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ACTIONS: A PLEA FOR AN ORDINARY FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation deals with the debate concerning how to understand human action and within which framework to do so.

We tend to consider actions as things people do and which people are praised and blamed for. However, we do not treat all the things we do as actions. If I sneeze while cleaning my dusty room, my flatmate will not praise or blame my sneezing (unless I have broken some *etiquette* rule), or ask me why I sneezed. On the other hand, if I sneeze on purpose pretending to be allergic to dogs and so avoiding an invitation from a dog-owner, my flatmate will have questions to ask and comments to make about what I did.

We rarely refer to our actions by mentioning mere bodily movements, and in very rare cases we ask people about those movements. We do not mention mere bodily movements even when we ask people why they did a certain thing. Even when we ask people why they did a certain thing, we do not mention mere bodily movements. If my flatmate flips the switch, turns on of the light, illuminates the room and wakes me up, I will not ask her why she moved her finger.

Sometimes people do things without moving their bodies, and we treat these doings as actions: if I do not pay the taxes I commit a crime, and if I do not ring up my mum for her birthday I offend her.

As far as the framework within which to understand actions is concerned, two main frameworks seem to be available: a naturalistic or causal framework within which actions are events or processes that occur like other *physical* events or processes, and a personal or agential framework, where actions are people's doing something deliberately, cheerfully, impulsively, intentionally, furiously, on

purpose... Within the personal framework, the attribution of responsibility plays a major role: indeed, it is what allows us to praise or blame what the agent did.

Nevertheless, these two frameworks are not always in competition. In acting people bring about effects and these effects are often identifiable with states of affairs: when I perform the action of opening the door, the door is open, when I wake my sister up, my sister is awake. However, in acting we generally bring about more than one effect: when I perform the action of opening the door, I move my hand, pull the handle, produce some noise, open the door, and let fresh air come in... To define what I *actually* did, that is, the most salient effect I brought about, the naturalistic framework is not enough.

In individuating actions we describe the salient effects brought about in acting, where the salience has to do with agents, and with other people who are affected by the effects agents bring about. A framework within which the salience of effects is taken into account in this way is the framework of our ordinary social interactions. What I propose is to understand actions within such a framework.

This dissertation is organized in three chapters. The first chapter deals with what has been defined as the issue of action individuation. Here, I reconstruct the philosophical debate by presenting three main views on action individuation: the Identity Thesis (1.2), the Fine Grained View (1.3), and the Middle Way Account (1.4). What these views share is the assumption that actions *qua* events are individuated by their *descriptive features* – such as where and when they occur, or what they cause or are caused by (1.5). As a further step, I examine the Normative-Functional Approach (NFA), where actions are individuated *via* their *normative features* (Maher 2011) (1.6). In this chapter, my aim consists in discussing the issue of individuation within a framework in which to individuate the agent's action means to answer the question: «What did the agent *actually* do?» (1.7). The connections between the issue of action individuation and the functioning of our ordinary practices of attribution of agency will be enlightened by looking at the so called «accordion effect», which is usually understood as a feature of our language whereby an agent's action can be described as narrowly or broadly as we please (1.7.2).

In the second chapter, I investigate how the notion of cause applies to the agent's performance and so contributes to the definition of action. I start by reviewing some relevant solutions to the classic problem of *the time of a killing* (2.2) and I focus on the related distinction between *causes* and *causings* (2.3).

The notion of cause applies to the agent's performance in two main ways: *i*) to the relation between the agent's mental event and the event of her bodily movement or *ii*) to the agent and what she does, in the former case we speak of «event-causal approach», in the latter of «agent-causal approach». In order to introduce the differences between these two approaches, I present Bach's analysis of what he calls the Causal Theory (Bach 1980). Various versions of the Causal Theory can be distinguished, among which Bach's own relational view where actions are not events, but instances of the relation of bringing about, whose terms are agents and events (2.4). In the following of the chapter, I discuss the Event-Causal Approach where actions are identified with the agent's bodily movements (2.5), and the Agent-Causal Approach, on which the bringing about is an *irreducible* relation between the agents and certain *things* (Taylor 1966), or between the agents and certain events or states of affairs (Chisholm 1964; 1966). Within the Agent-Causal Approach, we may isolate an interesting view elaborated by Alvarez and Hyman (1998): on this view, the agents do not cause their actions, but what they cause are the results of their actions (2.6). At the end of the chapter, I go back to the discussion of the accordion effect (2.7).

In the third chapter, I propose an outline of a non-reductive notion of action (3). Such a notion is non-reductive in the sense that it does not take the action to coincide with the agent's bodily movements, rather the action is identified by means of its description. In proposing this outline of a non-reductive notion of action, on the one hand I draw my morals from the debates I have presented in the previous chapters, and, on the other hand, I hope it to become the starting point for further developments (3.5). I start presenting Sandis' distinction between various different conceptions of behavior (Sandis 2012) (3.2), and as a further step, I introduce the distinction between behavior and performance: while the term *behavior* is the most general term by means of which we may refer to «the agent's doing something», with the term *performance* we refer to the agent's doing

something insofar as it is related to the bringing about of a result and its consequences. Performances may be positive when the agent does something *physically*, or they may be negative when the agent does not (physically) do anything. What positive performances and negative performances have in common is that their results and consequences can be straightforwardly ascribed to the agents (3.3). In the following of the chapter, I expose an alternative understanding of the accordion effect partly inspired by Sbisà's work on speech actions (Sbisà 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b) (3.4).

1. INDIVIDUATING ACTIONS

1.1 HOW MANY ACTIONS?

Suppose a sniper bends her finger, pulls the trigger, shoots the gun, kills the President, reduces the world's population by one.

According to many philosophers, to individuate the sniper's action(s) we have also to answer the question «how many actions did the sniper perform?». Although a criterion of individuation does not necessarily provide an explicit method of counting,[1] the main philosophical attitude toward the issue of action individuation has been consisting in enumerating actions.

What does it mean for actions to be counted? Or, more precisely, by virtue of which of their features *can we* count actions? Philosophers have treated actions mainly as a sub-class of events (actions are events even if not all events are actions), and of an event *E* it is correct to say

E occurred at time *t* in place p.

If actions are treated as a sub-class of events, then actions – like events – can be dated in time and placed in space, and therefore individuated as countable particulars.[2]

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[1] As has been pointed out by Goldman, one can provide a criterion of identity for patches of red or for pieces of wood without providing a principle for counting patches of red or pieces of wood (Goldman 1971: 773). Also Hornsby argued against conflating identity criteria with enumerative ones (see Hornsby 1979).

[2] As far as «what events are» is concerned, two significant views can be traced: one is Donald Davidson's own view that events constitute a fundamental and irreducible ontological category of particulars (Davidson 1969); and the other is Jaegwon Kim's view that events are *property exemplification*. According to Kim, an event is the exemplification of a property by an object at a time. On this view, events can be analysed in terms of items belonging to other categories: the categories of objects, properties and times (Kim1976).

As has been pointed out, there are two senses of the term *individuation*: a cognitive sense and a metaphysical sense (Lowe 2010). In the former sense, individuation stands for the picking out of some entity in thought, as in the case of a witness who may be said to have individuated a killer at an identity parade. As far as the metaphysical sense is concerned, individuation means a «mind-independent determination relation between entities» (Lowe 2010: 5), it is in this sense that a set is individuated by its members, its members determine which set it is, and in so doing they fix its identity. When philosophers are concerned with the issue of action individuation, the sense of term involved traditionally is the metaphysical one, and the metaphysical requirement is also combined with the willingness to count actions.

In this chapter, I present three main views on action individuation: The Identity Thesis (1.2), the Fine Grained View (1.3), and the Middle Way Account (1.4), and subsequently I highlight their common assumptions, namely,

1) actions *qua* events are individuated by their *descriptive features* – such as where and when they occur, or what they cause or are caused by (Maher 2011);
2) to individuate actions, we have to find metaphysical criteria that enable us to answer the question: «How many actions did the agent perform?» (1.5).

As a further step, I will lay the basis for an alternative approach to the problem of action individuation, where the cognitive-attentional sense of the term *individuation* will be favoured over the metaphysical one: following Maher's idea that actions should not be individuated on the ground of their *descriptive features* (Maher 2011) (1.6), I examine her Normative Functional Approach where actions are individuated *via* their *normative features* (1.6.1, 1.6.2, 1.6.3).

In this chapter, my aim consists in discussing the issue of individuation within a framework in which to individuate the agent's action amounts to answering the question: «What did the agent *actually* do?» (1.7, 1.7.1). The connections between the issue of action individuation and the functioning of our ordinary practices of attribution of agency will be enlightened by looking at the so called accordion

effect, which is usually understood as a feature of our language whereby an agent's action can be described as narrowly or broadly as we please. The accordion effect will be introduced at the end of this chapter with reference to its original formulation by Joel Feinberg (1970) (1.7.2).

1.2 THE «IDENTITY THESIS»

The Identity Thesis is also named the Anscombe-Davidson thesis on action identification: many philosophers have indeed argued for or against this thesis attributed both to G. E. M. Anscombe and Donald Davidson.

According to the identity thesis, with one identical bodily movement an agent can produce different effects, nevertheless *the* agent's action is only one, and the different descriptions in terms of effects of bodily movements refer to the *same* action. Suppose Donald moves his finger, flips the switch, turns on the light, and illuminates the room. Unbeknownst to him, Donald also alerts a prowler to the fact that he is home (Davidson 2001: 4). Within what can be named as Donald's action sequence[3], we may refer to what Donald did by means of different expressions that individuate Donald's bodily movement or one of its effects:

1) Donald's moving of his finger,
2) Donald's flipping of the switch,
3) Donald's turning on of the light,
4) Donald's illuminating of the room,
5) Donald's alerting of the prowler.

According to the Identity Thesis, 1) – 5) are different descriptions which refer to the same action, in other words they are all the *numerically* same action: there is only *one* single action performed by Donald that can be individuated by different

[3] «Action sequences» (or «action series») are the core of the discussion on action-identification: they are characterized by the fact that it is not clear whether the agent acting in a place *p* at time *t* (or over a single period of time) has done one thing or several things. Nevertheless, counting the agent's doings (or the things done) does not coincide with the counting of her actions.

descriptions based on Donald's bodily movement or on its effects, or on the circumstances surrounding its execution.

In the next subsections, I reconstruct Anscombe's thesis on action identification by referring to her book *Intention* (1963) and to her later essay «Under a Description» (1979) (1.2.1). Then, I develop Davidson's version of the identity thesis by referring to the papers collected in *Actions and Events* (2001) (1.2.2). Subsequently, following Julia Annas' argumentations (Annas 1976), I clarify the differences between these two theses on action identification: by the claim that we can speak of one single action under different descriptions Anscombe and Davidson mean very different things (1.2.3).

1.2.1 G.E.M. ANSCOMBE'S IDENTITY THESIS: THE MAN PUMPING WATER

Anscombe tackles the problem of action identification in §6 and in § 23 ff. of *Intention*.

In §6, after defining intentional actions as those to which the relevant sense of the question «Why? » is applied,[4] Anscombe proceeds by analysing cases in which the question «Why? » has no application. In particular, the question is refused application by the answer «I was not aware I was doing that». What needs to be noted is the fact that

> since a single action can have many different descriptions, e.g. 'sawing a plank', 'sawing oak', 'sawing one of Smith's planks', 'making a squeaky noise with the saw', 'making a great deal of sawdust', and so on and so on, it is important to notice that a man may know he is doing a thing under one description and not under another. (Anscombe 1963: 11)

[4] The relevant sense of the question «Why?» that characterizes intentional actions is that in which the answer, if positive, provides a reason for acting, where a reason for acting is not a cause for acting. Anscombe dedicates § 10-19 to investigate the distinction between reasons and causes (see footnote 43).

According to Anscombe, the *same* action can be intentional under one description and not intentional under another: to say that an agent knows she is doing X is to provide a description of what she is doing *under which* she knows it (Anscombe 1963: 12).

In § 23, Anscombe asks if when intentional action occurs, there is a description which is *the* description of an intentional action, and she considers the case of the man who is pumping water into a cistern which supplies the drinking water for a house. Someone has contaminated the source with a deadly poison, and the families which inhabit the house will be subjected to the fatal effects of the poison. Many descriptions refer to what the man is doing, but only some of these will individuate his intentional action(s): A description of the kind «the man is X-ing» is a description of a man's intentional action if *i*) it is true, and *ii*) there is such a thing as a relevant answer to the question «Why are you X-ing?» (Anscombe 1963: 38).

As far as the first criterion is concerned, any description of what is going on with the man as subject is true (e.g. he is contracting his muscles, he is supporting his family, he is making a big noise, he is generating some substances in his nerves fibres…).

With regard to the second criterion – the existence of a relevant answer to the question «Why are you X-ing? » –, some descriptions of what the man is doing, such as the ones answering the questions: «Why are you contracting your muscles?» or «Why are you generating some substances in your nerves fibres?», are ruled out by the kind of answer expected.[5] The answer, indeed, must provide a reason for acting as opposed to a cause for acting, that is, it must make the motive for the action and the intention *with which* the action has done explicit.[6]

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[5] The question «Why?» has not the relevant sense if the answer is evidence or states a cause, including a mental cause. If the answer gives an interpretation of the action or mentions something future or is a reference to the intention *with which* the action was done, then it is characterized as a reason for acting and answers to the question «Why? » in the relevant sense (Anscombe 1963: 24-25).

[6] In § 12, Anscombe explains that in philosophy a distinction has been drawn between motives and intentions in acting, but popularly they are not treated as so distinct in meaning. What should be said is that «motive for an action» has a wider and more diverse applications than «intention with which the action was done» and that motives are not causes at all: «Motives may explain action to us; but it is not to say that they "determine" in the sense of causing, actions. We do say: "His love of truth caused him to..." and similar things, and no doubt such expressions help us to think that a

Among the descriptions referring to the man's doing, Anscombe mentions:

A) moving his arm up and down,
B) operating the pump,
C) replenishing the water supply,
D) poisoning the inhabitants.

For the purposes of the analysis of the matter of action individuation, the crucial question is: given these four descriptions, are we to say that the man who intentionally moves his arms, operates the pump, replenishes the water supply, and poisons the inhabitants is performing four actions or only one? Anscombe's answer is that the man is performing only one action, therefore we have one action with four descriptions. The four descriptions form a series[7], A-B-C-D, in which each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one and as independent of the following one: within the series, B is not the description of A in the same way as C is not of B, and so on (Anscombe 1963: 45).

What if we say there are four actions? According to Anscombe, in the case we say there are four actions, we will find the only action B consists in is A: «Only, more circumstances are required for A to be B than for A just to be A. And far more circumstances for A to be D than to A to be B» (Anscombe 1963: 46). What needs to be noted is that these circumstances need not include any particular action on the part of the man who did A, B, C, and D.

The man performs only one action A:[8] moving his arm up and down is, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it is replenishing the water supply; and, in these circumstances, it is poisoning the inhabitants. Each description of the single action depends on the wider circumstances, and each description is related to the next as description of means to end (Anscombe 1963:

motive must be what produces or brings about a choice. But this means rather "He did this in that he loved the truth"; it interprets his action» (Anscombe 1963: 19-20).

[7] The fact that the four descriptions are understood as a series is brought out by the kind of answer to the relevant question «Why? » Anscombe imagined (Anscombe 1963: 45).

[8] In «Under a Description», Anscombe discusses the legitimacy of a question such as: «if one action can have many descriptions, what is *the* action which has all these descriptions?». She says that the proper answer is to give one of the descriptions: «Any one, it does not matter which; or perhaps it would be best to offer a choice, saying "Take whichever you prefer"» (Anscombe 1979: 220).

45). What about intention? Can we speak of one intention or four intentions? Anscombe clarifies that when we speak of four intentions we are speaking of the character of being intentional that belongs to the act in each description, but when we speak of one intention we are referring to the intention *with which*. In this sense, the last term of the series provides «the intention with which the act in each of its other descriptions was done, and this intention, so to speak, *swallows up* all the preceding intentions with which earlier members of the series were done» (Anscombe 1963: 46). Because of this swallowing up, provided the agent intends to poison the residents**,** the answer to the question «Why?» about A can be found in D. Terms so related form a series of means, the last term of which, being given as the last, is thereby treated as end (Anscombe 1963: 47).

1.2.2 DONALD DAVIDSON'S IDENTITY THESIS: SHOOTING THE VICTIM AND BUTTERING THE TOAST

In «The Logical Form of Action Sentences», Davidson tries « […] to get the logical form of action sentences straight» that is, on his view, the same things as « […] showing how the meanings of action sentences depends on their structure» (Davidson 2001: 105).[9]

Davidson's interest lies in the possibility of revealing the logical structure of sentences in which actions are adverbially modified, so as to preserve all our valid inferences into first-order notation.

His idea is that we should quantify over events[10] and he proposes to formalize «Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom at midnight» as:

[9] Davidson is not concerned with the analysis of logically simple expressions, indeed this goes beyond the question of logical form, e.g. he is not concerned with the meaning of 'deliberately' as opposed for example to 'voluntary'; but he is interested in the logical role of these words (Davidson 2001:105-106).

[10] Davidson is one of the most influential proponent of the dominant view. His «Action, Reasons and Causes» explains how actions are events specifically caused and explained (Davidson 2001: 4-20), the next chapter «Actions and Causation» will focus on it.

(∃ x) ((Buttered, Jones, the toast, x) & (In, the bathroom, x) & (At, midnight, x). . .) (Davidson 2001: 118-119).

This solution guarantees the validity of inferences from «Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom at midnight» to «Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom» and «Jones buttered the toast» and allows the mechanical transition of action sentences from our ordinary talk to canonical notation. Moreover, Davidson's analysis of logical form preserves his idea that: «Much of our talk of action suggests [...] that there are such *things* as actions, and that a sentence like [...] Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom at Midnight […] describes the action in a number of ways» (Davidson 2001: 107). Actions are things like tables or chairs, and tables and chairs can be counted and described in many different ways.

Davidson's analysis of action sentences implies that the event described as «Jones's buttering of the toast» has identity conditions independent of how it is described (as «Jones's buttering of the toast» or as «what happened in the bathroom»). «Jones's buttering of the toast» is, in fact, what the variable ranges over in «Buttered, Jones, the toast, x» and in «In, the Bathroom, x», and also in «At, Midnight, x»: It is the same event, that is Jones's action, to which we refer under different descriptions.[11]

Recalling the fact that our common talk and reasoning about actions supposes that there are such entities, Davidson provides another case, the one in which Dan did not know the gun was loaded, and he pointed the gun and pulled the trigger and then he shot the victim. Dan does not deny he pointed the gun and pulled the trigger, nor that he shot the victim.

Dan's ignorance explains that he pointed the gun and pulled the trigger intentionally, but he did not shoot the victim intentionally (Davidson 2001:110).[12]

According to Davidson, the fact that the bullet pierced the victim is a consequence of Dan's pointing the gun and pulling the trigger. It seems clear to Davidson that

[11] The fact that Davidson's belief that it is possible to quantify over events (and hence over actions) is the ground of his assumption that a single action can be variously described is also stated by Cohen (Cohen 1971: 77).

[12] What actually means «doing something intentionally» is a crucial question in Davidson's philosophy of action. This issue will be tackled in the next chapter.

these are two different events, since one began slightly after the other, and it seems also *natural* to him that the relation between Dan's pointing the gun and pulling the trigger, and Dan's shooting the victim is a relation of identity (Davidson 2001: 111). Dan's excuse «I did not know the gun was loaded» works in virtue of the identity between these two events: Dan is accused of doing *b*, which is bad, but he admits he did *a*, which is excusable. Dan's excuse for doing *b* is grounded on his claim that he did not know that *a* = *b*.

The need of speaking of the same action or event under different descriptions is stated also in «The Individuation of Events» (Davidson 2001: 164-179).[13] Here Davidson specifies that the different descriptions must refer to the same thing and not change the referent of the re-described expression. This requires that there are singular terms denoting events that can be referred to in different ways.[14]

According to Davidson, there are good reasons for taking events seriously as entities: first of all, a satisfactory theory of action requires that we can refer literally to the same action under different description and the functioning of excuses clearly shows this point. As we have seen in Dan's case, if I intentionally burned a scrap of paper, I have the possibility to excuse my burning my mother's document only because I did not know that the scrap of paper was my mother's document, and because my burning the scrap was identical with my burning my mother's document (Davidson 2001: 164-165). Another reason for taking events as entities is explanation: explanations are based, indeed, on the possibility to describe and redescribe *one* thing happened (a catastrophe in the village described

[13] The many possible re-descriptions of what Davidson calls «primitive actions» – the only actions there are – is the core of his essay «Agency» (Davidson 2001: 43-63). Here Davidson explores how the effects of actions (primitive actions) enter into our descriptions of them. The topic of one action under different descriptions is crucial also because Davidson provides a definition by which someone is the agent of an act if what she does can be described under an aspect that makes it intentional. I will deepen his analysis in the context of the discussion of the accordion effect, where the topic of action-individuation will be linked up with causality and agency (see 2.7).

[14] Davidson notes that it is singular terms rather than the whole sentences that refer to events. Sentences – formalized in the standard way or in our ordinary idiom – are only existential and generic with respect to events: they merely say that at least one event occurred, but they do not refer to any particular one of them (Davidson 2001: 169). To believe that "Cesar died" refers to or describes an event and then to conclude that the sentence as a whole refers to an event is an error. Frank Ramsey describes it as the error of conflating facts (which are what propositions correspond to) and events (Davidson 2001: 169).

as an avalanche) including a cause rather another (the heavy snow falling or the skiers imprudence). Davidson notes that «All this talk of descriptions and redescriptions makes sense, it would seem, only on the assumption that there are *bona fide* entities to be described and redescribed» (Davidson 2001: 165).

If events are particulars, then it is legitimate to ask: «When are events identical, when distinct? What criteria are there for deciding one way or the other in particular cases? ».[15] Davidson suggests that two events are identical if and only if they have the same cause and the same effect: «For the criterion is simply this: where *x* and *y* are events, (*x* = *y* if and only if ((*z*) (*z* caused *x* ↔ *z* caused *y*) and (*z*) (*x* caused *z* ↔ *y* caused *z*)) » (Davidson 2001: 180). Davidson underlines that not only are these – the sameness of cause and effect – the features that we refer to when we are interested about events, but they are also the features that guarantee to individuate them (Davidson 2001: 181)[16].

1.2.3 Is There Any «Identity Thesis»?

In Anscombe's case of the man pumping water, we have one action performed by the man, and a series of four descriptions referred to the same action, with such a series being a means-end chain. In Davidson's case of Jones' buttering the toast, we have a single event that is identical under different descriptions, because of its belonging to a fundamental ontological category of particulars.

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[15] Davidson's strategy consists in substituting for questions about identities questions about sentences about identities. Then instead of asking when events are identical, he asks when sentences of the form «a=b» are true, where he supposes «a» and «b» supplanted by singular terms referring to events (Davidson 2001: 164).

[16] According to Davidson, the sameness of cause and effect seems to be the only condition always sufficient to establish the sameness of events. What about other conditions? Could the sameness of location in space and time be another one? Although Davidson states to be uncertain whether or not sameness in place and time is enough to establish identity between events (Davidson 2001: 178), in the conclusions of the essay he clarifies that the sameness of causal relation is not the only way to support a claim that two events are identical. Logic alone or logic and physics may also do the job, it depends on the descriptions provided. Davidson's proposal consists, indeed, in considering the causal nexus as what that «provides for events a comprehensive and continuously framework for the identification and the description of events analogous in many ways to the space-time coordinate system for material objects» (Davidson 2001: 181).

