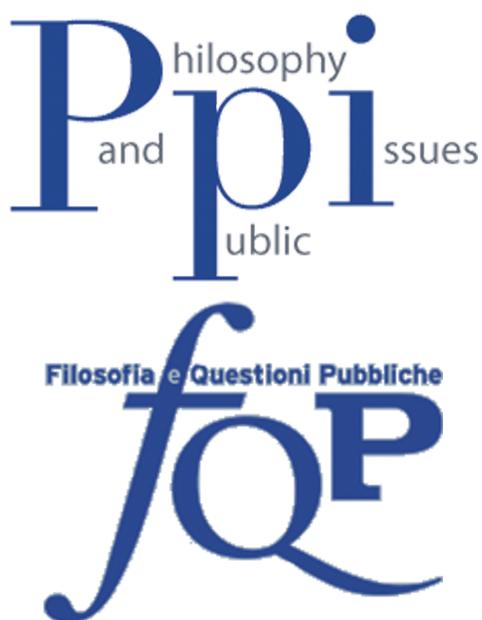


SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME  
LIFE AND ACTION IN ETHICS AND POLITICS



HE BUTTERED THE TOAST  
WHILE BAKING A FRESH LOAF

BY  
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# He Buttered the Toast While Baking a Fresh Loaf

Constantine Sandis

**I**n a notable footnote, Michael Thompson writes the following:

The schedule of inferences propounded above appears, at first sight, to put the present doctrine at odds with that of Davidson's paper "The Logical Form of Action Sentences"... It is interesting, though, that *every sentence Davidson analyses there is in the simple past*; the theme of the paper is "He did it," not "He's doing it." I will not comment on the matter, except to remark on the almost eerie contrast we find, in respect of aspect, between the illustrative propositions given in the first six essays of Davidson's work and those provided in Anscombe's *Intention*. Davidson's are typically in the third person and past; Anscombe's are in the first or second person of the present progressive.<sup>1</sup>

What are the two doctrines in question and why should a difference in person and/or tense affect their compatibility? There are three differences here. The first is that between the first and third persons. Anscombe uses the former and Davidson the latter. I suspect it unlikely that this is without psychological or philosophical interest, but shall not pursue this here. The second difference is between present ("am") and past ("was") tenses. I shall not be exploring this either, save to note that the former does not

<sup>1</sup> M. Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 2008), p. 136, fn. 17, emphasis in original.

easily lend itself to the simple, as opposed to the progressive, especially in the case of action explanation (in this respect future tenses are more similar to past ones).<sup>2</sup> In the main text to which the above note is appended, Thompson accordingly offers these three examples:

“I baked *a loaf of bread*”

“I was baking *a loaf of bread*”

“I am baking *a loaf of bread*”

The sentences serve to mark the transition from simple past to present progressive, via the past progressive, and are all in the first person. This brings us to the final difference, which is between the simple (what I, you, or we do, did, or will do) and the progressive (what any of us were, are, or will be doing). Thompson gives far more attention to this distinction than the other two, making it a central feature of his chapter 8 (‘Action and Time’). I shall follow suit, focusing on talk of action that is simple and talk of action that is continuous. For the narrower purposes of this essay, then, it won’t matter whether these things are in the past, present, or future, or attributed in the first, second, or third person.

Thompson is particularly interested in the progressive because he takes it to reveal the temporal parts expressed by what he calls the event or process’ descriptions of action.<sup>3</sup> This interest stems from Anscombe’s general reminder that ‘a man can *be doing*

<sup>2</sup> Thompson remarks that free-standing sentences in the simple present tense (e.g. ‘I walk to school’) ‘can only be read habitually’ (*Life and Action*, p. 125). But note how we frequently use the tense in question in the course of philosophical writing, as I do throughout this footnote for example.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson (*Life and Action*, p. 13 ff.). This umbrella term functions similarly to Emmon Bach’s term ‘eventuality’. E Bach, “The Algebra of Events,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 9, 5–16 (1986).

