

## 6. THERE ARE REASONS AND REASONS

## 6.1. INTRODUCTION

Why do people do the things that they do? This is a very general question, and I want here to treat it as such, without unduly narrowing it down. I do, however, want to restrict the question to those things done that are intentional actions, or things done for a reason in the particular sense that Elisabeth Anscombe was searching for in her book *Intention*.<sup>1</sup> People sometimes do things other than what we would consider to be intentional actions. When Talleyrand (the great French diplomat who served in turn the Ancient Régime, the Revolutionary government, Napoleon I, the restored monarchy with Louis XVIII, and Louis-Philippe after the 1830 revolution) finally died in 1838, Metternich famously remarked ‘I wonder what he meant by doing that’. But people do not die intentionally, for reasons in the sense required for meaningful intentional action (suicide is something quite different), and that is what makes the remark into a nice compliment to Talleyrand, who was said never to do anything without good reason.

Now, following on from Anscombe, and since the work of Donald Davidson, I will characterise intentional action as action done for a primary reason, consisting of a belief and an attitude towards this kind of action (I will from now on call it a desire, in the knowledge that this term is desperately vague; but nothing hangs on it here), and this belief and desire will give the answer why, in the sense we want, people do the things that they do. As Davidson puts it, the primary reason rationalises the action. And it will also causally explain it.<sup>2</sup>

That intentional action can be explained in this way, by reference to mental states of the individual – beliefs and desires – is now pretty much a philosophical commonplace, and the idea now has claim for a kind of monopoly. In fact, it has claim for two kinds of monopoly. First, it claims a monopoly in the sense that all intentional actions are supposed to be explainable by appeal to the individual’s beliefs and desires – by what I will from now on call a belief-desire explanation. This first monopolistic claim has recently been challenged, but I have no quarrel with it so far as it goes;<sup>3</sup> in fact, I think it is correct.

It is the second claim for monopoly that is my target. This is the claim that belief-desire explanation fully and satisfactorily explains intentional action, or, alternatively, that any other kind of explanation will ultimately resolve into a belief-desire explanation. When it comes to action explanation (and prediction too for that matter, although that will not be my concern here), the belief-desire story is supposed to be the only game in town. For example, Jerry Fodor uses the terms ‘commonsense psychology’ and ‘commonsense belief-desire psychology’ pretty much interchangeably, and Donald Davidson says that

constructing a primary reason (a belief-desire pair) is not only necessary but also sufficient to rationalise an action. More recently, Greg Currie and Ian Ravenscroft place all their emphasis on the idea that our 'everyday understanding of minds' requires a grasp of 'the beliefs and desires of someone ...whose behaviour we want to predict or understand', and Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich say that 'the central concepts implicated in mindreading' are 'belief, desire, intention'.<sup>4</sup>

In challenging this second claim for monopoly, I will try to show that our everyday explanations of intentional action – as part of our so-called folk psychology – are characteristically quite different from this. What will emerge, I hope, is that these everyday kinds of explanations of action, which I will call *thicker explanations*, are much more revealing, much more far-reaching, and much more varied than belief-desire explanations. Because I am not challenging the first monopolistic claim, I am not denying the availability of belief-desire explanations. What I am denying is their explanatory adequacy; belief-desire explanations are seldom sufficient *as explanations*. Moreover, in their detail belief-desire explanations are not necessary either, except in special circumstances of the kind I will be discussing.

If this is true, then there are significant implications for the philosophical debate concerning the way we go about our everyday explanations of other people's actions. If the belief-desire story was the only game in town, then any explanation of action would have to appeal to these reasons – beliefs and desires as occurrent mental states of the individual – and appeal to these reasons would be sufficient to explain an action. And then the question becomes pressing as to how we 'gain access' to, or come to know, another person's beliefs and desires. Do we gain a grasp of these reasons, these occurrent mental states of the other person, by theorising about them, as what are sometimes called 'unobservables'; or do we simulate or imaginatively project ourselves into the shoes of the other person in order to generate imaginative counterparts of the other's mental states in our own minds, and then assume that the other is thinking as we are? It is now fashionable to call this the 'mindreading' debate, which is the term supposed to bring out the apparent mysteriousness of how we can 'gain access' to what is going on in another's mind.<sup>5</sup> But if my claim is true, then this whole debate would seem to have the wrong focus: 'Mindreading', in the sense of 'reading' the goings-on in another's mind, is only a small part of what is necessary for our everyday framework of action explanation, and this is because the detailed goings-on in the other person's minds as causes of the action are not relevant to those thicker explanations that I will be discussing. What the current debate seems to have lost track of is something that ought not to be at all controversial, namely the sheer complexity of the aetiology of intentional action, and the consequent diversity of possible causal factors that can be appealed to in any given explanation. Beliefs and desires, as occurrent mental states, are only one causal factor, and appealing to them to explain an action is (except in special circumstances) redundant.

