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Anomalousness in Action

Jennifer Hornsby

I shall begin in section 1 by scrutinizing two claims in the area of action. Both are claims of which Donald Davidson has persuaded great many philosophers over the years. A: that we must be careful to distinguish between actions and their descriptions.[1a] B: that action explanation is causal explanation.[1b] These two claims, along with a claim about the nature of causation,[1c] can be the basis of the doctrine of anomalous monism.[1d] In bringing the doctrine to light, Davidson showed us how it is possible to embrace a thoroughly physicalist ontology even while one denies any connections between everyday psychological concepts and scientific physical concepts.

Anomalous monism has set the terms of many debates. But such is the sway of reductionism in some quarters that a physicalist ontology has not been enough to satisfy everyone's 'physicalist' or 'naturalist' metaphysical cravings.[2] I think that there is considerable confusion about each of claims A and B, and that when this is set aside, we find that there is more space for doctrines which are both 'anomalous' and 'monist' than Davidson carved out for his own doctrine. My conclusion will not be welcome to the reductionists. But it may be of comfort to anyone whom Davidson persuaded on the subject of the mental's anomalousness, but who has been led by the literature critical of Davidson to doubt whether a reasonable anti-Cartesian anti-reductionist position is available.[3]

1. Action

Actions, things done, descriptions.

We can distinguish between any thing and a description of that thing. Of course. On the face of it, it seems implausible that anyone should ever muddle up the two: who would mistake Donald for 'Donald'? But in the realm of action, there is a very common confusion that corresponds to a confusion between actions and their descriptions, and I want to start with this before I bring descriptions in.

If the causal world includes events, and if one of our objectives is to understand the place of human agency in the causal world, then insofar as there are (to put it tentatively) events where there are human agents, we need to talk about these events explicitly.[4] There is thus good reason to reserve the word 'action' for a specific use in philosophy, so that it applies to things in the domain of events. In this use of 'action', the following are events that are (or may be) actions: Anna's writing of the word 'blue', Peter's setting light to the fuse, my eating of

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[1] All papers by Davidson referred to here, are reprinted in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980). a. 'Agency', b.' Actions, Reasons, and Causes', c.' Causal Relations', d. 'Mental Events'.

[2] I am thinking of the fact that eliminative materialism and functionalism (in one or another version) remain such popular positions.

[3] I am thinking of the literature suggesting that Davidson's position is epiphenomenalist. There is a discussion of that suggestion in my 'Agency and Causal Explanation', in *Mental Causation*, eds. J.Heil and A.Mele (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993).

[4] For further defence of the event ontology (not concerned specifically with introducing it where action is the topic), see Davidson's 'The Individuation of Events' and 'Events as Particulars' (in *op. cit.* n.1)

my breakfast.[5] In ordinary English, however, these are not actions. For in ordinary English 'actions' is used for things that people do. And a person does not relate to what she does as she relates to her action (in the philosophers' sense just introduced): people do not do events. Anna does not do Anna's writing of the word 'blue', for instance; rather what Anna does is this— *[to] write the word 'blue'*.[6] Such a thing as *write the word blue*—or *set light to a fuse*, or *eat breakfast*—is repeatable; it is not a particular. Consider that someone other than Anna may write the word 'blue'; and that Anna may write the word 'blue' on several different occasions. But remember that Anna's writing of the word 'blue' at noon (say) is something to which no-one other than Anna is related as Anna is, and that it is something that cannot happen more than once. Evidently enough, actions in the philosophers' sense must not be confused with the things people do. I italicize phrases for the latter; and I use the word 'actions' only for actions in the philosophers' sense. Muddling up phrases of two different sorts,[7] and using 'action' ambiguously, can foster confusion, which these pieces of terminological policy are designed to guard against.