If it seems rather obvious to Davidson to appeal to the naturalness of the identity relation between Dan's pointing the gun and pulling the trigger, and his shooting the victim, on the other hand, Anscombe is not concerned with the claim of the naturalness of saying that the man performed one action of which we have four descriptions. Her idea is that we face up to the same action under different descriptions just in the case those different descriptions are related as descriptions of means to descriptions of ends.

As has been pointed out by Annas, it is only when this important qualification is left out that Anscombe's point can be moved closer to Davidson's (Annas 1976: 253). Davidson's cases do not involve any reference to the means-end relation: Jones' buttering the toast is not a means to Jones' buttering the toast in the bathroom at midnight. Davidson's interest lies in the proper canonical notation for action sentences with adverbial modifiers, while Anscombe deepens a case where the descriptions are related as descriptions of means to descriptions of ends.

In her «Davidson and Anscombe on the "same action"», in which she denies that there is any single Anscombe-Davidson thesis about action identification, Annas examines two arguments that have been put forward against the view which has been taken to be common to the two philosophers, and she argues that in each case the argument holds against Davidson's view, but not against Anscombe's.

The first argument is an argument of Cohen against Davidson's analysis of the identity between Dan's pointing the gun and pulling the trigger. Cohen adds to Davidson's case the detail that Dan shot the victim *with a revolver* (Cohen 1969-1970: 77-79). Following Davidson's formalization, we have:

(∃ x) ((Shot, Dan, the victim, x) & (With, a revolver, x)) and (∃ y) ((Pointed, Dan, the gun, y) & (Pulled, Dan, the trigger, y))

but since, according to Davidson, x = y, we ought to be able to infer:

(∃ x) ((Pulled, Dan, the trigger, x) & (With, a revolver, x)),

and hence we get: Dan pulled the trigger with a revolver, which is absurd (Cohen 1969-1970: 78). This argument can be applied to all cases analysed by Davidson: If action x is identical with action y, then predicates true of x will be true of y: absurdities abound, even if we exclude intensional contexts (Annas 1976: 254).[17] What if we apply Cohen's argument to Anscombe's case of the man pumping water? At an early stage, it would seem that if we apply the principle that what is true of A is true of B, C and D, we are led to the same previous absurdity.

Annas proposes to imagine that the man's moving his arm up and down A) is tiring, and then she asks if it is true that poisoning the inhabitants D) is tiring (Annas 1976: 254). Even if we admit it is true, it is at least odd. However, as Annas notices, we are not led to such absurdities by Anscombe's principle: indeed, it states that descriptions are descriptions of the same action if they are related to form a means-end chain. Since we may accept as true the principle that not everything that is true of the end is true of the means (and vice versa), then we see that Anscombe does not have to say that everything that is true of A is true of D, where D is the end to which A is a means (Annas 1976: 255).

Annas concludes the application of the first argument to Anscombe's analysis by claiming that it is actually impossible for Anscombe to share Davidson's analysis of action sentences and formalize her example as (∃ x) (Ax & Bx & Cx & Dx). This formalization would not only ignore the means-end relationship, but would also suggest the idea that what is true of x is true of it regardless of whether it is described as being A or being D. But, as we have seen, this is not true if, as in Anscombe's analysis, A is the description of a means to an end and D is the description of that end (Annas 1976: 255).

[17] Annas explains that it can be objected that we should ignore the oddity of these results: if action x and action y are the same action, then what is true of x is true of y, and the oddity of saying it is irrelevant. However, this objection will not save Davidson's case: to say that I pulled the trigger with a revolver not only is odd, but also false. A more useful strategy would be to say that examples like these show that we have to be careful which predicates of an action we give as descriptions of it. Davidson's example leads to absurdity because the description 'With, a revolver, x' applies to x only if x is already thought of under the description *a shooting*, not if it is thought of under the description *a pulling of the trigger*. According to Annas, this strategy would save from Cohen's problem, but if we adopted it, we would distinguish between predicates of an action which apply to it directly, and those that apply to it only in virtue of a further description (Annas 1976: 254).

The second argument against the presumed «identity thesis» examined by Annas is the emptiness of the notion of «the same action under different descriptions»: No criteria of identity can be given, in fact, for actions in general. Since there can be no criteria of identity at this level of generality, to ask whether *a* is the same action as *b* is as useless as to ask whether *x* is the same thing as *y*. According to Annas, Davidson and Anscombe could escape this problem rather differently. Davidson thinks that it is legitimate to seek identity conditions for actions, and – being, on his view, actions a subclass of events – he does try to provide identity conditions for events. In «The Individuation of Events», Davidson suggests that events are identical if and only if they have the same causes and same effects, but he does not provide a clear and explicit way of using this to give us conditions for same action.[18]

As far as the application of the second argument to Anscombe's analysis is concerned, we can see that – if we understand Anscombe's identity thesis as «descriptions are of the same action if they form a means-end chain» – the argument does not apply. We face up to the same action under the descriptions A, B, C and D when A-D form a means-end chain; but this does not mean that there is a single action which A-D all are, rather it means that there is an action which can be identified independently of any of the descriptions A-D. Anscombe argument is that the only action that B consists in here is A, so B will be the same action as A, C the same action as B, and so on. What is important here is that if we follow Anscombe's analysis, we have not to identify the same action independently from the chain of descriptions A-D, we have only the possibility to identify B via A, C via B, and so on. We need not to look for criteria for the same action in general as Davidson tries to do. Going back to the man pumping water: If we have to identify *the same action*, we do not have to look for an action that we can identify as the

[18] Annas points out that in his writings Davidson wavers between the idea that *an action* is the same action under different descriptions, and the one that it is the *same event* under different descriptions. Annas suggests that on Davidson's view this problem is not to be solved on the level of the present discussion. Davidson, indeed, appeals to an identity theory of the mental and the physical. What needs to be noted, according to Annas, is that since Davidson uses the notion of «the same action under different descriptions» in talking about agency and action, it is legitimate to expect a treatment of it that does not depend on acceptance of a theory about the mental and the physical (Annas 1976: 255).

same before saying that this same action is moving his arm, operating the pump, replenishing the water-supply, poisoning the inhabitants. What we say, from Anscombe's perspective, is that operating the pump is the same arm-movement as replenishing the water-supply in these circumstances; replenishing the water-supply is the same act of operating the pump in these circumstances, that is the same act as poisoning the inhabitants in these circumstances; and so on. What we have to be able to say is only that B is the same A as C and C is the same B as D, and not that A, B, C and D are *all* the same action.

We can conclude with Annas that there is not a single Anscombe-Davidson thesis about the identification of action: Anscombe and Davidson have quite different ideas with significantly different implications. They also mean different things by the claim that we can speak of the same action under different descriptions. In Anscombe's view there is an action under different descriptions when these descriptions form a means-end chain and it means that there is an action which can be identified independently of any of its descriptions that form a means-end chain. On the other hand, in Davidson's view there is an identical event, that is the agent's action, and it has identity conditions independently to its descriptions in virtue of its belonging to a specific ontological category. For these reasons, in what follows, with the expression *the identity thesis* I will refer to Davidson's thesis of action individuation, and not to the presumed Anscombe-Davidson one.

1.3 The Fine Grained View

Going back to Donald's case introduced in 1.2, according to the fine grained view, Donald's flipping the light switch and his turning on of the light are distinct events and this means that Donald has performed two actions. Recalling Donald's action sequence:

1) Donald's moving of his finger,
2) Donald's flipping of the switch,

3) Donald's turning on of the light,
4) Donald's illuminating of the room,
5) Donald's alerting of the prowler

On fine grained view, 1) - 5) are all different actions. This view is characterized by a distinctive conception of what individual actions are. For Alvin Goldman, the most influential proponent of this view, any individual action is an exemplification of an act property by an agent at a time (Goldman 1971: 769). According to Goldman, Donald's moving of his finger and Donald's flipping of the switch are different individual actions because being a moving of one's finger and being a flipping of the switch are different properties. In the next subsections, I examine two strictly related notions which the fine grained view is based on: that of the «by-relation» (1.3.2) and that of «act token» (1.3.3), both coming from Goldman's works (Goldman 1970; 1971).

1.3.1 The By- and the Causal Relation

In «The Individuation of Action», Goldman discusses Anscombe's case of the man pumping water. According to him, not only Anscombe does not offer solution to the problem of act-individuation – the problem of when act A is the same as A' –, but she also proposes an «embarrassing fact» for her position: The order in which the putative identities – the A) - D) descriptions – are presented or, in other words, the fact they form a series. According to Goldman, the ordering is justified if we claim that «the descriptions designate different acts which stand in a certain asymmetric relation to one another» (Goldman 1971: 762), but since the descriptions all designate the same action, whence does the order stem from? Goldman notes that in Anscombe's case the ordering is imposed not by the descriptions themselves, but by the world: if man's doings had been different, a different ordering would be required. For this reason, Goldman suggests that «Anscombe's descriptions are not in fact descriptions of the very same action, that

the "is" it seems natural to employ here is not the "is" of identity» (Goldman 1971: 762).

To confirm this point, Goldman proceeds to re-analyse the case of the man pumping water by means of the preposition «by»: it is true, in fact, to say that the man poisons the inhabitants *by* replenishing the water supply, that he replenishes the water supply *by* operating the pump, and that he operates the pump *by* moving his arm up and down. What needs to be noted is that the way in which the preposition «by» is used seems to express a relation that holds between *acts*, and more specifically, between an act of replenishing the water supply and an act of operating the pump (in that order) (Goldman 1971: 763). If Anscombe's claim that the man's operating of the pump is identical[19] with his replenishing of the water supply is true, then any relation that holds between these acts in one direction must hold between them in the opposite direction. But though it is true to say that the man replenishes the water supply *by* operating the pump, it is false to say that he operates the pump *by* replenishing the water supply. It would be also odd to say that the man operates the pump *by* operating the pump. Goldman points out that the by-relation is an asymmetric and irreflexive relation[20] and, since no such relation can hold between a given thing and itself, he concludes that the acts in this example are not identical. As he explains in *A Theory of Human Action*,

> If *A* and *A'* are identical, there can be no asymmetric or irreflexive relation which one bears to the other. If *A* and *A'* are genuinely identical, then if a relation *R* holds of the ordered pair *(A, A')* it must also hold of the ordered

[19] As we have seen in 1.2.3, Annas' analysis allows us to understand Anscombe's thesis on action identification in a different way. We have the same actions under the descriptions A, B, C and D when A-D form a means-end chain, and this means that there is an action which can be identified independently of any of the descriptions A-D, and not that there is a single action which A-D all are, as Goldman seems to intend.

[20] This point about the asymmetry and irreflexivity of the by-relation is deepened by Goldman in *A Theory of Human Action*. As far as the matter of asymmetry is concerned, he says that if agent *S* does act *A'* by doing act *A,* then he does not do *A* by doing *A'.* If John turns on the light *by* flipping the switch, he does not flip the switch *by* turning on the light. We can *explain how* John turned on the light by indicating that he flipped the switch, but we cannot explain how John flipped the switch by saying that he turned on the light. With regard to the irreflexivity, Goldman uses the same example: we would not say that John turned on the light by turning on the light, we cannot explain how John flipped the switch by indicating that he flipped the switch (Goldman 1970:5).

pair *(A', A).* And if *R* holds of the ordered pair *(A, A'),* it must also hold of the ordered pairs *(A, A)* and *(A', A').* (Goldman 1970: 5)

The by-relation can be often confused with a causal relation: in many cases the by-relation holds between two acts in virtue of a causal relation between one of the acts and one of its consequences, as in the case in which I push the button and this causes the bell to ring. My pushing of the button causes the bell to ring and this is an obvious causal relation. But there is not any by-relation between this act and this consequence (Goldman 1971: 763). I can say «I ring the bell *by* pressing the button» in virtue of the causal relation, thus the by-relation holds between my ringing of the bell and my pushing of the button. Many instances of the by-relation concern causal relations, and many do not, as in the case of the by-relation that holds between my fulfilling of my promise and my returning of the book**.** Here the by relation does not depend on any causal relation. A certain background condition makes it true that I fulfil my promise by returning the book (Goldman 1971: 764).

According to Goldman, in Anscombe's case the by-relation can be represented as a column of circles the lowest of which stands for the man's moving his arm up and down and the upper nodes of which stand for the other acts. A vertical line indicates that the upper circle represents an act that bears the by-relation to the act represented by the lower circle. The diagram shows that the by-relation is not only asymmetric and irreflexive, but also transitive (fig. 1, Goldman 1971: 764):

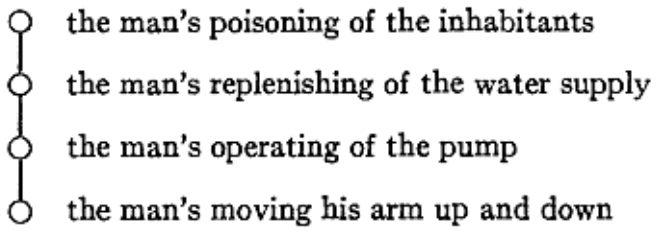

Figure 1

What Goldman proposes is to use more complex diagrams: tree shaped ones, with branches going off in different directions. This kind of diagrams are supposed to be

able to account for cases such as the one in which Boris moves his finger, thereby pulling the trigger, thereby firing the gun, thereby killing Pierre, thereby preventing Pierre from divulging the party's secrets, thereby saving the party from disaster. By killing Pierre, Boris also leads Pierre's lover to suicide. Here, the by-relations cannot be represented by a single column of acts (fig. 2, Goldman 1971: 764).

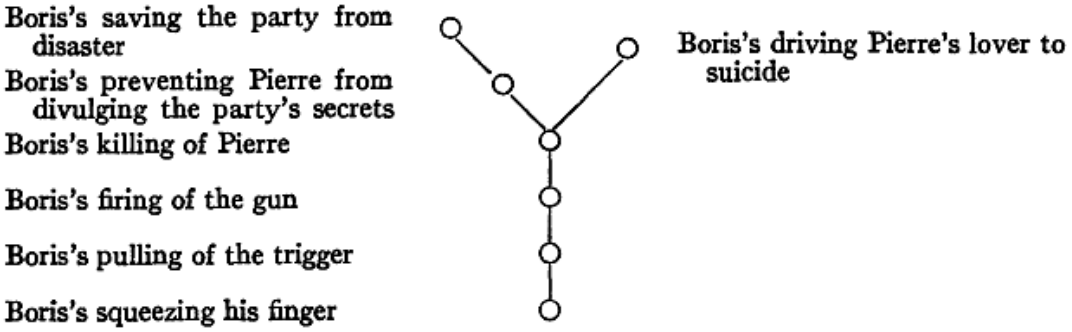

Figure 2

In the following of the paper Goldman discusses Davidson's general criterion for act individuation:[21]

> D1: Events are identical if they have the same causes and the same effects. (Goldman 1971:765)

Goldman does not believe that sameness of causes and effects is a sufficient condition for act identity, but he has no quarrel with the claim that it is a necessary condition. In fact, if we assume that «being a cause of E» and «being an effect of E» are genuine properties, its being a necessary condition follows from Leibniz's law of indiscernibility of identicals (Goldman 1971: 765)

Goldman points out that many acts Davidson would consider as identical have not the same causes or the same effects.

[21] As we have seen, Davidson's criterion is a criterion for the individuation of events, it works also for actions in virtue of their being a sub-class of event (see n.17).

With respect to the requirement that identical actions have the same effects, consider A's act of pulling the trigger and his act of killing B. A's pulling of the trigger certainly causes the gun's firing, but does A's act of killing B cause the gun's firing? «A's act of killing B caused the gun to fire» seems to be false, and also odd. So, if we consider true Davidson's criterion according to which «Events are identical if they have the same causes and the same effects» (D1) we must conclude that A's pulling of the trigger and A's killing of B are two different acts.[22]

With respect to the requirement that identical actions have the same causes, Goldman notes that Davidson considers «A's singing», «A's singing loudly», and «A's singing off key» as identical in virtue of their simultaneity. Now, following Goldman's reasoning, suppose that A's singing loudly is partly caused by her being angry, but her being angry is not at all a cause of her singing out of the key. So, if we accept Davidson's criterion (D1), we must conclude that «A's singing», «A's singing loudly», and «A's singing off key» are three different acts (Goldman 1971: 767).

This discussion over causes and effects of an act opens an important question regarding what is an action: «What things are "constitutive" of an action and what things are mere aspects or properties of it? ». Goldman suggests that «some of the terms in causal relations are things that consist in something's having a certain property»: either A's having the property of singing loudly, or her action's having the property of being loud (Goldman 1971: 767).

1.3.2 Act Type and Act Token

To formulate an adequate criterion of identity, Goldman reflects upon what he calls the «ontological status of an act». He introduces the distinction between an «act type» and an «act token». An act type is what can be defined as a *generic* action, it is what we refer to when we speak of the fact that the same action can be

[22] The debate over the individuation of a killing will be tackled in the next chapter, where it will be analysed by introducing the temporal problem raised by Thomson (1971) – and recently examined by Weintraub (2003), Sandis (2006) (see 2.2).

performed on more than one occasion (I did the same thing to my brother and to my friend, or I performed the same action today as I did yesterday, or my sister and I went – separately – to the swimming pool[23]). The act type cannot be concrete or individual because an individual act cannot occur at different times, and two persons cannot be agents of the same individual act (here we are not considering the possibility of collective actions). The notion of act type is used also in talking about agent's ability to perform actions, as in the case we assert the existence of an action that an agent is able to perform and another agent is not: we are not referring to a concrete action, nor are we supposing that the agent has performed that action. Goldman specifies that an act type «is simply an act property, something that an agent exemplifies. [...] when we say "John signalled for a turn" or "John killed George", we ascribe act properties or act types to John: the property of signalling for a turn, or the property of killing George. To ascribe an act type to someone is to say that he exemplified it» (Goldman 1971: 769). Two agents which are performing the same act are exemplifying the same act type. What needs to be noted is that Goldman admits there is a difference between exemplifying a property and performing an act, and this difference is to be understood in terms of what causes the exemplifying of the property:

> If I sneeze as a result of the usual causes, I exemplify the property of sneezing, but I do not perform an act. If sneezing is under my voluntary control, however, and if I exercise this control by sneezing on purpose, then I have performed an act of sneezing. (Goldman 1971: 769)

If the notion of act type stands for a generic action, the one of act token denotes an individual, concrete action. The act tokens are acts that have a particular agent, that occur at a particular time (or at a stretch of time), and that serve as particular terms in a causal relation. We refer to an act token by means of a nominalised form of an action sentence and, since an action sentence associated with such a nominalization asserts that a person exemplifies a certain act property, it is natural

[23] It is meant not together, it is not a case of acting together.

to understand the *designatum* of such a nominalization as an exemplifying of an act property by a person (Goldman 1971: 769).

For these reasons, A's killing of B is an exemplifying by A of the property (act type) of killing B. Moreover, since the act type of killing B is distinct from the act type of pulling the trigger, it seems natural to say that A's exemplifying of the act type of killing B is distinct from A's exemplifying of the act type of pulling the trigger.

As we have seen, the same agent can exemplify the same act type on different occasions, but Goldman wants to consider these exemplifyings as distinct, so he includes the temporal characterization into his notion of act token: «an act token is an exemplifying of an act type by a person *at a time* (or during a stretch of time)» (Goldman 1971: 71).[24] The criterion for the individuation of act tokens which reflects their ontological status is stated as follows:

> For any act token A and any act token A', where *A* is the exemplifying of ϕ by X at t and A' is the exemplifying of ψ by Y at t', A = A' if and only if X = Y, ϕ = ψ, and *t* = *t'*. (Goldman 1970: 771)

Where the Identity Thesis individuates only one action, Goldman's analysis allows us to individuate a multiplicity of act tokens and, nevertheless, there can still be different descriptions of the same act token: like any entity, an act token can be referred to by a variety of nonsynonymous expressions. Just as an act token may have many descriptions, it may exemplify many proprieties (Goldman 1970: 772).[25]

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[24] Goldman specifies that this characterization is not quite complete, because a person may be the agent of two or more exemplifyings of the same act type at the same time. If, at time t, John points with his right hand and points with his left, then he is the agent of two simultaneous act tokens of pointing. This problem can be dealt with by specifying the way in which an act token is performed, in this case, either with the right hand or with the left.

[25] Goldman goes on explaining that the *man*'s operating the pump (at t) exemplifies the property of being caused by a desire and the property of causing the inhabitants to be poisoned. Nonetheless, this act token does not exemplify the property of operating the pump. The property expressed by «x operating the pump» and the property expressed by «x is an operating of the pump» are distinct properties: the former is exemplified by the man, the latter by the man's act (the latter is equivalent to «x is a *token* of the type, *operating the pump*» and this predicate can be true only of an act token not of a person) (Goldman 1971: 772).

What about of the unity among acts (that unity stressed by the identity thesis)? According to Goldman, his theory is able to account for the unity among the different acts by conceiving this unity in terms of a single act tree, where each of the nodes on the tree stands for an act (it can be a *basic* act or bear the by-relation to a basic act)[26] (fig. 3, Goldman 1971: 774).

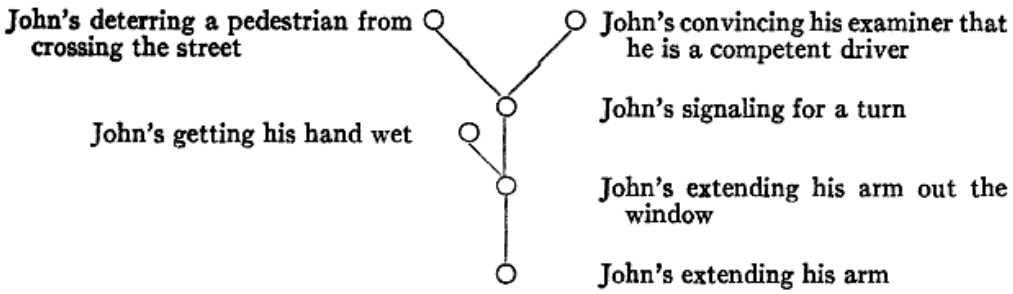

Figure 3

1.4 A MIDDLE WAY ACCOUNT

In this section, I accept Maher's proposal to identify a middle way account of action individuation (Maher 2011:101). Recalling our initial Donald's action sequence:

1) Donald's moving of his finger,
2) Donald's flipping of the switch,
3) Donald's turning of the light,

[26]Actually, the set of distinct acts on a single act tree cannot be ordered by the ordinary by-relation. According to Goldman's criterion of individuation, John's singing (at *t*) and John's singing loudly (at *t*) will be distinct acts. But we would not ordinarily say either that John sings *by* singing loudly or that John sings loudly *by* singing. In *A Theory of Human Action*, Goldman introduced a slightly broader relation, which he called «level generation», under which the ordinary by-relation is subsumed (Goldman 1970: 20-30).

4) Donald's illuminating of the room,
5) Donald's alerting of the prowler.

The basic idea for this middle way account is that 1)–5) are distinct actions, but 1) and, say,

1.1) Donald's *swift* moving of his hand

are the same action.

The main difficulty with this approach lies in providing a consistent ground on which to maintain that in a classic action sequence some actions are identical with one another, and therefore the same action, while others are distinct. One attempt in this direction comes from Carl Ginet (1990) and his sophisticated theory of criteria for co-reference of action-designators. Ginet derives the idea of action tree from Goldman, and he adds a relation, named GEN relation, in virtue of which two action-designators belong to the same action tree: «Two canonical action-designators belong to the same action tree just in case they refer to the same agent and one has the ancestral of the GEN relation to the other, or there is a third canonical action-designator that belongs to the same action tree as each of them» (Ginet 1990: 45-46). I will not enter into a detailed explanation of Ginet' s theory of action-identification: compared to the identity thesis and to the fine grained view, its technicality seems to be *ad hoc* for responding to the problems opened by the others two approaches. Moreover, Ginet himself, at the end of his chapter «The Individuation of Action», writes: «I should confess that it seems to me that the issue over the individuation of action, though sufficiently interesting in its own right, is not one on which much else depends. As far as I can see, there is no other significant question in the philosophy of action that depends on it. Whichever account one adopts, one can equally well state and discuss the metaphysical questions about action that the present book addresses in its other chapters» (Ginet 1990: 70). According to Ginet, the issue over the individuation of action «is not more than a verbal issue» and it does not limit at all our genuine philosophizing over the big themes on action (Ginet 1990: 71). The big themes on action regard, according to Ginet, metaphysical questions such as «What is the

general mark of action? What is it for action to be intentional? Is free action compatible with determinism? What makes a reasons explanation of an action true?» (Ginet 1990: 70).