something which he nevertheless does not *do*’, if it is some process or enterprise which it takes time to complete and of which, therefore, if it is cut short at any time, we may say that he *was doing* it, but *did not do* it.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the simple past and present highlights a complete or perfective aspect of action that is absent from the (imperfect or incomplete) progressive:

That I walked to school presumably entails that I was, at some point, walking to school. But that I was, at some time, walking to school, does not entail that I ever walked to school; I might have been gunned down or kidnapped by aliens, or again, it might be that I am still walking there.<sup>5</sup>

So, while we can infer from the fact that I walked to school that there must have occurred an event (or process) of my walking there, we cannot conversely infer from the fact that I was (or am) walking to school that there ever was (or will be) an event of my having walked there.<sup>6</sup> To put it the other way round: while it is always possible that I can be engaged in doing something that I never get done, it cannot be true that I did something unless there was a time—however brief or instantaneous—when I *was doing* it viz. during which I was active.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell 1957), §23, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, *Life and Action*, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> According to Thompson’s ‘initial segment argument’ the things we do come in parts in that if I have been walking to school there must be an event of my having walked part of the way, which in turn entails that I had been walking that part of the way etc. This is contested by J. Hornsby (“Basic Activity,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 87, Issue 1, 1-18. § V) on several grounds.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. H. Steward, “Actions as Processes,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 26 (2012), pp. 373–88, and, “Processes, Continuants, and Individuals,” *Mind* 122 (2013), 782–812. The point is not restricted to actions cf. B. O’Shaughnessy, “Processes,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 72 (1971 - 1972), pp. 215-240, A.P.D. Mourelatos, “Events, States, and Processes,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1978), pp. 415-434, and R. Stout, “Processes,”

It should not be surprising, then, that a philosophical study of action which focuses on things one *did* may yield different results from one which focuses on things one *is doing*. To anticipate, an obvious contender for how this difference may be relevant to action theory would be the thought that while the logical form of sentences concerned with the former commits us to the existence of *events* (and nothing else), that of sentences concerned with the latter seems to assume the existence of *processes*.<sup>8</sup>

Consider the opening paragraph of Davidson's article on the logical form of action sentences:

Strange goings on! Jones did it slowly, deliberately, in the bathroom, with a knife, at midnight. What he did was butter a piece of toast. We are too familiar with the language of action to notice at first an anomaly: the 'it' of 'Jones did it slowly, deliberately, ...' seems to refer to some entity, presumably an action, that is then characterized in a number of ways. Asked for the logical form of this sentence, we might volunteer something like, 'There is an action  $x$  such that Jones did  $x$  slowly and Jones did  $x$

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*Philosophy*, Vol. 72, No. 279 (Jan. 1997), pp. 19-27. For worries about instantaneous events see J. Hornsby, "Basic Activity," § II, n. 2.

<sup>8</sup> A significant part of Davidson's project was to prove the former. See D. Davidson "The Logical Form of Action Sentences," in (ed.) N. Rescher, *The Logic of Decision and Action* (University of Pittsburgh Press 1967), Reprinted with "Criticisms, Comments, and Defences," in D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 2nd revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2001), pp. 105-148), to which any page numbers given refer. See also D. Davidson, "Events as Particulars", *Noûs* 4 (1970), reprinted in D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, pp. 181-87), to which any page numbers given refer. Thompson (*Life and Action*, p. 137, fn. 19) notes that Parsons (T. Parsons, "The Progressive in English", *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12 (1989), pp. 213-41) 'attempts to supply a formally straightforward extension of Davidson's doctrine ... to imperfective propositions' but is sceptical about both the intelligibility and the importance of such an ontology. I fear this attitude might extend to some of the things that I am trying to achieve in this essay.

deliberately and Jones did  $x$  in the bathroom, ...’ and so on. But then we need an appropriate single term for ‘ $x$ ’.<sup>9</sup>