Davidson's own terminological policy is different. He thinks that in order to retain a correct conception of the particulars that are actions, we have to be clear about the difference between (say) Mary's flipping of the switch, and its description 'Mary's flipping of the switch'. Someone who conflated the action and its description would not be able to see that 'turning on the light' can also have application to Mary's flipping of the switch: the conflation obscures the fact that an action can be described in different ways. Now I think that taking account of different descriptions of Mary's action is simply a way of taking account of different things that Mary did—*flip the switch* and *turn on the light*. If that is so, then Davidson's thought about the importance of distinguishing actions from descriptions might be put differently: we have to allow that there can be two different things that Mary does, so that Mary's doing one of them is (the same as) Mary's doing the other.

Davidson showed that keeping track of the distinction between actions and descriptions enables us to keep track of the notion of *agency* itself. To have exhibited agency, a person has to have done something intentionally. But when it is recognized that a single event may be described as a person's doing one thing and described as her doing some other thing (and, perhaps, her doing some third and fourth things), then in must be allowed that she may have done one thing intentionally, another not. For instance, it might be that Peter intentionally set light to a wick but did not intentionally set light to the fuse of a bomb, even where his lighting the wick is his lighting the bomb's fuse. Davidson's way of putting this is to say that an action

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[5] Each of these three nominals is true of events. It is easy to slip between these and nominals in a different category. And there are many philosophers, who, although they are explicit about believing that some nominals are true of events, seldom explicitly use nominals which are plausibly so: they are more likely to say [i] 'Anna's eating the apple' than [ii] 'Anna's eating of the apple'. Notice that of these two nominals, only [ii] (which I use) has any of the following three properties (a) it can be pluralized; (b) 'Anna's' in it can be replaced by an article, (c) the residual verbal element in it can be modified with adjectives (not adverbs). The fact that [i] has none of these properties makes it implausible that it stands for any particular, for any event.

[6] The square-bracketed 'to' is optional. The context 'What she did was ---' can in fact be inhabited by phrases of three different kinds: at least I find it O.K. to put in any of the forms: 'write' (infinitival), 'to write' (a true infinitive), 'writing' (which behaves sometimes like an imperfect infinitival).

[7] The muddles are introduced, for instance, with use of verbal '–ing' forms. These can either be shortened nominals (and then they may or may not denote events: see n.5 above) or can behave like infinitives (in which case they denote things people do: see n. 6 above). One finds philosophers using (say) 'eating' intending to denote an event, but using it in a construction in which it cannot denote an event.

is an event which is intentional 'under some description'.[8] So, for instance, Peter's action, though it was intentional under the description 'setting light to a wick' was not intentional under the description 'setting light to a bomb's fuse'. But if the descriptions of actions correspond to things that people do, then we could say, more simply, that an action is a person's doing something (or other) intentionally. (The point that a person's doing something unintentionally may be an action is accommodated when it is seen that a person's doing one thing may be the same as her doing some other thing.)

If it is agreed that we can make all the necessary discriminations by thinking of the different descriptions that her actions fell under (on the one hand) or by thinking of the different things someone did (on the other hand), then there will be little to choose between Davidson's way of talking—using descriptions—, and another way—using things the person did. We may prefer Davidson's way if we dislike mentioning things people do, on the nominalistic grounds that these things would come into a prohibited category—of universals. But if we are prepared to introduce into theoretical generalizations about agency the locutions that are used every day, and to save it for another occasion to decide whether all mention of universals needs to be banished, then we do better, I think, to leave mention of actions' descriptions out of it. This seems to me to be better for a pair of reasons. First, when we allow ourselves to speak of things done, we can understand how the confusions that Davidson is concerned to banish crop up, and we can be armed against them. Secondly, we can get rid of some of the wrong impressions which the 'description' way of talking has given rise to. The 'description' way of talking can even reintroduce the confusion it is intended to eliminate. People no sooner adopt the locution 'intentional under a description' than they talk about doing things under descriptions. It then seems as if the things that people do had various descriptions to which 'intentional' might or might not correctly be added. But of course things that people do are *not* redescribable things, they are repeatable things; when spoken of as if they were redescribable, they get confused with actions (which *are* redescribable particulars).