1.5 SUMMING UP THE THREE VIEWS

As has been pointed out by Maher, the three classic approaches formulate the issue of action identification in semantic terms: « [...] given two action designators "A's F-ing" and "A's G-ing", each of which refers to a particular action, under what circumstances do they refer to the same particular action? » (Maher 2011: 100). By taking into consideration Donald's action sequence, and asking if 1)-5) are all, some or none the numerically same action, philosophers have framed the issue of action identification in a specific way: they have focused on *whether* 1)-5) differ and not *in virtue of what* they differ.[27] Since the whether-question seems to allow only three possible answers (1. all; 2. none; 3. some), the debate has been structuring around these three possibilities and no alternative has been found.

The identity thesis preserves the criterion of parsimony about actions and the sense of unity concerning the agent and her doing something within a certain action sequence. Nevertheless, such a thesis identifies two or more actions that seem to be numerically distinct insofar as they stand in causal relations with different events, as in the case in which A's pulling of the trigger certainly causes the gun's firing, but A's act of killing B does not cause the gun's firing (see 1.3.2).

The fine grained view sorts out this kind of difficulties claiming that in a given action sequence there are *n* actions: actions are, in fact, exemplifications of an act property by an agent at a time. If an action is an exemplification of a property, different properties exemplified will correspond to different actions. According to this view, hence, «Donald's moving of his finger» and «Donald's flipping of the

[27] As Maher clarifies, in answering the whether-question we must take a view about how or in virtue of what they differ or are the same (Maher 2011: 100).

switch» are two different actions since being a moving of one's hand and being a flipping of the switch are different properties.

Where the identity thesis finds only one action, the fine grained view sees too many actions. In order to work out what seems to be an unintuitive outcome, the middle way account offers an *ad hoc* solution: some actions in the sequence – i.e. 1) – 5) in Donald's one – are distinct, but (1.1) and (1) are not. The main difficulty with such an account lies in providing a consistent ground on which to maintain that in a classic action sequence some actions are identical while others are not.

1.6 THE NORMATIVE-FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

The three classic approaches to action identification are based on the same assumption: if we are interested in *individuating* actions we must refer to what Maher calls their *descriptive features*, that is, when and where they occur and what they cause or are caused by (Maher 2011: 102), and, along these lines, to individuate them means to count them.

Nevertheless, following Maher's analysis,[28] we can search for an alternative strategy. Maher does not deny that actions have descriptive features, but they are not the most relevant ones. Actions have, in fact, also normative features: they license, permit, or warrant other actions (i.e. if you offended me, I probably will not help you with housework), and they can require or obligate further actions (i.e. if I clean our kitchen in your turn to do it, you should express gratitude to me). Maher claims that actions are individuated by their normative features or, as she says, their *normative function* or *role* (Maher 2011: 102). According to Maher, any action has its normative features essentially, this means that any action could not occur without these features. Let us consider the case of «Donald's turning on of the

[28] As Maher explains, her approach is inspired by the work of Wilfred Sellars that has been developed by Robert Brandom: they claim that speech acts should be thought of in terms of their normative functional role in «the game of giving and asking for reasons». The idea is that acts in general could be thought of in similar terms. Maher's aim is not, however, to engage directly with Sellars and Brandom's work, but rather to export their basic idea (Maher 2011: 99).

lights»: the turning on of the lights is something Donald is specifically responsible for in a way that he is not responsible for any other action.

> Roughly, we can think of this as meaning that he is the person of whom reasons may be asked and the person at whom praise or criticism may be directed for that specific turning on of the light on that occasion. (Maher 2011: 103)

If Donald was not responsible in the relevant sense, there would not have been that turning on of the light by him: Maher claims that Donald's turning on of the light differs from other actions in virtue of its specific normative role. What should be underlined is that the dimension of normativity involved is not the moral one. Actions are, in fact, «normatively significant in a broader sense» (Maher 2011: 102): What we do produces effects and consequences that may be the starting point of other actions independently of its being valued as good or bad.

If, as we have said above, Maher does not deny that actions have descriptive features, what is the relation between descriptive features and normative ones? The relation between descriptive and normative features is exemplified by considering an object-type that is distinguished by a function, such as sharpening pencils.[29] To be a pencil sharpener is to be something that has the function of sharpening pencils. A pencil sharpener could be made of plastic or metal, but it could not be made of foam: its structure, indeed, must be adequate to its function. What Maher emphasizes is that the structural constraints on pencil sharpeners derive from their pencil-sharpening function (Maher 2011: 104). Likewise, an action has certain descriptive features *because of* the normative role it plays.

In what follows, I present the model case used by Maher to introduce the Normative Functional Approach (1.6.1), then focus on her definition of the normative context (1.6.2). In 1.6.3, I discuss how mundane actions (actions that seem to occur outside of any human social practice) are explained by Maher's approach (1.6.3).

[29] Maher specifies that the analogy is limited because 1) it concerns objects, not events and 2) it concerns types, not tokens.

1.6.1 A MODEL CASE

To introduce the normative functional approach (NFA), Maher proposes a scene from a baseball game in which Martin hits the ball into shallow right field. Consider:

a) Martin's hitting of the pitch

What makes Martin's action the action it is? This particular hit put Martin in the position of being allowed to run to first base, and it also called on Martin's rivals to try to get the ball. These are normative features: they concern what Martin (and his rivals) may do or should do. According to Maher, a) has to be understood in terms of its role in that game: «Martin's specific hit has a specific role in the particular game in which it occurs» (Maher 2011: 104). Such a role can be explained by making reference to two distinct elements: its *input* and its *output*. Its input consists in Martin's standing to hit that specific pitch (he had to be on a particular team, and have a certain place in the batting order). On the other hand, the output of a) is Martin's status as a runner, or, more precisely, is a multidimensional status change for Martin and the other players: Martin's being a runner is both *i*) a matter of what Martin should do (getting on a base), and *ii*) a matter of what rival players should and can do (stopping Martin in the allowed ways). What Maher underlines is that the output of the hit is not merely what the hit causes (Maher 2011: 104):[30] the output is primarily a change in the normative status of the different players, «the outputs are changes in what should or should not be done. For shorts, the outputs are sets of normative statuses» (Maher 2011: 105).

To underline the specificity of that particular hit, Maher clarifies that a) has a unique role: «The particular hit that we have been considering occurred at a particular time in a specific game» (Maher 2011: 106). Martin, indeed, may have had other similar hits, in other games, or also in that same game: these other hits might have had roles similar to that of the hit described as a), but not its very same

[30] As a result of his pitch, Martin should get the first base, but he might not run, he might collapse. And the same principle works for the rival players: as a result of Martin's pitch they should stop him, but they might not

role. Therefore, we may, with Maher, consider it plausible that Martin's hit is individuated by its specific role within the game in which it occurs. As we have seen, according to Maher to sort out the issue of action individuation primarily means to clarify *in virtue of what* an action differs from another: in this sense, what makes Martin's hit the action that it is is its specific role within the context in which it occurs[31]. If a) is individuated by its *unique* role in that game – and this means that nothing else plays the same role a) plays –, it is possible to ask what happens if we consider a phrase such as:

b) Martin's hitting of the ball

Are a) and b) the same action? Are they numerically identical? According to NFA, a) and b) are identical if they share the same normative role.

Maher defines the question about the sameness of a) and b) a hard case: it is not clear, indeed, whether they share the same normative function. But, according to her, this is not a test case for the NFA, since there is no agreement about the status of a) and b) in the antecedent literature. For this reason, according to Maher, a proper defence of NFA can leave the question of their numerical identity open (Maher 2011: 106).

1.6.2 THE NORMATIVE CONTEXT

To introduce NFA, Maher used a) as a model case. Her strategy consists in extending the application of her approach to other sorts of action. The model case, a), occurs within a game which is a context strongly structured by norms, but many actions do not occur within game-like contexts, at least seemingly. Maher argues,

[31] A misleading understanding of NFA would be: if a) did not play the role it actually plays, a) would not be the action that it is. Such an understanding suggests that a) could have occurred without being of the type: "Martin's hitting of the pitch". On the contrary, NFA claims that if that specific role were not to have occurred, then there simply would not have been that hit by Martin (Maher 2011: 105).

indeed, that all actions always occur in a normative context (Maher 2011: 107). But what does Maher mean by *normative context*?

Maher observes that actions are, primarily, authored or owned by their agents, and this is the reason why they can be defined as events which an agent is responsible for:

> If E is an action of an agent A, then we generally expect that A has something to say about E, why she did it, for instance, what her reasons were for doing it. [...] By contrast, the same is not true of mere goings on of my body. (Maher 2011: 108)

Maher is arguing that when I close the door, that event is mine. The event of the perspiring of my body is mine, too. Evidently there is a significant difference between these two senses of being mine: an event which is an action belongs to its agent in a specific sense. Such a sense concerns the agent's capacity of giving (appropriate) reasons for that event which is her action. Probably you would ask me for my reason for closing the door, while you would not ask me for my reason for perspiring. Perspiring is not something one is normally responsible for. According to Maher, to be responsible means to be in a position in which it is appropriate to be questioned, blamed, and praised.

From the perspective on responsibility suggested by Maher to be responsible is indeed to be the fair target of the so-called reactive attitudes (see Strawson 1962). On this perspective, actions such as walking to work, parking a car, buying a soda, or playing with a child are actions for which it is appropriate to regard the agent who performs them in a certain way as responsible. Roughly, we can be the fair target of praise and blame when we walk to work, park a car, or buy a soda. When we perform any one of these actions, which Maher defines *normal* actions, we alter our normative status, how the status is altered depends on what we do, how we do it, and in what circumstances. From this perspective, «all actions, insofar they are actions, must occur within some normative context» (Maher 2011: 107). Although some actions can be performed in circumstances that mitigate the agent's responsibility for them (actions performed under the threat of violence, or

coercion), the claim that in general an action is an event for which the agent is responsible for is not undermined. Indeed, it is plausible that an event for which an agent is not responsible *at all* cannot be properly considered as an agent's action, but only as one event in which she is involved (Maher 2011: 108).

1.6.3 MUNDANE ACTIONS

On Maher's view, it is an illusion that actions can ever occur outside any normative context. However, there are actions that seem to occur outside of any human social practice and therefore do not depend on any human *conventions*. These actions include bodily movements, such as lifting an arm or turning one's head, and they are defined as mundane actions (Maher 2011: 108). Maher aims to show that mundane actions too have normative significance: also mundane actions play a normative role, although they are not part of any explicitly structured social practice.

In order to show the normative significance of mundane actions, Maher considers the following example: Elizabeth is sitting on the couch holding a magazine in her left hand, while her right hand sits in her lap. Suppose she lifts her right arm and lets it rest beside her on the couch. Consider:

a) Elizabeth's lifting of her arm

What is the (normative) input of c)? Apparently, there is no input constitutive of lifting of one's arm: to lift my arm I do not need any kind of standing, I *can* lift my arm whenever I want. However, Maher argues that the «can» involved here is the can of *permission*, not of physical possibility: the fact that I can lift my arm whenever I want does not imply I do not have the standing to lift my arm. A person who is physically able to move her body is also rationally permitted to move it (unless we are in a slave society where people physically able to move their bodies are not rationally allowed to do so).

We normally have the authority to move our bodies, and if someone said that we are not allowed to do so, we would consider this challenge strange, or, more

likely, wrong. So, the input of c) is Elizabeth's status of being justified in lifting her arm in that way: Elizabeth has the rational authority to lift her arm in that way, and her justification can be expressed as «I wanted to lift it! ».

As far as the (normative) output is concerned, if we consider c) as a mere bodily movement independently of any explicit conventions (it is not a vote, nor a greeting...), it can seem that c) has not any normative output. But c) is something Elizabeth does and it is something for which she is accountable: it would be appropriate for an observer to ask her *why* she did it, and she would be likely to reply «because I wanted to», which may be accepted or not. So, albeit minimal, there are normative consequences to c).

Moreover, Elizabeth can lift her arm quickly, awkwardly, or bothering someone, this means that there are standards of performance for c). Observers are entitled to feel, think and say things about Elizabeth's lifting of her arm, and they are also permitted to treat Elizabeth in certain ways they weren't entitled to before she so acted (Maher 2011: 108).

What Maher is claiming is that Elizabeth will be a «locus of responsibility» for her lifting of her arm, as Martin is for his hitting the pitch. Mundane actions do have a normative output, that is, what an agent is responsible for. Even if a mere arm-lifting is not part of a well-defined social practice in the same way as baseball is, it appears nonetheless plausible to Maher that such a mere arm-lifitng operates within a context of norms: «Mundane actions have normative features. Perhaps in that regard they are not so mundane» (Maher 2011: 110).

Mundane actions do have normative features and by means of these normative features can be individuated: the specific way in which Elizabeth's lifting of her arm changes her normative status is essential to that arm-lifting, that is, if c) did not play that role, it simply would not be. Moreover, if the arm-lifting is an action of Elizabeth and actions are events which the agents are responsible for, then c) allows Elizabeth to be asked about c) in any of the ways relevant to c).

On Maher's view, Elizabeth's arm-lifting could not have occurred without its normative features (its output and its input). If c) could have occurred without its output, then it would not be an action at all (and all questions would be inappropriate in principle), or it would not be *the* act of Elizabeth's arm-lifting

(Maher 2011: 110). On the input side, c) could not have occurred without being a thing which is permitted by claims that justify it, such as «I wanted to lift my arm». If Elizabeth's lifting of her arm was not justified, we would have two possibilities: *i*) it is not an action at all (actions are the kind of things that are typically justified by reasons), or *ii*) it is not justified by any claims concerning Elizabeth's lifting of her arm, but maybe reasons can be offered for Elizabeth's moving of her foot, or for another person's moving of her arm. However, in those cases none of the acts in question is c) (Maher 2011: 112).

1.7 Action Individuation and Agency

Maher's proposal has the merit of breaking into a debate in which the three dominant positions seem equally plausible. The plausibility of the three main approaches has been acknowledged by some philosophers themselves, who have tried to get rid of the issue of action-individuation by saying that it is not an issue on which much else depends (Ginet 1970; Mele 1997). On the contrary, Maher's analysis clarifies that the existing debate is based on the assumption that actions are individuated by their descriptive features. Such an assumption should not be underestimated: in fact, it has contributed to the understanding of the issue of action individuation in terms of the *whether-question*. The whether-question, as we have seen, can be formulated as follows: given *N* action designators «A's F-ing», «A's G-ing», and «A's *N*-ing», each of which refers to a particular action, are they all, some or none the numerically same action? Since, put in this way, the only possible answers seem to be all, some, or none, then to sort out the trouble of action individuation primarily means to quantify over actions.

The Normative Functional Approach (NFA) has the merit of shifting the discussion over the individuation of action from the *whether-question* (that is, the question whether action a) is the same as action b) or not) to the question about *in virtue of what* one action differs from another. Moreover, by introducing in the analysis the *normative features* of actions, NFA solves the issue of action individuation by

claiming that actions are individuated by their normative features (input and output); such features are what distinguishes one action from another. In so doing, NFA establishes a link between the problem of action individuation and the normative dimension that characterizes human agency. Such a link seems to be ignored by the three views we have examined above, which understand the issue of action individuation and that of the normative dimension of human agency as unrelated ones.

In the concluding section of her paper, Maher compares her account with the other three (Maher 2011: 112-113). I find her explanation of the following case particularly clear: we have David, a chess player, and Immanuel, his coach. During a game David thinks that moving his rock in A6 would be a good move. David understands that Immanuel would not agree with this move, and that such a move would irritate him. Since ultimately David founds Immanuel to be overbearing, David does the move anyway, irritating Immanuel. Consider:

b) David's moving of his rock to A6,
c) David's irritating Immanuel

According to Maher, d) and e) are *two* different actions in virtue of the different normative features they have. d) is a specific move in a certain chess game, its input is the standing to move the rock at that point in the game, and its output is the complex status coming with placing the rock in that positions. On the other hand, e) is «a move in 'the game of coaching and being coached'»; its input consists in the standing to influence the relationship between David and Immanuel, and its output is, roughly, the status of having (knowingly) irritated the coach (Maher 2011: 111). d) and e) exist as two different actions – they are two different things – in virtue of their different normative features. This is the way in which NFA works, and it seems to work fine.

However, NFA does not answer a question that can be raised when the issue of action individuation is conceived within the framework of an ordinary social interaction, in which participants are interested to attribute to each other precise responsibilities.

To clarify this point, I go on with Maher's example of David and Immanuel imagining that, after the game, Liam, a friend of Immanuel, noticing Immanuel's irritation towards David, asks: «What did David do?», meaning by it: «What did David *actually* do?»

Various answers to Liam's question would be possible and plausible:

d) David moved his rock to A6;
e) David lost the game;
f) David provoked Immanuel.

These expressions all describe what David did, but when Liam asks what David did, he is interested in attributing *one* of these doing-descriptions to David as his action, that is, he intends to individuate the thing David did which is the most salient in that context.

In effect, with one identical set of bodily movements David did various things which d) – f) report, but to provide a list of descriptions of things done by David does not yet amount to establishing which description provides the most appropriate answer to the question about what David (actually) did.

1.7.1 A Framework for Action Individuation

As we have seen, the three main approaches to the issue of action individuation (the identity thesis, the fine-grained view, and the middle way account) are based on what Maher calls the descriptive features of actions, that is, what they cause or are caused by, when and where they occur. Individuation *in virtue of* descriptive features assumes that

1. actions always have causes and effects, which are identifiable;
2. actions always occur at a specific time and in a specific place, therefore actions can always be localized;
3. descriptive features of actions suffice to action individuation.

Maher does not deny that actions have descriptive features, what she claims is that they are not the most important features of actions. Actions have, indeed, also normative features: they license or permit or warrant other actions, and they also can require or obligate other different actions. Maher, thus, argues that actions are individuated by means of their features. Individuation *in virtue of* normative features assumes that

1. actions always permit, or warrant, or legitimate other actions;
2. actions always require, or obligate other actions;
3. normative features of actions suffice to their individuation.

As we have seen in David's case, individuation *via* normative features provides us with a series of descriptions, where each description reports *one* action. Indeed, according to NFA, d) - f) are *three* different actions in virtue of their different normative features (their specific inputs and outputs): NFA tells us *in virtue of what* one doing differs from another, distinguishes the various doings, and considers them all David's actions *qua* events for which David is responsible.
However, individuation via normative features does not provide us with an answer to the question: «What did the agent *actually* do?», that is, does not say which among the plausible candidates for David's action is the most salient. In the framework of ordinary social interaction, the issue of action individuation is generally settled by reference to the salience of one of the action descriptions available. When we ordinarily try to individuate the agent's action, indeed, we *zoom in* on a stretch of behaviour and within that stretch we single out the agent's salient doing among the various things she did, that is, we individuate *the* salient doing within the stretch of behaviour we are considering. When we ask «what did the agent (actually) do?», we are not interested in being provided with a series of descriptions of what she did, that is, we are not interested in enumerating her doings; rather we expect to be provided with a description focusing upon the salient thing the agent did in that specific situation. Our interest in individuating the action, indeed, precisely lies in attributing to the agent a certain degree of responsibility for the most salient thing done. This means that what we are

interested in is a specific kind of a distinction: the one between things done (whom the various doing-descriptions refer to) and actions. Such a distinction is consistent with the idea that all our actions are, in some sense, doings, but not all our doings at once can be considered as our actions.

If we accept, as Maher seems to do, that with one identical set of bodily movements the agent may be said to do various things reported by means of related descriptions we are not yet deciding which description provides the most appropriate answer to the question about what David actually did. If, on the one hand, Maher's approach to action individuation is a pluralist approach and therefore allows us to take into account the fact that with one set of bodily movements the agent can be said to do various things, on the other hand, Maher does not consider the importance of the question about what the agent *actually* did.

With NFA, we can count things done, we can enumerate them in virtue of their specific normative role, but we have no criteria to individuate *the* action among the various things done: any of the descriptions individuate one action in virtue of its specific normative features.

By saying this, I am not excluding that there can be situations in which the agent with one identical set of bodily movements does more than one salient thing, and therefore more than one action is attributed to her. Rather, I am pointing out that when in ordinary situations we are interested in individuating the agent's action, we look for an answer to the question «what did the agent do?» which consists in the attribution to the agent of the most salient doing within the stretch of behaviour on which we are zooming in.

1.7.2 The Accordion Effect: An Early Formulation

In what follows, I introduce the phenomenon called the accordion effect in its early formulation by Joel Feinberg (1970): my main aim is to make explicit the

connection between the issue of action individuation and its linguistic, and therefore intersubjective dimension.

In «Action and Responsibility», Feinberg refers to the accordion effect as a feature of our language «whereby a man's action can be described as narrowly or broadly as we please». When an agent A did the action X with the consequence Y, we can individuate the agent's action by means of the narrower description «A did X» (in this way we relegate Y to the role of consequence), or we can incorporate Y into a broader description and say «A did Y». In Feinberg's words:

> We can, if we wish, puff out an action to include an effect, and more often than not our language obliges us by providing a relatively complex action word for the purpose. (Feinberg 1970: 134)

The importance of this phenomenon lies in the fact that, because of it, «we can usually replace any ascription to a person of causal responsibility by an ascription of agency or authorship» (Feinberg 1970: 134). But what does Feinberg mean by «ascription of causal responsibility» and by «ascription of authorship»?

In his theory, Feinberg develops H. L. A. Hart's view according to which the primary function of action sentences is to ascribe responsibility (Hart 1949). Feinberg distinguishes five types of ascription of responsibility (Feinberg 1970: 132-136):

1. Straightforward ascriptions of causality, where responsibility means causal assignability;
2. ascriptions of causal agency or authorship, where responsibility means causal authorship (authorship for complex actions);
3. ascriptions of simple agency, where responsibility means simple authorship (authorship for simple or basic actions, actions without causal components);
4. imputations of fault, where responsibility means imputability;
5. ascriptions of liability, where responsibility means liability.

As Feinberg explains, this classification shows that «all five types of ascription can be made in the language of responsibility» (Feinberg 1970: 137). Responsibility may mean causal assignability (in 1), causal authorship (in 2), simple authorship (in 3), fault-imputability (in 4), and liability (in 5). In the first three cases (straightforward ascription of causality, ascription of causal agency or authorship, and ascription of simple agency), responsibility applies to the *normal case* of action where questions of fault, desert and punishment do not arise (Feinberg 1970: 137)[32].