Davidson’s solution is to propose an event  $x$ , such that  $x$  is a buttering of the toast by Jones.<sup>10</sup> By this he doesn’t necessarily mean to make the ontological statement that the things we do *are* events but, rather, a point about the *meaning* of statements which seem to refer to such things, which he further identifies with their truth conditions.<sup>11</sup> The point in question is that a statement such as ‘Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom’ is true ‘if and only if there exists an event satisfying these two conditions: it is a buttering of the toast by Jones, and it occurred in the bathroom’.<sup>12</sup> But this doesn’t license us to conflate things done with doings. Davidson’s ontological swallowing-up of the former by the latter would only be acceptable if we can say everything we need to say about action without talking of things done at all.<sup>13</sup>

Thompson’s footnote serves as a reminder that the above is an account of sentences that *prima facie* refer to things *he did*. This is in principle compatible with a different account of sentences that appear to refer to things *I am doing*. So whereas in Anscombe my opening the cupboard to take out the tea can (already, as it were) be redescribed as ‘making the tea’, for Davidson there could only have been an action of making the tea if and only if a corresponding event viz. of my making the tea was a *fait accompli*. This would explain how while it might *appear* that, unlike Anscombe, Davidson cannot allow for forms of (naive) explanation through redescriptions which reveal an imperfect

<sup>9</sup> D. Davidson “The Logical Form of Action Sentences,” p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> For why Davidson’s account can’t do that see C. Sandis, *The Things We Do and Why We Do Them* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), p. 145ff.

aspect of the action in question, their views are strictly speaking not at odds with each other since Davidson's analysis only purports to be about *things done*.

In what follows I shall argue that while it is not always a mistake to align events with the simple and processes with the continuous (and not only so in the case of action but with *any* happening or occurrence). I shall tackle this issue in a roundabout way, by exploring the different difference between *what* one does and *one's doing* it. On the face of it, it may seem that Davidson's remarks are about the former and Anscombe and Thompson's about the latter, but I shall attempt to demonstrate that this is not so.

## I

### The Structure of Doables

Thompson follows Anscombe and Davidson in maintaining that one and the same action has numerous descriptions and may be intentional under some of them but not others. As stated the view is reasonably uncontroversial, but its precise meaning largely hangs on what is meant by 'action' here.

Some philosophers of action distinguish between the *things we do* ('doables') and our *acts of doing* them ('doings'), a distinction intended to be analogous to that between things we perceive, believe, or say etc. and our perceiving, believing, or saying them.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> E.g. J. Macmurray, "What is Action?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume XVII (1938), pp. 69-85, J. Hornsby *Actions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1980) and "On What's Intentionally Done," in S. Shute, J. Gardner, and J. Horder, (eds.), *Action and Value in Criminal Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993) pp. 57-74, P. Ricœur, *From Text to Action*, trns. K. Blamey & J.B.Thompson (London: The Athlone Press 1986/1991), and C. Sandis, *The Things We Do and Why We Do Them*.

The most influential way of capturing this Fregean distinction in Anglophone philosophy is that of Jennifer Hornsby.<sup>15</sup> The precise details of her view have evolved over the years, but the following serves well as a clear statement of how it relates to the thesis that whether or not an action is intentional is a matter of description:

Actions are particulars—unrepeatable things, named by phrases like ‘Hyam’s setting light to the petrol at two o’clock on the fateful day’, and ‘my reading this paper now’, *Something done*, on the other hand, is not a particular: things done are named by phrases like ‘inflict damage’, or ‘eat an egg’, or ‘throw a brick’... a person’s doing one thing may be the same as her doing another thing...when a person does two things, she may do one intentionally and the other not intentionally...someone who inflicts damage by throwing a brick, might throw the brick intentionally, but not inflict damage intentionally.<sup>16</sup>