Avoiding the 'under a description' way of putting things enables one to see more clearly how it works out to use 'intentionally', as Davidson did, as a mark of agency. Davidson said 'A person is an agent of an event if and only if there is a description of what he did that makes true a sentence that says he did it intentionally'.[9] One may say instead that an event is an action if and only if it is someone's intentionally doing something. But when this is said, attention is drawn to the fact that someone can do something intentionally without there being any *event* which is her doing it. For example, Bill might protest by intentionally failing to show up at the meeting; and here 'Bill's protesting' seems not to stand for any event.[10] If the application of 'intentionally' signals agency, then it looks as though examples of agency are

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[8] The phrase had been used by G.E.M. Anscombe in *Intention* (Oxford University Press, 1957). For Anscombe's own misgivings about the uses to which it has been put, see her 'Under a Description', *Nous* 13 (1979).

[9] P.46, *op. cit.* n.1. In this formulation (as in many others in Davidson) the 'it' is required to make back-reference to an event, yet the 'it' occurs in 'he did it'—as if people did events.

[10] I rely here on a conception of an event as something which triggers or is triggered by another event. And I should suggest that such a conception is relied on in the understanding of 'cause' as a relation between events which Davidson's argument introduces. Notice that it would be wrong to think that whenever there is something 'negative' someone did (i.e. when for some instance of 'Ø', she did not Ø), there is no event of her doing it. This must be wrong, since an event which is someone's doing one thing may be the same as her not doing some other thing. In the example here (and in the different example in the text below), where I claim that there is no event of someone's not Ø-ing, I do not relying on the fact that we have something that she did not do, but on a conception of an event which I have gestured towards with the notion of a "trigger".   (I take it to be one merit of giving *things done* priority over *action descriptions* that we can more easily see our way through the tangle of issues surrounding so-called negative action. But I cannot explore this here.)

not exhausted by events that are actions. We shall see shortly how this may affect causal claims in the sphere of action.

Causal explanation

If someone does something intentionally, then a distinctive kind of answer can be given to the question 'Why did she do that?'. The answer, as Davidson said, is of the rationalizing kind: it tells us enough about what the agent thought and wanted to show us what reason she had for doing the thing. And, as Davidson argued:

> (CE) Rationalization is a species of causal explanation.

(CE) is the summary statement of Davidson's position which he sets off from in 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. But before the end, another summary is used:

> (C) Reasons are causes.

There seem to me to be important differences between the two; and I shall suggest here that only (CE) is warranted.

Much of Davidson's defence of his position was devoted to removing obstacles in its way; and some of these are removed by adopting the broadly Humean perspective on causation that is Davidson's own (on which more below). But there is also an important positive argument which Davidson gave, which is often overlooked, and which appears not to rely on settling on any particular account of causation. The argument asks us to consider a case in which someone did something and had a reason for doing it, yet cannot be said to have done it *because* she had the reason. We are to contrast such a case with another, in which we can actually explain why someone did the thing by mentioning this reason. 'Because' gets in now: she did it because she thought ——, and wanted ——. When the 'because' does get in, but not in the other case, we not only have an explanation of why she did what she did, we can see her having the reason she had as making the difference to her doing it. When her having the reason can be cited in explanation, but not when the agent can be said only to have the reason, it is operative: the agent is moved by having it. All of the notions *making a difference*, *being operative*, *being moved* are causal notions. Thus causality comes to be seen to be at work when, but only when, the explanatory 'because' links 'She did it' and 'She had this reason'. Action explanations are causal explanations: the argument establishes (CE).

Now in order for this argument to work, 'She did it because...' does not have to be true in virtue of the occurrence of an event. Suppose that both of Mary and Jane deliberately (and intentionally) failed to answer the question. And suppose that both of Mary and Jane thought the question to be a stupid one, and that both of them have a pro-attitude (in Davidson's sense) towards stupid questions' not receiving answers. Then Mary and Jane alike have a certain reason for not giving an answer. But suppose that it is true of Mary, but not of Jane, that she didn't answer the question because she thought it was stupid. (Although Jane thought that it was stupid, what actually ensured that the question didn't receive an answer from her was the fact that Jack was present: Jane, for reasons of her own, never participates in discussions if Jack is present.) Now the difference between Mary and Jane seems to be this: in Mary's case, her thinking that the question was stupid made the difference to whether she answered the question. Where, but only where, there is a 'because'-statement linking the agent's doing something [here *not answering the question*] and the agent's having a reason to do it, the agent's having that reason is seen to be relevant causally to what she did—or didn't—do.

