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Davidson on Practical Knowledge

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Did Donald Davidson agree with G.E.M. Anscombe that action requires a distinctive form of agential awareness? The answer is No, at least according to the standard interpretation of Davidson's account of action. A careful study of Davidson's early writings, however, reveals a much more subtle conception of the role of agential belief in action. While the role of the general belief in Davidson's theory is familiar and has been much discussed, virtually no attention has been paid to the singular belief. This essay makes a start on remedying this neglect. I begin, in section 1, by examining Davidson's claim that for a desire or belief to rationalize and cause an action it must have a suitable generality. It must, he says, be 'logically independent' of the action itself. While he was clear about this requirement in the case of the desire that forms part of a person's primary reason, I show in section 2 that his early treatment of belief confuses general and singular beliefs. This confusion reflects his failure clearly to distinguish the two roles belief can play in his account of action: as rationalizing cause and as agential awareness. Somewhat surprisingly, though, after he carefully drew the distinction and announced that intentional action requires practical knowledge, he pretty much ignored it. This may explain why some have assumed that Davidson parted ways with Anscombe on this. But a careful study of their writings shows that in fact they held remarkably similar views on the nature and need for practical knowledge.

Davidson on Practical Knowledge

David Hunter

Did Donald Davidson agree with G.E.M. Anscombe that action requires a distinctive form of agential awareness? In a series of papers starting with 'Actions, Reasons and Causes,' Davidson announced a break with many of the views that Anscombe and others had advanced in the 1950s and early 1960s. He rejected her incompatibilism about freedom and determinism, held that reasons for action are psychological states, argued that those states cause actions, and insisted that all causation is nomological. He did not reject all elements in Anscombe's account of action, for he accepted her view that an action can be intentional under one description but not another. But what of her claim that intentional action requires practical knowledge, that an agent acts intentionally only if she knows what she is doing where this knowledge is not based on observation, inference or testimony? Did Davidson follow her on this too?

The answer is No, at least according to the standard interpretation of Davidson's account of action. Consider how Alfred Mele, a prominent and sympathetic interpreter of Davidson's views on action, sketches Davidson's views. He is discussing the question, 'How are actions different from events that are not actions?' and says that according to Davidson:

Actions differ from events that are not actions in their causal history. Events that are actions are produced by reasons... Events that are not actions lack a causal history of this kind. Alternative conceptions of action include an 'internalist' position, according to which actions differ experientially from other events in a way that is essentially independent of how, or whether, they are caused...; a conception of actions as composites of non-actional mental events or states (e.g., intentions) and pertinent non-actional effects (e.g., an arm's rising)...; and views identifying an action with the causing of a suitable non-actional

product by appropriate non-actional mental events or states...or, instead, by an agent... (Mele 2003, 65.)

The suggestion is that an event's causal history is all that really matters, on Davidson's view, to its being an action. Mele contrasts Davidson's view with a 'composite one', according to which both past and concurrent conditions, which might include agential awareness, matter to whether an event is an action. Here is another well-known passage, this time by Harry Frankfurt, sketching the essentials of a Davidsonian account of action.

It is integral to the causal approach [such as Davidson's] to regard actions and mere happenings as being differentiated by nothing that *exists or that is going on at the time those events occur*, but by something quite extrinsic to them—a difference at an earlier time among another set of events altogether.....This is what makes causal theories so implausible. (Frankfurt, 1988, 71; italics added)

As is well known, Frankfurt then develops an alternative to a Davidsonian account of intentional action, one emphasizing what is happening at the same time as the action itself. And here, finally, is a recent passage from Fred Stoultand, also a sympathetic interpreter of Davidson, contrasting Davidson's account of action with Anscombe's.

Davidson admitted a distinctive first-person knowledge of the contents of one's beliefs, desires, and intentions—hence of (what he took to be) one's reasons for acting—that is not based on evidence, observation, or introspection...But he did not extend such knowledge of the reasons for which one acts to acting itself, and he did not, therefore, put knowledge of what one is doing at the centre of his account of intentional action or stress its distinctively practical character. (Stoultand. 2011, 18)

On this standard interpretation of Davidson, whether an event is an action depends solely on its causal history, and not at all on what else is happening at the time of the event. Though an agent's beliefs play an essential role on this account, as one part of the action's cause, there is crucially no requirement that the agent have any beliefs about or awareness of the event *as it is happening*.

When I raise my arm to turn on the light, my arm's movement is an intentional action because of the way it was caused. I may of course believe that I am raising my arm and I may see and feel the arm's movement. I may even believe, of that very movement, that is an action and that I am its agent. But whether my arm's rising is an action has nothing to do with any belief I may have about that action itself. The only essential role for agential belief on this account is as a cause.

But a careful study of Davidson's early writings reveals a much more subtle conception of the role of agential belief in action. Davidson held that acting intentionally requires a person to have *two* beliefs: a general one about the kind of action being performed and a singular one about the particular action itself. The general belief forms part of the primary reason for the action and is among its causes. When I intentionally turned on the light, I believed that turning it on would illuminate the room, and this belief was both a cause of and a reason for my action. The required singular belief, by contrast, neither causes nor rationalises the action, but constitutes rather the agent's awareness of it. When I intentionally turned on the light, I believed, *of that very action*, that it (say) would illuminate the room. What is more, Davidson may even have agreed with Anscombe that this singular belief is not based on observation, that the distinctive knowledge a person has of her own mental states may extend to her actions as well. In other words, a careful study of Davidson's early writings suggests that he followed Anscombe completely when it came to practical knowledge.

While the role of the general belief in Davidson's theory is familiar and has been much discussed, virtually no attention has been paid to the singular belief. It is not mentioned in standard presentations of his views, either by his critics or his supporters. Fault for this neglect largely rests with Davidson himself, who seemed to confuse the two beliefs in crucial early passages, did nothing to highlight their differences once he drew the distinction, and then only mentioned the singular belief in passing. And while

he developed a subtle and sophisticated account of self-knowledge, he never, so far as I can tell, connected this account with agential awareness. But, importantly, his commitment to agential awareness is clear in crucial early passages, and he never renounced his agreement with Anscombe. As a result, a central element in Davidson's account of action, one that deepens the debt he owes to Anscombe, has been neglected. This essay makes a start on remedying this neglect.

I begin, in section 1, by examining Davidson's claim that for a desire or belief to rationalize and cause an action it must have a suitable generality. It must, he says, be 'logically independent' of the action itself. While he was clear about this requirement in the case of the desire that forms part of a person's primary reason, I show in section 2 that his early treatment of belief confuses general and singular beliefs. This confusion reflects his failure clearly to distinguish the two roles belief can play in his account of action: as rationalizing cause and as agential awareness. Somewhat surprisingly, though, after he carefully drew the distinction and announced that intentional action requires practical knowledge, he pretty much ignored it. This may explain why some have assumed that Davidson parted ways with Anscombe on this. But a careful study of their writings shows that in fact they held remarkably similar views on the nature and need for practical knowledge.