The phenomenon of the accordion effect concerns the first two types of ascription: Straightforward ascriptions of causality and ascriptions of causal agency or authorship. As far as the first type of ascription is concerned, Feinberg points out that when a meteorologist ascribes today's whether to yesterday's pressure system, she is merely meaning that the latter is the cause of the former. We frequently ascribe this kind of causality also to the actions, omissions and dispositions of human beings. Feinberg notes that those ascriptions of causality often use the language of responsibility: We might say that *a low-pressure system was responsible for the storms* and in the same causal way we might say that the

[32] Different types of responsibility are also distinguished by Hart (1968). In «Responsibility and Retribution», Hart classifies four types of responsibility: role-responsibility; causal-responsibility; legal liability-responsibility and capacity-responsibility (Hart 1968: 212-230). Role-responsibility has to do with the distinctive place or office occupied by a person in a certain social organization. However, the term *role* includes also tasks assigned to people by agreement or otherwise, as in the case in which two friends planning their holiday agree that one will book the flight and the other will book the hotel room, then the one is said to be responsible for the flight and the other for the hotel room. It is interesting to note that, in Hart's view, this type of responsibility may take either legal or moral form. Causal-responsibility concerns cases in which it is possible to replace the expression «x was responsible for» with the words *caused* or *produced* or, as Hart specifies, «some other causal expression in referring to consequences, results or outcomes» (Hart 1968: 214). Not only human agents can be said responsible in this sense, «also their actions or omissions, and things, conditions and events may be said responsible for outcomes» (Hart 1968: 214). The third type of responsibility (legal liability-responsibility) has to do with legal systems and legal rules. Hart dedicates a long discussion to distinguish legal responsibility and liability: in virtue of their being distinguishable it makes sense to say that because a person is legally responsible for some action, she is liable to be punished for it (Hart 1968: 222). If we replace *deserving blame* to *liable to punishment*, we have what Hart calls moral liability-responsibility (Hart 1968: 225). Capacity-responsibility concerns both moral liability-responsibility and legal responsibility: indeed it is the type of responsibility that depends on certain capacity of the agent (capacities of understanding, reasoning and control of conduct) (Hart 1968: 228).

agent's action was responsible for subsequent effect or state of affair, without imputing blame, or guilt or liability to the agent:

> When we assert that Smith is responsible for x, we can mean simply that x is the result of what Smith did or, in equivalent terms, that Smith did something and thereby caused x to happen. (Feinberg 1970:130)

In order to define the second type of ascription, Feinberg introduces the distinction between complex and simple acts. Complexity and simplicity concern causality, so we can distinguish between causally complex actions and causally simple actions. A causally complex action is one that produces results – intentionally or not – by means of other, relatively simple, constitutive acts. Classic examples of complex actions are achievement of certain tasks and goals: the complex task – say, opening a door or rescuing a drawing swimmer – is performed by means of a series of purposively connected *subacts*. A causally simple action, instead, does not require any earlier doing as a means: Smiling, raising one's arm, moving one's finger are causally simple cases of doings, to do any of these things we do not need to do something else. Nor, in Feinberg's view, is it necessary to do something in one's mind as a kind of triggering to set off a volition or something like that. However, Feinberg notes that «in very special circumstances, of course, these normally simple acts can be complex» (Feinberg 1970: 133), as in the case in which one has to make herself smile even if she is angry or sad. But in *normal circumstances*, Feinberg says, «one smiles spontaneously without having to cause oneself to do so» (Feinberg 1970: 133).

The accordion effect does not work with simple actions. The reason Feinberg provides is that simple actions have no causal components; therefore, «one cannot play the accordion with them». Simple actions such as «raising one's arm» cannot be squeezed down to, for instance, «she contracted her muscles thereby causing her hand to be raised» (Feinberg 1970: 132). The accordion effect understood in Feinberg's terms allows us to shift from straightforward ascriptions of causality to ascriptions of causal agency. In the classical case reported by Feinberg, we have

Peter who opened the door and thereby caused Paul (who is inside) to be startled, Paul then suffered a heart attack and died. We can say:

1. Peter opened the door and thereby caused Paul to be startled and then Paul died, or
2. Peter startled Paul and then Paul died, or
3. Peter killed Paul.

The important thing is that Peter, with one simple action (moving his hand), did all these things: he turned the key, opened the door, startled Paul, killed him...
Because of the accordion effect, instead of saying «Peter did A (a relative single act) and thereby caused X in Y», we can say «Peter X-ed Y»; instead of «Peter opened the door causing Paul to be startled», we can say «Peter startled Paul».

According to Feinberg, there are two exceptions to the application of the accordion effect, that is, two exceptions to the rule that causal ascriptions of responsibility can be translated into ascriptions of causal agency (cf. Bratman 2006). The former is considered not very relevant by Feinberg himself, and concerns a mere matter of fact: it may happen that there is no single action word in the language that is precisely equivalent to a given causal phrase. For Feinberg the accordion effect requires, indeed, a specific causal verb to apply (e.g. kill for cause the death). The second exception to the functioning of the accordion effect is considered crucial by Feinberg himself and regards cases of interpersonal causation where an agent causes another person to act (it is not important how she does it). The doctor, by making some technical movements on John's forearm, may cause John's finger to move. Even though, in some sense, it would be correct to say that doctor's movements cause John to move his finger, we would not say that the doctor moved the finger himself. Causing to move, indeed, is not the same as moving (Feinberg 1970: 135).[33]

We may distinguish two uses of the accordion effect in Feinberg's formulation: a main use and a secondary one.

[33] It might be objected that in the case of *moving* we have two uses: a transitive use and an intransitive one. But we can build some other cases in which an agent A can influence the agent B to act in a certain way, without using the verb *to move*.

As has been recently pointed out by Sven Fockner (2013), in «Action and Responsibility» Feinberg's goal is to reinterpret Hart's argument in order to avoid the criticism that was launched against it, namely that Hart's thesis works exclusively in offenses or sub-par performances (Fockner 2013: 2). After having discussed faults and offenses that were the focus of Hart's article (Hart 1949), Feinberg tries to establish a broader basis for ascriptiveness that includes non-faulty action sentences, and this is the reason why he individuates five different types of responsibility ascriptions.

In Feinberg's formulation the main use of the accordion effect is to show that ascriptions of agency are, basically, ascriptions of responsibility. Feinberg is trying to show that in many cases causality is hidden in agency: ascriptions of causal responsibility are often precisely equivalent to ascriptions of the second type, which Feinberg defined ascriptions of causal agency (Fockner 2013: 2). Causal responsibility and causal agency both say something about causation, the one quite explicitly, the other in the language of agency or authorship: According to Feinberg, indeed, «A did X» is often just an implicit form of saying «A caused X», where «A caused X» is ascriptive (Fockner 2013: 2).

The accordion effect has also a secondary use: Feinberg mentions, indeed, that it is a tool to redescribe simple actions in terms of their consequences (Feinberg 1970: 130). Such an use is secondary to the extent that Feinberg is using the accordion effect primarily «to deconstruct action sentences in order to lay bare the causal connection hidden in them» (Fockner 2013: 2).

If our leading question about the issue of action individuation is «what did the agent *actually* do?», both uses of the accordion effect may help us: on the one hand, the accordion effect shows that by ascribing agency we basically ascribe responsibility, and on the other hand, the accordion effect allows us to refer to what the agent did by means of various descriptions in terms of consequences of (causally) simple actions. Nevertheless, the analysis of the accordion effect raises two relevant problems:

1) Does the accordion effect affect the actions themselves, or does it merely concern their descriptions?

2) Does the accordion effect presuppose the notion of simple action?

Both problems concern what we take actions to be and the framework within which we understand them, and both will be tackled in the next chapter.

2. ACTIONS AND CAUSATION

2.1 THE TIME OF A KILLING

Suppose that our sniper shot the President at time *t1*, but that the President only died at time *t3*. Before the President dies (*t3*), the sniper kills herself at time *t2*. When did the sniper kill the President?

If we say that the sniper did not kill the President until time *t3*[34], we accept that the sniper killed the President after her own death (*t2*); differently, if we say that the sniper killed the President at time *t1*[35], we accept that the sniper killed the President before the President died.

This problem concerning the temporal individuation of a killing is often cited in order to provide grounds for challenging what we have called the identity thesis of action individuation (see Pols 2013): according to various authors (Mackie 1997, Mossel 2001, Weintraub 2003, Sandis 2006), those who endorse the identity thesis are committed to claiming that since the sniper has killed the President by shooting him, and being the shooting identical with the killing, therefore the killing happened at time *t1*, that is, the sniper killed the President before the President died. This solution, for those who do not endorse the identity thesis of action individuation, is absurd.

The problem of the time of a killing may be tackled to enlighten issues about action individuation, or to investigate how the notion of cause applies to the agent's performance. Since issues about action individuation were discussed in chapter 1, in this chapter I consider the time of a killing problem in order to investigate how the notion of cause applies to the agent's performance and so contributes to the definition of action. I start by reviewing four relevant solutions

[34]This is what Alvin Goldman (1971), Irving Thalberg (1971), and Judith J. Thomson (1971) claim.
[35]This is what is claimed by Donald Davidson (2001) and Jennifer Hornsby (1982, 1983).

to the problem of the time of a killing: those proposed by Davidson (2001), Thomson (1970), Weintraub (2003), and Sandis (2006) (2.2), then I focus on the related distinction between *causes* and *causings* by referring to the dispute between J. Lowe (1981, 1983) and J. Hornsby (1980, 1982) (2.3).

The notion of cause applies to the agent's performance in two main ways: *i*) to the relation between the agent's mental event and the event of her bodily movement or *ii*) to the agent and what she does, in the former case we speak of *event-causal approach*, in the latter of *agent-causal approach*.

In order to introduce the differences between these two approaches, I consider useful to present Bach's analysis of what he calls the Causal Theory (Bach 1980) (2.4). Bach defines the Causal Theory as the general causal framework within which the production of a change by an agent counts as the performance of an action only if that change *is caused* in the right way by the right sort of psychological event. On the ground of such a shared view on actions, various versions of the Causal Theory can be distinguished, which Bach analyzes and discusses, not without putting forward a view of his own (the relational view)(2.4.1). On Bach's view, actions are not events, but instances of the relation of bringing about, whose terms are agents and events (2.4.2).

I then proceed to discussing the Event-Causal Approach (2.5), which has been considered the standard story of action (see Hornsby 2004). In this approach, it is innocently presupposed that actions are *physical* events (2.5.1). The Event-Causal approach will be discussed in particular with respect to the issue of *deviant causal* chains (2.5.2) and to the understandings of the phenomenon of the accordion effect by two of its proponents: Davidson (2001) and Aguilar (2007) (2.5.3).

Next, I consider the Agent-Causal Approach (2.6), on which the bringing about is an *irreducible* relation between the agents and certain *things* (Taylor 1966), or between the agents and certain events or states of affairs (Chisholm 1964; 1966) (2.6.1). Within the Agent-Causal Approach, we may isolate an interesting view elaborated by Alvarez and Hyman (1998): on this view, the agents do not cause their actions, but what they cause are the results of their actions (2.6.2).

At the end of the chapter, I go back to the discussion of the accordion effect to compare Davidson's understanding with the early one by Feinberg. Here, I suggest

that while Feinberg's use of the accordion effect is aimed to make possible the attribution of different types of responsibility to the agent for what she did, in Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect the attribution of responsibility to the agent has no role (2.7).

2.2 Some Solutions to The Time of a Killing Problem

In his already quoted «The Individuation of Events», Davidson makes two claims:

> i) to describe an event as a killing is to describe it as *an event* (here an action) *that caused a death*, and
> ii) to describe the shooting as a killing is to describe it as *the causing of a death* (Davidson 2001: 177).

On Davidson's view, the sniper's killing the President is identical with her shooting him (see 1.2.3): the killing is over when the shooting is, therefore we have to say that the sniper killed the President long before he dies (Davidson 2001: 178). We should observe, according to Davidson, that we may know that an event is a shooting without knowing it is a killing, «just as we may know an event is the death of Scott without knowing it is the death of the author of Waverly» (Davidson 2001: 177). On the one hand, when we describe an event as a killing, we describe it as an event (here an action) that caused a death. Apparently, we describe an action as one that caused a death only when the death occurs, but the action may be a death-causing one even before the death occurs and before any observer knows it will occur. On the other hand, when we describe the shooting as a killing and therefore as the causing of a death, what is to be noted is that «such a description loses cogency, as the causal relation is attenuated» (Davidson 2001: 177).

According to Judith Thomson (1971), there is no true answer to the question about the time at which the sniper killed the President that provides a time-stretch smaller than the minimum one that includes both the time of the sniper's shooting

of the President (*t1*)[36], and the time of the death of the President (*t3*) (Thomson 1971: 122). Thomson's proposal is that the sniper killed the President at *t**, where *t** includes both *t1* and *t3*. Two bits of terminology are introduced: (*a*) the time of *initiation* of the sniper's killing of the President, and (*b*) the time of *completion* of the sniper's killing of the President, that is, the time at which the sniper's killing of the President starts, and the time at which it is finished. According to Thomson, we could say that the sniper killed the President at *t** if and only if *t** includes both the time of initiation and the time of completion of the sniper's killing of the President (Thomson 1971: 123). Nevertheless, Thomson acknowledges that there are difficulties that arise when we try to provide precise definitions of (*a*) and (*b*).
As far as (*b*) is concerned, Thomson suggests that we have to decide among three alternatives:

1) It is the point of time before which the sniper's killing of the President has not occurred, but after which it has occurred. What is to be noticed is that if we are supposing that so long as the President is alive the killing has not occurred and that when the President is dead the killing has occurred, then our account of the time of completion of the killing commits us to supposing that there is no last instant at which the President is alive and that there is no first instant at which he is dead and that there is one point of time at which he is neither;
2) it is the point of time before which the sniper's killing of the President has not occurred, but at and after which it has. This provides us a first moment at which the President is dead, and no last moment at which he is alive;
3) it is the point of time at and before which the sniper's killing of the President has not occurred, but after which it has. This gives us a last moment at which the President is alive, and no first moment at which he is dead. (Thomson 1971: 122-123)

[36] In her diagram, Thomson marks the time of the sniper's shooting the President (*t1*) as a blotch rather than a point, making it a time-stretch rather than a time-point, «for shooting someone *takes* time» (Thomson 1971: 116).

According to Thomson, it is not clear on what grounds we could decide among these three options (Thomson 1971: 123-124).

As far as (a) is concerned, the difficulty is of the same kind as the above mentioned one: the time of initiation of the sniper's killing of the President is that point of time before which the sniper's killing of the President is not occurring, but after which it (for some time) is occurring, and: is there such a point of time? Or should we instead define the time of initiation as the point of time before which the sniper's killing of the President is not occurring, but at and after which it (for some time) is occurring? And so on (Thomson 1971: 125).

However, Thomson decides to ignore these difficulties: all that does matter for her is that the time of completion of the sniper's killing of the President (*b*) is not the same as the time of completion of the sniper's shooting of the President, and that the time of initiation of the sniper's killing of the President (*a*) is the same as the time of initiation of the sniper's shooting of the President (Thomson 1971: 127).

Ruth Weintraub, referring to the two above-mentioned Davidsonian claims, argues that the problem about the time of a killing only arises when we slide between viewing the killing as (1) an event that caused death and (2) the causing of a death (Weintraub 2003: 179): according to Weintraub, indeed, there is a crucial difference between (1) and (2). By ignoring this difference and conflating these two ways of interpreting the killing, we cannot engender the right kind of question about when the sniper killed the President. If we conceive the killing as an *event that caused* a death (1), the location of the killing (so conceived) is at *t1*, and there is nothing odd about the temporal gap between the killing and the death, since the causes can be distant from what they cause. That the killing lasts until the President's death is, instead, inappropriate. Differently, if we conceive the killing as the *causing* of a death (2), our question concerns the temporal location of the causal interaction between two events, and that the killing is over when the sniper has shot the President is inappropriate: since both cause and effect are involved in the interaction, they must both overlap with it (Weintraub 2003: 179).

On Weintraub's view, by ignoring the difference between (1) ad (2) we conflate talking of *causes* with talking of *causings*, and we make a mistake because only

causes are events. Why cannot causings be events? According to Weintraub, if causings (causal interactions) were events, they would have themselves causes and effects, but this would engender an infinite regress: if A causing B (call it C) has a cause, D, then E, the causing of C by D, is itself an event, and has a cause, F, and so on ... if we want to avoid the infinite regress, then the question «What caused the causing of B by A?» appears to be non-sensical. Does A cause the causing in addition to causing B? Or, to be more precise, does A cause B via the causing? (Weintraub 2003: 181- 182).

Therefore, only the first way of interpreting the killing, that is, as the event that caused a death (1), engenders the right kind of question, which can be answered. The second way of interpreting the killing (2), concerning the individuation of the causal interaction (causing), is incoherent. On Weintraub's view, in addition to cause and effect there is not a third event (their interaction), and therefore there is nothing to be temporally located. This is why, according to Weintraub, the question «When does X cause Y?» is non-sensical (Weintraub 2003: 181).

Constantine Sandis agrees with Weintraub that there is a difference between (1) a cause of death and (2) a causing of a death, nonetheless he does not think the difference is that only (1) is an event (Sandis 2006: 180). The difference lies in the fact that *the causing of x* does not have a specific temporal location as *the cause of x* does. This insight, according to Sandis, is what leads Weintraub to claim that the causing of x is not an event (Sandis 2006: 181). On Sandis's view, the question «When does x cause y?» is not non-sensical: indeed, if x shot y in June 2001 and y died in August 2001, then we may say that x killed y in the summer of 2001. From the fact that we cannot give a more *precise* temporal location, it does not follow that it makes no sense to ask *when* the killing occurred. What is non-sensical is to conclude that x was killing y *throughout* the summer of 2001: «Just because we cannot locate a killing more precisely than on a certain day, week, month or year it does not follow that the killing was occurring throughout that week» (Sandis 2006: 181). What Sandis underlines is that not having a continuous duration and not having a temporal location are two different things: the causing of x has no continuous duration, but, according to Sandis, having a continuous duration is not a necessary condition for something's being an event.

What is a necessary condition for something's being an event is instead a precise temporal location: for any event whose duration is not continuous we must be able to individuate the precise times at which it starts and stops occurring (Sandis 2006: 181). Turning back to our sniper, we can say when she began killing the President (when she fired the first shot), and when she stopped killing him (when she fired the last shot). We can say this even though it was not true at the time at which the sniper fired the last shot that she had killed the President (since in our case the President lives on until after the sniper's death) (Sandis 2006: 182). The sniper stops killing the President before he dies, but it is not to say that the sniper killed the President before this happens. What Sandis says is that the sniper has stopped killing the President before the event of her killing him has occurred: the suggestion is that «one may stop causing something to happen before it occurs as the result of their actions (and, therefore, before they have *caused* it to happen)» (Sandis 2006: 182). The right conclusion to draw is, according to Sandis, that even if we still cannot locate the killing precisely, «we can now precisely locate the various non-continuous times at which it stopped and started (at which it was occurr*ing*, but not at which it occurred)» (Sandis 2006: 182).

2.3 CAUSES AND CAUSINGS

We have just seen that the way in which the relationship between the event that caused a death (cause) and the causing of a death (causing) is understood is crucial to determining *when* the killing of the President occurred.

In this section, I investigate the relation between 1) the cause of x and 2) the causing of x by referring to the dispute between E. J. Lowe (1981, 1983) and Jennifer Hornsby (1980, 1982, 1983).

In *Actions*, Hornsby develops a theory of action whose main thesis can be summarized as follows: «Every action is an event of *trying* or attempting to act, and every attempt that is an action precedes and causes a contraction$_I$ of muscles and a movement$_I$ of the body» (Hornsby 1980: 33). The subscript «I» indicates that here

"movement" is related to the *intransitive reading* of certain verbs like *move* as in the sentence «John's arm moved$_I$» (Hornsby 1980: 2).

According to Lowe (Lowe 1981: 126), Hornsby's main thesis is reducible to: «All actions occur inside the body» (Hornsby 1980: 13), and Hornsby's argument for her principal thesis is that:

> Whatever events they are that cause the body to move$_T$ they presumably occur inside the body (if they can be located everywhere). But movements$_T$ cause the body to move$_I$. And actions are movements$_T$. Thus [...] all actions occur inside the body. (Hornsby 1980: 13)

The subscript «T» here indicates that here *movement* is related to the transitive reading of certain verbs like *move* as in the sentences «John moves$_T$ his arm (Hornsby 1980: 2).

Lowe claims that Hornsby's view of actions «arises from a serious misconception of the relationship between the notions of action and causation» (Lowe 1981: 126). He points out that the crucial premise of Hornsby's argument is that «movements$_T$ cause the body to move$_I$» (Hornsby 1980: 13). Since we have neurophysiological evidence that the causes of bodily movements are events that occur inside people's brains, then if those actions that Hornsby identifies with bodily movements$_T$ are also causes of the bodily movements$_I$, it seems to Lowe that we have no alternatives to identify the actions with the internal neural events (Lowe 1981: 127). Lowe claims that Hornsby's premise commits us to saying that if John raises his arm, then his action of raising his arm *causes* his arm to rise (Lowe 1981: 127): this reveals a misconception of the relationship of the notions of action and causation. Lowe does not deny that the notion of action and that of causation are intimately connected: indeed, John's raising his arm is *somehow* related with the fact that his arm is caused to rise (Lowe 1981: 127).

As Hornsby herself acknowledges, «questions about whether persons have done certain things can be reduced to questions about whether they have caused certain other sorts of things, and numerous philosophers have spoken of actions as agents' *bringing things about*» (Hornsby 1980: 9-10). Nevertheless, Lowe claims

that this way of speaking is not compatible with Hornsby's view about the relation of action and causation. According to the above-mentioned way of speaking, indeed, saying that John raised his arm is reducible to saying that John caused his arm to rise, but this does not give support to Hornsby's thesis that John's raising his arm caused his arm to rise. Indeed, if John's raising his arm is a matter of his *causing* his arm to rise, then, according to Lowe, Hornsby's thesis commits us to saying that «John's causing his arm to rise caused his arm to rise»: something that is «distinctly odd» (Lowe 1981: 128).

In her reply to Lowe, Hornsby specifies that «"A's causing x caused x" is not odder than the plain truistic "*e*'s cause caused *e*"» (Hornsby 1982: 152). According to Hornsby, indeed, an event x may be both caused by an agent A and caused by her action, in this case we say that A caused x, and, as Hornsby states in *Actions*, it seems plausible to say that her causing x is her action (Hornsby 1980), «but A's action caused x. So we have it that A's causing x caused x» (Hornsby 1982: 152).

Lowe reaffirms that «A's causing x caused x» has distinctly odd consequences despite, according to Hornsby, this is no odder than the plain truistic «*e*'s cause caused *e*» (Lowe 1983: 140). What seems to be unclear is, according to Lowe, why we should accept in the case of human agents something that is manifestly absurd in the case of inanimate agents: when we say that billiard ball *B* caused billiard ball *C* to move (i.e. caused the event of *C*'s moving), we do not want to imply that *B's causing C to move* caused *C*'s moving. Indeed, if we want to refer to an *event* that caused *C*'s moving, we may refer to *B*'s moving, but not to *B*'s causing *C*'s moving which is, according to Lowe, doubtfully an event at all (Lowe 1983: 140). It might be objected that the sense in which a billiard ball *causes* another to move is different from the sense in which a human agent *causes* his arm to move, but Lowe does not think that «cause» is thus ambiguous, and considers this kind of objection not compatible with a naturalistic account of human beings. In the case of a human agent who caused her arm to rise, to refer to the *events* which caused her arm's rising, we must refer «*at least once* to a very different sort of event from the sort of event we could refer to in the case of an inanimate agent such as a billiard ball» (Lowe 1983: 141). In the billiard ball case, we referred to *B's moving* as an event that caused *C*'s moving, and B's moving is a physical event. Analogously, in the arm

raising case we find events which we could refer to as having caused A's arm to rise: some of these events will be physical (as the contracting of *A*'s muscles), but we will also find *at least one* event (A's ø-ing) that is a mental event of some sort. What Lowe underlines is that the difference between a human agent's causing something and an inanimate agent's causing something does not reside in any difference in the sense of «cause», but only in the fact that human agents, unlike inanimate ones, have mental states that are causally efficacious. On Lowe's view, then, if we accept this, then we cannot escape the absurdity of saying things such as «A's causing x caused x» (Lowe 1983: 141).

