You appear to me, Mr. Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would often make one readily yield to a request, without waiting for arguments to reason one into it. ...(S)hould you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without wanting to be argued into it?

From Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*

The present chapter aims, first, at making more attractive the thesis that moral agents don’t have an overriding obligation to act based on moral beliefs arrived at through reasoning and, second, at demonstrating how a substantive argument for this thesis would be able to defeat the argument that if reasoning brings about more certainty about what is morally correct, it follows that one should always reason before acting. To be sure, the thesis that I want to make more attractive is not simply that in some circumstances there are good excuses not to reason before acting (lack of time or of serenity, for instance), but that there are circumstances in which, although the ideal conditions for reasoning are present, there is no moral obligation to perform reasoning. The way in which I expect to make the thesis that there is no moral obligation to reason more attractive is to defend a conception of ethical life that is a necessary condition for the thesis to be true against objections which have been raised against it. And the way in which I want to demonstrate how a substantive argument could defeat the argument of moral certainty is, first, to identify which sort of argument this substantive argument would have to be and then show how this sort of argument can defeat arguments based on moral certainty.

In the first part of the chapter, I present the thesis that morally correct action can be preceded by events other than moral judgement, paradigmatically by the excitement of settled dispositions (I shall call those actions ‘particularity-dependent’ in what follows). I start by introducing the notion of *antecedents of actions* and then I move on to present Simmonds’s argument for the connection between mercy and judgement. The reason why I introduce Simmonds argument is the fact that I take mercy to be a paradigmatic case of a particularity-dependent action. Merciful actions will work as a testbed for my thesis that there are
certain kinds of moral action that should be conceived as *reactions* that follow from the agent having been *affected* by certain states of affairs. In Simmonds’ conception of merciful actions, they must always be preceded by judgement. Judgement is an *active* sort of motivation (different from the passive motivation of having been *affected*) and that seems to go directly against my own conception of mercy as a particularity-dependent action. Given the sharp contrast between the way in which I conceive of merciful actions and the way Simmonds does, the best way to get my argument across is to present it in the form of a dialogue with Simmonds’s main argument and some of its possible developments. In arguing my case, I first defend that human action in general and moral action particularly, can be *caused*. I then move on to deal with the epistemological argument put forward by Simmonds according to which the perception of states of affairs is necessarily propositional (constitutes a judgement), from which it would follow that even if action can be caused, in order for causes to be perceived by the mind, they have to take the form of propositions about universal features of present states of affair. I shall object also to this epistemological argument in order to show how the way through which some moral actions are brought about can be explained in purely causal terms. If my objections work, the most important arguments against the thesis that the excitement of dispositions can work as an antecedent for moral action would have been disproved.

In the second part of the chapter I try to show a way to deal with the thesis that if reasoning increases certainty, it follows that one should always reason before acting. In order to show which kind of arguments would be needed to prove this argument to be invalid I shall explain in more detail what I mean by ‘particularity-dependent actions’ and why the distinction between particularity dependent actions and actions that spring from reasoning is morally relevant. That would lead me to some conclusions about *which sort* of substantive moral claim would have to be true in order to prove the argument from moral certainty to be invalid. In the final section, I try to show how those sorts of argument would be able to prove that the conditional ‘if reasoning increases certainty, it follows that one should always reason before acting’ is false.

**ANTECEDENTS OF ACTION**

Let me introduce the notion of ‘antecedents’ of actions and distinguish it from related concepts such as the concept of intentionality through a comparison between moral reasoning and legal reasoning. Although what I mean by the phrase ‘antecedents of action’ will be only be fully explained through the discussion of the relation between causes and actions below,