Hornsby is here explicitly stating that doables are not actions, even once we have done them. If so, then Thompson’s naive theory is not about action and its explanation. We should not get caught up on whether the term action is here being used technically or ordinarily, on whether it might be ambiguous between two things, and so on. What matters is that there is a distinction to be made, whatever we end up calling—and whatever the precise ontology of—the things that Hornsby is distinguishing. Of particular interest here is the thought that there can be one act of one’s doing two different things, and that different descriptions apply to the former but not the latter. Across two consecutive footnotes Hornsby adds:

[T]he things—that agents do—, unlike actions, are themselves as finely discriminated as (interpreted) descriptions of actions ... where an agent

<sup>15</sup> See J. Hornsby “Thinkables”, in M. Sainsbury(ed.), *Thought and Ontology* (Milan: Franco Angeli 1997), for why the distinction is Fregean.

<sup>16</sup> J. Hornsby, “On What’s Intentionally Done,” p. 56; See J. Hornsby, *Actions*, pp. 3-5.

does one thing in or by doing another, her doing the one thing is (identical with) her doing the other, so that ‘doing the one thing’ and ‘doing the other’ both apply to her action.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, when one looks at the work of Anscombe, Davidson, and Thompson they all seem happy to talk of redescriptions of things one did, does, will do and/or was, is, or will be doing. Consider the following remarks by Anscombe and Davidson:

‘Why are you moving your arm up and down?’ - ‘I’m pumping’. Why are you pumping?’ - ‘I’m pumping the water-supply for the house’...moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water-supply; and, in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household.

So there is one action with four descriptions...<sup>18</sup>

*Explaining* an action by giving an intention with which it was done provides new descriptions of the action: I am writing my name on a piece of paper with the intention of writing a cheque with the intention of paying my gambling debt. List all the different descriptions of my action. Here are a few for a start: I am writing my name. I am writing my name on a piece of paper. I am writing my name on a piece of paper with the intention of writing a cheque. I am writing a cheque. I am paying my gambling debt. It is hard to imagine how we can have a coherent theory of action unless we are allowed to say that each of these sentences is made true by the same action.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> J. Hornsby “On What’s Intentionally Done,” p. 56, fns. 2 and 3.

<sup>18</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, § 23, p. 38, and § 26, p. 46). See also G. E. M. Anscombe, “Under a Description,” *Noûs* 13 (1979). Reprinted in her *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind. Collected Papers Volume II* (Oxford: Blackwell), 208-219, to which any page references refer.

<sup>19</sup> D. Davidson “The Logical Form of Action Sentences”, p. 110). For a similar passage paraphrased by Thompson (*Life and Action*, p. 87) in which intentions are replaced by wants see D. Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes,”

There are two things worth noting here before returning to my main point. The first is that despite beginning with talk of what *was done*, Davidson proceeds to examples of what *I am doing*. This is a rare exception to his characteristic use of the third present simple past pointed out by Thompson in the passage I quoted at the outset of this essay. I take it that this can be explained by the fact that Davidson is here mirroring the passage by Anscombe I quoted above. The second thing to note is an important difference between the two approaches. Anscombe proposes that we can explain an action by offering a redescription of it which reveals more about what the agent was doing. Davidson, by contrast, takes the redescription of the action to reveal her intention or desire. The central feature of Thompson's naive explanation of action (Chapter 7) is a defence of Anscombe's view that we cannot fully know *what* someone did unless we know *why* they did it.<sup>20</sup> I am persuaded by Thompson's arguments here, but what I say below, if right, challenges an important detail of his thesis.

Let us now return to the fact that Anscombe and Davidson maintain that *what* one did or was doing may be variously described, a view inherited by Thompson. The view also appears to have been held by J.L. Austin:

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*Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963), pp. 685-700, reprinted in Davidson (*Essays on Actions and Events*, 3-19), to which any page numbers given refer: pp. 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intentions*, § 46, p.83). A very similar view may be found in R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1946/1994), p. 177 and p. 215). *Pace* Anscombe, Thompson maintains that we typically explain actions not by redescribing them but by offering description of logically separate actions of which the act to be explained is a smaller part. Thus, whereas Anscombe believes that my breaking those eggs *is* my making an omelette Thompson thinks the former action is a distinct part of the latter (M. Thompson, *Life and Action*, p. 110, fn. 7). J. Hornsby ("Basic Activity," p. 5) suggests that Anscombe may be exonerated if she is loosely talking about *activities*.

