

UNITED WISDOM

Being a Cause and Being an Author: Different Meanings of Participation

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *an endless nest of mannikins*

Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Beginner's Psychology*, chapter I, §2, p.8. A short image from his criticism of explaining mind through another acting person inside us. The RU text gives our own translation. This is a rejected model, rather than a statement about the structure of personality. Primary context.

What this article is about

After an accident, people often ask who did it. The question seems straightforward until one answer combines several things: whose movement changed the situation, what that person intended, which consequences they could understand and what now needs correcting. If the final movement becomes the entire cause, conditions disappear. If we list every condition and forget the person acting, their particular participation disappears. Neither transition is automatic.

Here, an author of an action means the person to whom we attribute conduct under a particular description. This is a working philosophical usage, rather than a legal determination or an image of an invisible master inside the body. Through a fictional scene involving a broken cup, we will distinguish causal contribution from intention, action description and responding to consequences. Historical arguments by Titchener, Hume and Aristotle help formulate questions; they provide neither a universal mechanism nor permission to guess another person's motives.

I. The Final Movement

Imagine Alina, a fictional person helping prepare a shared room for a gathering. She moves a table to widen the passage. A cup stands near its edge. When the table shifts, the cup falls and breaks. Someone tells Alina she broke the cup. This is an understandable everyday description: her movement immediately preceded the fall. Others had also acted in the room, though. Someone placed the cup near the edge, someone left a narrow passage, and someone requested a change of arrangement. The event has several conditions even when its final movement is known.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Listing those conditions does not yet settle blame. It changes the object of explanation. Why the cup fell concerns the sequence of events. What Alina was doing concerns her action. Why she chose that method concerns a reason still to be established. What the participants can correct concerns their future participation. One short everyday sentence may suffice to begin a conversation without sufficing for all these tasks. That limitation does not make ordinary speech false.

Suppose Alina saw the cup too late. Suppose books had hidden it. Or she noticed it but thought it would not fall. These are different versions of the scene, rather than established facts. The table moves in each, but knowledge of the situation differs. Consequently, the visible result alone does not establish that she wanted it, disregarded it or gave no thought to others. The initial fact remains important without these additions.

We can begin by acknowledging our own movement: I moved the table, and the cup then fell. This neither supplies the entire causal history nor determines the final response to the damage. It makes known participation visible. Distinguishing questions helps when a conversation readily becomes a choice between total self-blame and total retreat into circumstances. More precise language can name the movement, preserve unknown conditions and continue examining the event without declaring it completely understood.

II. Conditions, Contributions and Sufficient Explanation

A causal description needs a stated purpose. Do the participants want to prevent a similar fall, distribute work or clarify a particular moment? The table's edge and the placement of objects matter for the first task. The preparation agreement matters for the second. Direction and speed may matter for the third, where they are known. There is no need to select the one most authentic description for every purpose. Different questions can highlight different conditions in the same sequence without cancelling one another.

Not every preceding event, however, becomes a useful explanation. Scheduling the gathering a week earlier is part of the history and explains why rearrangement was needed. It does not directly explain why the cup failed to remain on the table. An excessively broad chain can include almost everything that happened in the room while losing its object. We can ask which difference in a condition might alter the particular outcome we are explaining. The fictional scene allows this question without becoming an experiment.

A cup placed at the very edge may be a relevant condition of its fall. That condition does not make the table's movement disappear, just as an obvious movement does not remove the placement question. We can speak of several contributions without assigning invented percentages to them. The article does not know the cup's mass, the table's surface or every

participant's movements. Exact shares would imply a false measurability. Preserving the observable sequence and separately marking suppositions is enough.

Nor must every everyday event become an endless investigation. Agreement to move cups away from edges and rearrange tables more carefully may suffice for the immediate task. Yet an explanation sufficient for preventing recurrence differs from one sufficient for a moral verdict against a person. A useful repair to the room does not establish every motive. A limited explanation can help precisely because it knows its object and promises no more than the situation permits.

III. What the Person Was Doing

Alina moved a table, cleared a passage, helped prepare a gathering and participated in an event where a cup broke. These descriptions concern one episode but emphasize different things: a movement, an immediate task, a broader purpose and a consequence. We need not choose as though only one verb could be true. Instead, we should examine the evidence for each verb and whether it adds an unknown intention.

Saying that she cleared a passage implies a comprehensible purpose for the rearrangement. Our fictional scene supplies that purpose. Saying that she was breaking a cup can suggest intentional destruction, which exceeds the established information. Everyday broke sometimes names a causal result without asserting intention; that distinction is easily lost in a dispute. Clarifying the word's meaning matters especially when attitudes toward a person depend on it. Clarification is not a trick for escaping acknowledged participation.