Admittedly, this interpretation of Davidson raises obvious exegetical questions. First, if he thought that agential awareness was necessary for intentional action, then why didn't he mention this awareness when discussing the problem of deviant causation? The most famous example he offered of it, that of the nervous mountain climber, involves a complete absence of practical knowledge. If he held that being caused by a primary reason was only a necessary condition for being an intentional action, and that agential awareness was also needed, then why didn't he respond to this apparent counterexample to his account of action by noting simply that letting go of the rope was not an action since, though caused by a primary reason, the climber lacked practical

knowledge of it? I don't have a completely satisfactory answer. One possibility is that Davidson distinguished two explanatory tasks. One is to explain what makes an event an action; another is to explain what makes an action rationalized by one set of reasons rather than another. Perhaps Davidson did not see how agential awareness could help with this second task, and so did not see how it could help address the threat posed by the possibility of deviant causation.

But a second and more intriguing possibility emerges when we consider a different exegetical question. How exactly did Davidson conceive of the relations between the singular belief, the primary reason, and the action? He never addresses the issue directly. But certain key texts suggest an interesting possibility, one that might explain why he never appealed to agential awareness in response to the problem of deviant causation. Perhaps he held that the singular belief is *identical with* the action itself. If he held this, then his considered view would have been that the primary reason causes both the action and the necessary agential awareness. Though Davidson never affirms this view, it sheds new light on his somewhat dark remark that Aristotle may have been right in holding that some actions are judgments. And it would explain why he did not appeal to agential awareness in response to the problem of deviant causation. I explore these exegetical questions in the final two sections of the paper.

1. The General Belief

Davidson held that to rationalize and cause a person's action, the psychological states that constitute her primary reason for the action must have a 'requisite generality.' The beliefs and desires must be 'logically independent' of the action itself. He illustrated this generality and defended its requirement in discussing the role that a person's desires play in causing and rationalizing their actions. But since he held that a person's beliefs also help to rational-

ize and cause her action, he must have held that to form part of a person's primary reason any belief must also have this requisite generality. In this section I explore the generality Davidson had in mind.

Here is how Davidson illustrates the generality at issue, in "Actions, Reasons and Causes".

How can my wanting to turn on the light be (part of) a primary reason, since it appears to lack the required element of generality? We may be taken in by the verbal parallel between 'I turned on the light' and 'I wanted to turn on the light'. The first clearly refers to a particular event, so we conclude that the second had this same event as its object. Of course it is obvious that the event of my turning on the light can't be referred to in the same way by both sentences since the existence of the event is required by the truth of 'I turned on the light' but not by the truth of 'I wanted to turn on the light'. If the reference were the same in both cases, the second sentence would entail the first; *but in fact the sentences are logically independent.* (Davidson 1980a, 5-6; italics added.)

This passage starts with Davidson raising an objection to the idea that a certain desire can be a reason. The objection is that the desire lacks the required generality. He then warns us against a linguistic mistake. We must not think that a sentence like 'I wanted to turn on the light' refers to a particular event. And, more specifically, we must not think that it refers to the same event as would the sentence 'I turned on the light.' If we think this, he says, we will fail to appreciate the desire's 'generality'. But in what sense is the desire general? And what precisely is the linguistic mistake that he is warning us to avoid?

The mistake, Davidson explains, is to think that the following sentences refer to the same event, or that they have the same event as their 'object'.

- (1) I turned on the light.
- (2) I wanted to turn on the light.

Davidson says that (1), if true, "refers" to an event. Call that event, "E". He then suggests that (1) is true only if E exists. Since it is

more natural of think of events as occurring than as existing, it would be better to say that (1) is true only if E occurred. This seems clear enough. (1), after all, is a sentence one could use to assert that E occurred. The mistake Davidson is warning us against is of thinking that (2) is also true only if E occurred. Despite the verbal similarity between (1) and (2), he tells us, (2) could have been true even if I had not turned on the light. Indeed, it could have been true even if I had never once in my life turned on a light. In this respect, (2) contrasts with (3).

(3) I wanted, of E, that it be my turning on of the light.

(3) is true only if E did occur. No one can desire, of a particular event, that *it* have been a certain way unless it did occur. An event must, as Davidson somewhat inaptly put it, 'exist' in order to be an object of desire. A desire that is singular with respect to some object or event requires the existence of that object or the occurrence of that event.

It is worth noting that these contrasts are present even in present tense versions of these sentences.

(1*) I am turning on the light.

(2*) I want to be turning on the light.

(3*) I want, of E, that it be my (or a) turning on of the light.

(2*) does not entail (1*). I may want to be turning on the light even though I never once in my life turn on a light. In this sense, (2*) is not making reference to the same event as is (1*). By contrast, if E is the event described in (1*), then (3*) does entail (1*). I cannot want, of a particular event, that it be a certain way unless that event is underway.

But there is more to Davidson's claim that (2) is more general than (1) than just the point that having that desire does not entail that E occurred. For that point is compatible with the desire's being about E is a different sense. To see it, suppose Alice wants Ortcutt to be a spy. Her wanting this does not entail that Ortcutt exists. (She might not realize he drowned at the beach.) But her

desire is *satisfied* only if he exists. Likewise, even if having the desire described in (2) does not require that E have occurred, satisfying it might. And if it did, then this would be a sense in which (2) is about E, after all.

But Davidson clearly meant that the desire described in (2) *can* be satisfied even if E did not occur, and that this is part of what makes (2) more general than (1). That this is Davidson's view emerges clearly in the following passage.

Whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterized as (a) having some sort of pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that *his action* is of that kind. (ARC, 3-4)

The desire (or other pro attitude) that figures in the agent's primary reason is general in the sense that it can be satisfied by any event of a certain kind. Its satisfaction does not depend on the occurrence of some one event in particular. My desire to turn on the light is satisfied only if an event of turning on the light occurs, but it does not matter whether I turn it on with my left hand or my right, or whether I use a pole or my nose to flip the switch. Any event of that kind will do. Likewise, my desire to have a cold beer is satisfied only if I have a cold beer, but it doesn't much matter which one I have: just about any cold beer would do the trick. This is the force of Davidson's claim that the desire must be that an event of *a certain kind* occur. And this is the sense in which (2) is more general than (1). (Notice, by the way, that the desire described in (3) does require the occurrence of E for its satisfaction.)³

I have been labouring this obvious point for a reason that will emerge when we turn to what Davidson says about the belief that figures in an agent's primary reason. But we should first see why Davidson thinks that a desire must have this sort of generality in order to figure in an agent's primary reason. This generality is needed, Davidson claimed, both for the belief to be a reason and for it to be a cause of the action. Again, he made these points explicitly in discussing desire.

