



5-2015

## Putting the Motive Back in Motivation: Exploring the Promise of Intention and Practical Knowledge in Reengaging the Apathetic Learner

Lisa M. Cronkhite-Marks

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters\\_theses](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses)



Part of the Educational Methods Commons, Humane Education Commons, and the Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Cronkhite-Marks, Lisa M., "Putting the Motive Back in Motivation: Exploring the Promise of Intention and Practical Knowledge in Reengaging the Apathetic Learner" (2015). *Master's Theses*. 557.

[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters\\_theses/557](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/557)

This Masters Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



PUTTING THE MOTIVE BACK IN MOTIVATION: EXPLORING THE PROMISE  
OF INTENTION AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN REENGAGING THE  
APATHETIC LEARNER

Lisa M. Cronkhite-Marks, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2015

This paper explores the conceptions of motivation from the standpoint of two very different types of discourse; the first from important theories of educational psychology such as Weiner's attribution theory, Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, and social constructivist theory of motivation, all of which rely on theoretical knowledge to investigate motivation; and the other found in philosophical/analytical discussions of motivation such as in the work of G.E.M. Anscombe, Julia Annas, and Rollo May, all of which make use of practical knowledge in their conceptualization of human motivation. The paper questions whether inquiry into motivation with the goal of positively impacting apathetic learners might be better served by the latter type which includes the concepts of intention and judgment as being components of practical knowledge and which may be characterized as expressing the moral dimension of motivation.

PUTTING THE MOTIVE BACK IN MOTIVATION: EXPLORING THE PROMISE  
OF INTENTION AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IN REENGAGING THE  
APATHETIC LEARNER

by

Lisa M. Cronkhite-Marks

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts  
Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies  
Western Michigan University  
May 2015

Thesis Committee:

Paul Farber, Ph.D., Chair  
Dini Metro-Roland, Ph.D.  
Allison Hart-Young, Ph.D.

Copyright by  
Lisa Cronkhite-Marks  
2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Paul Farber whose breadth of knowledge, academic generosity, and patient mentoring have made this project possible. His practice exemplifies the best of teaching. In addition, I acknowledge Dr. Jeffrey Glindmeyer who taught me that in teaching, as in life, it's all about the relationship.

I would also like to acknowledge my husband, Tom, who served as a sounding board throughout and provided very helpful feedback, insights, and moral support.

Finally, I dedicate this project to my son, John—who is simply the best.

Lisa M. Cronkhite-Marks

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CONCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION EXPRESSED IN..... EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH	5
Motivation as Goal.....	6
Motivation as Need .....	8
Motivation as Social Norm .....	10
Effects of Assumptions on the Truly Unmotivated .....	13
THE LIMITS OF THEORETICAL IN UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION.....	16
CONCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION FROM PHILOSOPHY:..... INTENTION, VIRTUE, AND INTENTIONALITY	20
G.E.M. Anscombe: Understanding Intention’s Role in..... Motivation	20
Julia Annas: Motivation as a Function of Virtue .....	25
Rollo May’s Intentionality: Motivation as Meaning .....	33
ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED: CALLING ON .....	37
PRACTICAL REASONING	
CONCLUSION.....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	49

## INTRODUCTION

Zvi Lamm, Israeli educator and author, writes that motivation (in the school context) became an issue only with the advent of free public schooling. He claims that prior to that students who did not perform (for reasons of ability or apathy) were mostly removed from the institutions, and those who stayed in school engaged, for the most part, in order to maintain their socio-economic class, resulting in a school environment in which “only those who were motivated to learn became pupils” (Lamm 173). Regardless of origin, there seems to be ample evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, that students in school now are more disengaged than ever. In fact, research conducted over the past 20 years confirms that student engagement is at an all-time low, in American schools at least, with between 40-60% of students now considered chronically disengaged (Marks 154). This is obviously a very serious, complex issue and an important one since, in the present age with economic pressures as they are, the futures of these students hang in the balance:

Lack of engagement adversely affects student achievement and initiates a downward spiral that may lead to dysfunctional school behavior and ultimately culminate in some students leaving school entirely. (Marks 155)

Part of the response has been to make student engagement a stated goal in school reform (Wang and Eccles 1; Marks 158), one researcher even calling it “an accountability outcome” (Taylor and Parson 4). Of course, educational researchers, including those in educational psychology, are working hard to find possible solutions (to understand and turn around this trend). Some of these efforts include identifying the necessary

conditions of engagement in school, with one study, for example, setting the goal of “identifying the optimal developmental correlates of school engagement” (Wang and Eccles 2).

Will this work, however, if the problem is *disengagement*? Will conducting research to uncover the usual criteria for *engagement* and then working to create classrooms which seem to satisfy the discovered criteria work to engage those already ‘disengaged’? Such an approach to solving the problem of disengagement leaves out discussion of *those who are disengaged* and studies, instead, an ideal classroom, an exemplary classroom, identifying its strengths then attempting to mold (or intervene) so that more classrooms have those qualities too. This same study identifies engagement as “a malleable state” and concludes that it holds “tremendous potential as a locus of intervention” (Wang and Eccles 12). I wonder, though, if we can assume that the understanding of the ‘engagement’ that is being studied will provide the necessary insight into the ‘disengagement’ many students are experiencing.

Another concern is our answer to the question why this matters—why it matters that so many students are now disengaged in their learning. Often the goal of much research seems to be the improvement of student performance, an important educational goal. So the answer to our question would seem to be because student achievement is adversely affected by lack of engagement/motivation (as we saw in the quote on page one). However, if the goal is achievement, and the student is already disengaged—what I will call apathetic—such efforts may have less chance of working. There may be a step missing between ‘apathy’, for example, and improved student achievement. Many steps,



in fact. Of course, achievement is important, but we also hope to help students to do more (and sometimes less). We also hope to help them to grow, to flourish.

While clearly there are students who, for one reason or another, are disengaged in a particular class or concerning a specific assignment, maybe even for an extended period of time. (I remember my eighth-grade Ohio history class end-of-year project, which I decided, very consciously, was too dull for the wandering attention of a 13-year-old.) I could, I think, most accurately call this ‘engagement’ and claim that it is, for the most part, observable and perhaps even “malleable”. I also think it can be reasonably argued that ‘engagement’ often refers to a shorter term outcome—while motivation—the focus of my paper—is most often used to refer to the deeper, harder to reach disposition; consequently, the kind of “disengagement” for the sake of which I want to explore motivation is more serious and longer lasting and may not be easily changed or even accessed. I am talking about the chronically disinterested, uninvolved state of some students that we could label student apathy and which some researchers call “academically unmotivated” (Hidi and Harackiewicz 151), those, who are, perhaps, most at risk for not benefitting from school reform programs aimed at ‘reengagement’.

Within education (perhaps in all arenas of practice), there seems to be a difference in understanding *in theory* versus understanding *in practice*, mostly, I suspect, having to do with the distinct goals of each. According to G.E.M. Anscombe, Aristotle divided subject matter into practical knowledge and scientific knowledge. In his view science is concerned with what is generalizable, whereas practical knowledge with “what is capable of turning out variously” (Anscombe, *Intention* 60): in other words, with the particular. For our purposes, that of understanding human motivation in a practical way, of the two,

we might find more help from practical knowledge, depending as it does on intention and judgment.

To understand the reasons intention matters significantly to education and educational practice, we could look briefly at another practice: medicine. There is a significant difference between the practice of, say, surgery and practices in psychology and education. The surgeon, for example, can learn a procedure, perform it and, depending on her technical skill and the particular condition of the patient, expect somewhat consistent results. In this way, she is more like the artist and her work more like art in the sense that the action might stand alone; the intention of the agent/artist may not be primary. On the other hand, therapists and teachers (those who are in the practice of psychology and education) are engaged in a different kind of practice, involving as it does intentions and judgments based on the murky terrain of human consciousness. A therapist or a teacher does not learn a procedure, apply it to different individuals, and expect results all without reference to his or her own intentions, as well as those of the patient/student. To behave/proceed as though the activities of teaching do not involve, are not contingent upon at every turn and on every level, the intention of both the teacher and the student is problematic, leading to ineffective results as well as misconceptions.

Returning to the work of G.E.M. Anscombe, intentions reveal about people what “further they are doing in doing something” (Anscombe, *Intention* 86). In this spirit, I describe my intention in writing this paper: to explore ways to think about motivation in order to help students who are mostly apathetic towards learning. I will work to understand the nature of motivation by exploring the conceptions of motivation or related to motivation as supported in several important psychological theories, especially those in

educational psychology; and then by examining treatments of motivation in examples of philosophical/analytical discourse, particularly from the writings of Anscombe, Julia Annas, and the psychoanalyst, Rollo May; in hopes of determining if one or the other kind of discourse (research in educational psychology/empirical or philosophical/analytical) may be better suited to this type of inquiry; I have the further aim of hoping that understanding may suggest ways to help students who are truly unmotivated.

### CONCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION EXPRESSED IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

To explore ideas to help our understanding and improvement in motivation, we start with empirical studies. Research on motivation in an educational context provides an array of constructs aimed at explaining/describing human motivation. In general, these theories pursue an understanding of how motivation ‘works’ with, perhaps, the further goal of changing behavior. This may especially be true in motivation theories from educational psychology wherein the goal of much research is the improvement of student achievement. This focus on outcomes may be a natural tendency in educational psychological research. After all, schools, in general, are set up to provide instruction and evaluate students’ progress. When progress lags, schools look for help to reengage students. Naturally, for students who do well, motivation is not an issue. Another reason for this focus on academic achievement might be the early grounding of educational psychology in both the optimistic goals of social reform from the early 20th century as well as in behaviorism which dominated all American psychology for 50 years and had the theoretical goal of “the prediction and control of behavior” (Grogan 42). While true that it has been several decades since the heyday of behaviorism’s tight grip, based on

some of what we witness in educational policy and practice, I wonder if author Marilynne Robinson is right when she observes that “behaviorism is a branch of psychology that seems to have passed out of style without taking its major assumptions with it” (9).

### Motivation as Goal

Cognitive theories presented a shift away from behavioral theories, with goals, rather than needs (physiological needs), becoming the “dominant motivational concept” (Deci and Ryan 228). Several important theories characterize motivation primarily as the means for improving or demonstrating academic achievement. In fact, applications of such theories seem to have the goal of effecting specific change in student behavior with the hope that the change leads to improved academic performance.

Bernard Weiner’s attribution theory, for example, a leading theory in the field for several decades (Bempecha par. 5), characterizes motivation as being determined by “attributes” such as lack of ability or lack of effort, which can be used to explain an educational outcome: for example, why I failed a test. A student’s motivated behavior is seen as an outcome of a causal search undertaken by the student to understand success or failure in a given situation (Graham and Weiner 71), such as failure on a test. In this way, the ability of a student to “be motivated” is linked to the way that student understands the cause of an outcome (“I’m stupid” vs. “I didn’t study hard enough”). This “understanding” provokes an emotional response, leading to particular behaviors (Seifert 140). It seems then, the emotional response would need to be ‘worked on’ to effect change in student’s motivation in order to achieve the desired outcome, a higher grade, for example.

To effectively apply attribution theory to practice, then, we would need to locate and manipulate students' emotional responses, in this way attempting to effect change in behavioral outcomes. Radovan states that while attribution theory explicitly includes emotions, it treats them as "the result of cognitive analysis of success or failure" (9). According to Weiner, the focus on achievement striving may be a particular reason for the theory's relative popularity in the school setting as the classroom provides relatively easy to find "naturally occurring instances of achievement outcomes" for field research (Weiner 619). In other words, schools provide researchers with plenty of research opportunities where students' behaviors can be observed.

Attribution theory, then, works to identify a mechanism of motivation to understand student behavior with the aim of improving student achievement in schools. This is a vital concern, and while we hope to be available to help students work to achieve their goals, we might ask whether such a conception of motivation assumes that the goals of the institution or larger society—those of achievement, performance, or mastery of academic subjects—are, in fact, the goals of students (for the apathetic students, I doubt it). In addition, such theories tend to promote an understanding of motivation as being comprised of various discreet elements which can be picked apart and 'worked on' separately. One researcher coined the term "snapshot" approaches to describe this type of theory which attempts to measure motivation at one particular time, not, she claims, a method suited to "investigating the complex ebb and flow of motivation" (Ushioda and Dornyei 397).

## Motivation as Need

Self Determination Theory (SDT), another influential theory of motivation in educational research, characterizes human motivation differently. Rather than motivation being focused on a goal (as in attribution theory, in which the goal is achievement), the motivational construct returns to need as it had been in the earlier theories of motivation, such as Hull's (purely behavioral) drive theory (1930s), or in Maslow's humanistic theory of needs hierarchy (1940s) in which the lower needs of safety and hunger must be attended to before the higher need of self-actualization. Rather than physiological needs, however, SDT is concerned with three psychological needs: competence—to be engaged I must feel capable; relatedness—I must feel confident that I belong; and autonomy—I must believe that I am able to exert some control over my environment (Ryan and Deci 4). If these needs (of feeling competent, related, and autonomous) are not met, the understanding is, motivation is impaired. According to SDT, these psychological needs act as motivating factors for human action (Ryan and Deci 2).

While SDT may not assume the acceptance of shared achievement goals (as does attribution theory, for example), there are other possible assumptions to consider as we continue to explore a conception of motivation useful for our purposes. There is a sense, for example, in which this theory takes an end-run around judgment. It is not strictly autonomy, competence, and relatedness *per se* that are at issue, but whether or not a person feels these are in place. In this way it is the perception (rather than the reality) of these three psychological needs being met that are being promoted as essential to human motivation and engagement in the application of this theory. For example, in a recent study, psychologists Loney and Standage posit self-determination theory's concept of

internalization as a strategy for promoting “compliance and adherence to behavior change” (94). According to SDT, internalization is the process through which a person internalizes extrinsic values—they become intrinsic and thus the person is much more likely to ‘comply and adhere’. These strategies may work well for some individuals; those with particular disorders such as PTSD might clearly benefit from such methods. They may, in fact, be reasonable and efficacious in the health care arena in general; however, in education, I am less sure. Educational researchers have noted the “promot[ion] of perceived autonomy and self determination” as being useful in an “effort to engage students’ mastery motivation” (Hidi and Harackiewicz 154). They suggest that giving students choices “even when seemingly trivial and instructionally irrelevant” may, in fact, increase their interest (154). They seem to advocate a kind of manipulation through which students would be made to feel as though they were autonomous.

The problem is that this understanding of motivation, as based on *perception* of fulfilled needs, might end up informing interactions in education with the goal of changing behavior—the perception of autonomy to replace real autonomy, the perception of relatedness to replace caring of an involved adult, the perception of mastery to replace deep understanding. If certain perceptions are seen as a necessary goal of practice—in other words, if they become the outcome that we seek—might we open ourselves up to the possibility of manipulation as a method, or strategy for engagement? The focus is on perceived outcome: does the student “feel” competent, included, and autonomous? Naturally these are important concerns; however, more useful questions might be has the student been included, been given the tools to become more competent, more autonomous when ready. It is possible to imagine, for example, a program designed to

increase students' feelings of autonomy with the hope that this might lead, ultimately, to higher test scores. Such a program might even include training in the specific classroom language necessary to promote such "feelings"—without ever acknowledging or accounting for the important processes of intention and judgment in the student or teacher. Given that our ability to judge well depends on a correct understanding of a situation, an understanding based on a perception rather than, for example, on reality, may hinder our ability to judge effectively.

### Motivation as Social Norm

Social Constructivist Theory (SCT) offers yet another conception of motivation. Based on ideas of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, social constructivism promotes a perspective in which the motivation to learn is conceptualized as a social norm whose meaning is negotiated by members of the group. In the case of motivation in a school setting, this group includes students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community (Sivan 209). This social perspective is in contrast to the "individualistic orientation" of motivation in most cognitive theories (211). Sivan claims that it is not useful to talk about motivation without also talking about a particular context: "From a social constructivist perspective, the individual no longer acts as the instigator of motivation. Rather, motivation is a socially negotiated process that results in an observable manifestation of interest and cognitive and affective engagement" (210). Under this theory motivation is understood as a "product of culture" or social/cultural norm.

Sivan (paraphrasing Brophy 1983) defines motivation in the classroom context from the perspective of SCT as both "a general disposition to learn as well as the specific



motivation that occurs in the learning situation” (217). SCT’s recognition of a student’s particular context indicates a move away from the more-or-less discreet constructs of goal and need to a more unified understanding—the ‘general disposition’. Of course, this also makes it a little slippery. Sivan again cites Brophy as defining motivation to learn as “a *particular melding* [my emphasis] of affective and cognitive components [which] results in intentional or purposeful behavior” (217) as well as an “internal source which enhances, maintains, or mediates cognitive development” (212).

This conception of motivation, which by definition, depends in large part on the “negotiation of meaning” among members of the group, seems to rest on a couple of important assumptions, for example, that the students are (or want to be) motivated. There is a further assumption of trust among the participants; yet what might we expect if that trust were breached, as might well be the case for our ‘apathetic’ student? Sivan discusses the three key components of SCT: cognitive activity; cultural knowledge, tools, and signs; and assisted learning. This third type, assisted learning, is described as relying, for its efficacy, on “the construction and negotiation of *mutually shared understanding* [my emphasis] of the sociocultural environment” (214). To be a useful construct, assisted learning requires “active involvement of both the more knowledgeable member of the culture and the person who is being socialized” (215). But how might this work in an environment in which some of the key players lack trust and/or remain out-of-reach and apathetic? What role in the negotiation, for example, would be available to students if their trust in the expert had been damaged? Anticipating these questions, Sivan suggests the development of “intersubjectivity and situation redefinition” to promote the ‘motivation to learn’ in students, what she calls “motivational competence” (224). She

describes this process: “teacher and students develop a common understanding in regard to the motive and the goals and the pay-off of the activity so that the students desire to achieve the same outcome as the teacher (223). Naturally, these strategies will only work, only have the desired effect, if the student is already motivated, and already has trust in those in charge. Sivan suggests as much, explaining that the student must be “willing, open to new knowledge, cooperative, and free of unusual worries” (222). With apathetic learners, this is certainly not the case.