When it is clear that it is (CE) at which Davidson's positive argument is aimed, a difference between (CE) and (C) is evident. (CE) requires no more in the way of causal statements

than the everyday ones that are found when *Why?*–questions about people's doing things are answered. (Some people think that such statements are not causal; but the argument has proved them wrong.) (C), on the other hand, requires statements recording the (putative) facts of reasons' being causes of actions—statements on the pattern of '*r* caused *a*'. The cases in which there is a reason-explanation of someone's doing something but no event of her doing it make it doubtful that we could always find something on this pattern. For in these cases, there is nothing which mentions a particular to put at '*a*'s place in '*r* caused *a*'.

Even if we stick to cases where there *is* an event of someone's doing something, it is not at all obvious that we can give substance to (C). Notice first that if we are inclined to accept instances of '*r* caused *a*', then it will not be a reason which is mentioned at '*r*'s place, but (rather) an agent's *having* a reason. This may seem to be a persnickety point about how the word 'reason' is used. But it is a point that assumes some importance when we remember that Davidson's opponents, who deny that action explanation is causal, want to insist that understanding in the space of reasons is never causal understanding. They may say 'We can see that there is a reason for someone to cross the road when we know that there is something that she wants on the other side. But seeing that there is a reason tells us nothing whatever about happenings in the causal world.' Of course what is said here cannot show that action explanation is not causal. It cannot show this, because in order to be able to explain a person's doing something, we need not just to see 'X is a reason for *a* to Ø' but (as it might be) '*a* Ø-d because she had reason X'. We need, that is, not only to be able to operate using what Davidson calls 'the constitutive ideal of rationality', but also to apply that ideal empirically, and to recognize actual dependencies between (say) a person's wanting something and her doing something. (Indeed the difference between the rational background and its actual application is what is revealed in Davidson's argument about the difference between 'She Ø-d and she had such and such reason' and 'She Ø-d because she had such and such reason'.)

Presumably, then, the claim (C), about reasons and causes, is intended as shorthand for 'People's havings of reasons cause actions'; and the sort of instance that would support it would be 'Mary's having a reason to cross the road caused action *a*'. But there is then a further complexity to notice here. For on Davidson's account, a reason is not a simple thing, but is made up of a belief and a pro-attitude. Allowing for this, the things on the pattern of '*r* caused *a*' that one should endorse now, if one favours (C), would go something like 'Mary's believing that *p* and Mary's wanting that *q* caused *a*'. But a statement like this—which speaks of the agent's believing something and her wanting something, and speaks of these together as cause of her action should not be thought to provide the whole causal story in the case of any action. Typically there are various things an agent did when there is any action—as we saw. If Mary wanted it to be light enough to read, for example, then she might have done all of these things: *move her finger*, *flip the switch*, and *turn on the light*. Any of these is something about which it might be asked 'Why did she do *that*?'; and the correct response to such a request for explanation depends upon what exactly is asked (upon what replaces '*that*'). It would be an error, then, to think that, for each action, there is one "belief-desire pair" that is mentioned whenever there is a request for explanation in respect of it. (This is an error that is fostered by using 'actions' sometimes for events, sometimes for with things people do; for then one forgets that what is explained is not an event, but an agent's doing *something* that she did.) If (C)'s proponents believe that there is just one statement on the '*r* caused *a*' pattern in respect of any action, then they must allow that lengthy descriptions come at '*r*'s place 'What caused Mary's action,' they might say 'was this: Mary's wanting it to be light enough to read and Mary's thinking that it would be light enough if the lamp was on and Mary's thinking that the lamp would be on if she flipped the switch and Mary's thinking that she could flip the switch by moving her finger...' . We surely need not accept such statements to be persuaded that everyday answers to *Why?*–questions use a causal 'because'.