## 6.2. BELIEF-DESIRE EXPLANATIONS AND THIN RATIONALITY

In our everyday discourse about action explanation, when do we refer to beliefs and desires? The kinds of example that are discussed in our lectures in the philosophy of mind are usually very simple. Someone opens the door of the fridge because he wants a beer and believes that opening the door is the best means of getting a beer, believing, as he does, that there is a beer in the fridge. Someone takes an umbrella because she believes that it is going to rain later on, because she wants not to get wet and because she believes that taking an umbrella is the best means of avoiding getting wet.

Then the lecturer goes on to point out that our explanations sometimes only refer to a desire ('he wanted a beer') and sometimes only to a belief ('she thought that it was going to rain'), but this is merely for Gricean pragmatic reasons, because reference to the other mental state is redundant, given the explanatory needs of the situation; it does not imply that a full belief-desire explanation is not available. It is also pointed out that this kind of belief-desire explanation can be expanded to allow for much more complex examples of intentional action.

I think this is all fine; in respect of all intentional actions, such belief-desire explanations are indeed available. This is the first monopolistic claim, and I am not disputing it. Indeed, it seems to me that in our thinking about action, our own and other people's, we just *take it for granted* – it is, I dare say, a priori – that belief-desire explanations are always going to be available.

Although we take it for granted that belief-desire explanations of intentional action are always going to be available, in practice we really only need to turn to their detail under special circumstances. Sometimes we turn to them when there is some kind of mistake involved, and in particular when one or more of the beliefs involved is false: There is no beer in the fridge. Sometimes we turn to them for forensic reasons; we might ask if she actually believed that this umbrella that she took was hers, or whether she just took the first umbrella that she saw. On such occasions, it is the specific details of what is in the person's mind that matters.

Where these special circumstances do not obtain, the reason why we do not turn to belief-desire explanations is that they are so thin as to be redundant or of little explanatory use. They explain so little partly because they rely, in turn, on such a thin notion of rationality. To rationalise an action in this thin sense is just to show how it could make sense for someone to do such a thing. And it can often make sense to do one of a diverse range of possible things. Someone is the non-paying guest in a restaurant, and the waiter brings him the wrong flavour of ice cream, explaining that they have run out of the chocolate flavour, which he ordered, and that this is why the waiter has brought him the strawberry flavour instead. It would make sense for one to tell the waiter to take it back; it would make sense for one to eat what one is given; it would make sense for one to leave it uneaten; it would make sense for one to throw the ice cream on the floor and walk out of the restaurant; it would make sense for one to offer the ice cream to one's host; it would make sense for one to pour the ice cream onto one's host's lap, etc. So we must not forget that a belief-desire explanation does not explain why someone did

one thing rather than another which was also open to him and which also would have made sense. The point is at its most stark if you are asked to *predict* what a rational person (that is all we know about him or her) will do if he or she is brought the wrong flavour of ice cream by a waiter in a restaurant. ‘Well’, you will sensibly reply, ‘it depends’.<sup>6</sup>

This thinness gives a supple kind of strength to belief-desire explanation, for it leaves the explanation open to be thickened out or supplemented in all kinds of ways, with reasons other than beliefs and desires.<sup>7</sup> Assume that our diner left the ice cream on his plate. To a rough approximation, the belief-desire explanation is that he did this because he desired not to eat the ice cream, believing it to be strawberry-flavoured, and he desired chocolate flavour and not strawberry. But this is singularly uninformative. It is the thicker explanation which is more interesting to us and which will give us the kind of interesting and revealing explanation that we are seeking when we ask why he left his ice cream. For example, does his action reveal a certain inconsiderateness towards his host?

It is to the various kinds of thickening out that I now turn. I will put them into four broad categories – more for the sake of discussion than out of some taxonomising zeal. The first kind of thicker explanation is concerned with motive and desirability characterisation.