There are many other theories of motivation and constructs available to apply to educational situations, some of which seem to actively seek a more unified understanding of motivation. One promising construct from second language acquisition (SLA or L2) research focuses on an extended view of the learner and the learner’s motivation, identified as “the person-in-context”(Dornyei 74). SLA theory’s focus on motivation as a critical consideration in learning is due to the essential and very practical role motivation plays in successful learning in the *language* classroom, in particular; a role that is less clear, perhaps, with other subjects: when learning a foreign language it is immediately clear how the knowledge is to be applied in the classroom in a very immediate way—to communicate, tied to communicative acts (this is at least true since the demise of the grammar-translation method of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century). For contrast, we can imagine a high school class where students struggling with stoichiometry equations or some equally difficult concept in Chemistry are wondering when they might be called upon to display understanding of these abstractions. With language, the knowing and the using (in a real communicative sense) are concurrent. Motivation has always been a central consideration in language teaching and research, particularly in *foreign* language acquisition (such as

studying French in a U.S. high school or college) where motivation has been identified as important a criteria for learning as even aptitude. In fact, it has been noted that for the most part “learners *with sufficient* motivation [my emphasis] can achieve a working knowledge of an L2, regardless of their language aptitude, whereas *without sufficient* motivation even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language” (Dornyei 74).

In both social constructivist theory and second language acquisition theory, motivation seems to no longer be thought of as a single, stable trait but is “situated, contextual, and domain-specific...” (Radovan 9), and while in the past, elements of cognition, affect and social were treated separately, in research and thinking, it seems that new constructs of motivation treat its nature as somewhat more integrated. The understanding of a more unified nature of motivation may make constructs of motivation, from SLA theory in particular, useful to our aim of helping to access the motivation of the truly unmotivated. In addition, motivation itself is an expressed goal, rather than—or at least in addition to—that of academic achievement This *a priori* acknowledgement that motivation is and will be an issue may prove particularly helpful because it does not make the assumption that students are already, in fact, motivated to learn.

#### Effects of Assumptions on the Truly Unmotivated

The understanding of motivation as goal, need or social norm as described in important theories of educational psychology undoubtedly helps some students to increase their engagement; it may help teachers and other school officials as they create programs or rethink curriculum; yet I wonder if something is missing from their accounts

which may keep them from helping those most at need of some help—the unmotivated, those whose motivation is not in want of reengaging, but rather can't be accessed at all. This focus on achievement as the only the accepted final end may be especially damaging to the truly unmotivated. Some students may find that a temporary, situational loss of interest can be remedied by practices which apply current theories to academic motivation, such as those found in social constructivist theory; however, for others, the rift is deeper, the apathy more profound and lasting, making it difficult to expect such theories to find solutions when they recognize no place for the truly unmotivated student.

Bernard Weiner, the psychologist credited with developing attribution theory, expressed reservations about research from cognitive theories such as his which focus on academic achievement outcomes. First, as noted above, he claims that an important reason why attribution theory had such wide spread appeal for so long was that it is easy to assess success or failure and the classroom provided the perfect field to do research (Graham and Weiner 66). This is troubling as it suggests that the method of evaluation or assessment might, in some sense, be determining the content, orientation, or goals of research. In addition, and more importantly for my argument, he acknowledges a basic, yet problematic, assumption of the theory: the students he is studying want to be motivated. He claims that "...when one examines the laws of motivation, it is presumed that the student prefers to do better. Without this [desire for improvement], motivational enhancement is not possible" (81). He contends that attribution theory will not help if students are not already motivated, that an understanding of the theories of motivation or motivational attributes will not help when children do not try to learn, yet he admits that "the most chronic and pervasive motivational problems are evident in children neither

wanting to learn, nor to try” (80). Other motivational researchers agree that all the “techniques that could be used to enhance motivation” (81) will only work if students actually value what we value and trust us to lead them to it (Paris, Lipson and Wixson 306; Tollefson 79).

A further complication is that some of the constructs useful or inherent in certain theories of motivation may lack efficacy when applied to those students identified as truly unmotivated. For example, Self-Determination Theory, discussed above, relies on an important distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The latter is usually defined as students finding value in an activity or topic without regard to external rewards (grades, prizes, perks, etc.). It is generally accepted that students “perform” better or persist in activities which foster intrinsic motivation (or for which they experience intrinsic motivation). In fact, research suggests that a focus on extrinsic motivation can undermine student motivation in the long run (Deci and Ryan 234). Students often find value in particular activities when they hold the interest of the student; the student has developed a personal interest in the topic. The student is said to be intrinsically motivated towards the topic.

Unfortunately, for a disengaged student the distinction between these “types” of motivation is apparently murkier. In fact, according to educational researchers Hidi and Harackiewicz, focusing solely on intrinsic motivation may compromise the motivation of truly disengaged students because they have not developed any personal academic interests, leaving no way to “work on” these interests—no avenue to intrinsic motivation. These researchers have suggested that for these unmotivated students a return to approaches/strategies which engage extrinsic motivation may help activate what they

have labeled “situational interest” in the student (Hidi and Harackiewicz 153). “External interventions may be critically important for unmotivated students who lack interest, intrinsic motivation and mastery goals for academic activities” (167). This is very possibly true. Who would argue that ‘interesting’ lectures or activities presented in engaging ways might help to “catch” certain students’ attention? (155). Then again, they might not. Part of the reason for this uncertainty seems to be what Israeli educator Zvi Lamm is getting at when he writes: “there can be no group solutions to this problem [of student motivation]” (176).

#### THE LIMITS OF THEORETICAL IN UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

While certain assumptions, such as that the student shares the theory’s goal of academic achievement, for example, may lead to difficulties when attempting to impact motivation in the truly unmotivated, could there be a more potentially problematic feature of empirical research into student motivation which might hamper our efforts to motivate the unmotivated: the theories’ reliance on theoretical knowledge (leading to their focusing on behavior and behavioral outcomes) to inform their understanding of the nature of motivation. Is it possible that theoretical knowledge alone, by its very nature, cannot provide an understanding of the nature of motivation? Have key elements of motivation such as intention and judgment been, at times, displaced, and might this ultimately promote a conception of motivation which evades important elements, such as its fundamentally moral nature?

David Roochnik, Professor of Philosophy at Boston University, sees this reliance on theoretical knowledge to help us understand aspects of human nature (such as when we investigate motivation) as troubling. He claims that, according to Aristotle, it is

precisely this type of knowledge (theoretical) that is “indifferent to us” (Roochnik 55-56). In fact, he says, it was the understanding of this indifference of the universe, which led Aristotle to turn away from the infinite when seeking the ‘good’ for humans, and to instead embrace an outlook more useful to humans, ultimately leading Aristotle to a position he called “privileging the finite” (76). This position promotes the understanding that we live on this earth and, in a very practical way, our concerns are the concerns of our ordinary lives. In other words, we should not expect theoretical science, even social science, to answer the “why question of life” (56).

I think it’s worth lingering here. It could be argued that there is ultimately no place for moral reasoning in a purely theoretical approach to understanding. While general principles are necessary when building a bridge or mapping the movement of planets (and in education, they comprise much content in the curriculum), theoretical knowledge alone cannot help us solve the problem of meaning or purpose in our lives or in the lives of our students. Roochnik writes that while the language of math, for example, can tell us much about the “motions of material clumps”, it cannot explain (here he quotes Husserl) the “space and time in which our vital life runs its course” (6). It cannot, for example, help us to understand why we are here or why we do what we do in a way that is meaningful to us, that helps us understand how the parts of our lives connect with purpose. For this, he says, we might turn to Aristotle, who in his ethical writings does exactly that.

Roochnik worries that modern science in order to do its work, of measuring and analyzing generalizable data to be applied to most situations, must perform a sort of ‘dehumanization’; the practicing scientist must check all values at the lab door, all

vestiges of the human (55-56). In this way, he suggests that science has forcibly removed intention and purpose from our understanding of human activities (this would include the important one of education). In other words, the answers to my questions of ‘why I do what I do’ and their connection to my life as a whole are unknown to me because I do not know to ask them, having not been encouraged to do so—or having no mechanism available to do so: “A universe structured only by the blind forces of physics and whose relevant units of time span millions of years is one in which human beings have no place. It is meaningless and can offer no answer to the ‘why’ question of life” (56). Yet it is the attempted answers to such questions which may offer a better understanding of my actions/behavior, and, importantly, may involve moral engagement—a deep understanding of my own actions and their effects on others and on the world—which might help me understand my motives for action, the meaning of my actions. The lack of such answers (or even questions), may not only make it difficult to understand motivation but may also compromise any efforts to effect change in the motivation of another.