Hornsby concedes that sentences from the pattern of «A's causing x caused x», such as «Hornsby's writing a paper is caused by Lowe's causing her writing a paper», may be uninformative and inelegant: many more informative and more elegant sentences which convey a similar message could be used. She also agrees with Lowe that is often possible to deduce an instance of «A's causing x caused x» from premises she should accept (Hornsby 1983: 141).

Nevertheless, on Hornsby's view, Lowe's reason for deriving «A's causing x caused x» was that he hoped to cast in doubt her assumption that actions are events: but if we must reject the assumption that actions are events, then, according to Hornsby, we also must reject the claim that B's hitting ball C is an event. Hornsby concludes by stating that although it might be strange to use many instances of «A's causing x caused x», they «can be got from unexceptionable premises by truth-preserving steps» (Hornsby 1983: 142).

The dispute between Lowe and Hornsby could have gone on *ad infinitum*. Sandis (2006) suggests that, in order to say who is right between Hornsby and Lowe, we have to specify how the term *cause* is used. Indeed, the term *cause* can denote a *relatum* of a causal relation and, in this case, it cannot be identical with the holding of the relation in question; or it can denote something that causally explains the occurrence of an event and, in this case, it is not causally related to the event in question. As Sandis points out, a *relatum* of a causal relation cannot be identical with the holding of the relation in question. But this objection does not work with causal explanation, where a fact concerning the holding of a causal

relation can explain (under a different description) why one of the *relata* (the effect) occurred (Sandis 2006: 180).

Focussing on the statement «John's raising his arm caused his arm to rise»: understood as the claim that the rising of John's arm can be causally explained by the fact that an event of John's raising it occurred, it is compatible with the statement «John's raising his arm *was* his causing his arm to rise», understood as an identity claim between events. The former statement, indeed, states that the fact that one event occurred (John's causing his arm to rise) causally explains why the event of which the aforementioned event was a causing (the event of John's arm rising) occurred. Therefore, as Sandis underlines, a statement that concerns an event which is the causing of another event may be capable of causally explaining (as opposed to bringing about) why the latter event occurred (Sandis 2006: 180). If we accept the distinction between causal explanations and causal relations, then we may identify the cause of a killing with the causing of a killing without referring to causal *relata*, but referring to something capable of causal explanation.[37]

In Sandis' perspective, we can accept Hornsby's statement «A's causing x caused x» only if we are speaking at the level of causal explanation where we can explain by reference to the holding of a causal relation why one of the *relata*, the effect (under different description), occurred.

2.4 On Causal Theories

In «Actions are not Events», Kent Bach claims that «on all sides of the debate on the individuation of action it is innocently presupposed that actions are events, as in the context of arguments regarding times, places, and causes of actions» (Bach 1980: 114). What Bach claims is consistent with our investigation in the previous chapter and in 2.2 and 2.3, where it is assumed that actions are (a kind of) events

[37] As Sandis specifies, this is what Davidson does (Davidson 2001: 150-162), being the distinction between causal explanations and causal relations his own (Sandis 2006: 181). Davidson's claims concerning the relation between causal relation and causal explanation of events that are actions will be discussed in the following 2.6.

somehow caused or brought about. The assumption that actions are events is discussed by Bach, who proposes a view according to which actions are not events, but «instances of a certain relation, the relation of bringing about (or making happen), whose terms are agents and events» (Bach 1980: 114). In what follows, before exploring Bach's relational view on actions (2.4.2), I focus on his analysis of a puzzle that arises within what he calls the Causal Theory when actions are conceived as events (2.4.1).

2.4.1 Actions as Events

Bach points out that, by analysing actions in terms of events, the different versions of Causal Theory (or Causalism) make attractive the view that actions *are* events (Bach 1980: 116). What are, then, events? Bach specifies that there are numerous theories about what events are, but an assumption common to most theories is that events exist in space and time and that they enter into causal relations as causes and as effects (Bach 1980: 115).

The Causal Theory holds that the production of a change by an agent counts as the performance of an action only if that change *is caused* in the right way by the right sort of psychological event. The rightness here is what the various versions of the theory differ on, but they all agree that an action involves one mental event causing a physical event (Bach 1980: 116). The various versions of the Causal Theory, then, share the view that an agent's behaviour counts as an action just in case it has a psychological cause: «Such psychological states as intentions, wants-and-beliefs, reasons, and volitions have been put forth as the requisite type of cause» (Bach 1978: 361).

Moreover, the various versions of Causal Theory do not differ only on the kind of psychological cause that makes a certain behaviour an action, but they also differ on what event *the* action is to be identified with: is the action to be identified with the psychological event, the physical event, or both? To simplify matters, Bach starts by discussing a case involving a mere bodily movement: suppose A

performs the action of wiggling her finger. For this performance being an action in the sense of Causal Theory, it is needed that it is not caused by an electrical shock or a muscle spasm. Causal Theory, as we have said, requires that a certain mental episode caused A's finger to wiggle.

There are, then, two distinct events involved here: *i*) the mental episode, and ii) the finger's wiggling: what is to be investigated is their relation to A's action (the action of wiggling her finger). In particular, it is to be clarified if A's action is to be identified with one or the other of these events, or with both (Bach 1980: 117). Bach explains that each of these possibilities has been defended:

1. The most common view[38] holds that the action of A's wiggling her finger *just is* the event of A's finger wiggling (this event *counts as* an action if and only if it is caused by the right mental episode). Therefore, A's action is identified with the event of bodily movement.
2. A second view holds that actions are not bodily movements, but causes of bodily movements, and the action is identified with the mental episode itself (a willing, a volition or a trying). Therefore, A's action of wiggling her finger is not (and does not include) the event of A's finger wiggling, but is simply the willing (or the trying) that A's finger wiggle.[39]
3. A third view holds that the action is the compound event made up of the relevant mental episode (a willing, a volition or a trying) and the event willed.[40]

To better illustrate these three views, Bach imagines a situation in which someone holds A's finger tightly in her hand and it takes some effort and two seconds before A's finger starts to wiggle, and then it wiggles for one second. Now the question is: did A wiggle her finger for one, two or three seconds?

[38] I refer to this view with the expression «the event-causal approach» (see 2.5).

[39] Bach connects this view to the work of H.A Prichard «Acting, Willing, Desiring» (Prichard 1949). We may include also Paul Pietrosky, who claims that while volitions are actions, bodily movements are never actions (Pietrosky 2000), and Jennifer Hornsby who, as we have seen, conceives actions as events of *trying* or attempting to act (1980, 1982, 1997).

[40] Carl Ginet claims that volitions *cause* bodily movements and both the bodily movements and the volitions are parts of actions: every action is, then, composed of the internal action *plus* the relevant effects in the body (Ginet 1990).

The three above-mentioned views provide different answers:

1. The first view says that A tried to wiggle her finger for two seconds, and she actually wiggled her finger for only one second;
2. The second view states that A wiggled her finger for two seconds;
3. The third view denies that A's action of wiggling her finger ended just when A's finger starts to wiggle, and answers that the action took three seconds.

Bach acknowledges that if we take into consideration actions that go beyond mere bodily movements (complex actions in Feinberg's terminology), matters can be complicated: here, he is referring to actions such as shooting and killing, and his example is of the kind we have discussed in 2.1 and 2.2.

We have a camper who, by moving his finger, presses the trigger of his gun, fires the gun, thereby shooting (with the intention to kill) a coyote. The coyote, as we may imagine, does not die for twenty-four hours. We already know some answers that have been given to the question about *when* the camper killed the coyote (2.2), and following Bach's recap, we have that:

a. If the action of killing the coyote is identical with the action of firing the gun, then the camper killed the coyote a day before the coyote died.
b. If the action of killing is to be identified with the event of the coyote dying, then the camper killed the coyote a day after he fired the gun (and the camper himself could have been killed before then, as our sniper who killed herself before the President died).
c. If the action corresponds to the whole series of events ending in the death of the coyote, then the killing took a whole day.

The three answers to the question about *when* the camper killed the coyote (a, b, and c) do not correspond to the three above-mentioned views (1, 2, and 3), rather they refer to theories of action individuation analysed in the previous chapter.

However, Bach's summary enlightens the sort of puzzles concerning location and causation of actions when they are conceived as events. From his perspective, also the question of *how many* actions were performed is a piece of the puzzle. The

camper moved his finger, pressed the trigger, fired the gun, shot the coyote, and killed the coyote… and even if we agree that we have tokens of five types of action, it remains to say how many actions were performed: one (belonging to five types), one per type (five actions), or some number in between? (Bach 1980: 117)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, different solutions have been provided, but the main views over the issue of action individuation (understood as an issue concerning the enumeration of actions) share the assumption that actions are events properly caused (see especially 1.5).

The issue of enumerating actions and that of the individuation of the camper's action are strictly tied. As Bach clarifies, if one says that the camper killed the coyote a day after he fired the gun, then she admits that the killing and the firing are two distinct actions (the killing and the firing are two different actions in virtue of their being events that occurred at two different times). Differently, if one claims that the camper's firing the gun was identical with his killing the coyote, then she is forced to say that the camper killed the coyote a day before the coyote died. What is to be underlined is that, as Bach says, this kind of conundrums arise when it is assumed that actions are events (rightly caused) and that they must be individuated *qua* events (see 1.7.2).

2.4.2 The Relational View

If «the fundamental question of action theory is what makes a piece of behaviour qualify as an action» (Bach 1978: 361), then, according to Bach, Causalism is fundamentally correct: «Behaviour counts as action because, and only because, it occurs as a result of something psychological on the part of the agent» (Bach 1978: 362). However, to accept this does not commit us to accept the assumption that actions are events. According to Bach's relational view, indeed, actions are not events, but *bringings about* or, more precisely, actions are instances of the relation of bringing about (or making happen), whose terms are agents and events.

To qualify his relational view, Bach starts by distinguishing between the relevant sense of action *qua* bringing about, and the sense in which the event

brought about is an action. To make this distinction clear, Bach makes the case that Wilbur bends the spoke of a bicycle wheel: what is relevant is not whether the spoke's bending is an event, but whether Wilbur's bending of the spoke is an event. As we have already seen, «the bending of the spoke» is subjected to intransitive and transitive readings like the gerundive forms of many action verbs such as *opening*, *heating*, *moving*... if we take them intransitively, Bach notices, they surely designate events (Bach 1980: 114).

Bach claims that the difference between a transitive reading and an intransitive one of a phrase like «my falling down» is conveniently ignored by Davidson who writes:

> If I fall down, this is an event whether I do it intentionally or not. If you thought my falling was an accident and later discovered I did it on purpose, you would not be tempted to withdraw your claim that you had witnessed an event. (Davidson 2001: 113)

Here Davidson is dismissing von Wright's view that actions are not events but bringings about of events: von Wright puts action sentences into the following form: «*x* brings it about that a state where *p* changes into a state where *q*». This view according to which action sentences do not describe the same event as the sentence embedded in them is endorsed also by Chisholm (1964). His proposal consists in actions sentences having the form «*x* brings it about that *p*», or «*x* makes it true that *p*», where the entities to which the expressions that replace «p» refer are «states of affairs». Chisholm specifies that states of affairs may be changes, events as well as unchanges (Chisholm 1964: 615).

Going back to Bach, according to him, Davidson ignores the difference between reading «my falling down» as an event description and as an action description. Indeed, the phrase «my falling down» *qua* an action description can be paraphrased as «my bringing about my falling down», where «my falling down» occurs as an event description (Bach 1980: 116).

By using examples like «He carved the roast», «He fell down», «The doctor removed the patient's appendix», Davidson admits that he finds he is puzzled as to

what the agent brings about. His problem is not that he cannot imagine that there is some bodily movement that the agent may be said to bring about, but that he sees no way automatically to produce the right description from the original sentence:

> No doubt each time a man walks to the corner there is some way he makes his body move; but of course it does not follow that there is some one way he makes his body move every time he walks to the corner. (Davidson 2001: 128)

According to Bach, Davidson does not explain why, on the view (contrary to his own) that action sentences do not describe the same event as the sentence embedded in them, there must be a mechanical way of deriving from an action sentence a description of the event brought about by the agent. According to Bach, then, Davidson fails to make a case against the view that actions are not events (Bach 1980: 116).

What Davidson does is to assume that actions are events and, consequently, that action sentences describe events. In considering Chisholm's representation of the form of action sentences as «x makes it happen that p», Davidson not only says that «whatever we put for "p" we have to interpret it as describing some event», but also adds that «it is natural to say that the whole sentences of the form "*x* makes it happen that *p*" also describe events» (Davidson 2001: 112). Bach underlines that Davidson does not say why (Bach 1980: 115)[41]. According to Bach, Davidson's position is emblematical: the ideas that actions are events and that action sentences describe events are not argued for, but they are assumed to be true.

Bach also distinguishes his relational view – that is a version of Causal Theory according to which the relation essential to action is analysed in terms of a causal relation between events – from what he calls «Chisholm's controversial Agency

[41] The fact that Davidson does not support with arguments that actions are events is also noticed by Alvarez and Hyman (1998). According to them, «Davidson *argues* that we cannot transform action sentences into logical notation without quantifying over events, but he *assumes* that the events we need quantify over are the actions that these sentences report» (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 225).

Theory» on which bringing about is an *irreducible* relation between agents and event (Bach 1980: 114). On Chisholm's theory of agency, the agent's role with respect to her action is to be understood in terms of an irreducible agent-causal power (Chisholm 1964).

According to Bach, even if we suppose that actions are causings, it does not follow that actions are events. As has been argued by various authors (Bach quotes Kim (1976) and Wilson (1979) but also, as we have already seen in 2.2, Weintraub (2003)), Bach claims that one event's causing another is not itself an event because we cannot identify the causing with either the cause or the effect. Furthermore, even if we suppose that these two events combine to form a composite event, it is odd to describe the composite event as the causing of one event by another (Bach 1980: 117-118)[42].

Whether we construe actions as irreducible bringings about or ultimately as causings, we have not the need to assign times and places to them, though of course the events they involve are datable and locatable. According to Bach, it is not clear that we *should* individuate actions by means of answering questions like: «How many actions did x perform at t?» or «How many things did x do at t?» and «Did the camper perform one action or five?», «Did he do one thing or five?».

According to Bach, the relational view allows us to reformulate these questions. We may ask how many events the camper brought about, and the answer is five, but in answering this question we need not say also how many actions the camper performed. What the camper did is not to perform a series of actions one after another (moving his finger, pressing the trigger, firing the gun, shooting the coyote, killing the coyote). Rather, the camper «in one stroke brought about a series of events one after another» (Bach 1980: 118). According to Bach, this is just another way to say that the camper brought about (on the Causal theory, that a certain mental episode caused) his finger to move, which caused the trigger to be pulled,

[42] Bach reports a case made by Davis (1979: 35): we may add an action of praising Sue together with the resulting change in Sue and say that the combination is itself one action, the action of making Sue happy. Nonetheless, according to Davis, this pair of actions seems to remain a pair of distinct events, not a larger event (Bach 1980: 118).

which caused the gun to fire, which caused the coyote to be shot, which caused the coyote to die.

If actions are instances of a relation, a theory of the individuation of actions is not required: instances are not individuals and are not subject to quantification. It would be as if in the case of a red, round ball, someone asked: «How many instances are there? One or two?». The only appropriate answer is, on Bach's view, that there is an instance of redness and an instance of roundness, but one and the same individual (the ball) is an instance of both. Or, more easily, we can say that one individual is an instance of both properties, that is, that the ball is red and round. By accepting that actions are instances of the relation of bringing about between agents and events, we have it that an action is performed if and only if an agent has brought about an event**,** and we need not enumerate actions, but only agents and events.

> Once we have specified all the relevant events in the act sequence and have described them as stemming from a mental episode in the way appropriate to action, we have said all we need to say about which actions were performed and what the agent did (Bach 1980: 119).

As far as actions and causal relations are concerned, since, according to the relational view, actions are not events, they do not enter straightforwardly into causal relations: they are neither causes nor effects. This is not in contrast to the Causal Theory of action, in so far as it does not contend that actions are caused, but only that an action is performed if a change is caused in the right way by a mental episode of the right sort. When the Causal Theory takes the relation of bringing about to be reducible to a relation between two events (one of which causes the other), it might be tempted to speak of actions being caused in the sense that the first event in the pair is caused and in turn causes the second. According to Bach, as we have seen, this is a dubious sense of speaking about *actions* as being caused. In the same way, it is dubious to speak of actions as having effects in the sense that the second event in the pair has an effect. It would be more appropriate to speak only of those events themselves as being caused or having effects.

On Bach's view, indeed, since actions are not events, they are neither causes nor effects. If we want to know why one agent did something, we have to seek an explanation of the mental episode that caused what was done, so as if we want to know the consequences of an action, we have to look to the effects of what was done (Bach 1980: 120).

2.5 THE EVENT-CAUSAL APPROACH

With the expression «event-causal approach» we refer to the standard view of what Bach calls causal theory (or causalism). According to the event-causal approach (sometimes also called Standard View see Hornsby 2004) actions are events and an event is an action if and only if it is *rightly* caused and explained (Davidson 2001; Goldman 1970; Brand 1984; Bratman 1987; Dretske 1988; Mele 1992, 2003; Enç 2003; Schlosser 2011). This approach has been defined a reductive approach *qua* it reduces the role of the agent who acts to the causal roles of agent-involving events (Velleman 1992). Opponents of the event-causal approach *qua* reductive approach are of two kinds: they are proponents of the agent-causal approach, or, otherwise, they are proponents of some version of the volitional and trying theory according to which actions are initiated (or caused, or brought about) by a mental act of the will (volition, trying, attempt), which is not itself caused by anything else (see O'Brien 2015). The event-causal approach may be defined a reductive approach also because, by identifying the action with bodily movements, it provides a reductive notion of action that takes into account only *physical* actions (Hornsby 2004). In the following subsections, I discuss the event-causal approach (2.5.1) by focussing on the issue of deviant causal chains (2.5.2) and on the understanding of the accordion effect by two proponents of this approach: Davidson (2001) and Aguilar (2007) (2.5.3).

2.5.1 ACTIONS AS EVENTS RIGHTLY CAUSED AND EXPLAINED

The event-causal approach comprises two kinds of claims*:* the former regards the nature of action, the latter concerns reason explanation. To simplify matters, we can distinguish, following Schlosser (2011: 14):

- Causal theory of the *nature* of action: An agent-involving event is an action if and only if it is caused by the right agent-involving mental states and events in the right way.
- Causal theory of *reason explanation*: Reason explanations of actions are explanations in terms of the agent's mental states and events that rationalize and causally explain her performance. In particular, a reason explanation of an action in terms of the agent's mental states and events is true only if those states and events causally explain the action.

Different versions of the event-causal approach differ over what are the *right* kind of mental events (or states) and the *right* way of causing (the event that is) the action. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to say that in all these versions the right mental event is some mental attitude (such as intention, desire, belief) that rationalizes and causally explains the performance of the action, and that the right way of causation is a causation that avoids *deviant causal chains* (a *non-deviant* causation).

Before exploring the issue of deviant chains, I outline the philosophical roots of the event-causal approach. The Causal theory of the nature of action and the Causal theory of reason explanation both stem from Davidson' s writings on action and events (Davidson 2001), in particular from two of his essays: «Actions, Reasons and Causes» (Davidson 2001: 5-20), and «Agency» (Davidson 2001: 45-62).

In «Actions, Reasons and Causes», Davidson argues that giving the reason for which an action was performed is giving an explanation called *rationalization*, and that rationalization is a species of causal explanation. A reason r*ationalizes* an action only if it says something the agent saw, or thought she saw in her action: indeed**,** we cannot explain why a person did A simply by saying that A appealed to

her. If an agent does something for a reason, then she can be characterized as *i*) having some sort of pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind, and *ii*) believing (or knowing, perceiving, noticing, remembering) that her action is of that kind (Davidson 2001: 4). Under *i*) Davidson includes desires, wantings, urges, promptings, and so on. The term *attitude* covers both permanent character traits and the most passing fancy that prompts a unique action. According to Davidson, giving the reason why an agent did something is often a matter of naming the pro attitude *i*) or the related belief *ii*) or both. This pair is called by Davidson the «primary reason» why the agent performed the action (Davidson 2001: 4). Then, Davidson reformulates the claim that rationalizations are causal explanations by saying that:

1. in order to understand how a reason rationalizes an action it is necessary and sufficient that we see how to construct a primary reason, and
2. a primary reason for an action is its cause.

As we have already seen, according to Davidson, if I flip the switch, turn on the light, illuminate the room, and unbeknownst to me I also alert a prowler, I performed only one action of which four descriptions have been given. I flipped the switch *because* I wanted to turn on the light, and by saying «I wanted to turn on the light» I give my reason for the flipping. What Davidson underlines is that by giving this reason, I do not rationalize my alerting of the prowler nor my illuminating of the room. Davidson explains that, reasons may rationalize what the agent does under a certain description and not under another: indeed, we cannot conclude, from the fact that flipping the switch was identical with alerting the prowler, that my reason for alerting the prowler was that I wanted to turn on the light (Davidson 2001: 5). This character of action descriptions in rationalizations can be marked by stating a necessary condition for primary reasons:

> C1. *R* is a primary reason why an agent performed the action *A* under the 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 the description *d*, has that property. (Davidson 2001: 5)

Davidson goes on noticing that to know a primary reason why an agent acted is to know an intention *with which* the action was done, but to know the intention is not necessarily to know the primary reason in full detail. If James goes to church with the intention of pleasing his father, then he must have some pro attitude toward pleasing his father, but it needs more information in order to tell whether his reason is that he enjoys pleasing his father, or thinks it is right or his duty or an obligation. The expression «the intention with which James went to church» should not be taken to refer to an entity, state, disposition or event: rather it is used to generate new descriptions of actions in terms of their reasons (Davidson 2001: 8). To sum up, my action of flipping the light switch can be explained by reference to my having the desire to turn on the light in combination with my having the belief that flipping the switch turns on the light. Moreover, my action of flipping the light switch can be redescribed as the action of turning on the light (under which description it is intentional) and also as the act of alerting the prowler who, unbeknown to me, is hidden in my kitchen (under which description it is unintentional). The connection between the reason for the action and the action is understood by Davidson as a connection between two events (the agent's believing and desiring on the one hand, and her acting on the other). This connection is both *rational* and causal: it is rational because the primary reason reveals the action as coherent with certain traits of the agent, and it is *causal* because the agent's believing and desiring (e1) causes the agent's action (e2), if (e1) is indeed the reason for (e2)[43] .

[43] The impact of «Actions, reasons and causes» on the philosophy of mind and action over the past fifty years is incontestable. When it was published (1963), the philosophical orthodoxy concerning reason-explanation was anti-causalist. Following the Wittgensteinian view that reasons cannot be causes, most philosophers considered the relation between reasons and causes to be a logical relation (Wittgenstein 1953, 1958; Dray 1963; Anscombe 1963; von Wright 1971, see also Nannini 1992). As D'Oro explains, since the publication of «Actions, reasons and causes», the philosophy of action has been dominated by the view that rational explanations are a species of causal explanations, nonetheless some dissenting voices can be isolated (Tanney 1995; Hutto 1999; Schroeder 2001; Sehon 2005) (D'Oro 2007, 2012).
D'Oro and Sandis (2013) reconstruct the debate concerning reason explanation individuating three relevant phases of it:

In «Agency», Davidson claims that a person is the agent of an action if what she does can be described under an aspect that makes it intentional (Davidson 2001: 46). It is a mistake to suppose there is a class of intentional actions, indeed one and the same action may be both intentional and not intentional: I intentionally offend the man at the helpdesk, but I do not intentionally offend my brother's friend. Since my brother's friend is the man at the helpdesk, my offending the man at the helpdesk is identical with my offending my brother's friend. Davidson's claim is that «a person is the 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» (Davidson 2001: 46).

