

« 1. *No modification without aberration.* When it is stated that X did A, there is a temptation to suppose that given some, indeed perhaps *any*, expression modifying the verb we shall be entitled to insert either it or its opposite or negation in our statement: that is, we shall be entitled to ask, typically, “Did X do A Mly or not Mly?” (e.g. “Did X murder Y voluntarily or involuntarily”), and to answer one or the other. Or as a minimum it is supposed that if X did A there must be at least *one* modifying expression that we could, justifiably and informatively, insert with the verb. In the great majority of cases of the use of the great majority of verbs (“murder” perhaps is not one of the majority) such suppositions are quite unjustified. The natural economy of language dictates that for the *standard* case covered by any normal verb—not, perhaps, a verb of omen such as “murder”, but a verb like “eat” or “kick” or “croquet”—no modifying expression is required or even permissible. Only if we do the action named in some *special* way or circumstances, different from those in which such an act is naturally done (and of course both the normal and the abnormal differ according to what verb in particular is in question) is a modifying expression called for, or even in order. I sit in my chair, in the usual way—I am not in a daze or influenced by threats or the like: here, it will not do to say either that I sat in it intentionally or that I did not sit in it intentionally<sup>1</sup> nor yet that I sat in it automatically or from habit or what you will. It is bedtime, I am alone, I yawn: but I do not yawn involuntarily (or voluntarily!), nor yet deliberately. To yawn in any such peculiar way is just not to just yawn. »

« 3. *The importance of Negations and Opposites.* “Voluntarily” and “involuntarily”, then, are not opposed in the obvious sort of way that they are made to be in philosophy or jurisprudence. The “opposite”, or rather “opposites”, of “voluntarily” might be “under constraint” of some sort, duress or obligation or influence:<sup>2</sup> the opposite of “involuntarily” might be “deliberately” or “on purpose” or the like. Such divergences in opposites indicate that “voluntarily” and “involuntarily”, in spite of their apparent connexion, are fish from very different kettles. In general, it will pay us to take nothing for granted or as obvious about negations and opposites. It does not pay to assume that a word must have an opposite, or one opposite, whether it is a positive word like “wilfully” or a “negative” word like “inadvertently”. Rather, we should be asking ourselves such questions as why there is no use for the adverb “adverently”. For above all it will not do to assume that the “positive” word must be around to wear the trousers; commonly enough the “negative” (looking) word marks the (positive) abnormality, while the “positive” word, if it exists, merely serves to rule out the suggestion of that abnormality. It is natural enough, in view of what was said in (i) above, for the “positive” word not to be found at all in some cases. I do an act A1 (say, crush a snail) *inadvertently* if, in the course of executing by means of movements of my bodily parts some other act A2 (say, in walking down the public path) I fail to exercise such meticulous supervision over the courses of those movements as would have been needed to ensure that they did not bring about the untoward event (here, the impact on the snail).<sup>3</sup> By claiming that A1 was inadvertent we place it, where we imply it belongs, on this special level, in a class of incidental happenings which must occur in the doing of any physical act. To lift the act out of this class, we need and possess the expression “not...inadvertently”: “adverently”, if used for this purpose, would suggest that, if the act was not done inadvertently, then it must have been done noticing what I was doing, which is far from necessarily the case (e.g., if I did it absent-mindedly), or at least that there is something

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<sup>1</sup> Caveat or hedge: of course, we can say I did not sit in it “intentionally” as a way simply of repudiating the suggestion that I sat in it intentionally.

<sup>2</sup> But remember, when I sign a cheque in the normal way, I do *not* do so either “voluntarily” or “under constraint”.

<sup>3</sup> Or analogously: I do an act A1 (say, divulge my age, or imply you are a liar), *inadvertently* if, in the course of executing by the use of some medium of communication some other act A2 (say, reminiscing about my war service) I fail to exercise such meticulous supervision over the choice and arrangement of the signs as would have been needed to ensure that. ... It is interesting to note how such adverbs lead parallel lives, one in connexion with physical actions (“doing”) and the other in connexion with acts of communication (“saying”), or sometimes also in connexion with acts of “thinking” (“inadvertently assumed”).

in common to the ways of doing all acts not done inadvertently, which is not the case. Again, there is no use for “advertently” at the same level as “inadvertently”: in passing the butter I do not knock over the cream-jug, though I do (inadvertently) knock over the teacup yet I do not by-pass the cream-jug advertently: for at this level, below supervision in detail, anything that we do is, if you like, inadvertent, though we only call it so, and indeed only call it something we have done, if there is something untoward about it. »

« 5. *Standards of the unacceptable.* It is characteristic of excuses to be “unacceptable”: given, I suppose, almost any excuse, there will be cases of such a kind or of such gravity that “we will not accept” it. It is interesting to detect the standards and codes we thus invoke. The extent of the supervision we exercise over the execution of any act can never be quite unlimited, and usually is expected to fall within fairly definite limits (“due care and attention”) in the case of acts of some general kind, though of course we set very different limits in different cases. We may plead that we trod on the snail inadvertently: but not on a baby you ought to look where you are putting your great feet. Of course it *was (really)*, if you like, inadvertence: but that word constitutes a plea, which is not going to be We know all about how to do quadratics: we know all the needful facts about pipes, cisterns, hours and plumbers: yet we reach the answer allowed, because of standards. And if you try it on, you will be subscribing to such dreadful standards that your last state will be worse than your first. Or again, we set different standards, and will accept different excuses, in the case of acts which are rule-governed, like spelling, and which we are expected absolutely to get right, from those we set and accept for less stereotyped actions: a wrong spelling may be a slip, but hardly an accident, a winged beater may be an accident, but hardly a slip. »