If we look at education through the lens of Aristotle’s three types of knowledge, there is clearly a place for each. The first two, for example, seem posed to help us understand or engage with the physical world around us: *episteme* (theoretical) by investigating/analyzing the natural world and *techne* (art/technology) by providing us with the ability to apply this knowledge to building structures or works of art. However, the purview of Aristotle’s third type, *phronesis* (practical knowledge), seems harder to pin down. Through *phronesis* I learn to engage my judgment which results in my intentional actions, and through the habit of such actions, I build my character or increase/decrease my virtues: I potentially learn to become ‘good’. It may be that this



type of knowledge, practical knowledge, is simply a better fit for inquiry into motivation because it is concerned with the important moral questions of the judgment and the intention of the agent. It provides the space for understanding the moral as in how do my actions affect others? How do they connect to my own purpose? What do they mean?

Certainly, the understanding and application of theoretical knowledge is critical in education; for a number of purposes it may be paramount, but if the balance is off, if theoretical knowledge becomes too influential, we may run certain risks, may cut off from understanding, or even acknowledgment, a place for moral understanding, for the connections to intentions, judgment and purpose to action. The discourse from educational psychology, expressing, by definition, theoretical knowledge, leaves something out, something important to both our understanding of motivation and the difficulty we have in helping students to find access to their own, particularly those who are struggling. While theoretical knowledge is after truth, the goal of practical knowledge is different and related to action. Roochnik (quoting Aristotle) tells us this goal is two-fold: first, it is after right action, that is “we investigate [using practical knowledge] not in order that we might know what virtue is [gain a theoretical understanding of virtue], but in order that we might become good, since otherwise there would be no benefit to it” (183); and secondly, the purpose of practical knowledge is to make clear the importance of the agent, as distinguished, for example, from knowledge of the work (techne) which can be judged solely by the quality of the product:

...things that come to be from the arts contain their merit in themselves. It is sufficient if they come to be having this quality. By contrast, the things that come from the virtues are not done justly or moderately if they are of this quality, but

only if the one doing is in a particular condition: first, if he knows what he is doing; second, if he rationally chooses the action; third, if he acts from a firm disposition that's hard to budge. (184)

Rather than an empirical understanding of motivation, we need a more reflective stance, one based on practical knowledge which helps us conceptualize motivation with the agent in mind. For this we explore outside the field of research psychology to philosophy which offers a different approach to the study of human nature and motivation, one in which the agent and the intentions of the agent are not only included, but critical.

#### CONCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION FROM PHILOSOPHY: INTENTION, VIRTUE, AND INTENTIONALITY

To investigate how and why practical knowledge might be useful to our understanding of the nature of motivation (and serve in a helpful way as moral understanding), we look to the 20th century British philosopher G.E.M. Anscombe for a discussion of the important link between intention and action. Practical knowledge as described by Anscombe relates directly to intention, “what we know about what we do”, which seems to stand in for moral understanding in a very useful way.

#### G.E.M. Anscombe: Understanding Intention's Role in Motivation

According to Anscombe, writing in the mid-20th century, it is not only modern science which is to blame for the preeminence of theoretical knowledge—that which she calls observational or speculative—but even much modern philosophy: Anscombe contends that modern philosophy (all philosophy since the Middle Ages) is based on a mistake (Anscombe, *Intention* 57) in that it treats all knowledge as

observational/theoretical (as when an observer watches a shopper and makes a record of his purchases). This type of knowledge is insufficient for understanding action (and consequently, motivation) because it ignores (does not have access to) intention, having separated it, (reducing motivation to motivated behavior). One of her important claims is that if we want to understand someone's behavior (to know what someone is doing), we need to ask about "what they take themselves to be doing" (Richer Sec. 4), not simply look at the behavior itself. To help clarify this notion, she distinguishes between two kinds of reasons: the reason I did something (my intention) on the one hand; and the reason something happened (the cause of the event/action) on the other. These two types of reasons, Anscombe believes, lead to two very different types of knowledge: practical and theoretical.

Practical knowledge can be defined as what we know about what we're doing. It is knowledge of our intentions. Theoretical knowledge, on the other hand, describes what most of us, most of the time, take to be knowledge; the knowledge gained from observing: "something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts" (Anscombe, *Intention* 57). In her discussion of the distinction between practical and speculative knowledge, Anscombe provides (what I take to be) support for the limits of an empirical approach to understanding or effecting change in motivation, as well as an understanding of the possible danger when intention is evaded or ignored, what Anscombe has called "separated from actions".

She uses the following scenario involving two separate lists to illustrate the important distinction between these two types of knowledge: one person (a shopper) has a self-written list and another person (a sort of detective) observes the shopper and jots

down the items which are purchased. If the shopper does not purchase an item from his own list (perhaps he intended to buy broccoli, but it wasn't fresh enough, or he simply changed his mind), the list of the detective, a list of purchases only, would reflect only 'observational knowledge'; in other words, there would be no understanding of the shopper's intention to buy broccoli (Anscombe, *Intention* 56). In this example, practical knowledge, knowledge of his intentions, can only be claimed by the shopper himself.

The problem with a world in which this separation has occurred—this cleaving of intention from action, as described by Anscombe—is that, in the end, results are all that matter. We have not concerned ourselves with “why,” with the meaning of our activity. The moral implications are obvious and were clear to Anscombe who feared that if “all that matters is results, there is no limit to what we might do to achieve the best results possible” (Richter Sec. 4). Anscombe coined the term consequentialism to label this kind of 'ethical' thinking (Anscombe, “Modern Moral...,” par. 31) and used it to describe a world which relies only on theoretical knowledge to make decisions, having no access to practical knowledge which is the knowledge of intentions behind our actions.

To understand the implications her concerns about the separation of intention from action may have on our conceptualization of motivation, we need to look closely at the connection suggested by her account between intention and motivation. What happens to motivation if intention is separated from action, and consequently ignored? An important consequence must be that we lose connection to our moral understanding. Again, we turn to Anscombe for assistance who tells us that our intentions contain the reasons for our actions; they are what we know about what we do. Intention matters

because it houses our morals: we are responsible for our intentional actions. In this way, our intentions indicate our moral understanding.

Anscombe was a moral philosopher interested in practical problems and was concerned particularly with the problem of responsibility for intentional actions (Diamond par. 2), actions for which our intentions are known to us, those which we chose and can connect with a motive—all but truly involuntary actions, such as being startled and knocking over a cup (Anscombe, *Intention* 15). Her account of practical knowledge is critical to our understanding of the connection between intention and motivation. In the absence of a psychological disorder, we know what we are doing because we know what our intentions are. She makes the claim that this is not extra knowledge that we have of our actions, nor are intentional acts a “type” of act. Human actions are, for the most part, intentional (Ford 38). When we are motivated to act, we know what we are doing because we have intention. The purpose of Anscombe’s introducing the term ‘consequentialism’ into philosophical discourse was to point out the error in the then current utilitarian view which did not distinguish between intended and unintended consequences (Richter par. 5).

For Anscombe the purpose of intention is to make plain the character of human action and will. Her understanding of intention includes its significance (meaning), its expression of moral understanding, and, importantly, intention’s relation to a unified end (*telos*), all expressed in practical knowledge. It might be useful to envision motivation as involving just this space, between intention/motive and action. As such, it clearly is also involved with the meaning, moral and *telos* of our actions. We might say motivation represents a sort of link between what we will and what we do—comprising the same

three components. Motivation helps explain my action—supplies meaning; motivation expresses my attitude to my action and its consequences which includes sincerity and willingness—both help express my moral understanding; and finally, motivation expresses how my action fits in with my goals—by connecting to my purpose or *telos*. Lacking a “reading of” or framework for motivation which includes the meaning of action (intentions), might I be left with action-only motivation, an impoverished understanding of “why?” which may lead to a kind of educational consequentialism. It is not difficult to find recent examples of this kind of thinking—No Child Left Behind being the most obvious—which leaves us with an understanding of motivated behavior, but not, I think, with motivation.

Intention is important to our understanding of motivation because it seems to include the elements of reason, sincerity, willingness, in short, meaning for the agent. Anscombe’s concern that intention has been effectively severed from our understanding of action might prove problematic for education, depending foundationally, as it does, on meaning for evaluation, reflection, and understanding.

The most critical element linking intention with motivation must be meaning. Our intentions make up the meaning of our actions. What do I take myself to be doing? How do I understand my actions? In this way intentions focus on reasons, not causes. My intentions reflect the reasons I did something, as opposed to the reason something happened. Another key factor must be willingness. If I intend something, I am obviously willing to do it. Willingness in turn assumes a certain sincerity—if only to myself. My intentions are in some way clear to myself, even though I may dissimulate to others (Newstead 171). In addition, intentions represent attention and choice. When I attend to

one thing rather than another, orient myself in one direction instead of another, I am exercising choice. Importantly, intention requires judgment, which constitutes a kind of ‘back story’ for intention. Finally, intentions are associated with our purpose, and in this way they connected to my final ends or *telos*. They add coherence and value to my actions and help me to express a unity.

Anscombe, writing a half-century ago, helps us to clearly understand the differences between theoretical (what she calls observational) knowledge and practical, and in this way she helps us to understand the critical role intention plays in motivation, prompting us to question how a separation of intention (and with it an understanding of the meaning and purpose) from our actions may have impacted motivation in a significant way by effectively making practical knowledge invisible and inaccessible, and possibly compromising our moral understanding of our actions, though possibly without our awareness. She prompts us to rethink action as being joined to intention in an essential way; otherwise, our singular concern with outcomes, action, behavior may only guide us to a narrow and diminished understanding of the nature of motivation, making it difficult, ultimately, to effect change in students’ motivation.