...it is in principle always open to us, along various lines, to describe or refer to “what I did” in so many ways.<sup>21</sup>

So put, the claim simply describes our ordinary linguistic practices, in which ‘what I did’ is itself ambiguous. It is only when we draw philosophical conclusions from this that the trouble arises. Is Thompson’s view not sufficiently ‘naive’ to escape my criticisms? Perhaps. He is certainly not guilty of any *linguistic* error. Rather, there is a conceptual distinction that, like Anscombe before him, Thomson fails to notice because it is masked by ordinary language. I shall try to demonstrate that disambiguation here helps us to make better sense of the relation of one action to another, and of all action to intention, time, and ethics.

Anscombe, Davidson, and Thompson casually switch from talk of descriptions of *what* one did or was doing to descriptions of (the event or process of) their doing it. Davidson’s official view is that there are no entities called ‘things done’ only events:

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...I do not believe we can give a cogent account of action...unless we accept events as individuals.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> J. L. Austin, “Unfair to Facts,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume XXIV, reprinted in J. L. Austin (*Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1961), pp. 102-22), to which any page numbers refer: p. 148, as quoted by D. Davidson “The Logical Form of Action Sentences,” on p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> D. Davidson, “The Individuation of Events”, in (ed.) N. Rescher, *Essays in Honour of Carl G. Hempel* (Dordrecht: R. Reidel), pp. 216-34, reprinted in D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 165. See D. Davidson, “Events as Particulars,” for the further thesis that events are particulars and D. Davidson, “Reply to Jennifer Hornsby,” in L. E. Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing 1999) pp. 636-7, pp. 636-40, for his (in my opinion misguided) resistance to Hornsby’s way of ontologizing actions.

Anscombe famously toys with the idea that ‘I do what happens’.<sup>23</sup> While reluctant to go along with it she switches back and forth between descriptions of doings such as ‘my pumping (of) the water’—which she sometimes refers to as ‘events’—and descriptions of *what* one is doing, such as ‘pumping the water’. Thompson likewise moves between descriptions of ‘things one was doing’ and ‘event – or process’ descriptions.<sup>24</sup> But his distinction between the simple and the progressive cannot license this if Hornsby et. al. are right that one’s doing something (viz. one’s being engaged in an activity<sup>25</sup>) is to be distinguished from *what* one is doing, and that the failure to appreciate this leads to all sorts of trouble in the philosophy of action and its explanation.<sup>26</sup>

David Charles (2014) has suggested that *what* is done is an event and the *doing* of it a process. While it is true, as Thompson and Davidson both suggest, that there cannot be a thing done without some corresponding event, this does not license us to identify the two. After all, it is also true that there cannot be a thing done without a corresponding fact.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, § 29, pp.52-3.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, M. Thompson, *Life and Actions*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>25</sup> J. Hornsby (“Basic Activity,” § III) argues persuasively that the activities we are engaged in are not particulars (two people may be engaged in the same activity).

<sup>26</sup> The term ‘action’ is ambiguous. Macmurray reserves it for the thing done, Hornsby for the doing of it. A further complication I shall not pursue here the further question of whether the ‘of’ in ‘event of my doing x’ is one of identity. See C. Sandis, *The Things We Do and Why We Do Them*, Ch. 1.1 and 2.2.

<sup>27</sup> See n. 12 above. For the relation of facts to events see P. Strawson, “Truth,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume xxiv, pp. 129-57, J. L. Austin, “Unfair to Facts,” and H. McCann, “Nominals, Facts, and Two Conceptions of Events,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Feb. 1979), 129-149.