(CE) and (C) are often treated as equivalent. But if they were really equivalent, then we should expect statements on the '*r* caused *a*' pattern to be forthcoming as soon as we accept (CE). What these last points have shown is that simple examples on that pattern are hard to come by. There is a considerable distance between statements which are made when action explanations are actually given (to whose causal character one is committed by (CE)), and statements whose acceptance (C) commits us to.

A distinction between (CE) and (C) turns on a distinction between '*causally explains why*' and '*causes*'. And this is a distinction which Davidson would be the first to acknowledge—indeed to insist upon. Of course, then, Davidson appreciates the difference between the two. But he accepts them both. We may take him to assume that someone who acknowledges the causal character of action explanation automatically commits himself to causal statements of the relevant sort.[11]

The Argument for Monism

'Statements of the relevant sort' here is vague; as is 'statements on the pattern of '*r* caused *a*'. I have not been very precise either about what we may actually extract from the thesis about causal explanation (CE), or about what a proponent of (C) thinks that he can extract. But this imprecision may not matter in the context of a discussion of Davidson. For here the important question is whether we can extract what Davidson needs in his argument. I shall suggest now that (CE) may not be enough to give Davidson the premise that he uses in his argument for monism.

Davidson's argument might be thought of as bringing two kinds of statement into a certain sort of relation—into such a relation that it can be established that statements of both sorts import the same ontology. The first kind of statement is an everyday "mental" kind got from such claims as we make when, e.g. we explain why people do things. Statements of the second kind are far from everyday: they record exceptionless physical laws. Using a rough and ready schema for each kind of statement, we could represent them thus:

      (1)   An A caused a B.

      (2)   Ms cause Ns.

'A''s and 'B''s instances here are the everyday predicates that occur in rationalizing explanations, whereas 'M''s and 'N''s instances are nomological predicates—bits of vocabulary in which exceptionless physical laws are framed. Davidson's Principle of Causal Interaction ensures the truth of statements like (1): 'at least some mental events interact causally with some physical events'. Davidson's Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality ensures in turn that the truth of something like (1) requires the truth of something like (2): 'events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic law'. Davidson's Principle of the Anomalousness of the Mental then tells us that mental vocabulary does not feature in laws; so it assures us that whenever there is an instance of (1) in which the place of 'an A' is occupied by a piece of mental vocabulary, it would be a piece of physical vocabulary that occupied the place of 'M' in the required instance of (2)—in the particular law covering the particular case. But this means that whatever we have picked out using mental vocabulary, we know that a piece of nomological, physical vocabulary would be applicable to it. That is to say that the mental thing is a physical thing: we arrive at monism.

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[11] For an instructive discussion of different conceptions of causal explanation, see William Child, *Causality, Interpretation and the Mind* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1994), Ch.3 §2.

If this account of the argument for monism is acceptable, then the role of the Principle of Causal Interaction in it is to assure us of statements like (1). The Principle, in that case, is not just any old claim to the effect that 'there is mental-physical causal interaction', but requires endorsement of causal statements of a certain sort. Where action is the phenomenon of concern, what I have suggested is that, despite what the slogan 'Reasons are causes' might have made us think, no simple statements of that sort are in fact available. From (CE), we cannot get statements (like (1)) standing in the sort of relation to nomological statements (like (2)) which the argument demands.

The best kind of candidate we can find, for a statement recording a causal interaction in accordance with the Principle in the needed sense, will be something like 'Mary's believing that she could get to the other side by crossing and Mary's wanting to be on other side caused Mary's crossing of the road'.**12** It is not obvious that we accept this statement. But even if we do accept it, it is hard to treat it as relating to statements like (2) in the way that Davidson's argument requires.**13** One obstacle to treating 'Mary's believing —— and Mary's wanting —— caused such-and-such action' as we should need to stems from the presence of the 'and' in it, in what precedes 'cause'. Should we say that wherever *x* and *y* caused *a*, there is something *x-and-y* which caused *a*? Or should we say that wherever *x* and *y* caused *a*, each of *x* and *y* caused *a*? It seems that unless we say one or other of these things, we shall not have the kind of causal statement which asserts a relation between two items, and which can thus be brought into such a relation to a statement of law that nomological vocabulary can be seen as applicable to the same things as mental vocabulary applies to.