#### Julia Annas: Motivation as a Function of Virtue

Julia Annas is another philosopher who both notes the limits of theoretical knowledge when trying to understand human action and intention and helps us to use practical knowledge to re-conceptualize motivation to include otherwise diminished or ignored, yet critical, elements. Annas adds the concept of virtue to our account and discusses its role. The elements of intention and judgment as critical to action are at the

heart of her account of virtue as the development of motivations. If Anscombe has helped provide the answer to ‘why’, Annas now provides the structure for the important question of ‘what’. What are our purposes and how do my intentions and actions relate to them?

While Anscombe was an analytical philosopher and student of Wittgenstein, Annas is a virtue ethicist and so her account of motivation is related closely to virtue. Her account is concerned with the development of motivations as the habituation of virtue. Like Anscombe, Annas seems to rely on Aristotle for her understanding of practical reasoning. It is Aristotle who makes clear the connection between virtue and practical knowledge: “Virtue makes the mark at which one aims correct, but practical wisdom [provides] the means toward that aim” (as qtd. in Roochnik 170). We can use her account of virtue development to help us explore how we might use practical knowledge to guide students’ motivations.

To illustrate the importance of practical knowledge/practical reasoning to her account of virtue, she first introduces and then works to refute claims made by psychologists that in many situations, people in studies do not exhibit virtuous dispositions, leading researchers to suppose that “virtue is hopelessly unattainable by all but a few” (Annas 173). Annas explains that the researchers have misunderstood. They are not studying virtue—not as she means it: “...the traits studied by the situationist psychologist are ones where results are got from noting what people do or don’t do, and ...*this is entirely inadequate to make claims about virtue* [my emphasis], on any understanding of virtue on which that is a disposition not just to act, but also to reason, respond, and feel in certain ways” because it leaves out any mention of “practical reasoning [which is] an essential part of virtue” (173). She suggests that while it is true



that we may often reason badly, rather than support that practical reasoning does not help us achieve virtue, this is evidence for “greater care in its development” (174).

*We come equipped with motivations, and the development of virtue is the education of these motivations in certain ways. (Annas 67)*

In her discussion of virtue, Annas puts into perspective the role of motivation in education, ultimately supporting an understanding of motivation as particular to individual students and serving as a conduit through which they can move closer towards their own purposes/ends. In fact, encouraging the development of the practical reasoning necessary to connect ours/students ‘motivations with “final ends” and recognizing this as the pursuit of virtuous activity (as “living one’s life”) could be the ultimate goal of a good education.

According to Annas, we come with motivations and dispositions to virtues already formed. By the time we are beginning to engage in ethical thinking, we are already “disposed” to think/ behave in certain ways and not others (25). In this way it may not be necessary to go about finding ways to motivate students, but finding out what their present motivations are and then guiding these motivations (67). Annas states that a brave person isn’t someone who learns about bravery, decides to act in a brave way, and then looks around for the motivation to be brave; on the contrary, a brave person already has the disposition to be brave, and this will be educated through practice and habituation (10).

Motivation is central to Annas’ discussion of virtues. In her use of “motivation” she seems to mean both the reason for doing something and the willingness to do

something, both elements of intention. Annas claims that our intentions (“the right reasons”) determine whether or not a particular act is virtuous (45), and (as in Anscombe’s account) they reveal or give meaning to our actions. She takes great pains for us to understand her difference between actions which are good or virtuous and those which are merely “right”. For example, she explains that even a cruel person can be said to “do the right thing,” albeit for the wrong reasons, depending on intention. Here, as in most of Annas’ arguments for her account of virtue development, she seems to point us away from outcomes and actions and toward more reflective reasoning based on our intentions.

Being clear about intentions is at the heart of Annas’ account, whether of acts, goals, etc. For education this focus has the important consequence of making reasons and intentions matter. She suggests that intentions matter more than actions because the latter are less reliable, being more strongly influenced by circumstances. Do virtues in this way create a sort of anchor/blueprint for us, anchoring us in our intentions? According to Annas, a virtue is a disposition—a tendency we are born with. But what do we do with this? How does it help us to think of virtue as a disposition? Rather than what? Rather than an ideal, or something I strive for, it is something I already possess...yet can also be developed—encouraged or discouraged? Like the tendency in some children to insist on perfection. Do I have the disposition to be generous in the same way? In this way is disposition linked closely to intention, rather than action? For Annas it is not enough to do the right thing; we must do it for the right reasons, and do it willingly. Our actions (based on right reasons) must be performed without resistance.

In Annas' account, virtues have, importantly, an "aspirational aspect." She says that even if few people attain virtuosity, her account "presents itself as an ideal that we can endorse...., an idea we can put to work in our lives as we live them" (171,172). Annas' "drive to aspire" includes three steps useful in working on our motivations as we develop our virtues, as we "actively try[ing] to change" ourselves in important ways (150): 1) "understanding what you are doing"; 2) "doing it in a self-directed way"; and 3) "trying to improve it" (37). It may be that in order for these three to be available to us and of any use in the first place, our own particular goals must be engaged. Problems may arise when we are denied this engagement in an activity—when we lack this engaged level of commitment. When we are not engaged in goal-directed activity (or the goals of such activity are not our own), motivation may flee. In order to be engaged in the first place, we must be working on our particular goals. Annas quotes Csikszentmihalyi to support this idea:

Every piece of information we process get evaluated for its bearings on the self.

Does it threaten our goals? Does it support them? Or is it neutral? A new piece of information will either create disorder in consciousness...or it will reinforce our goals, thereby freeing up psychic energy. (Csikszentmihalyi, as qtd. in Annas 71)

For Annas, we exercise our practical reasoning to determine our goals and actions. This makes it a critical consideration when thinking about the best way educate. Annas describes our goals as being nested: each "fit[ting] into structured patterns", and revealing something about the larger aims in our lives (122). It is practical thinking which helps us build up these structures in part by focusing on the particular goals of our particular lives. If we accept Annas' account, if we accept that students come already

motivated—although these motivations need forming and educating (unveiling?)—then the work we must do to help guide students in identifying their motivations and dispositions, as well as distinguishing intentions from actions—to help them evaluate the virtue of their actions—will require practical reasoning.

Annas talks about virtue as a disposition (not necessarily our current state, but a tendency to change in a certain way). She claims that the development of our virtues is not a “once-and-for-all achievement” (38), instead, it is a continuous struggle of making choices, choosing to act or not to act:

Since life is always ongoing and we are always developing in various ways, both as a result of reflection and in response to changing factors in our circumstances, my character is not fixed; I am always maintaining the way I am, whether sustaining or protecting formed dispositions or actively trying to change myself in some respect. (150)

It sometimes seems that we sometimes ignore this basic fact: that each of us has a very particular life with very particular goals. We may well remember it about ourselves, but is this understanding sometimes lost when thinking of the best way to help students? Annas wonders, and so must our students how to “achieve the goals I have in the life I have” (123). Practical thinking/reasoning seems a powerful educational (motivational) tool, providing a way in to a virtuous, reflective life by helping students unify their goals and actions, figure out what they care about, and lend structure to their lives (123). Annas warns us not to confuse this working on a structure of our lives with a determined outcome. She talks about the importance of our lives a whole—and the role virtue plays

(particularly, the unity of virtue). She credits Aristotle as naming this *telos* and defines it as “what my life is aimed at” (123). Annas does not claim that this *telos* will necessarily come to pass—in fact, “most of us have only the vaguest idea of what we are aiming for in life as whole” (123), —only that through practical thinking we are to do the reflecting necessary to keep trying to unify the goals in our lives. Once again, her focus here is on intention—not action. It is also intention behind her helpful distinction of “the circumstances of a life” and “the living of a life” (92). The former includes all those things we can’t control (genes, nationality, etc.) and the latter—what each of us does with our particular life.

Perhaps much of life works against our understanding of this important truth—that each life is particular. All around us, our rules and laws, even signs help to create a firm sense of continuity in time and shared experience, disguising this truth. Could it be that virtues act as a sort of line on a map (directions on mapquest?), helping us to know our intentions, to guide our actions, shaping our motivations, allowing us to change and move forward as we face new particular situations in the world? Without our virtues, are we alone on the interstate (or the back roads of Kentucky), without a map or any understanding of how to get where we think we want to be?

When we work to unify our goals, we are struggling to determine our final ends. And ethical reflection (practical reasoning) helps us do just that—not to arrive at them (final end), but to continue to struggle to determine them. It’s important to note that in Annas’ account, ethical thinking does not require us to do what we are told (34). For Annas, the final end— “what I am aiming at in my life as a whole”—is an “indeterminate notion” but it is an important one, integral to our understanding of practical reasoning and

one that I must struggle to determine: “the role of ethical thinking is to get us to think more determinately about [the final end], to do a better and more intelligently ordered job of what we are already doing anyway” (124). Isn’t this just the sort of engaged work necessary for humans to stay focused and motivated?