Because 'I wanted to turn on the light' and 'I turned on the light' are logically independent, the first can be used to give a reason why the second is true. (Davidson 1980, 6)

The example [of flipping the switch to turn on the light] serves also to refute the claim that we cannot describe an action without using words that link it to the alleged cause. Here the action is to be explained under the description: 'my flipping the switch', and the alleged cause is 'my wanting to turn on the light'. What relevant logical relation is supposed to hold between the phrases? It seems more plausible to urge a logical link between 'my turning on the light' and 'my wanting to turn on the light', but even here the link turns out, on inspection, to be grammatical rather than logical. (Davidson 1980, 14)

Let's consider causing first and then consider rationalizing.

On Davidson's view, an event's cause must have existed prior to it, or at least must have been in existence before the event began. And this means that the desire cannot be singular with respect to the event it causes. One cannot have a singular desire about a particular event until the event occurs, for until then, there is nothing for the desire to be singular with respect to. So if the desire is to cause the event, it cannot be singular with respect to it. It must be about a type of event, not about a particular one. The requirement that a cause precede its effect, together with the requirement that a singular desire requires the existence of its object, entail that for a desire to cause an action it cannot be singular with respect to that action. This logical independence, on Davidson's view, allows the desire to be a cause of the event.

Did Davidson also hold that what rationalizes an event must also have existed before the event occurred, or must anyway have been in existence before the event began? The texts are not clear. Nor is it obvious why he might have thought this. For why couldn't (2*) or (3*) help to rationalise the event described in (1*)?

(1*) I am turning on the light.

(2*) I want to be turning on the light.

(3*) I want, of E, that it be my (or a) turning on of the light.

There is, after all, nothing very odd in someone's explaining an action by citing a contemporaneous desire for that very action. Nor is there anything especially odd in someone's explaining why they are doing something by describing a type of future state they hope to bring about by means of it. While it may be natural to think that an event's *cause* must have existed before that event, it is not so obvious (to me, anyway) that the same must be true of what rationalizes an event. In any case, as the first of the two passages makes clear, Davidson did seem to think this. It is also clear that he held that linking an agent's reasons for acting to the action's causes was the most promising way to understand what it means for a person to act from one set of reasons rather than another. So he was certainly committed to the idea that a person's reasons for acting must have existed prior to the action itself.

Though Davidson was discussing desires in these passages, he must have held that the points apply equally to the primary reason's belief. That belief must be logically independent of the action if it is to be a reason for the action and one of its causes. When I turned on the light, I believed that turning on the light would illuminate the room, and this was part of my primary reason for turning on the light.

(1) I turned on the light.

(4) I believed that by turning on the light I would illuminate the room.

(5) I believed, of my turning on of the light, that it would illuminate the room.

The belief described in (4) is general in the sense that my having it does not require that I turned on the light. I could have had that belief even if I had never once turned on a light. It is a belief a certain kind of event. This generality is needed if the belief it describes is to cause and rationalize the action described in (1). The belief's logical independence from the event allows it to be its cause, and the event's being of the relevant type allows the belief to rationalise it. In this way, that belief contrasts with the singular

belief described in (5). That singular belief is true, and one can have it, only if E did occur. The belief described in (5) is thus singular with respect to that event.

Again, it is worth noting that these same contrasts appear in present tense versions of these sentences.

(1*) I am turning on the light.

(4*) I believe that by turning on the light I will illuminate the room.

(5*) I believe, of my turning on of the light, that it will illuminate the room.

I can have the belief described in (4*) even if I never in my life turn on any light. So my having that belief does not entail that E occurred. And in fact, that belief can be true even if I never once turn on any light. In this way the belief contrasts with the desire described in (2), which does require for its satisfaction that I turn on the light. And (4*) also contrasts with the singular belief described in (5*). I can have that belief, and it can be true, only if E did occur.

All of this means that the belief that forms part of the agent's primary reason for some action cannot constitute awareness of that action. For I take it that a state can constitute awareness of an event only if it requires for its truth that the event occur. It must, in other words, be like the following:

(5) I believed, of my turning on of the light, that it would illuminate the room.

Only a belief that is singular with respect to an action can constitute agential awareness of it. Since the belief that figures in the primary reason cannot be singular with respect to the event, that belief cannot constitute agential awareness. So an agent's primary reason for an action, if it is to cause and rationalize the action, cannot at the same time constitute agential awareness of it.

2. Davidson's Early Confusion

All of this, I think, is fairly clear. But it seems that Davidson was confused about it, at least in the early papers. For several key passages suggest that the belief figuring in an agent's primary reason has the singularity needed for agential awareness rather than the generality needed to be a rationalising cause.

Consider, again, this passage.

Whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterized as (a) having some sort of pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that *his action* is of that kind. (Davidson 1980, 3-4; italics added)

There is much that is puzzling here. But it is clear that the belief described is not a general one about actions of a certain kind. The belief is about the action itself, and it is to the effect that the action is of the desired type. In my case, it might be my belief, of my arm's rising, that *it* is a turning on of the light. This belief is true only if that event of arm rising is occurring. It is thus singular and so incapable, on Davidson's own terms, of either causing or rationalising the action. Nor is this an isolated passage. We find the very same confusion when Davidson offers his technical notion of a primary reason.

R is a primary reason why an agent performed the action *A* under description *d* only if *R* consists of a pro attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that *A*, under description *d*, has that property. (Davidson 1980, 5)

Here too, the belief makes reference to the action itself, and not just to actions of a certain sort. The variable in this schema, '*A*', is a singular term ranging over particular events, not kinds. The agent is to believe, *of the action she is performing*, that it has a certain property. This makes it a singular belief about the action and so, on Davidson's own terms, unfit to be a reason for or a cause of that action.

The first passage in the paragraph above is puzzling for other reasons too. Davidson says that the cognitive attitude in the person's primary reason need not be a belief about the event but could instead be one of knowing, perceiving, noticing, or remembering the event. Each of the middle two—perceiving and noticing—would, so far as I can see, be a state that is singular with respect to the event that is the action. One cannot perceive or notice a type of state, though one can perceive or notice a state of a certain type. Those attitudes would certainly have to be singular. This means they would lack the logical independence from the event that Davidson claimed is needed for figuring in the agent's primary reason. But it also means that they would be simultaneous with the event—occurring while it occurs. This means they could not be among the event's causes. States of perceiving or noticing an event lack both the logical independence and the temporal priority needed to be causes of that event. The final state Davidson mentions—remembering the event—is even more puzzling. For not only does it lack the logical independence needed to be a cause of the event, it occurs after the event! It is hard to see how Davidson could seriously have thought that a memory of an event could be one of its reasons, let alone one of its causes.