### 6.3. THICKER EXPLANATIONS

#### 6.3.1. *Motive and desirability characterisation*

I will start with Elisabeth Anscombe’s famous example of ‘the man who (intentionally) moves his arm, operates the pump, replenishes the water supply, poisons the inhabitants’. Anscombe says that the man is performing just one action which has four descriptions, ‘each dependent on wider circumstances, and each related to the next as description of means to end’... ‘the last term we give in such a series [A, B, C, D] gives 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. The mark of this “swallowing up” is that it is not wrong to give D as the answer to the question “Why?” about A’.<sup>8</sup>

The thinnest of belief-desire explanations in the example is that the man wants to move his arm and believes that he can do this by doing just what he is doing. It is less thin if the explanation appeals to the ultimate intention, the last in the series, which is to poison the inhabitants; so this belief-desire explanation would then be that the man wants to poison the inhabitants and believes that he can do this by doing what he is doing, namely operating the pump by moving his arm in this way. But our interest in such a case extends beyond this, to find an explanation of *why* the man wants to poison the inhabitants. We are looking beyond his desire, for some *desirability characterisation* as Anscombe calls it, which will capture what is desirable for this man about poisoning the inhabitants. Let us now assume that ‘The bastards deserve to die in agony after what they did to us’ captures this desirability characterisation.

This seems now to be an act of revenge. Revenge was the *motive*. As Anscombe says, ‘popularly, “motive for an action” has a rather wider and more diverse application than “intention with which the action was done”’; ‘[t]o give a motive ... is to say something like “See the action in this light”’.<sup>9</sup> I would like to put it like this: The notion of motive is both summarising and evaluative of what is in the mind of the person doing the action, but it does not imply that the motive, as such, was in the person’s mind as he did the action. So when we say that this man’s motive was revenge, we do not imply that revenge as such was in his mind as he was operating the pump. The man might be so caught up in the desperate cycle of revenge that he might not even dwell on the desirability characterisation of his action; he simply carries on, tit for tat, atrocity for atrocity. A man can be ‘set on’ revenge but not be thinking about revenge as such. The point in general, though, applies equally to motives such as curiosity, spite, friendship (examples of Anscombe’s), vanity, pride, self-improvement, ambition, greed, envy, modesty, inconsiderateness.

Take the first of these: an action done out of curiosity. You have invited your neighbours round for drinks. We see one of them wander out of the drawing room, heading up the stairs towards the bedroom. I ask you why she is going up the stairs, and you reply ‘Curiosity’. If it is true that she is doing this out of curiosity, then the appropriate desirability characterisation might be ‘It would be interesting to see what their bedroom looks like’. Perhaps if pressed as to why she thought she would find that interesting, she might say, ‘Well, come to think of it, I suppose I was just curious,’ but that is not to give a further reason – a further thought, latent or occurrent – to causally explain her action; rather it reveals that she later accepts that it is appropriate for us to see her action in this light. In giving this thicker kind of explanation, appealing to motive, we go beyond the belief-desire explanation.

Now consider the last of the motives on my list: inconsiderateness. A man opens the fridge door, looks in, sees just one remaining slice of lemon pie and eats it. Let us say that his only relevant desire was for food (a so-called unmotivated desire<sup>10</sup>), and, if pressed, the best he might be able to say to explain his action is ‘Well, I was just hungry, and there was the lemon pie.’ But our thicker, evaluative, explanation claims that he was being inconsiderate, and it goes further than the belief-desire explanation: It accepts the truth of the belief-desire explanation, and adds the idea that something was *lacking* in this man’s motivations: he failed to take account of others’ interests (we might also have said he was being selfish and thoughtless). This explanation of his action – ‘he was being inconsiderate’ – is a kind of evaluatively loaded causal explanation: Just as we say that the building collapsed because the builders did not bolt the beam to the wall (as they should have done), we say that the man took the last slice of pie because he failed to consider others’ interests (as he should have done). In saying that he was being inconsiderate, there is no implication that his thinking involved first considering others’ interests, and then on reflection he found them to be of less importance; on the contrary, the remark suggests that the interests of others never so much as entered his mind. So this example shows clearly that one cannot always equate motive and intention. And

how much more interesting and revealing is this thicker explanation than the one that just cites the man's actual beliefs and desires – what actually went on in his mind at the time!

In thickening out the explanation by appeal to motive and desirability characterisation, we also leave beliefs and desires behind in this sense: Having determined what the motive and desirability characterisation were, we are not interested in the *detailed* goings-on in the mind of the person doing the action, the *specific* beliefs and desires, except under special circumstances of the kind I mentioned earlier. Moreover, the order of discovery does not have to be, and typically is not, first discovering the specific beliefs and desires and then inferring the motive and desirability characterisation. Sometimes the motive can be manifest in a person's intentional action – consider greed and vanity as examples. On other occasions, the process can be one of testing various possible motives and desirability characterisations against the specifics of particular actions. Detectives work like this. What was his motive for suffocating his terminally ill wife – love, financial gain, revenge or loathing? But if it had been financial gain, why did he show such complete lack of interest in her financial affairs? Thus, we can test each possible motive against the detail, but finally it is the motive that concerns us more, not just because it is thicker than the belief-desire explanation, but also because it is evaluative.