It might emerge that Alina intended to move the table quickly and knowingly accepted a risk. Her choice would then have a fuller description. Alternatively, she might have followed a precise request without understanding the cup's position. Different information would matter. We do not know in advance which version is correct. The philosophical distinction prevents all these circumstances being inferred from one result. The consequence identifies a subject for discussion without itself telling the whole history of the decision.

A more precise description also reveals where participants disagree. One discusses movement, another carelessness, a third disregard for the shared room. They may think they are addressing one question while advancing different claims. Each needs its own basis. Alina can accept the first and ask about the second without denying the event. The conversation improves when agreement about an observable fact is not quietly turned into agreement with every assessment that follows.

IV. An Inner Author Does Not Settle the Question

Near the beginning of *A Beginner's Psychology*, §2, Titchener criticizes explaining mind through a little inner person. If that person's actions also require explaining, moving inward merely postpones the question. We need this limited argument against an endless explanatory repetition. His structuralist program remains historical and should not be declared a contemporary account of the whole psyche. Primary context actually read, pp.6–8.

A similar move appears in everyday speech when Alina's true self is said to have ordered her body to move the table. This can be a metaphor for experiencing a decision. It establishes no further facts about the event. Asking why the true self issued its order brings us back to reasons, knowledge and circumstances. Naming an inner author has not replaced those questions. The metaphor helps only while it remains a metaphor rather than a discovered mechanism supposedly explaining every act without further inquiry.

Rejecting a little inner controller does not reject the person as a participant. Alina remains in the scene when we consider her movement and reasons without that image. She can explain what she intended, acknowledge what she saw and revise her assessment. These ordinary forms of participation do not require settling every dispute about consciousness first. We can describe human action conversationally while leaving open which philosophical theory best explains its possibility.

The historical criticism should not become a new universal proof. It neither shows that responsibility is illusory nor establishes that observing the body fully reveals every action. Those conclusions need other arguments. Our narrower point is that adding another hidden agent does not make an explanation sufficient. To understand this cup and this table, we should return to the known sequence, the accepted description and what remains unknown.

V. Causes and Character Are Different Claims

In section VIII of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume connects human actions and character with causation and conditions of liberty. This is a historical philosophical position rather than a current legal rule. It prompts us to distinguish explaining an event from assessing a person's enduring reasons or dispositions. Selected paragraphs were considered, rather than his complete teaching. Primary text, VIII, §§73–77.

The broken cup may lead participants to call Alina careless. This word implies more than one established contribution: it connects the event to a degree of behavioral consistency. Additional cases and an understanding of conditions are needed, rather than only the owner's frustration. Even repeated similar outcomes do not automatically reveal a cause: the room may

repeatedly be poorly prepared while methods of rearrangement vary. Caution about character does not prevent careful attention to a particular movement and its consequences.

Alina might also move too quickly from the event to a general verdict about herself. Concluding that she always ruins everything would add a claim the scene does not support. It erases distinctions among a broken object, a mistaken risk assessment and an entire life. A strong feeling does not make the conclusion's scale precise. We can respect the unpleasantness without treating it as proof of a permanent trait. A narrower description sometimes leaves more room for actual correction than a convincing general sentence.

Character can matter in a longer discussion of someone's usual participation in shared work. Even there, observable particulars need naming: which actions recurred, what changed, which requests were understood and how mistakes were corrected. The word then does not replace description. Our scene supplies none of those data, so this article does not determine Alina's character. It marks a boundary: contributing causally to an event and having an enduring personal trait are different claims whose justifications do not automatically transfer.

VI. Knowledge of the Particular Situation

In Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1, Aristotle considers voluntary action with attention to circumstances known or unknown to the agent. For our contemporary fictional scene, this supplies a question rather than a ready classification: which particular information was available to Alina? Ancient categories and judgments cannot replace a separate examination. Primary text actually read, III.1.

Someone can know there are objects on the table without seeing a cup behind papers. They can see it while misjudging stability, or understand the risk while expecting their movement to be smooth enough. These versions differ in knowledge and assessment. Asking whether Alina knew is too general without naming the object. Did she know the cup existed, its position, the possibility of falling or her method of moving? Clarifying that object sometimes shows what participants had previously been talking past.

Knowledge after an event cannot simply be transferred to the preceding moment. Everyone now sees that the cup was badly positioned. Clarity after the fall does not establish equal clarity before movement. This does not mean no one could have noticed the risk. It means that visibility and understanding must be established. Alina might recall a warning, while another participant clarifies that it came after movement began. Sequence matters when discussing available understanding rather than only the final picture.