So what explains Davidson's confusion? How did he fail to see that no belief can meet his demands for being a reason while also constituting agential awareness? I do not have a completely satisfactory answer. One possible explanation is that he was led astray by an overly theoretical conception of practical deliberation, one that obscured the important differences between reasoning about objects and events in general and deliberating about what to do. Such a conception is apparent, I think, in an example Davidson discusses in an early paper on weakness of the will (Davidson 1980, 33). The example is meant to illustrate what is going on when reason and lust pull a man in opposite directions as he considers his options.

The side of Reason

The side of Lust

- (M1) No fornication is lawful
- (m1) This is an act of fornication
- (C1) This act is not lawful

- (M2) Pleasure is to be pursued
- (m2) This act is pleasant
- (C2) This act is to be pursued

When our man considers whether to act, he finds that moral considerations oppose hedonic ones. The major and minor premises are meant to formulate reasons in favour of each option. If they are to fit Davidson's account, they are meant to be the contents of attitudes that can cause the act. But the reasoning presented is not about a kind of action—it is rather reasoning about a particular act. Both the minor premise and the conclusion have the feel of singular propositions. This makes no sense (unless the act is already *in flagrante*.) For if the man is considering his options, considering what to do, then there is as yet no particular act for him to have a singular thought about. Contrast this with the following reasoning about another man's action.

The side of Reason

- (M1) No fornication is lawful
- (m1) That man's act is an act of fornication
- (C1) That man's act is not lawful

The side of Lust

- (M2) Pleasure is to be pursued
- (m2) That man's act is pleasant
- (C2) That man's to be pursued

Here the reasoning is not practical deliberation, though it does concern action. It is theoretical reasoning about an action's properties, and involves propositions that are singular with respect to that action. This sort of reasoning of course requires a singular proposition, which requires awareness of the act. This awareness is possible precisely because the act is occurring. But when our man considers his own options, thinking about what he will do, he cannot be thinking of a particular act and its properties. (Matters are different, of course, if he is considering whether to continue with some action. But set this aside.) He can only be thinking about a certain type of action.. So his reasoning cannot involve propositions that are singular with respect to whatever act he ends up doing. So it cannot involve agential awareness of that act. It is

no doubt a nice problem to say how practical reasoning is supposed to proceed, how we are to move from thought to action, when there is as yet no action to think about. But whatever the nature of such reasoning, it is surely a mistake to think of it too much along the lines of theoretical reasoning about events and objects. So one possibility, I suggest, is that committing this mistake led Davidson to confuse the sort of belief needed to be an action's reason and the sort of belief needed for agential awareness.

Another possible explanation for his confusion is more mundane, but perhaps more understandable. In these early writings Davidson was focused, sensibly enough, on announcing and defending his *disagreements* with Anscombe and others, not on identifying common ground. In particular, he developed and defended the views that reasons are psychological states and that they cause actions. He knew that these views were controversial. And for whatever reason, he developed them by focusing on the role that desire plays on his account, as both reason and cause. Perhaps he felt no special need to discuss agential awareness because he viewed it as common ground, something that he and his opponents agreed on. If he did feel this way, then it might not have occurred to him to think too much about the different roles belief can play in an account of action. And so he might not have realized that no belief can meet his demands for being a reason and a cause while also constituting agential awareness.

Whatever explains Davidson's early confusion, it is gone by the time he writes "Intending".

If someone performs an action of type A with the intention of performing an action of type B, then he must have a pro attitude towards actions of type B (which may be expressed in the form: an action of type B is good (or has some other positive attribute)) and a belief that in performing an action of type A he will be (or probably will be) performing an action of type B (the belief may be expressed in the obvious way). (Davidson 1980, 87)

Here the belief mentioned has the required generality. Its truth does not depend on the existence of the action. I can believe that in flipping the switch I would (probably) be illuminating the room without ever in my life flipping any switch. That belief is thus suited to be both a reason and a cause of my action.

3. The Singular Belief

Davidson plainly held that acting intentionally requires having a general belief, one whose content is logically independent of the action itself. This is the core of his idea that reasons can be causes. But he never abandoned the view that action requires a singular belief, and there is some textual evidence that he considered this belief to be non-observational. Curiously, though, he only discussed this in passing and he never argued for it. Again, perhaps he simply took it for granted, as Anscombe, Hampshire and others had argued, that action requires some form of agential awareness.⁴

Admittedly, a well-known passage from "Agency" suggests that Davidson did deny that intentional action requires agential awareness.

[A] man may... be doing something intentionally and not know that he is; so of course he can be doing it without knowing that he is. (A man may be making ten carbon copies as he writes, and this may be intentional; yet he may not know that he is; all he knows is that he is trying.) (Davidson 1980, 50)

The same example appears several years later in "Intending".

It is a mistake to suppose that if an agent is doing something intentionally, he must know that he is doing it. For suppose a man is writing his will with the intention of providing for the welfare of his children. He may be in doubt about his success and remain so to his death; yet in writing his will he may in fact be providing for the welfare of his children, and if so he is certainly doing it intentionally....[H]ere is another example: in writing heavily on this page I may be intending to produce ten legible carbon copies. I do not know, or believe with any confidence, that I am succeeding. But if I am producing ten legi-

ble carbon copies, I am certainly doing it intentionally. (Davidson 1980, 91-2)

Recently, some have pointed to these passages as evidence that Davidson rejected the views on agential awareness defended by Anscombe and Hampshire.⁵

But matters are more complicated. For immediately following the above passage from "Agency," after claiming that a person can do something intentionally without knowing that he is doing it, Davidson says the following.

Action does require that what the agent does is intentional under some description, and this in turn requires, I think, *that what the agent does is known to him under some description*. (Davidson 1980, 50; italics added)

Later in the same essay, he says this.