In order to motivate this view, more needs to be said about why it is wrong to conflate ‘pumping the water’ with ‘*my* pumping (of<sup>28</sup>) the water’. We saw above that Hornsby thinks the latter is a particular. Whatever the correct metaphysics, the point here is that whereas we can both be engaged in the same activity viz. that of pumping the water (perhaps even together and for the same reason), my pumping (of) the water is distinct from yours; they may, for example, have different phenomenologies (strictly speaking, it makes no sense to say that the activity itself has a fixed phenomenology). So, while I agree with Hornsby that actions—viz. our engagement in activities—should not be confused with the activities we are engaged in when we act (and that neither should be confused with what the agent *did*) I part company with her in not assuming that the abovementioned ‘of’ is one of identity and, *mutatis mutandis*, that the activity we are both engaged in is ‘pumping the water’.<sup>29</sup> If I am right to be sceptical about these things, then what one *is doing* and what one *did* are not so different in structure: both are doables as opposed to doings.<sup>30</sup>

It is worth asking, at this point, whether doables are repeatables: can one do or be doing the same thing more than once the way that one can say or think the same thing on more than one occasion? I can certainly keep reading the same book, cooking the same meal or, indeed, making the same mistake, or

<sup>28</sup> For thoughts on the ontological significance of the word ‘of’ in this context see J. Hornsby, “Anomalousness in Action,” in L. E. Hahn *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, pp. 623-35, p. 624, fn. 5, and C. Sandis, *The Things We Do and Why We Do Them*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>29</sup> See fn. 28 above.

<sup>30</sup> These are akin to Hornsby’s thinkables (J. Hornsby, “Thinkables”); J. D. Velleman (‘Doables’, *Philosophical Explorations*, Jan 2013: DOI:10.1080/13869795.2012.756924) uses the term ‘doables’ in a related but distinct sense, albeit without explicitly distinguishing them from doings.

telling the same lie time after time. By contrast I cannot keep killing the same person or eating the exact same carrot each time in the same way in which I can keep reading the same copy of a book (though I may bake something more than once). In this sense, we can build unrepeatability into some fine-grained descriptions of what was done, but this has nothing to do with the logic or ontology of action: were my victim to rise from the dead I could kill him again.<sup>31</sup>

With this in mind, suppose now that we both pump water on different occasions and that my pumping the water can be redescribed as my poisoning the inhabitants but yours cannot be redescribed as your poisoning the inhabitants. In such a case there is no answer to the question of whether what we did (viz. pump the water) can be redescribed as poisoning the inhabitants. Anscombe et al. must accordingly commit themselves to the view that, strictly speaking, two people cannot do the same thing, and nobody can do the same thing more than once, but only the same *type* of thing. But the argument for this had better not be that *my* doing *x* is distinct from *your* doing *x*, since this has already been granted. Moreover, the move that the things we do are types rather than tokens (which, incidentally, Hornsby is sympathetic to) is at odds with the claim about redescriptions since it cannot be the case that ‘pumping the water’ is redescribable as ‘poisoning the inhabitants’, for one can perform an action that falls under the first type but not the other. If we are to talk of redescriptions here at all then, these must be necessary rather than contingent: killing a cat is always redescribable as killing an animal, reading *Life and Action* is always redescribable as reading a book, and so on. But no thing done will always be describable as

<sup>31</sup> We might also artificially build in features of the situation into our descriptions e.g. I killed him on Wednesday 23 July, 2014, but these are not really properties of *what* I did but of *when* I did it.

intentional unless the intention is already built into the very name we give it, e.g. lying (as opposed to telling a falsehood).<sup>32</sup> For those prone to analogical thinking, we might compare such considerations to the things we say, see, believe, fear, and so on.<sup>33</sup> It seems to me at best misleading to treat any of these as entities for which we need to provide an ontology, though it needn't follow from this that we must adopt a completely quietist stance.<sup>34</sup>