As with motivation, Annas believes that we all come with unified goals in mind, “a vague and possibly muddled idea of what our ‘final end’ is (123), and that we commence our ethical thinking (development of virtue) this way—in this way our motivations are tied up with our ideas about our ‘final end’. What this might mean to us as educators is that as we attempt to steer, guide our students’ motivations, we are, in a very real way, helping them to develop their virtues (or vices).

Annas’ account of intentions supports Anscombe’s, and in the way she emphasizes the moral weight of intention—through the possibility of virtue and her emphasis on judgment as important to right action—her account adds to our conception of motivation. In addition to the ‘why?’ of intention—intention as the meaning of my action—Annas adds the ‘what?’ of purpose: how does my action help me connect to my own ends/purposes? Annas’ *telos* is connected to both intention and virtue, and so in a practical way is immediately useful to us. In her account, it is the moral weight of intention that seems most essential. Anscombe is concerned with the intentional nature of action: behavior alone is not enough because the meaning of the action is in the agent’s intention. Annas writes about judgment and “right actions” because right actions which are intentional are connected to our final ends through the practice of virtue which she writes is a “deep” and “persisting” feature of a person and “develops through selective response to circumstances (9). Her account helps us think about motivation as a process,

one of virtue habituation. As such it depends on connecting us to our final ends in ways in which general principles, such as those found in theories of educational psychology, may not be helpful because each life is particular; a focus on results, by ignoring intention as a critical component to right action, tells only part of the story.

#### Rollo May's Intentionality: Motivation as Meaning

Julia Annas reminds us that a “good ethical education does not encourage [the] habit of doing what you are told” (34). Because educating is fundamentally a moral endeavor, we mostly strive to inculcate virtues as well as chemistry. We want for our students something in conjunction with understandings about algebra and literature: we want them to possess what philosopher Barbara Herman calls “moral literacy”—the ability to ‘read’ our world usefully and effectively. We hope for them “the ability to recognize and interpret moral facts [which is] a necessary condition for moral action and criticism...” (Herman ix). To achieve this end Herman expresses a preference for “an account of motivation that transcends psychology” (viii), by which I believe she is referring to the kind of psychological empirical research informed by theory at the expense of human practice.

*It is an unjustified reduction on the part of Wittgenstein and the positivists—and the behaviorists are to be included at this point—to make the world only out of objective facts. “I can” is part of the world. (May 242)*

Rollo May, a mid-twentieth century American psychoanalyst, also found much to criticize in the way psychology, as a modern scientific enterprise, characterizes human motivation or will. He writes that “we [psychologists] have omitted a dimension of

human experience which is important, indeed critical, to human will” (May, *Love and Will* 200), that by excluding “human awareness and consciousness”, we deny that human behavior is unpredictable. He blames psychology for tossing aside intention—and claims that because of the focus on behavior we agreed that intentions were “mostly illusions” (May, “Intentionality” 204). May, writing and practicing many decades ago, believed this misconception about the nature of human will resulted in what he identified as “a crisis in will,” and traced it to humankind’s “conviction that he [sic] is the helpless object of scientific forces (*Love and Will* 184). He describes what he perceives to be a general state of apathy or lack of will and notes that such apathy is most likely a defense against anxiety, the anxiety of feeling powerless: “When a person continually faces dangers he is powerless to overcome, his final line of defense is at last to avoid even feeling the dangers” (May, “Intentionality” 28). He goes so far as to claim apathy as a “necessity” and even more: “Apathy seems to me to be a miracle of protection by which a personality in utter fiasco rests until it can do something else” (31).

His proposed correction to such a misconception was to reintroduce an old term as a new a way of thinking about the nature of human will. Believing that an answer could be found “in a dimension which cuts across and includes both conscious and unconscious, and both cognition and conation” (May, *Love and Will* 222), he named this dimension Intentionality—a concept he revived from the Middle Ages. May defines intentionality as involving “the totality of a person’s orientation to the world at that time” (“Intentionality” 202), and credited it with providing “the structure which gives meaning to experience” (*Love and Will* 223). More than intention itself, it represents our ability to have intentions and describes, for May, an important dimension of human experience



excluded from understanding since Descartes (201). May saw the value of intentionality in its help “explaining all human action as motivated by a sense of meaning” (Grogan 133) which he felt had been undermined by psychology’s replacing *human* with *normal* in thinking about understanding and helping people in crisis.

While he distinguishes intentionality from intention (which he calls ‘conscious purpose’), intention is central to his account, as it is in Anscombe’s; in fact, he claims that it is not possible to understand why a person does what he does without looking at the person’s action as an expression of their intention: “Meaning has no meaning apart from intention” (May, “Intentionality” 205). As a dimension, intentionality represents a kind of framework for consciousness—for will, desire, choice—in short, for meaning or intention leading to action; in this way, it seems to provide a useful motivational structure. It seems important that this is a particular framework; mine is like no one else’s because my intentionality includes not just reasons and purpose, but also my own past as well as movement toward my unique future (“Intentionality” 205).

As a framework for understanding the world, intentionality provides the meaning to my decisions and my purposes. Our intentions comprise the frame and “are decisive with respect to how we perceive our world” (May, *Love and Will* 224). The example he gives by way of illustration is of a visit to the same house at five different instances. My reason for going, the approach I take to get there, my moods or expectations, even the time of day and the particular memories that come to mind of the house—all will determine how I view the house. What I see, how I feel, the very meaning of the action will change in each of the instances while the house itself (the objective world) remains the same, and I am the same person.

May's concept of intentionality aids our understanding of motivation by pointing out its unified nature. Paraphrasing Heidegger, he warns us that "will is not an independent 'faculty', or a department of the self, and we always get into trouble when we try to make it [so]" (*Love and Will* 290). Several of the features he describes add to our evolving conception of motivation. Selectivity is one. My intentionality is selective in that I choose to attend to one object over another. Selectivity is engaged as I orient myself in a particular direction, which creates the necessary conflict he calls the "essence of consciousness" and the "beginning of volition" (May, "Intentionality" 207). Related to this is a feature he calls taking a stand which refers to the commitment involved in choosing. For May memory is a function of intentionality, and he claims that in order to remember, one must take a stand toward something. While he uses these constructs as a psychoanalyst to help explain why certain memories may be repressed, I wonder if they might be useful for understanding a student's motivation to learn: that in order to learn, we must first be able to select, and then make a commitment towards what we are trying to learn. A student must exercise some control over what she is to learn (selectivity); then the student must decide whether to make the effort to learn it or not (taking a stand).

Intentionality, it seems to me, represents a critical concept to teaching and learning and is tied to motivation in very particular ways. Unlike conceptions born of educational theories from psychology which seem at times to displace or minimize the critical role of meaning and intention, opting instead to identify a 'mechanism' such as the push or drive to act, or relying for effectiveness on the understood, and already functioning motivation of student, May's intentionality undergirds all intentions and wishes and provides meaning in the form of an answer to the "why?" of an action,

making it very similar to Anscombe's intentional action. In this way it serves as the link between intention and action, and I want to suggest that it serves as a useful conceptualization for motivation, especially in the educational arena, involving, as it does, meaning, choice, intention and judgment—all in relation to action. In other words, could we say that intentionality includes both intentional action (intention plus action) as well as a person's disposition towards that action (Annas' virtue). Viewing motivation in a similar way might help. Students' actions would be understood to be expressions of intention, and their intentional action as part of a larger scheme of orientation to the world, their intentionality. It might be useful to think of students this way, especially those who flounder in school, or those who appear apathetic. Their 'behavior' is an expression of something, both of an intention on the student's part but also, and critically, of the student's understanding of our perceptions of them.

#### ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED: CALLING ON PRACTICAL REASONING

It seems that a number of educators face a familiar situation in public schools: too many students are disengaged, apathetic, inattentive, assuming they have shown up. May's explanation of the process of becoming apathetic as a kind of "defense against anxiety" may help us to understand student motivation, not as a particular attitude at a particular time, but as an expression of the student's intentionality, of the anxiety of feeling powerless.

A primary task of educators is to motivate others to do good work which we hope is valued by both the individual and society. In order to teach well, we need a good understanding of what motivates our students, of why they behave the way they do (Green 8). Engaging in this "real" work might lead to what Harry Brighouse calls

flourishing, helping students “to lead flourishing lives,” which, he believes, represents the primary aim of education (Brighthouse 15). Maybe until we settle this—reach an agreement on the aims of education—we won’t get any closer to a shared understanding of what we mean by motivation. Some might question whether this aim of flourishing is (or really should be) a goal of public education. They might be right to question, for who could think in our current climate of over-populated classrooms, focus on summative versus formative assessment, the frenzied scramble often just to get through a pre-determined curriculum that we have time for such work, for such aims? That instead our aims are often to transmit knowledge so that students can earn their grades or their degrees and move on to try to enter the next stage: higher education or employment. But I’m talking here about education as distinct from training. Acknowledging that there is overlap in public education, they are not the same since their goals are different. Training rightly focuses on outcomes. The goal is to change (or begin to change) behavior by the end (of the session, of the class period, of whatever). There is a fixed and pre-determined finish which very specifically involves a learned behavioral outcome.