For an agent always knows how he moves his body when, in acting intentionally, he moves his body, in the sense that there is *some* description of the movement under which he knows that he makes it. Such descriptions are, to be sure, apt to be trivial and unrevealing; this is what ensures their existence. So, if I tie my shoelaces, there is a description of my movements: I move my body in just the way required to tie the shoelaces. (Davidson 1980, 51; italics in original)

Davidson's point is that when a person performs an action, he must be aware of the action *under at least one* intentional description, though perhaps not under all such descriptions.⁶ He may believe, of the particular event that is his action, that it is a writing of his will while not believing of it that it is a securing of his children's welfare. Or he may believe that it is a pressing hard with his pen but not that it is a filling-in of the bottom-most sheet. At the very least, he must believe of it, that it is a bodily action of some sort, a moving of his fingers in this or that way. Since Davidson held that all actions are bodily actions, he must also have held that all action requires agential awareness of relevant bodily actions.

What Davidson was denying in those earlier passages was not that action requires agential awareness, but only the stronger claim that it requires a sort of *complete* agential awareness: that an agent must know her action under all its intentional descriptions. In other words, in those passages where Davidson seemed to be denying agential awareness, he was denying Completeness but not Singularity.⁷

Completeness: If a person performs an action, A, then for all descriptions D, such that A is intentional under D, the person believes of A that it is D.

Singularity: If a person performs an action, A, then for some description D, such that A is intentional under D, the person believes of A that it is D.

There is as we have seen strong textual evidence that Davidson accepted Singularity. I know of no textual evidence that he rejected it. And notice that Singularity is almost exactly what he says in "Actions, Reasons and Causes" about the belief a person must have who acts intentionally.

Whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterized as ...believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that *his action is of that kind*. (Davidson 1980a, 3-4; italics added)

It is agential awareness that Davidson has in mind in this early passage—all the terms he chooses to characterise the belief are forms of awareness. While he confuses two beliefs, one whose generality makes it suitable (in his eyes) for being a cause and a reason, and one whose singularity makes it suitable for being the agent's awareness of the action, by the time he came to write "Intending," Davidson had clearly distinguished them and was explicit that action requires both.

In the normal case, a person's action will be of many types, and so the person will have many general and singular beliefs. When I turned on the light, I believed that I could flip the switch by raising my hand to it, and that by flipping the switch I could

turn on the light. Perhaps I was a little unsure whether this would illuminate the room, because I was not sure how powerful the bulb was. These beliefs about how to do something and what doing it would accomplish are general in the sense that I could have had them even if I have never once turned on any light. Though they may be singular with respect to certain things, such as my arm, the switch, and the bulb, they are not singular with respect to the action itself. This logical independence from the action allows the beliefs both to cause and to rationalise the action. In a normal case, a person's actions will be caused and rationalized (on this Davidsonian picture) by a set of such general beliefs.

The agential awareness will also, in the normal case, involve several singular beliefs. I believed, of that rising of my arm, that it was my raising my arm, and also that it was my flipping the switch, and also that it was my turning on the light. It is important that I believe of the event that it is *my* flipping of the switch. If I believed merely, of the event, that it was *a* flipping of the switch, this could not constitute agential awareness of the event, though it might constitute awareness of it. I might, after all, believe of Jane's action that it is a flipping of the switch. And if I know that Roger is controlling my arm with his computer, I may believe, of my arm's rising, that it is *his* raising of my arm. For the belief to constitute agential awareness, I must believe, of the event, that I am its agent. Perhaps I was unsure whether that rising of my arm was also my illuminating the room, since I was unsure whether the bulb was powerful enough. In a normal case, though, a person's agential awareness of her actions will be constituted by a set of singular beliefs. Identifying the relevant general and singular beliefs in any particular case will be complex, but no more complex than identifying what the person thinks she's doing and why she thinks she is doing it.

4. Davidson following Anscombe

I doubt that Davidson's views on agential awareness would have shocked Anscombe. She too rejected Completeness. Consider this.

Surprising as it may seem, the failure to execute intentions is necessarily the rare exception. This seems surprising because the failure to achieve what one would finally like to achieve is common; and in particular the attainment of something falling under the desirability characterisation in the first premise. It often happens for people to do things for pleasure and perhaps get none or little, or for health without success, or for virtue or freedom with complete failure; and these failures interest us. (Anscombe 1962, §48)

That a person is mistaken about what he is accomplishing is common, Anscombe says. A person might think they are accomplishing some thing but in fact be failing to accomplish it. Anyone aware of this commonplace might reasonably doubt on some occasion that he is accomplishing what he is aiming to do. He might doubt whether he is securing his children's welfare, or even whether he is filling in the bottom-most sheet, even when he is in fact accomplishing both. This familiar room for error—as we strive to execute our more or less grand ambitions—is what undermines Completeness. It is hard to see how Anscombe, in this passage, is saying something radically at odds with what Davidson said about the carbon-copier case. And notice that, after making this first point, Anscombe immediately adds this.

What is necessarily the rare exception is for a man's performance in its more immediate descriptions not to be what he supposes. Further, it is the agent's knowledge of what he is doing that gives the descriptions under which what is going on is the execution of an intention. (Anscombe 1962, §48)

This sounds just like Singularity, the thesis that when a person acts there will be *some* description under which he knows he is performing that action.

Anscombe held that agential awareness is not based on observation or testimony. There is some textual evidence that Davidson held a similar view. He mentions the idea here.

...it is often said that primitive actions are distinguished by the fact that we know, perhaps without need of observation or evidence, that we are performing them, while this is not a feature of such further events as hitting a bull's eye. But of course we can know that a certain event is taking place when it is described in one way and not know that it is taking place when described in another. Even when we are doing something intentionally, we may not know that we are doing it; this is even more obviously apt to be true of actions when they are described in terms of their unintended begettings. (Davidson 1980, 60)

Davidson does not endorse the view he presents in the first sentence. But nor does he deny it, even though he knew the view was held by Anscombe and others who, he knew, denied that reasons are causes. Rather than denying it, he instead added a qualification that echoes his rejection of Completeness. Had he disagreed with the Anscombean idea, this would have been a perfect place to announce it. The fact that he did not announce any such disagreement suggests that there was no such disagreement.

Interestingly, Davidson did affirm an Anscombean view concerning our knowledge of our reasons for action.

The fact that you may be wrong [about which motive made you do something] does not show that in general it makes sense to ask you how you know what your reasons were or to ask for your evidence. Though you may, on rare occasions, accept public or private evidence as showing you are wrong about your reasons, you usually have no evidence and make no observations. Then your knowledge of your own reasons for your actions is not generally inductive, for where there is induction there is evidence. (Davidson 1980, 18)

Davidson's point is not just that a person knows without evidence or observation his own beliefs and desires—states that *can be* reasons for action. Rather, it is that *when we act* we typically know without the need for observation or evidence *why* we are acting. I know without observation or evidence why I am flipping the

switch—I know which belief and desire explain why I am flipping it. Now, Davidson does not say that we also typically know without evidence or observation *that* we are acting. But it would certainly be odd to hold that one can know without observation or evidence *why* an event is happening but not *that* it is happening. If this had been Davidson's view, why wouldn't he have argued for it, or at least announced it? It is, in any event, difficult to understand these passages in Davidson as expressing radical disagreement with Anscombe's views on the character of agential awareness.