I have elsewhere suggested a related attempt to individuate things done, as opposed to doings which takes the form of a Rylean test in which we ask of any two things done whether the agent can be said to have done the first *and* the second. Gilbert Ryle argues that someone who contracts his eyelids as a form of winking (in turn making a conspiratorial signal) does not do three things but one. The example is perhaps meant to be reminiscent of his claim that one who buys a pair of matching gloves does not *also* buy a left glove and a right glove<sup>35</sup>, but there is an important disanalogy, for buying two matching gloves (typically a left and right one) is constitutive of what it is to buy a pair of gloves, whereas one can contract ones eyelids without winking. My contracting my eyelids *is* my winking which in turn *is* my making a

<sup>32</sup> cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, & J. Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 1954), §644, and G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, § 25.

<sup>33</sup> For views I am sympathetic to see A. R. White, "What We Believe," in N. Rescher (ed.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Mind*, APQ monograph series no.6 (Oxford: Blackwell 1972), pp. 69-84, and J. Hornsby, "Thinkables." For the same-saying correlate to the same-doing position I have been attacking here see D. Davidson, "On Saying That," *Synthese* 17 (1968), pp. 304-23, reprinted in D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2011), pp. 17- 36, to which any page numbers given refer.

<sup>34</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 304. See also J. Hornsby, "Basic Activity", § III.

<sup>35</sup> G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: London: Hutchinson 1949), p. 23.

conspiratorial sign, but this doesn't entail that I only do the one thing. The Anscombean individuation of *doings* offers no principled reason why we should not individuate *doables* in terms of informative conjunctions.

If my buttering the toast was my making a mess, then it would be natural to say that I both buttered the toast *and* made a mess, whereas it is at best misleading to claim that Oedipus killed both an old man *and* his father. A good explanation of why this is so is that while I could have buttered that piece of toast and not made a mess (or made a mess without buttering the toast), Oedipus could not have killed *that* old man without killing his father (or vice versa). If this is right then Anscombe is wrong to say that 'handing two bits of paper to the girl' is the same action as 'paying the gas bill'<sup>36</sup> *even if* my doing the one is sometimes the same action as my doing the other.

While I see no overwhelming reason to completely abandon these approaches, they are not worry free. One difficulty is that people's intuitions may not always cohere. Another is the pragmatist thought that different methods of individuation will be appropriate for different purposes, so that the answer to the question 'how many things are you doing?' depends on why one wants to know. In addition, we may legitimately wonder whether 'thing done' is a count noun at all. However we decide these matters, though, remains possible that one can perform an act of doing more than one thing. *Pari passu*, it cannot be the case that every correct description of my doing  $x$  yields a new description of *what* I am doing.

<sup>36</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, § 42, p. 80.

## II

### Conclusion

I have been suggesting it is only our *doings*—and not our *doables*—that are open to various descriptions. By the same token, it is only our doings that relate to time in the ongoing ways that Thompson suggests. *What* one is doing, just like *what* one did, does not unfold over time at all. To be sure, one may do different parts of what one is doing *at* different intervals (e.g. break the eggs before taking the pan out of the cupboard), but we cannot infer from this that either the sub-parts or the whole thing I did occurred *in* or *across* time, only that in the particular case in question they were done at different moments. What I was doing may have taken me time, but all this can mean is that it took me time to do it i.e.—and here I find myself in alliance with Davidson—that my doing it took time.

Finally, just as we can distinguish between doing what is intended and acting intentionally, we now have the tools needed to distinguish between doing *what* is right and acting *rightly*. This is of relevance to Thompson's take on the relation of the particular to the general,<sup>37</sup> in the third section of his book. But the discussion of the relation of Thompson's philosophy of action to his moral philosophy shall have to await some future occasion.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> M. Thompson, *Life and Action*, pp. 161-66 and pp. 172-6.

<sup>38</sup> Many thanks to Catherine Rowett for very helpful discussions, to István Zárday, and to Louise Chapman for helpful comments on earlier drafts.