However, this leaves open the problem of what makes possible to describe a certain event as intentional under a description (and then to conceive it as an agent's action). According to Davidson, a way to justify attributions of agency is to show that a certain event was caused by something the agent did, such a criterion works when an agent does something (causes an event) by doing something other: to say that x caused the death of y, that is, that x killed y, is an elliptical way of saying that some act of x (something x did, such as put poison in the grapefruit) caused the death of y. Indeed, «the notion of cause appealed to here is ordinary event causality, the relation that holds between two events when one is cause of the other» (Davidson 2001: 49). But not every event we attribute to an agent as her action can be explained as caused by another event of which she is the agent:

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1. In the first phase, prior to Davidson's essay, the consensus was anti-causalist. The focus is on methodological issues related to our explanatory practices, and the philosophy of action is understood as part of the philosophy of social science.
2. The second phase starts with the publication of Davidson's essay. The consensus is causalist, and philosophy of action is closely aligned with the philosophy of mind. Hence, there is a shift from a focus on our explanatory practices towards an emphasis on metaphysical issues.
3. In the third phase, the Humean conception of reasons (all reasons must be explained by some psychological state of the agent from whom they are reasons) with which causalim is often associated is attacked and the philosophy of action comes into grater proximity with moral philosophy (D'Oro and Sandis 2013: 8).

For recent anti-psychologistic proposals of reasons for action see Alvarez (2010, 2013) and Tanney (2013).

according to Davidson, some actions must be primitive, that is, they cannot be analysed in terms of their causal relation to other acts of the same agent[44]. In ordinary actions such as pointing one's finger or tying one's shoelaces, primitive action is a bodily movement (Davidson 2001: 49). Davidson notices that the idea that primitive actions are bodily movements may arise two objections:

1. it may be said that, in order to point my finger, I do something that causes the finger to move, namely contract certain muscles; and perhaps this requires that I make certain events take place in my brain.
2. It may be said that some primitive actions involve more than a movement of the body. When I tie my shoelaces, there is on the one hand the movement of my fingers, and on the other the movement of the laces.

Davidson replies that

1. doing something that causes my finger to move does not cause me to move my finger, it *is* moving my finger.
2. Action requires that what the agent does is intentional under some description, and this in turn requires that what the agent does is known to her under the corresponding description. In the case of tying my shoelaces, I know I am doing the bodily movements required to tie my shoelaces. This is enough to individuate the bodily movement (the primitive action) in which the action (of tying my shoelaces) consists in (Davidson 2001: 50).

Going back to event causality, it cannot be used to explain the relation between an agent and her primitive action, since this kind of causality may expand the attribution of agency to include the consequences of the action, but cannot help understand the attribution of agency to the agent for her primitive actions

What happens if, to explain the relation between the agent and her primitive action, we appeal to the agent causality? Davidson makes two hypotheses:

[44] The existence of primitive (or basic) actions is a central issue for various versions of the event-causal approach, and for causal theory in general. For a detailed overview on this topic see Sandis (2010).

1. the causing of a primitive action is an event discrete from the primitive action or
2. the causing of a primitive action is not a discrete event.

If it is the case that 1., causing a primitive action introduces an event separate from (and prior to) the action**,** is that prior event an action or not? If it is an action, then the action we were considering was not primitive. If it is not an action, we are employing the notion of a causing that is not a doing which is, according to Davidson, extremely obscure.

If it is the case that 2., the causing of a primitive action coincides with the action itself and the concept of cause seems to play no role (Davidson 2001: 52), but Davidson emphasizes that «Causality is central to the concept of agency» (Davidson 2001: 53). The kind of causality he is referring to is the ordinary causality between events, and concerns the effects and not the causes of actions. To sum up, the relation between the agent and her primitive action has nothing directly to do with the notion of cause, causality applies to the primitive action and its consequences, thus it applies to relations between events. Moreover, event causality allows us to redescribe actions, but it does not allow us to explain what to be an agent is. Action requires that what the agent does is intentional under some description, and this in turn requires that what the agent does is known to her under some description. In order to individuate the bodily movement (the primitive action) in which the action consists in, it is required that the agent knows what she is doing under some description. My intention to tie my shoelaces is all that is required to individuate my fingers moving as my primitive action. Our primitive actions are all the actions there are. If an event is an action, then under some description(s) it is a primitive one, and under some description(s) it is an intentional one, but the concept of being primitive and that of being intentional are intensional, and cannot mark out a *class* of actions (Davidson 2001: 61).

2.5.2 Deviant Causal Chains

The different versions of the event-causal approach all agree that the right kind of causation is a causation that avoids deviant causal chains (non deviant causation). A deviant causal chain is one in which causation does not give a reason explanation for the effects achieved by the agent: suppose a man whose intention is to kill his uncle is so agitated by this thought that he drives too fast and accidentally kills a pedestrian who happens to be his uncle. Even if the man's intention was to kill his uncle, the killing of his uncle was not achieved by the man's intention to kill him (Chisholm 1966). Moreover, the right kind of causation seems to be one that succeeds in guaranteeing the agent's control over her action and over the effects of her action (Bratman 2001; Mele 1995, 2003): An agent exercises control in this way only if her action and its effects are properly caused by the mental states and events that rationalize them. As Schlosser underlines, crucial to the event-causal approach are the causal roles of mental events and states, and in particular the causal and explanatory role of their intentional contents (Schlosser 2008, 2011).

In the following of this subsection, I focus on two recent understandings of the issue of deviant causal chains: the first is Schlosser's, which is internal to the event-causal approach (Schlosser 2008); the second is O'Brien's, which focuses on the ineliminable role of the agent's perspective in determining which causal pathways are deviant and which are not (O'Brien 2012).

Schlosser starts by discussing Davidson's climber case:

> A climber might want 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. (Davidson 2001: 79)

According to the event-causal approach, the reason states of the climber cause and rationalize his loosening the hold on the rope. What Schlosser points out is that the climber does not perform an action at all, except the loosening his hold on the

rope intentionally or for reasons, «hence, causation and rationalization by reason states is not sufficient for agency» (Schlosser 2008: 187). The standard causal theory requires that reason states cause movements in the right, non deviant, way: in the case of the climber, the reason states cause the bodily movement, but not directly. The causal chain, that starts from the reason states and ends to the movement, runs through a state of nervousness, which renders it false that the agent performs an action. The state of nervousness, the causal intermediary, renders the causal pathway deviant.

Schlosser explains that different kinds of deviant causal chains can be distinguished[45], but focuses on the two most important kinds of deviance: basic deviance and consequential deviance. All cases of deviance are characterized by the presence of some state or event that undermines the agent's control between the reason state and the event caused. In cases of basic deviance the event that undermines the control occurs between the reason states and a basic action (that is the equivalent of Davidson's primitive action: an action the agent performs without doing anything else), Davidson's climber example is a case of basic deviance. In the case of consequential deviance, the state or event that undermines the control occurs somewhere between a basic action and some outcome that the agent intended by performing that basic action. The standard example of consequential deviance concerns a sniper who has the intention of killing an enemy by shooting him. He carries out the intention, but misses. By producing the noise of the shot, though, he stampedes a herd of wild pigs which trample the enemy to death (Bishop 1989: 126)[46]. The sniper performs a basic action intentionally, for reasons, and he is in control as far as that basic action is

[45] Davidson distinguishes between a primary deviance that occurs between the mental event and the initial bodily movement, and a secondary deviance that breaks the causal path from initial bodily movement to later consequences (Davidson 2001: 78-79). Along Davidson's lines, antecedential deviance and consequential deviance are distinguished by Brand (Brand 1984). Mele individuates primary and secondary deviance (Mele 1992, 2003). Antecedential or primary deviance is what Schlosser calls basic deviance, where the expression «basic deviance» is borrowed from Bishop (1989). Bishop (1989) and Enç (2003) isolate a further kind of deviance that occurs when the agent's control is undermined by an intervening agent. However, cases of this kind of deviance may be understood as special cases of either basic or consequential deviance (Schlosser 2008: 188).

[46] Chisholm's example of the man who kills his uncle is of the same kind (Chisholm 1966).

concerned. The deviance affects the outcome that the agent intended to bring about by performing the basic action.

Schlosser clarifies that this kind of cases are thought to constitute counter-example because the agent's end is not to perform the basic action. The sniper's end is to kill his enemy: he intends to do so, and his intention *de facto* causes the enemy's death. According to what Schlosser calls a *simple* standard causal theory, *a*) the sniper not only performs the action of firing the shot intentionally and for reasons, but *b*) he also kills the enemy intentionally and for reasons. Now, while a) is true, b) is clearly false. In considering b) true, simple standard causal theory is wrong (Schlosser 2008: 189). As Schlosser explains, a standard reply to consequential deviance consists in considering that what goes wrong in such cases is that the intended action is not caused according to plan (Brand 1984; Bishop 1989; Mele 2003).

The standard causal model can exclude cases like that by requiring that actions are *guided* by the contents of the relevant reason states. In cases of consequential deviance, the agent has a certain action-plan that is included in the contents of the relevant reason states (the sniper's action-plan consists in the intention to kill the enemy by shooting him). «To say that the performance of the action must be guided by the intention is to say, simply, that the way in which the intended end is brought about must be in accord with the agent's action-plan, which is incorporated in the content of the intention» (Schlosser 2008: 189). Schlosser considers a simple case of non basic action, where actions are caused by intentions: an agent S wants to bring about E. S knows that performing a basic action A is a necessary means in order to bring about E. S forms the intention to bring about E by A-ing. So, in order to obtain E, S must A, which means that S must form an intention to A. Successful performance of the non-basic action requires that S's A-ing brings about E, and how likely it is that S brings about E by A-ing depends on the reliability of the causal connection between A-ings and occurrences of E. The plan says that E must be brought about by A-ing (rather than some chain of events that results in E). In order to bring about E, S must form an intention to A, and the formation of this intention must also be guided by the

agent's action-plan: S must form an intention to perform a basic action of the type specified in the action-plan:

> This can be accounted for in standard causal terms, if it is granted that the intentional contents of reason states can be causally relevant. Because then, the action-plan can be causally relevant as to whether the intention to bring about E by A-ing causes an intention to A. (Schlosser 2008: 189-190)

Cases of consequential deviance are so excluded by the standard causal theory which requires guidance by reason states. The notion of guidance assumes that reason states are causally efficacious in virtue of their contents, and is conceived as accordance between the actual sequence of events and the agent's action-plan.

Nevertheless, the issue of basic deviance is understood as separate from that of consequential deviance just seen, and is thought to require its own solution[47]. According to Bishop (1989), the solution to the problem of consequential deviance does not apply to basic deviance: since guidance by reason states presupposes that the agent has a relevant action-plan that is incorporated in the contents of those states, then the guiding role of the contents of mental attitudes can only solve the problem of consequential deviance: Indeed, «we do not plan basic actions, because we do not have to know how or by what means to bring them about. We just do them; that is why they are basic. But as guidance is guidance by a plan, reference to guidance by reason states cannot help with basic deviance» (Schlosser 2008: 190, cf. Bishop 1989: 132-34).

In order to solve the problem of basic deviance, different strategies have been adopted. Bishop considers counterfactual and teleological solutions to the problem of basic deviance (Bishop 1989), others require that an action is proximately or

[47] For a recent, specific solution for basic deviance see Aguilar (2012). In his essay, Aguilar defends the idea that *reliability* offers a way of avoiding basic causal deviance by eliminating the possibility of accidental occurrences in the production of an intentional basic action. Reliability is defined by Aguilar «as a measurable capacity exhibited by a process or a system to satisfy a given goal» (Aguilar 2012: 7): it eliminates the possibility that the causal mechanism involved in the production of an action can give rise to an accidental event that fortuitously happens to be the intended behaviour (Aguilar 2012: 8).

directly caused by an intention (Brand 1984; Thalberg 1984; Mele 1992)[48]. Schlosser argues that a solution to the problem of basic deviance does not require additional conditions or a different strategy from that used to accommodate cases of consequential deviance: The solution to the problem of consequential deviance assumes that the intentional contents of reason states are causally relevant and causally explanatory, such an assumption provides us with the following solution to the problem of basic deviance (Schlosser 2008: 191-192).

The standard causal model not only requires that mental states rationalize and cause actions, but, as we have seen with respect to the consequential deviance, it also requires that reason states cause and causally explain actions in virtue of their contents. In the climber case, the reason states cause the nervousness and the nervousness causes the movement: the reason states cause and explain the occurrence of the movement *de facto*, but not in the sense required. We may agree that if the agent had not had the reason states, the bodily movement would not have been performed, we may also agree, thus, that there is a sense in which reason states are causally explanatory of the movement. Nonetheless, this is not enough to ensure the right kind of causation: the standard causal model requires that reason states cause and causally explain actions *in virtue of* their intentional contents and this is violated in the climber case. Indeed, even if the relation of causation holds, if we consider the whole causal pathway from the reason states to the movement, the relation of causation in virtue of content and the relation of being explanatory in virtue of content break down. The reason states cause the nervousness which in turn causes the movement, thus it is possible to say that reason states cause the movement. Nonetheless, the reason states do not cause the movement in virtue of their contents. Accordingly, the reason states do not explain

[48]The proximity solution requires that intentions are the proximate or immediate causal antecedents of all actions. This solution excludes the possibility of basic deviance by excluding *all* causal intermediaries. Schlosser considers proximity solution unsatisfying. Indeed, as has been pointed out, actions that are done for a reasons are responses to those reasons (Audi 1997; Bishop 1989; Stoutland 1998). On the one hand, the proximity solution guarantees that the action is caused and rationalized in a way that ensures agential control, but on the other hand it does not treat the action as a response to the reason state *qua* reason state. The proximity solution does not show that the reason state causes the action because it is a reason state: although «the reason state causes and rationalizes the action, the reason state's rationalizing the action seems to be irrelevant to its causing it» (Schlosser 2008: 191).

the occurrence of the particular movement in virtue of their contents, and the occurrence of that particular type of movement rather than another cannot be explained by reference to the contents of the reason states.

According to Schlosser, not only causation in virtue of the intentional content of reason states can accommodate basic deviance, but also captures the notion of reason-responsiveness:

> Being caused and causally explained in virtue of content, an action is not merely a response to a cause, but it is a response to a reason state *qua* reason state; it is a response to the content of the mental state in the light of which its performance appears as intelligible. (Schlosser 2008: 192)

In «Deviance and Causalism», O'Brien focuses on the role the agent's perspective plays in determining which causal pathways are deviant and which are not. She embraces a typical causalist view of mind-body relations in action, while denies the viability of a reduction of intentional action to causal terms (O'Brien 2012: 175-176). I do not tackle O'Brien's detailed analysis of causalist responses to deviance (Bishop's and Enç's), rather I focus on her positive proposal.

O' Brien starts by defining causalism as a theory of intentional action that characterizes the relation between intentional action and mental events in causal terms:

> Causalism: A is an intentional action iff A is a behaviour that is caused by a mental item, such as intention, with appropriate mental content. (O'Brien 2012: 176)

According to O'Brien, Causalism, which offers constitutive conditions on intentional action, is unacceptable, but it is possible to formulate a *weaker* claim that is merely a generalization about intentional action, namely:

> Causal Commitment: if A is an intentional action, then an intention (with appropriate mental content) causes A. (O'Brien 2012: 176)

O'Brien, then, argues against Causalism, but not Causal Commitment.

Deviant causal cases – both primary/antecedential/basic deviant cases where the deviance occurs between the mental event and the initial bodily movement, and consequential deviant cases where the deviance occurs between the initial bodily movement and later movements and other consequences – seem to fit the causalist's conditions on intentional action. O'Brien points out that causalist's solution to deviant cases consists in further specifying the nature of a *normal* causal pathway:

> Causalism: A is an intentional action iff A is behaviour that is caused by a mental item, such as intention, with appropriate mental content.
> Supplement: a bodily movement is caused by an intention in the right way iff . . ..(O'Brien 2012: 177)

The causalist approach to deviance attempts to establish what conditions are sufficient for intentional actions but ignores the role of the agent's perspective in the possible solution to this problem. To introduce her proposal, O'Brien presents a pair of cases in which an agent attempts to perform an intentional action. In both cases the causal chain involves nervousness. In the first case, the causal chain is deviant and prevents intentional action, while in the second case it is not deviant and permits the intentional action. Here are the two cases:

> Case A: Maria – Before
> Maria is employed by the committee in charge of the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Her job is to let go of balloons that she is holding during the ceremony, allowing them to float over the stadium. When it is time to let them go, she forms the intention, 'I will let the balloons go' (INT). However, her intention causes nervousness, and to her surprise, the nervousness causes her to let go of the balloons. (O'Brien 2012: 179)

> Case B: Maria – After
>
> Maria (of Case A) is employed by the committee in charge of the closing ceremony of the Olympics. Her job is to let go of balloons that she is holding during the ceremony. Because of her past experience with the opening ceremony, and experiences of practice sessions, she predicts that when it is time to let them go, and she forms the intention, 'I will let the balloons go' (INT), her intention will cause nervousness, and the nervousness will cause her to let go. She reasons about what to do to deal with her problem, and comes to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to do nothing differently. She predicts that her intention will cause her to be nervous, this will cause her to let go, which is what she wants to do. When the time comes to let go, she forms the intention, 'I will let the balloons go' (INT), her intention causes nervousness, which causes her to let go. (O'Brien 2012: 180)

The case of Maria-Before presents a standard o basic deviance (similar to Davidson's case of the climber). In Maria-After, events follow a plan, such a plan is the outcome of an accurate prediction and careful deliberation about how to deal with the problem.

O'Brien claims that the kind of control that guarantees the intentional action can be causally diverse, and that the agent's perspective on her action can play a role in determining such a control. According to O'Brien, the problem for causalists stems from the great diversity among the causal pathways involved in intentional action. What O'Brien believes is that the agent's perspective on causal pathways plays an important role in accounting for this diversity (O'Brien 2012: 189). In the case of Maria-After, a causal pathway between intention and behaviour is selected by the agent as a route to her intended outcome and can therefore make her action intentional. Nonetheless, not any causal pathways that an agent may select can be used by her as a mechanism of control: the agent has to choose a causal pathway about which she could make an accurate prediction. In the case of Maria-After the causal pathway would be deviant if it had not been for the fact that Maria accurately predicted its outcome and selected it as a mechanism of control. The

problem for causalism is that «it is difficult to see how we could find a purely causal understanding of a normal causal pathway if a pathway can become 'normal' because it is accurately predicted and selected by an agent» (O'Brien 2012: 190). On O'Brien's view, causalist attempts to solve the problem of deviance «by describing what a normal causal pathway is in terms that are independent of the agent's perspective on her action are foiled by the innovativeness of agents who select abnormal but predictable pathways as mechanisms of control and action» (O'Brien 2012: 190).

In order to further clarify the problems that deviant causal chains pose to causalism, O'Brien considers a case in which a normal causal pathway is made inadmissible by the agent's rejection of it. There is Carol, who suffers from a neurophysiological problem that prevents her intention from causing her arm to go up**.** Carol, to sort out her problem, can choose between seeing a neurophysiologist and buying a newly developed machine to bridge the broken connection. Since Carol is full of hatred toward neurophysiologists and believes that they are unreliable, she buys the machine. By refusing to see the neurophysiologist and buying the machine, Carole chooses one causal pathway and rules out the other. O'Brien claims that, in such cases, «the agent's rejection of a causal pathway is a determinant of whether or not it counts as viable for intentional action» (O'Brien 2012: 190). O' Brien concludes that even if causalism elaborates an abstract and unified characterization of all control-preserving causal pathways, it does not follow that an intention that causes a bodily movement by one of these pathways counts as a production of an intentional action.
Indeed, it is possible that the pathway has been rejected by the agent:

> If the agent can play a role in determining what counts as a viable causal pathway, then reference to the agent's perspective on what counts as a viable causal pathway cannot be omitted from a completed theory of intentional action. (O'Brien 2012: 191)

When causalism offers conditions on the normal causal pathways of intentional action it does not take into account the agent's perspective, and therefore it cannot work.

What O'Brien suggests is that a theory of intentional action should not reduce intentional action to purely causal terms, which is not to say that a theory of intentional action should abandon causal theory of mind-body relations. Rather, a theory of intentional action should accommodate the agent's perspective on her action. The strategy suggested by O'Brien consists in understanding intentional action in terms of a bodily movement that *matches* the content of the agent's intention in action and relevant beliefs. The focus of the strategy would be on those features of mental events that have to do with their content, and on their relation with bodily movements. The relation between the content of the agent's intention and the bodily movement can be understood as a matching relation. Such a relation may be analysed in terms of a movement's meeting the requirements that are specified in the content of the intention:

> A bodily movement, M, is an intentional action iff it meets the requirements in the contents of the intention (and other relevant beliefs) that is directed upon it. (O'Brien 2012: 192)

The *matching* relationship that obtains between intentions and bodily movements is a relationship that «may be explicable in terms of meeting requirements that the agent herself has posed with her intention» (O'Brien 2012: 192). This relationship can be generalized to all practical agents and has the feature of unifying all intentional actions. As O'Brien clarifies, this strategy can be carried out without abandoning Causal Commitment, which is a generalization of intentional action that captures much of the appeal of causalism (O'Brien 2012: 192).

To sum up, Schlosser's proposal focuses on the difference between basic deviance and consequential deviance, and consists in applying to cases of basic deviance the standard solution used by causalists in cases of consequential deviance. The solution to the problem of consequential deviance assumes that the intentional contents of reason states are causally relevant and causally

explanatory. According to Schlosser**,** causation in virtue of the intentional content of reason states not only can accommodate basic deviance, but also captures the notion of reason-responsiveness, according to which an action is a response to the content of the mental state. Schlosser's proposal is internal to the standard causal view and finds a solution consistent with the main structure of what can be defined standard causalism (cf. O'Brien 2012), according to which A is an intentional action iff A is a behaviour that is caused by a mental item, such as an intention, with appropriate mental content.

On the other hand, O'Brien's proposal focuses on the role of the agent's perspective in determining which causal pathways are deviant and which are not. She suggests that a theory of intentional action should not reduce intentional action to purely causal terms, rather it should accommodate the agent's perspective on her action. O'Brien's strategy is not internal to the standard causal view, indeed she proposes to understand intentional action in terms of bodily movements that match the content of the agent's intention in action and relevant beliefs. In order to do that, Causalism needs to be abandoned in favour of Causal Commitment, according to which if A is an intentional action it is caused by an intention (with appropriate mental content). On O'Brien's view, Causal Commitment is a generalization on intentional action that captures much of the appeal of causalism and, at the same time, may accommodate the agent's perspective.

2.5.3 The Accordion Effect: Recent Understandings

In 2.5, we have seen that event-causality, while it cannot help to understand the attribution of agency to the agent as regards her primitive act, allows us to expand the attribution of agency to the consequences of the action. Effects and consequences of bodily movements are ordinarily attributed to the agents as their actions. In «Agency», Davidson refers to this feature of the language we use when we talk about actions with the expression «accordion effect» (Davidson 2001: 53).

In what follows, I outline the understandings of the accordion effect by two proponents of the event-causal approach: Davidson (2001) and Aguilar (2007).

In «Agency», Davidson writes that the accordion effect is a mark of agency because it allows us to attribute the effects of an event to a person only if that event is an action: «It is a way of enquiring whether an event is a case of agency to ask whether we can attribute its effect to a person» (Davidson 2001: 54). Davidson's example is quite clear: if Jones intentionally swings a bat that strikes a ball that hits and breaks a window, then we say that Jones not only struck the ball but also broke the window. What we do not say is that the bat, or even its movement, broke the window, though of course the movement of the bat caused the breakage (Davidson 2001: 54). On the other hand, whenever we say that a person did something where what we mention is not a bodily movement, we make her the agent not only of the mentioned event, but also of some bodily movement that brought it about (Jones not only broke the window, he also moved his arm).