Davidson does not argue for these claims about agential awareness. But neither did Anscombe. She treated them rather as data for an account of action, not part of a theory of action that needs defending. Perhaps Davidson shared this attitude. This would help explain why he somewhat carelessly confused the general and the singular beliefs, why he offered no argument for Singularity, and why he mentioned it only in passing. The thesis of Singularity would have contrasted in his mind with the thesis that reasons can be causes, which he knew was controversial, which he knew Anscombe denied, and which he took great pains to elaborate, support and defend. And perhaps it is because she knew that Davidson accepted her views on practical knowledge that Anscombe never said that he rejected them, while she did discuss at length their disagreements over the causes and metaphysics of action.

5. Agential awareness and deviant causation

I have argued that Davidson gave belief two roles to play in his account of action. A general belief is needed to cause and rationalize the action while a singular one is needed to constitute agential awareness of it. Whenever someone acts, she must have (or have had) a general belief about actions of a certain type and she must, as she acts, have a singular one to the effect that her action is of

that type. So on his account, the two beliefs need to have coordinated contents. But, as I will show in this section, cases of wayward causal chains show that there will have to be some explanatory or causal connection between the two beliefs as well.⁸

Let's start with the problem of deviant causation. Here is Davidson's famous example.

A climber might wish to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, and he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him as to cause him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never *chose* to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally. (Davidson 1980, 79; italics in original)

Suppose that the climber's belief and want caused his hand to open, releasing the rope. Plausibly, the hand movement is not an intentional action. Now, Davidson clearly considers this case to pose a difficulty for his own account of action. But it is not perfectly clear just what he thinks the difficulty is. And it is puzzling why he says nothing about agential awareness when discussing it.

Perhaps Davidson considered the case to be a counter-example to a thesis about what makes a doing into an action.

Action-Making: If a person has a belief and a desire that would together rationalize his doing A, and if that belief and desire cause him to do A, then his doing A was an action.⁹

That Davidson took the climber case to be a counter-example to Action-Making is suggested in the next paragraph, where he says that "since there may be wayward causal chains, we cannot say that if attitudes that would rationalize x cause an agent to do x, then he does x intentionally." (79) The point seems to be that the possibility of wayward causal chains—as illustrated by the climber's case—shows that a bodily movement's being caused by rationalizing attitudes is not sufficient to make that movement an action. But it is puzzling that Davidson would consider this to pose a difficulty for his view, since he would surely have denied

Action-Making. For he denied that an event's causal history is all that is relevant to making it an action. Agential awareness is also needed. Recall: "*Action does require ... that what the agent does is known to him under some description.*" (Davidson 1980, 50; italics added) So, a case like the climber's simply could not be a counter-example to Davidson's theory. But if not, then why is he spending time discussing it?

This puzzle is deepened when we note that, for all the story tells us, the climber may not even have been aware of the hand movement. He certainly need not have believed, of the hand movement, that it was his loosening of his hold. In fact, so far as the story is told, the climber need not have had any belief about the movement at all, not even that it was happening. So the climber clearly may have lacked agential awareness of the event. But then, why didn't Davidson point this out? In fact, why didn't he use this case to show that an event's being an action requires *both* a certain causal history and agential awareness? And then why not use it to highlight a virtue of his theory—that it requires agential awareness and so can avoid the climber counterexample—instead of treating it as if it revealed a defect in his theory?

Maybe Davidson meant to draw a different moral from the case. Perhaps he meant it to be a counterexample, not to Action-Making, but to a thesis about what it is for an action to be done for one reason rather than for another.

Reasons-For: If a person has a belief and a desire that would together rationalize his doing A, and if that belief and desire cause him to do A, and if his doing A is an action, then that belief and desire are the reasons for which he did it.

That Davidson considers the climber case to be a counterexample to Reasons-For is suggested in the way he prefaces the case. He says that he despairs of "spelling out...the way in which attitudes must cause actions if they are to rationalize it." (79) So perhaps rather than showing that having a certain causal history is not sufficient for an event's being an action, the case is meant to show

that an action's being caused by a set of attitudes that would rationalize it is not enough for the action's having been done *for that reason*.

It is, after all, one task to explain what makes an event an action and another to explain what makes it an action done for one reason rather than another. We may know that my turning on the light was an intentional action, without knowing whether I did it to illuminate the room or to startle the burglar. This second explanatory task was the one Davidson announced at the start of "Actions, Reasons and Causes", and the answer he proposed was that when a person has multiple reasons to perform an action, the ones that actually cause the action are the ones for which he did it: the reasons for an action are its causes. So perhaps Davidson considered the climber case to show that simply having been caused by a (candidate) primary reason is not sufficient for an action to be have been done for that reason.

Unfortunately, a puzzle remains, even on this interpretation of Davidson's interest in the climber case. For if Davidson wanted a counter-example to Reasons-For, then he chose a very poor example indeed. For the climber's hand movement is not an action. So it is not a case of an action that is caused by, but not rationalized by, a certain primary reason. (Though it is a case of an event that is not an action being caused by a possible primary reason.) If Davidson wants a counterexample to Reasons-For, then he needs a case where an action is caused by a belief and a desire that are not the reasons for which the agent performed the action.

I am not sure that such a case is possible. But consider the following variation on the climber story. Our climber wants to reposition the rope in order to lessen the danger, and believes that he can do this by carefully loosening his grip while looping the rope around a lower piton. But he also has a second belief, that by loosening his grip altogether he could let his companion fall. As his hand opens he believes, of that movement, that it is his loosening his grip. If asked, he'd say he is loosening his grip in order to reposition the rope. But, as luck would have it, the anxiety produced

by his second belief makes his hand movements careless, and as a result he loosens his grip altogether, and his companion falls. His hand movement is an action, known to him in that special way, but, it seems, the attitudes that caused it are not the reasons for which he did it.

I am not sure that this really is a counter-example to Reasons-For. For it is not so clear that the second belief really did cause the hand movement. Perhaps it merely interfered with its performance. That is, it seems plausible to say that the climber's hand movement was caused by his desire to reposition the rope together with his belief about what this would achieve, but that the anxiety produced by the second belief marred his performance of that action, resulting in his companion's fall. Viewed this way, the case is not a counterexample to Reasons-For, since the action would after all have been caused by the reasons for which it was done (or anyway, attempted). The second belief merely marred that action's performance, but did not cause it.