The difficulties of finding the needed statements multiply when we notice not only that there can be causal explanations of what someone does where there is not an event of her doing it (as we noticed above), but also that there can be causal explanations of a person's doing something in which the fact that the person did *not* believe something, is crucial. Are we then to say that her *not* believing that *p* is "a cause"? Is this—her not believing that *p*—an item that could be subsumed under a law?

Questions like these will not seem pressing to those who are in the habit of talking of 'beliefs and desires as causes of actions'. But here I am trying to challenge that habit.**14** The habitual way of talking derives from a certain model of causal explanations in the case of action—according to which explanations go hand in hand with statements in which pairs of particulars are related to one another by 'cause'. Yet the model does not apply across the board, and it seems to be unsupported by any examples of actually accepted statements.

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12 If we treat such relatively simple statements as this as a candidate then (since, in respect of any one action, there will be many such statements: see above) we must allow that any action has many causes.

13 The mere occurrence of the verb 'cause' is not enough to ensure that there is a statement expressing a simple causal relation between events. In the example sentence considered in the text, I have introduced the word 'of' so that we have 'Mary's crossing of the road': this ensures that we have an event-denoting nominal following 'cause' (see n.5 above); but it may also ensure that the sentence is unacceptable (people's intuitions vary).

Often '*a* X-d because *b* Y-d' can be paraphrased with '*b*'s Y-ing caused *a*'s X-ing'; but the gerunds in such paraphrases are not event-denoting nominals, so that the 'caused' in them is not a relation between events.

14 This habit is reinforced by recurrent talk of "token states" (not found in Davidson, however.) "Token states" are meant to be particulars on a par with "token events". But (a) it is extremely doubtful whether the relation between things called-'events'-which-are-not-in-the-category-of-particulars and things-called-'events'-which-are-in-the-category-of-particulars is rightly conceived as relation of type to token; (b) it is extremely doubtful whether the distinction between non-particulars and particulars which is correctly made between two different categories of things that are all called 'events' is a distinction that has any counterpart for things called 'states'. See Helen Steward, *The Ontology of Mind: Events, States, and Processes* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1997), esp. Ch.4, for a detailed account of what is wrong with assumptions that there are "token states".

2. Anomalousness

Rationalization and anomalousness

Anomalous monism is a general doctrine about the mental, not confined to the area of action. But if any feature of human beings really did pose a threat to physicalism, then agency would surely do so.[15] The case of action then seems a useful one to take if one is investigating how dualism should be avoided. Moreover the phenomenon of action can seem peculiarly tractable ontologically speaking: there are actions, and we can inquire into their etiology.

But we should remember that the Davidsonian thesis that reason explanation is causal explanation has application outside the domain of action—that it is not only where human beings are agents that reason is at work. Action explanation, one might say, is one species of reason explanation, where reason explanation is something of which we find examples not only when we ask (for instance) 'Why did she look in the cupboard?', but also when we ask 'What made her think that the cornflakes were in the cupboard?'. In 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', Davidson's concern was explanation of people's doing things, and not explanation of their thinking things (for instance). But if one is concerned about the repercussions of Davidson's causal thesis for the philosophy of mind generally, then it will be important to take account of the pervasiveness of rational-causal-explanation. In whatever sense we expect to see someone as rational in learning why she did what she did, we expect to see her as rational again in learning why she thought what she did. And we should attend to the general significance of the fact that (as Davidson put it) 'rationalization is a species of causal explanation'. When we contemplate the wider picture, we may find that there is much less pressure to accept the model of causal statements which has become so popular in the philosophy of action.