According to Davidson, Giorgio's action of moving his hand can be described in terms of any of its causal effects, such as: «Giorgio's pulling the handle», or «Giorgio's opening the door», or «Giorgio's scaring his sister». What needs to be noted is that in Davidson's view, there is only *one* single action performed by Giorgio – the primitive action of moving his hand – with different descriptions based on its effects or on the circumstances surrounding its execution. What Davidson underlines is that once Giorgio has done one thing (move a finger), «each consequence presents us with a deed; an agent causes what his actions cause» (Davidson 2001: 54). If Giorgio moves his hand in such a way as to produce the opening of the door and thus the opening of the door causes the scaring of his sister, the accordion effect applies; indeed, it is possible to say both that Giorgio opened the door and that he scared his sister. The accordion effect does not reveal in what respect the single action performed by Giorgio is intentional: it is possible he did not intend to move his hand so as to produce the door's opening, nor to scare his sister, but for the accordion effect to be applied an intention is always required (Davidson 2001: 54). Thanks to the accordion effect, it is possible to extend (or contract) the descriptions of single (primitive) actions so as to include (or to exclude) effects and consequences of bodily movements. The plurality of

related descriptions corresponds to a single *descriptum*: such a *descriptum* is the bodily movement. What we extend or contract by means of the accordion effect are descriptions of single (primitive) actions: We cannot extend or contract the action, the action is always one and *always* a bodily movement (Davidson 2001: 58). Davidson concludes that our primitive actions, the ones we do not do by doing something else, are all the actions there are. «We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature» (Davidson 2001: 59).

Davidson's analysis of the accordion effect has been recently used to give an answer to the problem of the agential attribution within the event-causal approach by Aguilar (2007). The following example by Aguilar explains to what extent agential attribution is a problem for the event-causal approach:

> I can move someone else's arm by pushing a button provided some of the arm's nerves are appropriately connected to this button. However, when some reasons of the arm's owner appear to causally connect my pushing of the button with the movement of the arm, I no longer cause this movement; its owner does. (Aguilar 2007: 219)

Since the event-causal approach assumes that *all* actions are causal events, then agential attribution is a problem this causal approach: if I influence a person to have the reasons that cause her arm to move (say, by offering money to this person to move the arm), then I causally influence the causes of the arm's movement without causally influencing the movement of the arm. Aguilar defines this philosophical puzzle as «breaking the causal chain».[49]

[49] The idea that actions have the capacity to break the causal chain is presented by Hart and Honoré in their *Causation in the Law* (Hart and Honoré 1959), where they suggest that breaking the causal chain is a feature of actions (Aguilar 2007: 220). Aguilar believes that actions *are thought* to have this feature: we attribute this feature to actions because we need to recognize spheres of agential influence and preserve their integrity (Aguilar 2007: 220). In the last part of his essay, Aguilar explains that we are inclined to understand actions as breaking the causal chain whenever we want to locate the agential responsibility or whenever we believe that agential integrity is in peril. Otherwise, we see actions as a part of the flow of causal events (Aguilar 2007: 232).

Aguilar points out that three kinds of solutions have been provided to this puzzle by what he calls the orthodoxy of the standard causal approach:

1. the first solution appeals to reasons: they possess the capacity to screen off the causal influences of previous events in virtue of their being causal antecedents of actions;
2. the second solution concerns stressing the specific causal path leading to actions through reasons;
3. the third solution consists in attributing the job of causally guiding and sustaining an action to the intentions (Aguilar 2007: 222).

Nonetheless, Aguilar claims that these efforts do not answer the puzzle of the of breaking the causal chain, and proposes what he defines a much more economical solution: a correct way of describing and individuating actions. This solution also answers an objection raised by Drestske (1992) against the event-causal approach. The objection consists in arguing that the event-causal approach distorts the attribution of agency in cases of interpersonal interactions (Aguilar 2007: 224).

Dretske imagines the following interaction: there is a boy, Jimmy, who is capable of wiggling his ears. Dretske offers Jimmy one dollar to see him do the wiggling. Since Jimmy wants the dollar and believes that by wiggling his ears he will get the dollar, Jimmy wiggles his ears. According to the event-causal approach, Jimmy's behaviour is an action: it is caused by the right mental events, and these mental events causally explain the execution of that particular behaviour. Moreover, the event-casual approach considers the basic elements involved in the execution of an action as parts of a causal chain of events that are transitively connected to each other. So, an action like Jimmy's is also seen as a part of a causal chain of events extending beyond the episode of the wiggling.

What Dretske objects is: if the wiggling is the causal effect of Jimmy's having certain reasons, then the event-causal proponent needs to say that whatever causes these reasons also causes the wiggling. Among the causes of Jimmy's reasons to wiggle his ears there is Fred's offer, then in virtue of causal transitivity, the event-causal proponent has to admit that Fred's offering is the cause of Jimmy's

wiggling. But if Fred causes the wiggling, what exactly stops the wiggle from counting as one of Fred's actions? (Aguilar 2007: 226). If we accept the possibility that actions are transitively caused when the agent is motivated by another agent, then an agent who provides the motivation for another to act seems to become the agent of this act, and this is very counterintuitive on Aguilar's view (Aguilar 2007: 225).

According to Aguilar, Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect provides an answer to Dretske's challenge to the event-causal approach. Aguilar starts by assuming that Fred causes Jimmy to wiggle his ears. According to Davidson, says Aguilar, we are in front of two basic actions: a first basic action performed by Fred and a second basic action performed by Jimmy, and the assumption is that the first basic action causes the second basic action. Thanks to the accordion effect, since Jimmy's basic action is a causal consequence of Fred's basic action, we may describe Fred's basic action as causing Jimmy's basic action, that is, we may describe Fred's basic action as «the cause of Jimmy's wiggling» or «the cause of the wiggling».[50] What is important to note is that we are describing Fred's action and not Jimmy's and, although Fred's basic action causes Jimmy's basic action, we are still dealing with two different basic actions.[51] Furthermore, since there is no need to identify a complex event that includes the two basic actions and of which Fred can be said to be the agent, we have no reason to identify Fred as the agent of Jimmy's basic action. According to Aguilar, then, if we employ the accordion effect as a descriptive tool of basic actions, we may refer to causal consequences of basic actions without enlarging these actions and thereby enlarging the corresponding agency. By using the accordion effect to redescribe basic actions, it is possible to explain how an agent may transitively cause an action without counting as its

[50] This is also the way in which *perlocution* works, particularly, when the perlocutionary effect consists in the performance of an act, whether linguistic or non-verbal, on the part of the receiver, as when a speaker persuades her receiver to do something. The perlocutionary act is introduced by Austin as the kind of act that can be performed by saying something, that is, by performing a locutionary act and therein an illocutionary act (Austin 1975: 101, 110; cf. Sbisà 2013: 34-36).

[51] As Davidson writes: «The mistake consists in thinking that when the description of an event is made to include reference to a consequence, then the consequence itself is included in the described event. The accordion, which remains the same through the squeezing and stretching, is the action; the changes are in aspects described, or descriptions of the event» (Davidson 2001: 58).

agent. Causing an action, indeed, is not sufficient to count as its agent (Aguilar 2007: 229-230).

2.6 The Agent-Causal Approach

The Agent-Causal Approach assumes that if an agent (intentionally or freely) caused an event we cannot «reduce it to the case of an event being a cause» (Davidson 2001: 128). In this sense, the agent-causal approach is a non-reductive approach that understands the relation essential to action in terms of the exercise of an irreducible agent-causal power (Chisholm 1964; Taylor 1966; Alvarez and Hyman 1998; O'Connor 1995, 2000; Mayr 2011).

In the following subsections, I explore the agent-causal approach with respect to the notion of *causing* (or *bringing about*): the causing may be intended as an *irreducible* relation between the agents and certain *things* (Taylor 1966), or between the agents and certain events or states of affairs (Chisholm 1964; 1966) (2.6.1). Next, I present an interesting and innovative view elaborated by Alvarez and Hyman (1998): on this view, the agents do not cause their actions, but what they cause are the results of their actions (2.6.2).

2.6.1 Actions as Causings

In order to preserve this concept of agent causation, proponents of the agent-causal approach have argued that agents cause their actions. In his *Action and Purpose*, Taylor writes:

> In describing anything as an act there must be an essential reference to an agent as the performer or author of that act, not merely in order to know whose act it is, but in order even to know that it is an act. (Taylor 1966: 108)

For any behaviour to be an action, an essential reference to an agent as the performer of that behaviour is required. Taylor, then, continues explaining such an essential reference:

> This reference to myself in distinguishing my acts from all those things that are not acts [...] must be a reference to myself as an active being. Another perfectly natural way of expressing this notion of my activity is to say that, in acting, I make something happen, I cause it, or bring it about. (Taylor 1966: 111)

The notion of the agent's causing her own action is**,** according to Taylor, a conceptual primitive that can be expressed only through synonymous expressions which present the cause as an action. The word «cause», here,

> has not the ordinary meaning of a certain relationship between events, but has rather the older meaning of the efficacy of power of an agent to produce certain results. This idea can be otherwise expressed by saying that an agent is something that originates things, produces them or brings them about. (Taylor 1966: 112)

On Taylor's view, actions are *things* the agent causes, originates, produces or brings about, and the causing of these things is not considered to be part of the agent's action. The causing, indeed, pertains to the agent's causal power to produce these things[52].

Chisholm's view is more articulated: while in his early writings he considers agent causation as a conceptual primitive (Chisholm 1964, 1966), since *Person and Object* (1976) Chisholm defines agent causation in terms of other concepts, such as that of undertaking or endeavouring.

As we have already seen (2.4), Chisholm's proposes that action sentences have the following form: «*x* brings it about that *p*», or «*x* makes it true that *p*», where the

[52] According to O'Connor, this is highly curious since the agent's causal production of certain events internal to her would seem to be the agent's activity *par excellence* (O'Connor 2000: 51).

entities to which the expressions that replace «p» refer are «states of affairs» and states of affairs may be changes, events, as well as unchanges.

More precisely, Chisholm's formulation is: «x makes it happen that *p* in the endeavour to make it happen that . . . » (Chisholm 1964: 615; 1969).

As O'Connor underlines, first, by attributing an intentional character to his formulation, Chisholm assumes that agent causation requires purposiveness, and, second, an agent's «making a state of affair *q* happen» does not always involve the agent's bearing an agent-causal relation to *q* itself. In some cases, this consists in the agent's directly causing a state of affairs *p*, and *p*'s causally contributing to the obtaining of *q*, as in Chisholm's illustration: «He makes it happen that his arm goes up in the endeavour to make it happen that the chairman sees him» (O'Connor 2000: 55).

Chisholm clarifies that the expressions «to undertake», or «to endeavour» are technical terms and do not mean *to try*, if *to try* connotes making or exerting an effort. Nor does it imply the exercise of «an act of will». What Chisholm is trying to do is to avoid action-triggering volitions: Indeed, the basic idea of his early writings is that an agent does not bring about a given behaviour by directly causing a decision or intention to so behave, which in turn causes the behaviour. Rather, Chisholm claims that the agent directly initiates the behaviour simultaneously with her having the intention to so act, and this event of the agent's undertaking to make something happen is the core-agent causal event (O'Connor 2000: 58).

Since *Person and Object* (1976), Chisholm modifies his above-mentioned view by embracing a kind of volitional perspective. Agent causation is now defined by Chisholm in terms of «undertaking» or «endeavouring», and action sentences are put in the form of: «x undertakes (or endeavours) *p*». For an agent to undertake (or endeavour) an event or a state of affairs is «to contribute causally to the occurrence of an event or state of affairs» (Chisholm 1976: 69). An agent may properly be said to causally contribute to an event, whenever that event is:

a. an undertaking,
b. an event that has an undertaking of the agent as its remote cause, and

c. a complex event constituted by her undertaking something contributing causally to some other event (Chisholm 1976: 70).

As has been pointed out by O'Connor, it is difficult not to interpret «undertaking» as a kind of intention that initiates the action: indeed, the agent's undertaking or endeavour is no longer identified with the agent-causal relation, but «is a psychological event comparable to thinking and judging» (Chisholm 1985: 56). As O'Connor suggests, Chisholm's reluctance to assimilate his notion of endeavour to other philosophers' concept of volition and choice may reflect the belief that more is involved in these notions than an intention concerning an immediate present (O'Connor 2000: 63).

What Chisholm's view and Taylor's have in common is what all proponents of the agent-causal approach have, namely, that «there is an intelligible notion of an agent's causing an event, such that this kind of causation is fundamentally distinct from the kind that obtains between events» (O'Connor 2000: 55). However, Chisholm's view is more ambiguous than Taylor's.

While according to Taylor agents cause things and these things are *de facto* actions, according to Chisholm agents make happen (and in the later writings, undertake or endeavour) states of affairs, and he specifies that states of affairs may be changes, unchanges, and events (Chisholm 1964: 615). Moreover, as O'Connor notices, Chisholm often refers to states of affairs as events (O'Connor 2000: 55). This ambiguity concerning *what* the agent causes leaves open more than one possibility: if what the agent causes is an event, then her action can be identified with that event; if what the agent causes is a state of affairs, then Chisholm's view may be conceived as closer to views according to which agents cause effects or results of their actions (Alvarez and Hyman1998).

It should be noted, however, that Chisholm's view has been brought together with Taylor's by authors such as Alvarez and Hyman who argue against the view that actions are things or events caused by the agents (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 222).

2.6.2 Actions as Causing of Results

According to Alvarez and Hyman, the idea that actions are things or events caused by the agents is untenable, mainly for the following reason: if an action is an event caused by the agent, then we can legitimately ask whether the causing of this event is itself an action or not. If it is, then it is an event caused by the agent and we can ask again whether the causing of this event is an action or not. If the answer is that this causing is an action too, then we have to admit that an agent who performs one action performs an infinite series of actions: she causes her action, she causes the causing of her action, she causes the causing of the causing of her action, and so on. But this is absurd. On the other hand, if the causing of an event is not always an action, a problem arises: how to distinguish between those causings of events that are actions and those which are not? (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 222). If we opt for the principle that a causing is not an action unless it is intentional (or free, or voluntary), we cannot avoid the regress. Indeed, if the causing of an event was not intentional, then the event caused was not caused intentionally, but if actions are events caused by agents, then an intentional action need to be one that was intentionally caused. If an event was an action (and therefore intentional) its causing must also have been intentional, and therefore an action. The regress, hence, is not avoided.

According to Alvarez and Hyman, the concept of agent causation can be rehabilitated by detaching it from the doctrines that agents cause their actions and that actions are events. They claim that an agent who acts causes an event, but actions are not events the agents cause (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 223). Alvarez and Hyman argue that the idea that actions are events caused by agents may appear particularly convincing if we take into consideration those actions that consist in moving parts of the body. Since many actions are bodily movements but not every bodily movement is an action, one may want to argue that what distinguishes those of A's bodily movements which are her actions from those which are not, is that A causes the first sort, but not the second. One might think that if A causes the bodily movements which are her actions, then it follows that the agent causes her actions. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, there is an

ambiguity that affects the use of the term *bodily movement* (or bodily motion). This ambiguity originates in the verb *move* that has a transitive and an intransitive form: the phrase «a movement of B» may signify either an action which consisted in making B move (transitive form of the verb), or B's moving (intransitive form). More precisely, with the phrase «a movement of B's finger», we may describe an action consisting in moving B's finger, or we may describe the result of such an action, that is, B's finger's moving. According to Alvarez and Hyman, if we do not distinguish between these two uses of such a phrase, we arrive at the wrong conclusion that agents cause their actions: if B moves her finger, then she does indeed cause a *movement of her finger*, and her action certainly is *a movement of her finger*; and it is therefore easy to conclude that she causes her action.

Nevertheless, bearing the distinction in mind, we understand that, since the movement of B's finger which the agent causes is not a movement in the transitive sense, it is not her action: it is the *result* of her action, consisting of a movement in the intransitive sense (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 223).

From this, it does not follow that the concept of agent causation is unsustainable. According to Alvarez and Hyman, what appears to be unsustainable is the doctrine that actions are events caused by agents. By detaching the concept of agent causation from this doctrine, we have a defensible conception of agent causation. Such a defensible conception «implies only that an action is a causing of an event by an agent: there is no need to suppose, in addition, that this event is the agent's action, or that an action is itself an event» (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 223). In fact, the event in question is not the agent's action, but its result. Therefore, on Alvarez and Hyman's view, what agents cause are the results of their actions. On their view, «to act is to exercise a causal power – to cause, bring about or effect an event. But the exercise of a causal power is neither an event, nor the relation between agent and event that it entails» (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 233). An agent does not cause her actions: she causes the *results* and at least some of the *consequences* of her actions. Here, Alvarez and Hyman follow von Wright (1963; 1971) in using the terms *result* and *consequence* in a technical sense.

Before concluding with Alvarez and Hyman's proposal, I briefly outline von Wright's view on action by focussing on his distinction among the act, its result,

and its consequences. According to von Wright, an action is the (intentional) production of a change or event in the world, where «the terms *change* and *event* must then be understood in the broad, generalized sense, which covers both changes (events) and not-changes (not-events)» (von Wright 1963: 38).
Von Wright, therefore, distinguishes between the *acts* and the *events* brought about in acting:

i. the act is defined as the act of effecting such and such a change (the act of opening a certain window is the act of changing or transforming a world in which this window is closed to a world in which it is open), and
ii. the change corresponding to this act or, alternatively, the end-state of this change is the *result* of the act, «thus by the result of the act of opening a certain window we can understand either the fact that the window is opening (changes from closed to open) or the fact that it is open» (von Wright 1963: 39).

According to von Wright, the relationship between an action and its result (the change or its end-state) is a logical relationship: if the result does not come about, the action has not taken place.

What is important to note is that the result of an action may produce further transformations in the world, with which the result is causally related: changes causally produced by the result of an action are called *consequences* (von Wright 1963: 40; 1971: 87). The result of my opening the window is its opening (or, alternatively, that the window is open), its consequences may be air coming in, the room getting colder, newspapers flying. If, as we have seen, the relationship between an action and its result is a logical/conceptual relationship, then that between an action and its consequences is a causal one: an action necessarily has a result, but it does not necessarily have consequences.

Going back to Alvarez and Hyman's proposal, we can conclude that on their view, an action is a *causing* of an event by the agent; the result of an action is that very event; and the consequences of an action are the effects of its result. Thus, according to them, the action of killing is a causing of a death, the result of a killing

is the death caused, and its consequences are the effects of that death (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 233).

To sum up, Alvarez and Hyman claim that the concept of agent causation can be rehabilitated by detaching it from the wrong ideas that agents cause their actions and that actions are events. On their view, agents who act cause events, but actions are not events the agents cause. Actions are causings of events by agents. The events caused by agents are the results of their actions (Alvarez and Hyman 1998: 223).

2.7 The Accordion Effect: Feinberg vs. Davidson

In this section, I go back to the discussion over the accordion effect and compare Davidson's understanding with Feinberg's.

Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect differs sensibly from Feinberg's. Davidson is looking for a criterion to distinguish a mere event (a happening) from an event that is an action. From this perspective, the accordion effect is a mark of agency because it allows us to attribute the effects of an event to a person only if that event is an action, and it shows that we treat the consequences of actions differently from the way we treat consequences of other events.

In Feinberg's analysis, the importance of the accordion effect lies in the fact that «we can usually replace any ascription to a person of causal responsibility by an ascription of agency or authorship» (Feinberg 1970: 134). Feinberg's interest lies in developing the view according to which the primary function of action sentences is to ascribe responsibility. According to Feinberg, hence, the main function of the accordion effect lies in the possibility of ascribing different kinds of responsibility to a person for what she did (Fockner 2013).

Davidson's use of the accordion effect concerns explaining causality between the bodily movement and its consequences (causality between events), and, moreover the accordion effect shows that we can *expand causality* (that is, attribute effects of an event to an agent) only if the event in question is an action. Feinberg uses the accordion effect mainly to show that ascriptions of agency

(ascriptions of the second type) are ascriptions of causal responsibility (ascriptions of the first type): causal responsibility and causal agency «both say something about causation, the one quite explicitly, the other in the language of agency or authorship» (Feinberg 1970: 134). Attributions of agency, thus, are nothing else than attributions of causality, which is a (basic) form of responsibility. Nonetheless, beyond this main use, we have found a secondary use of the accordion effect in Feinberg's theory: that of constructing action sentences that include (or exclude) causal consequences of what the agent did (or her action). With respect to this secondary use of the accordion effect, in the previous chapter we concluded the analysis of Feninberg's understanding of the accordion effect with two open problems:

1) Does the accordion effect affect the actions themselves, or does it merely concern their descriptions?
2) Does the accordion effect presuppose the notion of simple (or basic or primitive) action? (see 1.7.2)

In order to compare Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect with Feinberg's, I try to answer these questions from Davidson's point of view and from Feinberg's.

The answer to 1) is quite simple in Davidson's case. Indeed, Davidson clearly states that, in the accordion effect, puffing out, squeezing down, and stretching out are operations performed on one and the same event, that is the basic or primitive action. Therefore, the accordion effect concerns descriptions of actions, not actions themselves. What we extend or contract by means of the accordion effect are descriptions of single (primitive) actions: we cannot extend or contract the action; the action is always one and *always* a bodily movement.

The answer to 1) is more complex in Feinberg's case. On the one hand, by saying that what can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched out by the accordion effect is «a man's action», Feinberg seems to accept that there is *one* action variously described. This would make Feinberg's position closer to Davidson's.

On the other hand, by saying that «with one identical set of bodily movements» the agent «did *all* these things» (he turned the key, opened the door, startled Smith, and killed Smith), Feinberg seems to admit that the agent did various things, and this can be understood as: by moving her body, the agent performed various actions.

If Feinberg, like Davidson, believes that there is one and the same action that is variously described, then the accordion effect in Feinberg's understanding, as in Davidson's, concerns action-descriptions and not actions themselves. If Feinberg, differently from Davidson, endorses the view according to which by moving her body, the agent may perform different actions, then puffing out, squeezing down, and stretching out are operations performed on what the agent did, on her things done, and not on one and the same event. This would make possible to understand the accordion effect as a phenomenon concerning the actions themselves, and not merely their descriptions.

The answer to 2) is, again, quite simple with respect to Davidson. The accordion effect requires the notion of primitive (or basic) action to apply. The basic action is, indeed, the single *descriptum* which the welter of related descriptions corresponds to. As regards Feinberg, the answer to 2) is, again, more articulated. As we have already seen, Feinberg distinguishes between causally simple actions (which require us to do nothing else) and causally complex actions (which require us to do something else as a means first). Classic examples of complex actions are achievements of certain tasks and goals: A complex task – say, opening a door or rescuing a drowning swimmer – is performed by means of a series of purposively connected *subacts*. On Feinberg's view, thus, to perform a complex action such as opening the door it is required to perform something else first, as a means. It is possible to gain at least two ideas from this conception of action:

i) When I close the door, there is a prior action of mine that causes me to close the door;

ii) when I close the door by moving my hand, I perform two numerically distinct actions (the simple action of moving my hand and the complex action of closing the door).[53]

What is to be noted is that i) and ii) are not consistent with the above mentioned answer to 1) that, according to Feinberg, what can be squeezed down to a minimum or else stretched out by the accordion effect is a man's action understood as one and the same action.

Effectively, Feinberg shows some tension between treating moving one's hand, opening the door, startling Paul as one action that can be squeezed down or else stretched out by the accordion effect, and, on the other hand, claiming that, in order to perform a complex action, an agent must perform first a simple action.

Going back to the answer to 2), whether we privilege the view according to which Feinberg opts for one and the same action squeezed down and stretched out in its description, or we favour the view according to which Feinberg claims that to perform a complex action the agent must perform first a simple action as a means, either way the notion of basic action seems to be required for the accordion effect to apply. In the first case, the basic action is the *descriptum* which the various descriptions correspond to. In the second case, the basic action is what the complex action can be squeezed down to, and what that can be stretched out into a complex action.