To remedy this flaw in the case, we would need the anxiety to *cause* the loosening of the grip, and not just to mar its careful performance. So suppose the second belief, together with a desire to rid himself of the danger, caused the hand movement. The climber correctly thinks of the hand movement as his loosening of his grip. But he is mistaken in thinking of it as his repositioning of the rope. For since the movement is not caused by his desire to reposition the rope and its accompanying belief, this is not in fact why he is doing it. Perhaps what we would have to say is that he is doing it for no reason. (Not all causes capable of rationalizing do in fact rationalize.) But now, it seems to me, it is not so clear that the hand movement really is an action, for there is too much agential error. How could a person really be that mistaken about why he is doing something? But if the hand movement is not an action, then the case is not a counter-example to Reasons-For.

In the end, I am not sure how to understand what difficulty Davidson thought he saw in the climber case. Still, I think we can draw an important lesson about Davidson's account from our dis-

cussion. For my revised story is a counter-example to the following thesis.

Rationalising-Awareness: If a person has a belief and a desire that would together rationalize his doing an action of type A, and if that belief and desire cause him to do something of that type, and if he believes of what he is doing that it is of that type, then his doing it is an action.

My revised climber case is a counter-example to Rationalising-Awareness. It shows that more is needed for a bodily movement to be an action than just a certain causal history and an appropriate singular belief. For the climber's hand movement in my case is caused by a belief and desire that rationalize it and the climber has the sort of singular belief needed for agential awareness, and yet the movement is not (I think) an action. (Of course, the key to the story is that the climber finds that type of action desirable for two very different reasons: as a means to reposition the rope, but also as a means to dropping his companion.) So to avoid this counter-example, some revision to Rationalising-Awareness is needed.

One suggestion starts from the observation that in my revised case it is pure coincidence that the climber's general and singular beliefs have properly coordinated contents. His general belief (that by loosening his grip he can remove the danger) may help cause the hand movement, but it plays no role in explaining why he believes of his hand movement that it is a loosening of his grip. (In fact, it is a bit mysterious how he even came to have that singular belief! Does he really know that it is his loosening of his grip? Or is it just a lucky guess?) This, I suggest, is part of why it is difficult to view the hand movement as an action: it is caused by a general belief that is causally unrelated to the singular one.

For Davidson's theory to be plausible, I suggest, what causes the action must also cause the awareness. The singular belief needs to be caused by the belief and desire that also cause the action. Not only must the primary reason cause the bodily movement, it must also cause an appropriate singular belief about that

movement. The causal chain in Davidson's original case is wayward precisely because it causes the bodily movement without causing the appropriate singular belief. That's why the event is not an action. In other words, an adequate Davidson-style account would have to entail something like the following.

Causing-Rationalising-Awareness: If a person has a belief and a desire that would together rationalize his doing an action of type A, and if that belief and desire cause him to do something of that type, and if *they cause him to believe of his doing it that it is of that type*, then his doing it is an action.

Whether this is at all a plausible thesis is a topic for another occasion.¹⁰

6. Agential Awareness and the 'all-out' judgment

I have been arguing that Davidson held that action requires a contemporaneous belief. As he acts, the agent must believe, of the action itself, that is of a certain type. But Davidson held, at least by the time he wrote "Intending", that action also requires what he calls an 'all-out' or unconditional judgment to the effect, roughly, that the action itself is desirable. I want to end by noticing two points of connection between the singular belief and this all-out judgment, though both points deserve more extended treatment than I have space for here.

Davidson introduces the idea of an all-out judgment by contrasting it with that of a *prima facie* judgment, and both concern the fact that an action might be desirable to a person in one respect but undesirable in another. In Davidson's example, eating a given piece of candy might be desirable in so far as it would be eating something sweet, but undesirable in so far as it would be eating something poisonous. That very action is at once of both a desirable type and an undesirable type. Whether performing the action is reasonable depends on which desire outweighs the other. Per-

forming the action, Davidson claims, requires (or perhaps consists in) a further judgment.

Prima facie judgments cannot be directly associated with actions, for it is not reasonable to perform an action merely because it has a desirable characteristic. It is a reason for acting that the action is believed to have some desirable characteristic, but the fact that the action is performed represents a further judgment that the desirable characteristic was enough to act on—that other considerations did not outweigh it. The judgment that corresponds to, or perhaps is identical with, the action cannot, therefore, be a prima facie judgment; it must be an all-out or unconditional judgment which, if we were to express it in words, would have a form like “This action is desirable.” (Davidson 1980, 98)

The need for such an all-out judgment is a key element in Davidson’s complicated account of practical deliberation and rational action. It is needed, he seems to think, in order for the action to be rational. This is not the place to explore this part of his view. But I think it is worth noting two points of connection between an all-out judgment and agential awareness.

First, the all-out judgment and the belief that constitutes agential awareness have very similar contents. For one thing, both are singular with respect to the action. We have already seen this in connection with the belief. That the judgment is meant to be singular is, I take it, why Davidson describes its content using the demonstrative “this”. And in a later passage, Davidson says that the all-out judgment “makes sense only when there is an action present (or past) that is known by acquaintance.” (Davidson 1980, 99). So, on Davidson’s view, when I intentionally turn on the light, I must believe something with respect to that very action and also judge something with respect to it. The belief grounds my awareness of the action, while the judgment (together with the primary reason) grounds its rationality.¹¹

What are the contents of the two attitudes? That is, what must I believe and what must I judge about my action? We have seen that for Davidson what I believe about the action must be coordi-

nated with the desire and belief that cause the action. When I act from a desire to flip the switch in order to turn on the light in order to illuminate the room, for instance, I might believe, of that very action, that it is my flipping of the switch, or that it is my illuminating of the room, or etc. I act in the belief that the action is of the desired type. In the passage quote above, Davidson says that the all-out judgment must be to the effect that the action is desirable. In my case, I would need to judge, of my action, that it is desirable. The judgment, unlike the belief, seems to have an essentially evaluative content. This suggests that what I believe about the action cannot be what I judge about it.

But matters are more complicated. For in a somewhat later passage, Davidson says this.

In the case of intentional action, at least when the action is of brief duration, nothing seems to stand in the way of an Aristotelian identification of the action with a judgment of a certain kind—an all-out, unconditional judgment that the action is desirable (*or has some other positive characteristic.*) (Davidson 1980, 99; italics added)

The italicised part suggests a more liberal view about the content of the all-out judgment. For it would seem to allow that the all-out judgment might be, not that the action is desirable, but that the action has some feature, which as a matter of fact, is desirable. That is, perhaps in my case, I could simply judge, of the action itself, that it is my flipping of the switch, or that it is my illuminating of the room, for the action is positive or desirable to me, under either description. If this is Davidson’s view, then the judgment need not have an essentially evaluative content.