Is it possible that the theoretical models of motivation may be more appropriately applied to activities involving training rather than education, the way I am distinguishing them here? Green, who tells us that the main goal of training is to change behavior (24), warns us against confusing instruction with training [what he calls ‘indoctrination’]: He writes that in training, “the concern to transmit certain beliefs because they are reasonable is changed simply into a concern to transmit beliefs” (30). The difference he points to here is judgment, on both the part of the teacher and the student, which seems to support our understanding of motivation’s reliance on the necessity of intentions: “...engaging in

any practical activity...involves not only doing certain things, but doing them for certain reasons” (Green 1). In other words, they involve judgment and intention. Intention involves the reason for my actions, either considered or executed (as we have clearly learned from Anscombe); while judgment involves my ability to recognize right actions (as Annas explains). The goal of education, as I mean it in the context of this paper, has to do with guiding students through example and examination to an understanding, for “the larger purpose” of what authors Sullivan and Rosin call “just human formation” (102). They use this phrase in the context of Socrates’ “educational agenda” in which he warns students of the dangers of working to acquire skill at argument without a foundational “moral compass” (101). Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist like Rollo May, argued that “learning was facilitated by relationships rather than instruction” (Grogan 147). This approach might be impossible without giving students a chance to explore their intentions, to flex their judgment muscles, to provide what Greene calls “practical activities involve[ing] an exercise in judgment” (1).

We need an account of motivation as more unified, as including important elements of judgment and intention, one which does not assume shared goals or purposes, in which my own purposes figure prominently. Anscombe was concerned about the consequentialism she observed, the focus on the importance of results at the expense of intentions. I wonder if, in part, the student apathy we observe is in response to educational theory and practice which seems to have displaced judgment, as it ignores intention. Could we be in the midst of a kind of educational consequentialism? If motivation is conceived as an implicit and reinforced willingness to comply, with even intention repackaged as compliance, what assumptions are being made about motivation?

I wonder if ignoring intentions and assuming shared goals have left us fewer choices, especially with unmotivated students. At the very least we are forced to use coercive tactics—which sometimes get us compliance, but which may ultimately result in apathy—an unintended consequence of coercion? Nel Noddings reminds us of the dangers of coercion when she writes that while forcing students to all follow the same curriculum in school “is meant to be ‘for their own good,’... it suggests strongly that their own interests, purposes, and talents are not highly valued—that to be valued themselves children must conform to a particular model of success” (30).

Of course, this coercion is worse for some students than for others; some students are able to see the purpose and relevance of their education to themselves, thus the work becomes “real” for these students. These students are able to “do well” to become “good students” even within the constraints of an assessment-based education, which supports the values of training. We value these students, as we should, without really understanding what motivates them. Some may simply be following instructions, having been well-socialized, others seem to know their own minds and know what satisfies their natures, and (this is the important part) school provides them with the tools to accomplish this. Others are not so lucky. Some may have no vision of themselves, never having had the opportunity to explore one, while others may have inklings of what their intentions and interests are, but school, unfortunately, being too rigid, may offer no tools for success.

Once labeled, it may prove difficult to turn this apathy around for students who refuse to participate in the classroom. Their behavior often angers teachers, with the result that they will most likely be “evaluated negatively, with maximum punishment

dispensed to students who have ability but do not exert effort and fail” (Graham and Wiener 72). As Rollo May made clear, anxiety or fear may act as preconditions to apathy. In fact, some students may simply stop trying because they are afraid to fail. Naturally, this places them in a difficult position, leaving teachers often confused and frustrated; however, the student may be choosing to protect themselves from the shame attached to trying their best and still coming up short (Tollefson 77). In this way, the student’s motivation to learn may remain buried under a sea of anxiety and apathy.

Practical knowledge/reasoning may offer help. Anscombe’s intention, Annas’ right actions, and May’s intentionality work together to provide a useful conception of motivation which might help us reach those beyond our reach—those labeled “unmotivated”. All three seem to rely on an understanding of human will and behavior dependent on practical knowledge and reasoning. In fact, school offers a particularly useful place for practical knowledge to potentially take hold. Part of what teachers do every day must involve aiding students in this kind of knowledge or reasoning; and although this knowledge remains undervalued or unrecognized, it is possible to imagine an education in which the development of practical knowledge is a vital concern.

The goal for authors Sullivan and Rosin in *A New Agenda for Higher Education* is just that: “to make practical reasoning pedagogically practical” (93). They advocate for the importance of practical reasoning in very deliberate ways to encourage engagement because they identify elements particular to practical reasoning which make it a good choice for this kind of work, claiming that teaching based on practical reasoning “teaches students how to navigate the world” through understanding of important concerns such as identity, community, responsibility and bodies of knowledge (93). The authors define

practical reasoning as discerning and acting in ways that are good for human life by “reconnect[ing] analytic thinking with the larger purpose of just human formation” (102). This approach might be useful for us in our understanding and working to impact student motivation in several important ways: by focusing on flourishing rather than achievement; by favoring engagement towards action; and by relying on the importance of intention in understanding human behavior.

Practical reasoning focuses on flourishing rather than achievement. When we separate out ‘student motivation’ or academic motivation’ from human motivation we have already compromised our attempt to understand, in a particular way: by designating academic motivation, for example, I have already determined a final goal—achievement in an educational arena. Human motivation does have ends, of course, but these are particular to the individual. This is contrary to an understanding of human motivation as unified. If we believe that students are primarily motivated by academic success and failure—and create school environments accordingly competitive—could we say that theories of motivation might be helping to construct a school culture which contributes to student apathy. Practical reasoning, by contrast, focuses on flourishing rather than achievement, making it sensitive to our nested goals (Annas), not assuming a shared goal of academic achievement, and consequently sending the message that we care about the students, not their academic performance. If such were the case, it seems much less likely that we would need to resort to coercion as a strategy for engagement.

Another reason we may look to practical reasoning for help is that it favors engagement towards action, what Anscombe calls “the calculation of what to do” (Anscombe 60), making it very useful to our understanding of motivation as well as our



goal of engaging the ‘unmotivated’. In practical reasoning motivation is not a separate issue “to be worked on” but is integral to this kind of reasoning. In fact, Sullivan and Rosin argue that practical reasoning can impact motivation when other approaches fail. For example, they discuss the limitations of the “critical thinking agenda” which they claim currently dominates higher education, at least. They wonder at an approach which, though prized for its ability to elicit perspectives which are analytical, reflective, and critical, seems powerless to help engage those who are unwilling to engage. In fact, they claim that this approach is unable to even help to explain the “willingness or unwillingness” of individuals to care or to be engaged: “It cannot, on its own terms, explain how to get students to care about disciplined inquiry and invest the work that is necessary for critical formation” (114). They claim that, as a result, this approach “is left straining for the “affective factors” that might lead to “curiosity and purpose” (Kurfiss qtd. in Sullivan and Rosin 114). They believe the critical thinking agenda lacks the necessary focus on engagement; in fact, engagement, they claim, is a necessary “precondition”. In other words, it is assumed that the student is engaged (motivated in a meaningful way) before any work can begin.

In addition, practical knowledge/reasoning relies on the importance of intention in understanding behavior, and consequently of judgment, and supports the idea that intention expresses the moral component of action. This focus on intention /judgment has the potential for promoting responsibility in students. The authors talk about their purpose of developing a third aim of education (in addition to getting a job and improving your mind): which they name formative. It seems helpful to think of Sullivan and Rosin’s formative dimension as the moral one, the one most closely tied to individual

intentions and purposes, to questions of why I act, to the meaning of my act. The authors imply that this dimension in learning has been mostly ignored.

In very particular ways practical reasoning may help put the motive back in motivation for those who are apathetic, who lack the disposition to learn. Applying practical knowledge means to discern and act in ways that are good for human life, ours and others'. If our conceptions of motivation from educational psychology have guided us to mostly think in terms of behavior, outcomes to be observed and then 'worked on', we miss out on the moral component of motivation, the sense that education is a moral venture. We risk ignoring that a student's motivation within education expresses an attempt to join a fundamentally moral activity. While it may very well be appropriate at times to try to influence or attempt to effect change in students' behavior, and this may at times lead to future habits, becoming part of the moral system of the student (Annas) there may be other times, many other times, when focusing on behavioral outcomes and achievement too often, as researchers and practitioners, means we do not look or acknowledge the greater picture of the student's orientation, her intentionality. Rather than helping them get through with the task, through the day, through the year, through with school, we help, instead, individual students learn to recognize their very particular role in this part of their lives and imagine how that role in a very real sense is up to them to shape, define, and improve.

## CONCLUSION

There's an early scene in the Woody Allen film *Annie Hall* in which the mother takes her adolescent son to the doctor, complaining that "He's stopped doing his

homework!” When the doctor asks for a reason, the despondent boy replies, “What’s the point? The universe is expanding!” In frustration, the mother exclaims, “What—is that your business?”

