequence of words counts as a sentence of English, such and such a piece of paper counts as a ten dollar bill in the United States, such and such a position counts as checkmate in chess, a person who satisfies such and such conditions counts as the President of the United States. These status functions differ from physical functions because an object such as a screwdriver performs its physical function in virtue of its physical structure, whereas English sentences, checkmates, money, and presidents can perform their
functions only if they are collectively recognized as having a certain status and with that status a function.

The combination of institutional reality, itself created by the imposition of status functions according to the constitutive rule "X counts as Y in C," together with a special form of status function, namely the imposition of meaning, enables individual human beings to create certain forms of desire-independent reasons for action. We will explore this phenomenon in detail in chapter 6. At this point I just want to emphasize the following. We have seen that meaning is a matter of the imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction (point 10); and that fact is combined with the fact that institutional facts are created within institutional systems, whereby an agent imposes a function on an entity where the entity cannot perform that function without some sort of collective acceptance or recognition of that function. These two factors together enable us to see how, in the performance of a speech act such as making an assertion or giving a promise, the speaker creates a new set of conditions of satisfaction, and this new set of conditions of satisfaction is the result of the creation of an institutional fact, for example, the fact that the speaker has made an assertion to the hearer or made a promise to the hearer.

14. Intentionality functions only to determine conditions of satisfaction against a pre-intentional or nonintentional Background of abilities.
In addition to the intentional structure of cognition and volition we need to explain that the entire system of intentionality functions, that intentional states determine conditions of satisfaction, only against a Background of
abilities, capacities, tendencies, and dispositions that human beings and animals have, and that do not themselves consist in intentional states. In order that I can form the intention to walk across the room or brush my teeth or write a book, I have to be able to walk across the room, brush my teeth, or write a book, or at least I have to presuppose that I am able to do these things. But my abilities do not themselves consist in further intentional states, though the abilities are capable of generating intentional states. Think of my abilities, capacities, tendencies, and dispositions ontologically speaking as a set of brain structures. Those brain structures enable me to activate the system of intentionality and to make it function, but the capacities realized in the brain structures do not themselves consist in intentional states.

The Background is important for understanding the structure of rationality in many ways that go beyond the scope of this book. Apparent cases of cultural relativity of rationality are usually due to different cultural Backgrounds. Rationality as such is universal. At this point in the argument, I just want to call attention to the fact that the system of intentionality is not so to speak fully intentional right down to the ground. In addition to the system of intentionality we have to suppose that agents have a set of abilities that do not themselves consist in further intentional states. And these sets of abilities I am labeling, by fiat and with a capital letter, "the Background."

15. **Intentionality-with-a-t must be distinguished from intensionality-with-an-s.**

Intentionality-with-a-t is that property of the mind, and derivatively of language, by which mental states and speech acts are about, or of, objects and states of affairs.
Intensionality-with-an-s is that property of statements, and other sorts of representations, by which they fail certain tests for extensionality. The two favorite tests are the substitutability of coreferring expressions without loss or change of truth value (sometimes called Leibniz’s Law) and existential generalization. For example, the statement “Oedipus wants to marry Jocasta” fails the substitutability test, because together with the statement “Jocasta is identical with his mother” it does not permit the inference: “Oedipus wants to marry his mother.” The statement is intensional with respect to substitutability. Statements that fail the substitutability test are sometimes called referentially opaque. The statement “Oedipus is looking for the lost city of Atlantis” does not permit the existential inference “There exists a lost city of Atlantis,” for Oedipus may be looking, even if the thing he is looking for does not exist. So the statement fails the test of existential generalization. Intensionality is important for the subject of practical reason, because, among other reasons, statements of reasons for action are typically intensional-with-an-s.

Conclusion

I apologize to the reader for the dryness as well as the swiftness of this discussion. I am going to need this apparatus in the subsequent chapters, and I cannot in good conscience tell my readers to first go and read all of my other books. So I have summarized enough to give you the weaponry to cope with the chapters that follow. Already we have enough material to see that the quest, common in writings on practical reason, to find an analogue that stands to intentional action in the way that
truth stands to belief, is hopeless from the beginning. Belief is an intentional state with conditions of satisfaction. If these conditions are satisfied, the belief is said to be true. Beliefs have the mind-to-world direction of fit. But intentional action consists of two components, an intention-in-action and a bodily movement. Actions, as such, do not have conditions of satisfaction. Rather, each intention-in-action has a condition of satisfaction, and if satisfied it will cause the bodily movement or other phenomenon that constitutes the rest of the action. So the action will be successfully performed if and only if the intention-in-action is satisfied. But in addition to that condition of satisfaction, there is no further condition of satisfaction for actions as such. Where the action is premeditated, that is, where there is a prior intention, the occurrence of the action itself, as caused by the prior intention, will constitute the conditions of satisfaction of the prior intention. Both the prior intention and the intention-in-action have the world-to-mind direction of fit. Actions are indeed the conditions of satisfaction of prior intentions, just as bodily movements are the conditions of satisfaction of intentions-in-action. But as I mentioned earlier, not all actions require a prior intention because not all actions are premeditated. All actions do require an intention-in-action, and indeed we may define a human action as any complex event that contains an intention-in-action as one of its components. In subsequent chapters we will be concerned to see how rational agents can organize their intentional contents as well as their representations of facts in the world so as to form rationally motivated prior intentions and intentions-in-action.