If this more liberal reading is Davidson’s view, then the all-out judgment and the belief may have the very same content after all. But then, why require both? Why not simplify, by identifying the attitude that grounds agential awareness with the attitude that grounds rationality? Instead of having a bodily movement, and two attitudes directed towards it, one a belief and the other a judgment, why not have only a movement and one attitude. Ad-

mittedly, the first attitude is a theoretical one while the second is a practical one, but so what? Action, after all, is where theory and practice meet. Why not a single attitude that is theoretical when considered as a belief-in-action, and practical when considered as an intention-in-action?

One final proposed identification is worth mentioning. It has already made an appearance in the two passages quoted above. Davidson suggests that (in certain cases anyway) the all-out judgment may simply be identified with the action itself. It is not that I must both flip the switch and simultaneously all-out judge that I am flipping the switch. Rather, my flipping the switch just is my all-out judgment that I am, at least if I am flipping it intentionally. On this view, to act rationally just is to make an all-out practical judgment. If, now, we merge this identification with that between the all-out judgment and the singular belief, we get the result that rational action is a practical form of self-knowledge. It is rational practical self-awareness. Heady stuff, indeed! Let me stress that, to my knowledge, Davidson never discusses this proposed identification of agential awareness and rational action. But I do think it is suggested by his texts. Of course, a good deal more needs to be said to make the idea clear. And even if it can be made clear, which I am not claiming it can, it might not in the end be at all plausible.¹² Exploring all of this, however, is work for another time.¹³

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Notes

¹ The singular belief does not even get mentioned in typical presentations of his views on action. This is true of two recent, sympathetic presentations: (Mele 2003) and (Stoecker 2010). Davidson's views on agential awareness are discussed, sympathetically, in (Setiya 2008) and in (Stroud 2013), though the distinction between general and singular beliefs is not discussed and neither draws attention to the confusions in Davidson's texts.

² In "Actions, reasons and causes", Davidson defended his view that reasons are causes against the objection that there is a logical (and so not a causal) connection between a person's attitudes and the actions they rationalize. We should distinguish two possible logical connections. First, the *fact* that a person has certain attitudes might logically entail that she undertakes some action. Second, the *content* of a person's attitudes might be logically singular with respect to that action. Davidson was plainly concerned about the first sort of logical connection, and his anomalous monism was designed to address it. The texts I am discussing indicate that he was also concerned about the second sort of logical connection, though as I show they also indicate he was confused about it.

³ Davidson is not alone in making this confusion. In a recent presentation of Davidson's view, Stoecker says that when an agent acts he has "a certain inclination *for a kind of action*—what Davidson called a 'pro attitude,' while most philosophers today simply call it a 'want' or 'desire'—and... the belief that the *event in question* is an action of the favoured kind." (Stoecker 2010, 598; italics added) Perhaps Stoecker is simply trying to be faithful to Davidson's own formulations. But it is remarkable nonetheless that Stoecker does not draw attention to this mistake.

⁴ Perhaps Davidson felt no need to argue that action requires agential awareness because he took it to be common ground that agents must monitor and adjust their actions as they unfold, in order to ensure that they conform to their primary reasons. It is certainly true that many kinds of actions—baking cakes, turning on lights—require some monitoring, though it is harder to see how basic bodily actions—such as moving a hand or twisting one's head—could require this sort of monitoring. It is also not clear what needs monitoring. Is it the action that needs monitoring or is it rather the effects being produced by one's actions? Baking a cake requires paying careful attention to the butter and sugar as they combine, and one may need to adjust one's actions to get the combination right. But it is not clear to me that it is the action itself that is being monitored here. Moreover, monitoring sounds like a kind of observing, whereas agential awareness, even for Davidson, is not a form of observation, nor is it even grounded in observation. Still, these are tricky matters, both exegetically and substantively. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.)

⁵ See, for instance, (Thompson 2011).

⁶ This passage is also discussed in (Setiya 2008), though Setiya does not discuss the difference between the general and the singular beliefs. The idea that intentional action requires a singular attitude towards the action is developed in (Thomson 1977). She suggests that intentional action requires, not believing the action to be of the certain type, but merely hoping it to be. Interestingly, she expresses doubt (Thomson, 264) that an event's being an action can be explained wholly in terms of its causes.

⁷ For the sake of simplicity of presentation, I am ignoring use-mention distinctions.

⁸ This interpretation of Davidson raises several exegetical questions. Why didn't Davidson discuss agential awareness when offering his account of self-knowledge? Why didn't he elaborate the idea, suggested in his texts, that agential awareness is non-observational? No doubt part of the answer is simply that no one can answer all questions, even all questions raised by one's own philosophical accounts. Still, Davidson's utter silence on these issues is surprising and more than a little disappointing.

⁹ Following Davidson, I assume that not every case of a person's doing something is a case of action.

¹⁰ But it is clear that this won't altogether avoid the threat posed by the possibility of wayward causation. For what if the singular belief is caused in the wrong way by the primary reason? And what if the bodily movement and the singular belief are caused in different ways by the primary reason? Something will need to be said, it seems, about the proper way. As is well known, Davidson came to despair that such an account can be given, though he also seems not to have thought that such an account was needed. All of this is beyond the scope of this paper. (Thanks to a referee for pointing this out.)

¹¹ One might have thought that the *prima facie* judgment could, after deliberation, simply become an all-out judgment. But if what I am saying in the text is correct, this thought faces a difficulty. For the judgments have different contents: the *prima facie* judgment is general while the all-out judgment is singular. To hold that the general *prima facie* judgment becomes a singular all-out judgment would require holding that one and the same judgment could change its content. This would require an unorthodox account of judgment.

¹² For the record, I am not convinced that a person's beliefs and desires cause him to act, or even cause his bodily movements when he acts. Nor do I think that a person's beliefs and desires are the reasons for which she acts, though I think she couldn't act for certain reasons without having appropriately related beliefs and desires. But I agree with Davidson that acting requires agential awareness that is not based on observation.

¹³ I am indebted to Phil Clark, Adrian Haddock, Matthias Haase, Jennifer Hornsby, David Horst, Sarah Paul, and Karl Shaffer for comments on earlier drafts and for discussion about the topic. I delivered a shortened version of this paper at the 2014 meeting of the Society for the Study or the History of Analytical Philosophy, and benefited from audience questions and discussion, especially those of Kirk Ludwig. Finally, I thank the two referees for this journal for their helpful and constructive reports.

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