David Roochnik seems to be trying, through his study of Aristotle, to help us come to a similar understanding, without a mother’s intention that we should “do our homework”: that while the universe swirls around us, taking us all with it on a ride over which we have, in infinite terms, little or no control (as finite beings), in the midst of all that possible chaos there is just this: a particular life, many of them, right here—ready for attention. Students might, sometimes, need help to understand that truth first. That their lives, while tragically contingent, are nevertheless filled with meaning and importance, even of their own making. That their actions not only have consequences, but may reveal, to themselves and to those around them, information, important information about their particular life—their intentionality. That their reasons for acting, their attitude towards objects in their world, the judgments they make are less contingent and therefore more vital, possibly, even than the circumstances of their life. And we might hope to help them understand this, to help them use the “Why?” offered by Anscombe as “a device which reveals the order that there is in the chaos” (Anscombe, *Intention* 89).

American novelist and essayist, Marilynne Robinson, in her book *Absence of Mind*, is highly critical of positivist scientific theories as they attempt to offer definitions of human nature. She claims such theories, while having irreconcilable world views, share the “assumption that the Western understanding of what a human being is ... has been fundamentally in error” (preface). According to Robinson, an avowed Christian, not only has religion been shut out but, “the classical and humanist traditions, also deeply

influential in Western thought, are just as effectively excluded by these variously determinist and reductionist models of human nature and motivation” (xiii). She fears that any ‘thinking’ [epistemology] that discards out-of-hand these traditions, also discounts “the self, the solitary, perceiving, and interpreting locus of anything that can be called experience” (7). And she goes to some pains to support this.

She complains that scientists when investigating human nature dismiss all reference to or acknowledgment of what she says Bertrand Russell called “the privacy of introspective data”: in other words, the non-observable subject. In their attempt to generalize, they sheer off an element essential to our nature, resulting in accounts of such human activity as religion, for example, as “only what could be observed using the methods of anthropology and sociology without reference to the deeply pensive solitudes that bring individuals into congregations and communities to be nurtured by the thought and culture they find there” (9).

I wonder if, in a similar way, empirical research on motivation from educational psychology “evades” the messy self, conceptualizes motivation as only that which can be observed and in this way fails to understand or take into account critical aspects of motivation tied directly to the self, such as intention and judgment.

In *Intelligent Virtue* Julia Annas is cautious of relying solely on theoretical knowledge and is careful not to situate the concept of virtue within a theoretical tradition. She claims that hers is “a holistic account whose force comes in part from the grounding in experience...” (170). While she does this to avoid relying on one particular framework of a theory to hold up her account, she also does not want the reader to feel compelled to

throw out her account over a “simple disagreement”, but instead hopes disagreements may lead to a clearer, richer understanding. In the conclusion to her book, Annas urges us to be reasonable about recognizing just such “a forced choice” (171).

While it may be that our understanding of motivation (educational) is also not best served by a purely theoretical account arrived at through empirical research, the point of this paper is not to disparage the work in this field, nor to imply that there can be only one way to understand our complicated natures, including our motivations. My purpose, instead, is to explore the need for additional resources to aid in our understanding of motivation with an eye to helping those students characterized as unmotivated, crippled by anxiety and apathy. The hope is that an exploration of practical knowledge and the more philosophical understanding of motivation it brings might help in that cause by working to reconnect our understanding of action with its meaning: intention, and by acknowledging the importance that individual goals and purposes might contribute to motivation.

Rollo May pushed for an understanding of human nature that included the individual human as the important component—not denying that culture affects us, but that “positive change could only emerge from individual change, and did not exist as a disembodied cultural current that could sweep us all along” (Grogan 106). If we take May’s account to heart, we might conclude that to understand people and particularly their motivations, their reasons for their actions, intentionality may need to be considered, not “specifically [left] out of the picture” as he contends much psychology does (May, “Intentionality” 206). When working with truly unmotivated students, we might be careful about creating competitive classroom orientations, and we might pay particular

attention to anxiety as a possible catalyst for apathy. May warns us: “Overwhelming anxiety destroys the capacity to perceive and conceive one’s world, to reach out toward it to form and re-form it. In this sense, it destroys intentionality” (*Love and Will* 245).

I give the last word to Nel Noddings, who advocates here, I believe, for an understanding of motivation based on her own *practical* knowledge:

Children who are genuinely and continuously cared for usually turn out to be reasonably good people. Thus, when things go wrong or threaten to do so, we have to reflect on our own actions and beliefs. It is not just a matter of tightening up the rules, getting tougher, being consistent about penalties, teaching “them” what’s right. It is more a matter of bringing relations into caring equilibrium, balancing expressed and inferred needs, and helping children understand both our actions and their own. (154)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Annas, Julia. *Intelligent Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford, 2011. Print.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1957. Print.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *Philosophy* 33.124 (1958): n. pag.  
Print.
- Brighouse, Harry. *On Education*. N.p.: Routledge, 2005. Print. Thinking in Action.
- Deci, Edward L., and Richard M. Ryan. "The 'What' and 'Why' of Goal Pursuits' Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior." *Psychological Inquiry* 11.4 (2000): 227-68. Digital file.
- Diamond, Cora. "Anscombe, Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret (1919-2001)." *Gale's Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2009. *Gale's Cengage Learning*. Web. 9 July 2014.
- Dornyei, Zoltan. Researching Motivation: From Integratedness to the Ideal L2 Self. *Introducing Applied Linguistics: Concepts and Skills*. Ed. S. Hunston and D. Oakey. London: Routledge, 2010. 74-83. Print.
- Ford, Anton. "Action and Generality." *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*. Ed. Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby, and Frederick Stoutland. Cambridge: Harvard, 2011. N. pag.  
Print.
- Green, Thomas F. *The Activities of Teaching*. New York: McGraw, 1971. Print.
- Grogan, Jessica. *Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology Sixties Culture and the Shaping of the Modern Self*. New York: Harper, 2013. Print.
- Herman, Barbara. *Moral Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2007. Print.

- Hidi, Suzanne, and Judith M. Harackiewicz. "Motivating the Academically Unmotivated: A Critical Issue for the 21st Century." *Review of Educational Research* 70.2 (2000): 151-79. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.
- Lamm, Zvi. *Conflicting Theories of Instruction: Conceptual Dimensions*. Berkeley: McCutchan, 1976. Print.
- Loney, Tom, and Martyn Standage. "A Motivational and Evolutionary Perspective of the Self in Exercise and Health." *New Developments in the Psychology of Motivation*. Ed. Filip M. Olsson. New York: Nova Science, 2008. 81-104. Print.
- Marks, Helen M. "Student Engagement in Instructional Activity: Patterns in the Elementary, Middle, and High School Years." *American Educational Research Journal* 37.1 (2000): 153-84. Print.
- May, Rollo. "Intentionality: The Heart of Human Will." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 5.202 (1965): 202-09. Print.
- - -. *Love and Will*. NY: Norton, 1969. Print.
- Newstead, Anne. "Interpreting Anscombe's Intention." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 34 (2009): 157-76. Print.
- Noddings, Nel. *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education*. New York: Teachers College, 2002. Print.
- Paris, Scott G., Marjorie Y. Lipson, and Karen K. Wixson. "Becoming a Strategic Reader." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 8 (1983): 293-316. Print.
- Parsons, Jim, and Leah Taylor. "Improving Student Engagement." *Current Issues in Education* 14.1 (2011): 4-31. Print.



- Radovan, Marko. "New Paradigms in Motivational Research." *International Journal of Academic Research* 2.2 (2010): 6-10. Print.
- Richter, Duncan. "G.E.M. Anscombe (1919-2001)." *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. James Fieser, Bradley Dowdon, and Aaron Preston. University of Tennessee, n.d. Web. 4 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>>.
- Robinson, Marilynne. *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*. New Haven: Yale, 2010. Print. The Terry Lecture Ser.
- Roochnik, David. *Retrieving Aristotle in an Age of Crisis*. Albany: Suny, 2013. Print. Suny Series of Ancient Greek Philosophy.
- Ryan, Richard M., and Edward L. Deci. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: Classic Definitions and New Directions." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25 (2000): 54-67. Print.
- Seifert, Timothy L. "Understanding Student Motivation." *Educational Research* 46.2 (2004): 137-49. Print.
- Sivan, Eva. "Motivation in Social Constructivist Theory." *Educational Psychologist* 21.3 (1986): 209-233. Print.
- Sullivan, William M., and Matthew S. Rosin. *A New Agenda for Higher Education: Shaping a Life of the Mind for Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. Print.
- Tollefson, Nona. "Classroom Applications of Cognitive Theories of Motivation." *Educational Psychology Review* 12.1 (2000): 63-83. Print.
- Ushioda, Ema, and Zoltan Dornyei. "Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self: A Theoretical Overview." *Motivation, Language Identities and the L2 Self*. Ed. Ushioda and Dornyei. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009. 1-8. Print.

- Wang, Ming-Te, and Jacquelynne S. Eccles. "School Context, Achievement Motivation, and Academic Engagement: A Longitudinal Study of School Engagement Using a Multi-dimensional Perspective." *Learning and Instruction* 28 (2013): 12-23. Print.
- Weiner, Bernard. "History of Motivational Research in Education." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 82.4 (1990): 616-22. Print.
- Weiner, Bernard, and Sandra Graham. "Theories and Principles of Motivation." *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. Ed. D.C. Berliner and R.C. Calfee. New York: Prentice Hall, 1996. 63-83. Print.