Clarifying knowledge does not erase consequences. Even if the cup was hidden and impossible for Alina to see, the room needs cleaning and an agreement about objects on tables. If she saw a risk, further questions about her choice may arise. We should not reduce

the situation to acknowledging uncertainty or repairing damage. The former limits an explanation of the past; the latter concerns participation available now. Distinguishing them prevents complete philosophical certainty being required before every necessary household act.

VII. Responding to a Consequence Takes Several Forms

After the fall, people can clear fragments, offer a replacement, apologize for inconvenience, change object placement or agree on rearrangement. These actions have different objects. Cleaning restores use of the room; replacement addresses the lost thing; apology concerns relationships; a new procedure concerns future cases. None necessarily substitutes for the others. Nor should they become a predetermined mandatory checklist: actual agreements and circumstances belong to the participants.

Alina can offer help without declaring herself the event's sole cause. This matters where the causal account exceeds the final movement. Acknowledging a contribution and participating in correction does not mean accepting every accusation. The owner can accept help while still wanting to discuss caution. Agreement on an immediate action does not require agreement on every assessment. Cleaning together may precede the conclusion of a causal discussion without pretending to settle it definitively.

A corrective offer also cannot purchase agreement. Replacing the cup gives Alina no right to demand that the other person stop feeling frustrated or trust her movements immediately. Someone else's feelings and assessments are not outcomes she controls. Particular requests and boundaries can be discussed, but their inner response cannot be declared part of her completed action. Again, we can distinguish what has been done, what has been offered and what depends on several participants.

This article does not determine legal liability for damaged property. Actual liability depends on current rules and facts our scene does not contain. Philosophical distinctions clarify questions without supplying an answer for a legal system. Where that answer is needed, an appropriate examination is required. For this limited subject, it is enough to see that everyday corrective participation, moral assessment and formal obligation differ, and none is established by a single word describing the cup's fall.

VIII. Who Else Participated

Suppose one person put the cup near the edge and another asked for the table to move without checking its surface. Their actions also belong to the history. This does not imply that everyone answers for the event equally. They may have known different circumstances, made different decisions and had different opportunities to notice risk. Listing people begins a description rather than distributes responsibility. Otherwise, multiple causes become a convenient way to stop distinguishing contributions, replaced by a general declaration that everyone is to blame.

Ask separately what each person was doing and what they knew. Placing a cup temporarily differs from leaving it before rearrangement. Asking for a clear passage differs from demanding immediate movement without a check. These distinctions are not endless subdivision for its own sake. They prevent one participant receiving another's knowledge and intention. A shared room links actions without creating a single shared consciousness that understands every condition in advance and decides for everyone.

An organizational level also exists. If the surface normally stores things while the passage is regularly cleared by moving the table, the arrangement may need changing. This does not cancel individual actions. It identifies a condition people can discuss together: designate a place for cups or clear the surface first. That is a proposal for the future, not proof that a system entirely explained the past. System can close inquiry as quickly as character when it lacks a definite meaning.

Distributed participation requires conversation rather than guessed shares. Alina can acknowledge moving the table, another placing the cup, and a third failing to check before requesting movement. Their acknowledgments may differ in significance and consequences. They make the sequence more accessible to shared understanding. If people disagree about facts, preserve that disagreement. A considerate wish to end a dispute does not justify inventing agreement about something no one has reliably established.

IX. Speaking in the First Person

Describing participation can begin with limited verbs: moved, noticed, supposed, offered. Each connects words to a particular object. When Alina says she supposed the cup was stable, she offers testimony about an assessment rather than an automatically verified account of every condition. When she says she moved the table, she identifies an observable action. Preserve the different status of these statements. The first person then becomes neither an infallible source of the whole truth nor a suspect place where every explanation is dismissed as an excuse.

Sometimes a person cannot clearly remember their reason. They can say so. Acknowledged uncertainty is better than a plausible story invented afterward merely to complete an answer. Alina may know she was clearing the passage without recalling whether she assessed the edge. Her participation has not disappeared; reconstruction is limited. People can discuss known actions while preserving uncertainty where evidence is lacking. A complete story sounds convenient, but convenience does not make every part reliable.

Self-explanation can also be separated from a request to another person. Alina describes movement and offers a replacement. These are different speech acts even when they occur together. Someone may accept the explanation while declining replacement, or accept replacement while leaving carelessness unresolved. A free response need not reproduce the internal logic of her offer. This boundary reduces the temptation to expect a well-formed acknowledgment to automatically produce the desired reaction and settle every relationship surrounding the event.