[53]According to Davidson, three mistakes stem from this conception of action:

1. The idea that when I close the door, there is a prior action of mine that causes me to close the door;
2. The confusion between "what my action of moving my hand causes" (the closing of the door) and something that is, according to Davidson, utterly different, namely, my action of closing the door;
3. The idea that when I close the door by moving my hand, I perform two numerically distinct actions (Davidson 2001: 56).

3. OUTLINE OF A NON-REDUCTIVE NOTION OF ACTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I propose the outline of a non-reductive notion of action. Such a notion is non-reductive in the sense that it does not take the action to coincide with the movement$_I$ of the agent's body (in the intransitive sense of the term *movement*), or with the agent's moving$_T$ of her body (in the transitive sense of the term *movement*). Rather**,** the action is identified by means of its description. As we have already seen, especially discussing the so-called accordion effect (1.7.2; 2.5.3; 2.7), we may refer to a certain agent's *behavior* by means of different descriptions, taking into consideration different effects of her *performance*. The distinction between behavior and performance, which is essential to my view of action, will be explicitly traced below (3.3).

Among the various descriptions in terms of effects of the agent's performance, the one by means of which the action is individuated is selected on the basis of its appropriateness. The appropriateness of action descriptions is conceived here in terms of the *salience* in the context of what the agent is held responsible for.

I start now by presenting Sandis' distinction between various conceptions of both behavior and action (Sandis 2012) (3.2), and then focus on the distinction between behaviors and performances (3.3): while the term *behavior* is the most general term by means of which we may refer to «the agent's doing something», by the term *performance* I refer to the agent's doing something that is strictly related to the bringing about of effects or consequences. I take the so-understood distinction between behavior and performance to be the core of the outline of the non-reductive notion of action I propose (3.3.1).

Performances may be positive when the agent does something *physically*, or they may be negative when the agent does not (physically) do anything (3.3.2).

What positive performances and negative performances have in common is that their results and consequences can be straightforwardly ascribed to the agents (3.3.3).

Subsequently, I expose an alternative understanding of the accordion effect partly inspired by Marina Sbisà's work on speech actions (Sbisà 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). However, I do not engage directly with Sbisà, but rather I try to export her reflections over speech actions to a more general ground in which in speaking of action we refer to an agent's performance together with (at least some of) its effects (results or consequences) (3.4).

In proposing this outline of a non-reductive notion of action, on the one hand I draw my morals from the debates I have presented in the previous chapters, and, on the other hand, I hope it to become the starting point for further developments (3.5).

3.2 Conceptions of Behavior

In «The Objects of Action Explanation», Sandis distinguishes between various different conceptions of both behavior and action, and explores a variety of distinct things that action explanation may amount to (Sandis 2012: 326-344).

In this paragraph, what I am particularly interested in is Sandis' distinction between different conceptions of behavior. Sandis starts by recalling von Wright's distinction between *i*) motionless behavior, and *ii*) behavior involving outward bodily movements. As far as motionless behavior is concerned, Sandis refers to von Wright's example of pressing one's hand against a door to keep it closed (von Wright 1988: 97), and clarifies that motionless behavior may, but need not, characterize omissions as opposed to active performances (Sandis 2012: 326). As far as behavior involving outward bodily movements is concerned, Sandis points out that there are three different things which we may have in mind:

a) The (mere) movement of the agent's body;
b) The event (b1) or process (b2) of the agent moving her body;
c) What the agent did (viz. move her body) (Sandis 2012: 327).

Whether the action is identical to (a), (b) or (c) is a matter of philosophical debate. As Sandis clarifies, (a) is a causal process or event that can be further specifiable as a *movement* of the agent's body in the intransitive sense of the term: the agent's body's moving. (b1) may also be thought of as an event, but it is not identical to (a). (b1) may be described as a *movement* in the transitive sense of the term: the agent's moving of her body. (b2) are processes of bringing (a)events about, and such processes are typically seen as being *causal*. Along these lines, some philosophers view actions as processes of agents *causing* (a)events (Alvarez and Hyman 1998). Sandis points out that processes differ from events in various way: they cannot be said to happen, they do not extend in time, though they may contain sub-processes.

Moreover, on some Aristotelian views, as Sandis specifies, actions are *non-causal* processes of people doing things: one may be engaged in a process of baking a cake, without succeeding in baking one (without there ever being the event of baking a cake), «on such a conception, the non-causal bringing about of an a-event is *constitutive* of action» (Sandis 2012: 328).

It is interesting to note that whether to be engaged in the process of baking a cake without succeeding in doing so is an *action* of baking a cake, or an *attempt* to bake a cake, is an open problem, whose solution may depend on the way in which we understand the relationship between the action and its outcome. If the achievement of that specific outcome (the cake having been baked) is required for the action of baking a cake to be performed, then being engaged in the baking a cake without succeeding in doing it is not an action of baking a cake, but an attempt to perform it. On the other hand, if the achievement of that outcome (the cake having been baked) is not required for the action of baking a cake to be performed, then being engaged in the process of baking a cake without succeeding in doing it may be the action of baking a cake, an action that fails.

Going back on Sandis' article, he notes that the process view (identifying action with b2) is consistent with the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first listed definition of «action» as «the *process* or *condition* of acting or doing (in the widest sense)». According to Sandis, processes are different from events, so that the process *of* my

raising my arm cannot be identical to the event *of* my raising my arm (b1). On the view that understands actions as (b2), the preposition «of» in a phrase such as «the event of my acting» does not mark an identity. By contrast, on the view that understands actions as (b1), the event of my raising my arm *is* my raising my arm[54] and therefore an action (Sandis 2012: 329).

Among the three things we may have in mind when we talk about behaviour involving outward bodily movements, it remains to mention (c), what the agent did, her deed as opposed to her doing of it. According to Sandis, the event of the agent's acting is an event of her bringing about a bodily movement$_T$:[55] «What the agent brings about (the movement) is the result of the former event: what she does is to bring it about. This is to be distinguished from the event, process or condition of her doing this [...]» (Sandis 2012: 329). On Sandis' view, «[...] it is as natural to talk of actions as things we do, perform, undertake, execute, or carry out as it is to talk of them as our doings of such things» (Sandis 2012: 329). The term *action* may be used to refer to either *what we do* (c) or the event (and/or process and/or activity) of *our doing it* (b1 or b2).

Sandis concludes the discussion of the relationship between behavior and action by claiming that even when we restrict our analysis to actions involving visible bodily movements, we have to acknowledge that both terms *behavior* and *action* lack an obvious single referent and, given their openness to the distinctions laid out above, «one cannot fix an *explanandum* by invoking them with no further comment» (Sandis 2012: 331).

Sandis' operation of disambiguating[56] the possible referents of these terms helps framing the proposal of my outline of a non-reductive notion of action.

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[54] As Sandis clarifies, on (b1) view, the action may or may not be identical to the process of my raising my arm, it depends on whether the (b1)theorist distinguishes processes from events (Sandis 2012: 329).

[55] Nonetheless, since to do something *is* to bring something about, we may also bring things about *by* and even *in* omitting to do them (Sandis 2012: 239).

[56] In the following of his essay, Sandis argues that while disambiguating between (a), (b), and (c) is a necessary requirement for specifying an *explanandum*, it is an insufficient one. Sandis proceeds to individuate the difference between identifying an action under a certain description and identifying what it is about it that is to be explained, and discusses ontological questions concerning the general nature of both *explananda* and their *explanantia* (Sandis 2012: 332).

3.3 Behaviors and Performances

We have seen that the fact that we may give different descriptions of what an agent does and include in these descriptions, or exclude from them, certain effects has long since been recognized.

In 1.7.2, we have examined Feinberg's early formulation, which treats the accordion effect as a feature of our language that allows us to describe an agent's action as narrowly or broadly as we please. If an agent A did the action X with the consequence Y, we can individuate the agent's action by means of the narrower description «A did X» (in this way we relegate Y to the role of a consequence), or we can incorporate Y into a broader description and say «A did Y». The importance of the accordion effect in Feinberg's theory, as we have seen (1.7.2, 2.7), lies in the opportunity we have to replace ascriptions to a person of causal responsibility (ascriptions of the first type) by ascriptions of agency or authorship (ascriptions of the second type) (Feinberg 1970: 137).

In 2.5.3, we have explored two recent understandings of the accordion effect internal to the event-causal approach: Davidson's and Aguilar's. In Davidson, the accordion effect is a mark of agency because it allows us to attribute the effects of an event to a person only if that event is an action. Davidson applies the notion of accordion effect to the analysis of the relation between the event of bodily movement (the primitive action) and its consequences, which is a causal relation between two events. We have also seen how Aguilar applies Davidson's version of the accordion effect to cases of agential attribution where one agent causally influences the causes of another agent's movements without causally influencing the movements: recall the case of Jimmy who wiggles his ears to obtain the dollar offered by Fred (Aguilar 2007: 229). If we apply Davidson's version of the accordion effect, then we are dealing with two primitive actions: a first primitive action performed by Fred that causes a second primitive action performed by Jimmy. It is thanks to the accordion effect that, since Jimmy's primitive action is a causal consequence of Fred's primitive action, we may describe Fred's primitive action as «the cause of Jimmy's wiggling» or «the cause of the wiggling». Of course, in this case what we are describing is Fred's action and not Jimmy's. In this section,

I use the core idea of the notion of the accordion effect to articulate a non-reductive perspective on action.

In what follows, I explain what I mean by behavior and performance (3.3.1), then focus on the performance, its result and further consequences (3.3.2), and discuss positive and negative performances with respect to their effects (3.3.3).

3.3.1 The Distinction Between Behavior and Performance

To work out an outline of a non-reductive notion of action, the idea that we may refer to a certain agent's behavior by means of different descriptions which take into consideration different effects (results and consequences) of her performance is crucial. In what follows, thus, I focus on what I mean by *behavior* and *performance*.

The term *behavior* is the most general term by means of which we may refer to «the agent's doing something»: as we have already seen, we distinguish (*i*) motionless behavior from (*ii*) behavior involving outward bodily movements. Nonetheless, both in cases of (*i*) and in cases of (*ii*) the agent can be said to do something. Here and in the following, I take «to do» in the widest ordinary sense, so as to include whatever an agent can be said to do, no matter whether intentionally or not.

With the term *performance*, I refer to an agent's doing something that is strictly related to the bringing about of a result and its further consequences. Performances can be negative or positive. With the expressions «positive performances» I refer to all cases of performance where the agent does something by moving her body in a way relevant to the bringing about of a certain result and its further consequences (independently of whether the result and its consequences are brought about intentionally or not)[57]. The positive performance is made up of:

[57]The expression «positive performance» is used by Hornsby to refer to cases in which people *intentionally* do something by moving their body. While in Hornsby's view the positive performance is strictly related to the idea of «doing something *intentionally*» (Hornsby 2004: 5-8), here I take the

(a) The *movement* of the agent's body in the intransitive sense of the term;

(b) The agent's *moving* of her body (in the transitive sense of the term).

However, *the* agent's action does not correspond to (a), neither to (b). The agent's action, indeed, is description-relative, that is, it depends on its description. This is not to say that a bodily movement cannot be considered as an action, but rather that what is considered as «action» need not be reduced to bodily movement.[58]

With the expression «negative performances» I refer to all cases in which the agent can be said to do something without moving her body in any way relevant to the bringing about of a certain result and further consequences (independently of whether the result and further consequences are intentionally produced or not). One can be said to offend someone by not taking her into consideration when planning the holidays, or to commit a crime by not paying the taxes, or to make someone sad by not calling him for his birthday. In negative performances there are not (a) and (b).[59]

3.3.2 Performance, Results and Consequences

Suppose that Chiara moves her hand, pulls the handle, opens the door, and scares her sister who is sleeping in the room. In this case, we may refer to Chiara's behaviour by means of different descriptions taking into consideration the result or one of the consequences of her (in this case, positive) performance. We may say

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expression «positive performance» to refer to cases in which people do something by moving their bodies no matter whether intentionally or not.

[58]As Sbisà argues, this idea characterizes Austin's view of actions (Austin 1975: 112): «[…] he is against identifying actions with bodily movements. He appears to assume, relying upon the way in which we ordinarily speak of actions, that we usually foreground those actions that are salient for us in context and that these are seldom mere bodily movements» (Sbisà 2014b: 22).

[59]Negative performances may be considered as cases of omissions (see e.g. Kleinig 1976; Clark 1994, 2014; Bernstein 2015). Boniolo and De Anna provide an interesting framework which takes into consideration the ontological, terminological, epistemological, and ethical aspects of omission. Such a framework is based on the idea that some omissions are actions and some omissions are not actions, depending on their causal role (Boniolo and De Anna 2006).

«Chiara pulled the handle», «Chiara opened the door», and «Chiara scared her sister».

How do we distinguish between Chiara's performance, its result and its consequence(s)? As we have already said, Chiara's positive performance is made up of:

(a) the movement$_I$ of Chiara's hand, and
(b) Chiara's moving$_T$ of her hand.

Moreover, recalling von Wright's distinction between the act and its result (von Wright 1963: 38-39), we may understand the pulling of the handle as the result of Chiara's bodily performance. Chiara's performance achieves a specific change, and this change is the result of her performance. What we have already noted is that the result of a performance may produce further changes in the world, with which it is causally related: again following von Wright, we may call the changes causally produced by the result of a performance the *consequences* of that performance (von Wright 1963: 40; 1971: 87). If the result of Chiara's performance is the pulling of the handle, then the consequences of her bodily performance are the noisy opening of the door, the scaring of her sister and their following quarrel.

3.3.3 Positive and Negative Performances

In this section, I focus on *i*) the relation between positive performances and their effects; and then on *ii*) negative performances which are ascribed to us with their effects, as much as positive performances are.

As far as the relation between positive performances and their effects is concerned, if we focus on our ordinary practices of attribution of agency, we note that we do not refer to what people do by mentioning bodily movements, rather we refer to what people do by individuating *salient* effects of their positive performances. Thus, we do not generally say «you moved your mouth», we say

«you said I'm stupid», or «you offended me!», or «you ruined my day!».[60] Indeed, the adjective *salient* has to be understood in terms of what is or might be relevant for the agent, and for the other agents who are in various ways affected by the effects of the agent's performance.

The fact that we understand what people do in terms of the salient effects of bodily performances clearly emerges in our ordinary ascriptions of agency. We may refer to our bodily movements (positive performance) in order to contract our agency as in the case in which I ask my brother: «Did you wake Mom up?» and he answers: «I pushed the door handle!».

And, at the same time, we may attribute more extended agency by including more effects in the description we give to the performance («You did not push the door handle, you woke Mom up!»). The agency we attribute, thus, may be contracted or extended by means of the different descriptions of the agent's performance we may use: when we want to contract someone's agency we include a smaller number of effects of the performance in the description we give of her action. On the other hand, when we want to extend someone's agency we include a greater number of effects of the performance in the description of her action. These descriptions and re-descriptions of actions are ordinarily used by the agents to mitigate the attributed responsibility and so to excuse themselves (see Sbisà 2014b: 19, 22).

Sometimes we do not perform any bodily movements at all, but the effects of our negative performance are ascribed to us as much as the effects of bodily movements actually performed. Suppose Franz's flatmate is waiting for an important phone call for a new job, but she must go out for an hour and asks Franz to answer the phone. She goes out, and when the phone rings Franz lets it carry on

[60] For a pluralist view about actions we do with words (speech acts) see Sbisà (2014a). The idea defended by Sbisà is that an utterance token can carry out more than one speech act, or, more precisely, that there are cases in which one and the same utterance token is the vehicle of more than one illocutionary act (Sbisà 2014a: 233). Sbisà moves from a pragmatic theme in the philosophy of language – namely speech acts – to the philosophy of action: she argues that Austin's distinction of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts already presupposes speech act pluralism (Sbisà 2014a: 230-233), and shows that views admitting of speech act pluralism require an ascription-centred conception of action, such as that outlined by Austin in his papers in the philosophy of action (Sbisà 2014a: 242-243).

ringing. Franz does not carry out any bodily movements at all, and yet, the effects of his negative performance will be straightforwardly ascribed to him. Franz's furious flatmate will certainly not say: «You did not perform any bodily movement!», rather she will say: «You let the phone carry on ringing» (the result of Franz's negative performance) or, very probably: «You made me lose my job!» (the consequence of his negative performance). We ascribe effects of negative performances to the agents as much as the effects of positive performances, and the point of so doing seems to lie in the relevance of these effects of the agent's performances (including negative performances) to the aims and interests of other persons.

3.4 The Accordion Effect and The Ascription of Responsibility

By means of a (positive or negative) performance, an agent may bring about (or produce) more than one effect and, therefore, can be said to do (or have done) various different things. We have already seen Chiara who, with her positive performance, pulled the handle, opened the door, scared her sister; and Franz who, with his negative performance, let the phone carry on ringing and made his flatmate lose the job.

In 1.7 and in 1.7.1, we have seen that in the framework of ordinary social interaction we individuate the action by answering the question «what did the agent do?», and in order to answer this question we *zoom in* on a stretch of behaviour and within that stretch we single out the agent's salient doing among the various things she did, that is, we individuate *the* salient doing within the stretch of behaviour we are considering. In Chiara's case, her salient doing is likely to be identified with the scaring of her sister (that is one of the effects of her positive performance), and the salient doing attributed to Franz identified with the loosing of the job of his flatmate (an effect of his negative performance). It is important to note that what in 1.7 and in 1.7.1 we have called «the things the agent did» are nothing other than *effects* (results and consequences) of the agent's (positive or negative) performance corresponding to the action. Effects, then, are

ascribed to the agent as results of her actions in virtue of their salience in that situation. If, as we have already said, the agent, by means of her performance, may produce more than one effect, then we have a plurality of descriptions available: the plurality of the effects brought about by the agent's performance corresponds, indeed, to a plurality of descriptions.

However, the effect which is ascribed to the agent is the most salient one in that ordinary social interaction. It is important to note that situations of ordinary social interaction are characterized by the fact that participants are interested in attributing to each other precise responsibilities. The salience of an effect, thus, is what permits responsibility for it to be appropriately ascribed to the agent: if a certain effect is the most salient one, then it is ascribed to the agent as what the agent is responsible for, which amounts to ascribing her the corresponding action. The notion of responsibility I am referring to is not a moral one. This notion applies to agents' doings independently of their being valued as good or bad (see Hart 1968: 212-230; Feinberg 1970: 137; Sbisà 2014b: 23, see also Paprzycka 2014). Moreover, as we have seen in 1.6 with regard to Maher's Normative-Functionalist Approach, we may invoke a dimension of responsibility within which if an agent's doing something is an action we may generally expect that the agent has something to say about it. To be held responsible is, from this perspective, to be considered in a position in which it is appropriate to be questioned, blamed or praised for the effects brought about.

It is not a matter of indifference which effects we include in the description we give to the agent's action as constitutive of its result and which effects we relegate among the consequences of the action: «She moved her finger» is not an appropriate description for the action of a woman who shot her partner in business to obtain money from insurance. On the other hand, «He killed his grandmother» is not the most appropriate description for the action of a grandson who, to surprise his old grandmother, caused such a great emotion that she suffered of a deadly heart-attack.

In considering the appropriateness of the description which identifies the action in terms of the salience of what the agent is held responsible for, I do not

want to ignore the agent's mental states, her perspective and the circumstances of her performance, rather, I think that all these aspects should be taken in.[61]

It is also important to clarify that by saying that the action is identified by means of the appropriate description in terms of the most salient effect brought about by the agent's performance, I am not denying that the agent's performance brings about more than one effect which might be found salient, and that more than one action may be attributed to the agent. What I have tried to point out is that when we ordinarily are interested in individuating the agent's action, we look for an answer to the question about what she did, and generally such an answer consists in a description of the most salient effect brought about by the agent performance within the stretch of behaviour we are zooming in on.

To say this is not in contrast with claiming that the agent can perform more than one action within the stretch of behaviour we are considering. Rather, it is *just* in virtue of the fact that the agent, by means of her performance, can perform more than one action that we, ordinarily, operate a selection among the various effects brought about and attribute to her the most salient one as her action. Much of our everyday disputes arise because of this: indeed, we rarely agree in selecting the *same* effect among those brought about by the agent's performance, with the consequence that we do not manage to select *the* action upon which to fight.

[61] Knobe and Doris point out that, when we attribute moral responsibility to other agents, we use quite different criteria in different kinds of cases: «the ordinary practice of responsibility attribution is pervasively variantist. People's ordinary responsibility judgments do not appear to follow from a single system of criteria that can be applied in all cases. Instead, it seems that people use different sorts of criteria depending on the case at hand» (Knobe and Doris 2010: 347). The attributed responsibility which I refer to is not necessary moral, however Knobe and Doris's studies can be equally useful in understanding ordinary practices of attribution of a more basic type of responsibility.

3.5 Further Developments

The outline of a non-reductive notion of action leaves open various problems and further developments in different directions are required to render this outline a proper notion.

The first kind of development regards the notion of context. We have said that the action is identified by means of a description in terms of the most salient effect brought about by the agent's performance *in the context*. We have also said that this salience contributes to making the selected description the appropriate one in the context. What needs to be clarified is, in particular, the relation between the context of action and the context of descriptions. To single out the most salient effect brought about by the agent performance in the context of action may be a different thing from singling out the most salient effect in the context of the action description. I have assumed that the context of action and that of action description are not in contrast with each other, but sometimes they might be: legal trials typically display a discrepancy between the context of action and the context of action description. Furthermore, the distinction between cognitive context and situational or objective context needs to be kept in mind. Most uses of context in the philosophy of language and pragmatics rely on a notion of cognitive context (according to which the context consists of assumptions that the participants have in mind: see e.g. Stalnaker 1999; Sperber and Wilson 1995, 1998, 2002), while for our purposes, it is pertinent to consider the situational or objective context (as proposed for speech act theory by Sbisà 2002; cf. also Gauker 1998).

The second kind of development concerns the notion of responsibility. We have seen that to adopt a non moral notion of responsibility involves the adoption of a kind of causal responsibility for the effects brought about. We have also seen that a normative dimension of responsibility may be invoked to render the agent accountable for the actions performed (Maher 2011). How these two kinds of responsibility are related needs to be explained. In particular, it needs to be investigated if a normative account of responsibility can be compatible with a notion of causal responsibility.

The third kind of development required involves the notion of cause. As we have seen, in particular in the second chapter, the notion of bringing about (or producing, or making something happen) is widely accepted as the notion that explains the capacity of the agent to act or her role in acting. In my outline of a non-reductive notion of action, I have used the notion of a bringing about as related to the effects (where the salient effect is the result of the action). As we have seen, authors like Alvarez and Hyman relate the notion of bringing about to results, and consider actions as *causings* of results. I am doubtful about the exact correspondence between the *causing* and the *bringing about*: the causing, indeed, seems to presuppose the special powers on the part that the agent that I prefer not to imply. However, the notion of bringing about I use does not directly apply to the agent and the results brought about, rather, it applies to the agent's performance (positive or negative) and the effects that the performance brings about. Further developments on this topic will be aimed to investigate the relation between the causing and the bringing about.

The last kind of development concerns the role of the agent's own perspective in accounting for her action. This topic is strictly related to that of the context and that of the notion of responsibility. In 2.5 and in 2.5.2, we have seen how the agent's perspective may play a role within a causal framework that focuses on intentional action, where if A is an intentional action, it is caused by an intention with appropriate mental content (O'Brien 2011). In a non-reductive notion of action, the agent's perspective has a role that is not defined in causal terms, rather may be defined in terms of the opportunity of the agent to negotiate the attribution of a certain salient effect rather than another.

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