Considering what it is for someone to operate as a rational perceiver, and as a rational thinker, as well as an agent, it becomes even clearer that acquiring the kind of causal understanding got from rational explanation is not a matter of finding pairs of particulars related by 'cause'. Someone who seeks understanding of a person's thinking something, say, does not look for states and events that occur in the region where the person is. One may find it intelligible (for example) that someone came to believe that *r*, having believed that *p* and that *q*, when one sees that *r* is a reasonable thing to believe given *p* and *q*. Appreciating what is reasonable in such a case is not a matter of judging that individuals' states of belief that *p* and individuals' states of belief that *q* have a causal tendency jointly (where they are inside the same head) to produce a state of belief that r. To suppose that reasonableness amounted to causal tendencies would be to ignore the normative character of rational relations; and it is the normativeness of these relations which, on Davidson's account, is at the root of the mental's anomalousness, and which reveals the unsuitability of concepts like 'belief' to be incorporated into strict laws.[16]

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[15] It has become common to think that there are two separable problems about mind: intentionality and consciousness. Even if it were granted that that is a correct way of thinking, it would have to be acknowledged that we find both sorts of problems together with the phenomenon of agency. In fact I think that the problems are erroneously taken to be separable, and that part of what is responsible for the error is that conscious beings are lost sight of when questions about intentionality are translated into questions about relations between states and events. Evidently they are not lost sight of when persons are treated as the topic of a monistic doctrine: see below.

[16] See Davidson's 'Replies to Essays X - XII' in *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, edd. Bruce Vermazen and Merrill Hintikka (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1985), especially his remarks on Lewis, Smart and Suppes) for the way in which normative considerations enter. See also John McDowell, 'Functionalism and

Accepting the anomalous of the mental, and *some* version of a principle of causal inter-action, we allow that rational thinkers are causally complex beings. But we do not have to think of their causal complexity as a matter of connections between self-standing states "interacting" inside them.

Monism

I presented the argument of Davidson's 'Mental Events' as encouraging us to say that a common domain provides for the truth of two kinds of statement—everyday psychological statements, and statements of laws. It now seems that everyday psychology does not deliver causal statements which can be brought into the kind of relation with statements of law which the argument requires; and that we are left without an argument for monism.

The problem, as I see it, with Davidson's argument, is that our use of the language of the mental does not supply us with any items that are candidates for being identified with things mentioned in laws' instantiations. It is easy to be under the illusion that there are such items: when reasons are spoken of as causes, they seem themselves to be such items. But we saw that reasons are in fact quite the wrong sort of things to be causes. Reasons are not encountered in the *causal* world when rational explanations are found: what are encountered there are people who have reasons. If, then, we want to show, as Davidson wanted to, that a common domain provides for the truth both of statements containing everyday mental vocabulary and of statements containing physical vocabulary, we must advert to persons (who have reasons).

The suggestion that persons could be items in a monist's ontology might seem absurd: it was surely the presence in the world of persons (or of other conscious beings) that gave rise to the metaphysical problem of mind in the first place. Still, it is not absurd to say that persons are things having both mental and physical properties, which is the conclusion reached, in respect of events, by Davidson's own argument. So there is a version of monism here. Moreover it is an anti-Cartesian version. For on a Cartesian view of human agents, there are non-physical things possessed of causal powers to be found in the spatiotemporal world. (These non-physical things are either persons or proper parts of persons, depending upon your interpretation of Descartes.) We turn our back on a Cartesian ontology when we acknowledge that persons are causally complex physical beings.

The only thing that I have taken issue with Davidson about here is the gloss that he puts on the causal interaction of mental with physical. Without this gloss, one may be satisfied with a monistic doctrine from which claims about mental events are missing. But even if one wishes to quarrel with Davidson, as I do, about what mental–physical causal interaction consists in, one can still take oneself to have learned from him that a philosophy of mind that endorses the obvious facts about causal interaction need make no ontological concessions to Descartes, nor any metaphysical concessions to those reductionists who refuse to accept the anomalousness of the mental.

Anomalous Monism', in *Actions and Events: Perspective on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, edd. E. LePore and B. McLaughlin (Basil Blackwell: Oxford 1985).