The first person also matters in revision. If another object is later found to have struck the table, Alina can clarify her first account without erasing the known movement. New information changes causal description without necessarily making an earlier limited statement dishonest. What matters is whether it was presented as the whole explanation or an established part. Precision from the beginning allows understanding to expand without replacing earlier facts with a convenient new story; it is not a defense of a flawless self-image.

X. Authorship Without Complete Transparency

Someone can be an action's author under a comprehensible description without knowing all its causes and consequences. Alina moved the table to clear a passage without being able to recount the room's entire physical and social history in advance. Such incompleteness is ordinary in our fictional case. Yet descriptions are not therefore interchangeable. We still distinguish the supplied purpose, the observable movement, unknown risk understanding and the actual fall. Authorship retains a definite object without promising complete power over the event.

A causal explanation can also expand without turning Alina into a vanished element. Learning about conditions can clarify her movement's contribution and others' participation. This does not first require declaring choice illusory or proving absolute independence from circumstances. Those metaphysical questions need their own arguments. In the everyday scene, avoid making quick conclusions from them that close off concrete participation. A list of causes and a description of action can operate alongside each other, answering different questions.

Our conclusion is not that a balance between accusation and excuse must always be found. Sometimes established facts require a clear assessment; sometimes they do not suffice even for that. Precise language preserves the grounds for transitions. Movement does not become intention, result does not become character, and contribution does not become obligation merely because a sentence sounds natural. Each transition adds content. Where that content is unestablished, mark a question rather than hide it in a familiar personal label supposedly explaining everything.

Alina can complete an immediate part of the situation with simple words and actions: name her movement, clear fragments with willing participants, discuss replacement and clarify rearrangement. This will not make every cause transparent or every assessment coincide. It can keep known participation from disappearing behind either a sweeping verdict or a long causal chain. A person remains visible in a particular action; the event remains larger than that action. Distinguishing both scales is the purpose of discussing authors and causes.

What this means in practice

For a safe, reversible case you voluntarily want to examine, divide a note into four brief questions. What observably occurred? What was I doing under a comprehensible description? What is actually known about my understanding of circumstances? What corrective participation is now available? Avoid this exercise for threats, coercion, serious harm or determining legal obligation. Its purpose is a voluntary clarification of language.

Mark where you add a supposition: about your earlier reason, someone else's intention, an enduring character trait or the sufficiency of one cause. Suppositions need not all be deleted; their status needs stating. If another person joins the conversation, invite them to clarify their action and known conditions. Refusal establishes neither guilt nor absence of participation and gives no permission to guess a motive.

Choose one question for the next step: check a fact, correct a particular consequence or agree a future procedure. The result is limited to that task. Cleaning does not establish complete causal clarity; clarifying causes does not replace agreement; offering help does not determine another's response. Stop if the exercise increases pressure. Where safety, legal or professional examination is needed, seek appropriate support; a philosophical distinction cannot itself supply that determination.

Key quotation

> *observed fact*

Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Beginner's Psychology*, chapter I, §2, paragraph following the inner-person criticism, p.8. The RU text gives our own translation of this short fragment

identifying a requirement for description in the author's historical program. It does not mean that another person's motives are directly observable.

Connections between traditions

Titchener limits an explanation that repeats an acting person inside the person. Hume connects action's causation with character and conditions of liberty. Aristotle distinguishes circumstances of voluntary action. These supports, actually read, preserve different questions without forming a single theory of consciousness or responsibility.

Alina's fictional scene is our own application of the distinctions. Unlike the earlier article about real alternatives, an event has already occurred and participation is being clarified rather than available paths being mapped. Correcting the cup is not equated with legal obligation, and unknown information remains unknown.

Sources

1. E. B. Titchener, *A Beginner's Psychology*, Macmillan1915, chapter I, §2, pp.6–8; selected opening of chapter IX, §53. Project Gutenberg51442. Selected authorial paragraphs and the preface's warning about epigraphs actually read; mosaic epigraphs were not used.

2. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VIII, selected §§73–77. Project Gutenberg9662. Historical support for distinguishing a causal account from assessing a person; no legal determination.

3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1, translated by W. D. Ross. Internet Classics Archive. Selected primary context of voluntary action's circumstances actually read. Complete books are not claimed read; territorial and editorial rights restrictions of particular versions remain applicable.

Tags

action, cause, authorship, participation, intention, consequence, circumstances, knowledge, description, responsibility, causation, voluntariness, assessment, character, explanation, uncertainty, first person, collaborative work, correction, agreement, Titchener, Hume, Aristotle, philosophy of action, historical psychology, distinction, limits of knowledge, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.