Motive and desirability characterisation, then, are the first kind of thicker explanation of action, beyond what is going on in the person's mind when he acts. The second is character and personality.

### 6.3.2. *Character and personality*

We often appeal to someone's character or personality to explain their action. Character traits, as well as many personality traits, are, roughly, dispositions reliably to have (or to lack) certain kinds of motives in certain kinds of situation, and thus reliably to act in certain kinds of ways. Although some personality traits, for example habits and action tendencies such as being fidgety are simply dispositions to behave in certain ways and in certain kinds of situation, and are not concerned with motive, it is a profoundly serious mistake to assume that all traits are merely dispositions to behave.<sup>11</sup> Most involve motive. To appeal to one of these traits to explain an action implies a certain kind of motive, but it goes further: It also implies a certain degree of reliability. 'Why did he eat that last slice of lemon pie?' The reply, 'Because he's inconsiderate' goes further than 'Because he was being inconsiderate'; the former implies both lack of consideration at the time and a reliable lack of consideration in this kind of situation; the latter merely implies a lack of consideration at the time.

Appeal to character and personality traits in this way certainly is a kind of action explanation. But it is not an explanation that cites the trait itself as a cause; rather, it points towards some sort of motive as a cause. The explanation that she helped him pick up his papers after they had fallen out of his briefcase because she is a kind and helpful person implies, first, that she has a disposition reliably to have kind and helpful motives when appropriate, and secondly, that this disposition was

operative on this occasion: she did have these motives. Of course in explaining an action in this way one does not pretend to explain why she has a kind and helpful disposition. It is, you might say, a dormitive virtue explanation, and these explanations have their place in our explanatory framework.<sup>12</sup>

I should mention here a claim that is sometimes made by philosophers and social psychologists: That, whilst it is accepted that our everyday psychological talk is replete with talk of character, there really are no such things as reliable character traits, understood as robust traits that are both stable and consistent across a broad and diverse range of situations.<sup>13</sup> I have discussed these claims elsewhere, so my comments here will be brief.<sup>14</sup> The first comment concerns the stability of traits. Our everyday psychological practice crucially depends on appeals to stable motives – in other words to mental dispositions, and not just to occurrent mental states. He leaves work early to go to his son’s school play, in spite of the important deal that had to be done that day. When we explain this by saying that he left early because he is a loving parent, the explanation does more than appeal to his occurrent loving thought about his son. It appeals to his loving disposition towards his son, of which his occurrent loving thought is an expression. Now, it is not generally denied here that there can be such dispositions; so let us assume that he has such a disposition. The question then turns to consistency, which is where the pressure on traits generally rises. It is true that we do expect consistency in respect of a trait such as love of one’s son, which ought to find expression in all kinds of situation, and not just when it is time to go to the school play. And it is also true that we are often disappointed: We can disappoint ourselves and others by acting out of character; and social psychologists have shown great ingenuity in proving it. But what this shows (so I argue elsewhere) is not that we should drop all talk of character, and of virtue, because character and virtue fail to manifest themselves with the required consistency across a diverse range of situations. Rather, it shows that our talk of character is *idealistic*. If we say that someone is loving towards his children, then we imply that he, as such a person, *ought* to have loving thoughts towards his child in all sorts of different situation, and that he *ought* to act accordingly. And of course it is possible to fail to have the thoughts and to do the things that one ought to do as a loving person whilst still being a loving person. I will turn to an example shortly.

Explanations of action in terms of character and personality, then, also go beyond belief-desire explanations. They indicate some kind of stability and consistency in motive and action. They are evaluative and normative. And – like motive in this respect too – they are less specific than belief-desire explanations. They just point towards a general sort of motive (or lack of motive) – kindness, helpfulness, inconsiderateness, and so on – without being concerned with the precise details of what was going on in the other person’s mind at the time of the action.

### 6.3.3. *Emotion, mood, and other undue influences on thinking*

To explain actions, we often appeal to factors that unduly influence thinking – the way someone’s mind works on an occasion – that are not themselves entirely

within what has been called the 'space of reasons': They so to speak bridge the divide between the mental and the physical. They include states such as being drunk, being under the influences of drugs, having a bad cold and being deprived of sleep.<sup>15</sup> They also include emotions like being angry and being jealous, which, although intentional and capable of being grounded in reasons, can still unduly influence thinking. They also include moods, like being depressed, tense, irritable, full of unlocated sexual desire, which are states that are sort of in between states like being drunk and states like being angry: They are intentional, but less specific in their objects than emotion.

Obviously, these states can affect one's ability to engage in certain kinds of theoretical reasoning: Adding up a column of figures or doing philosophy is harder when drunk or feeling irritable, for example. But in practical reasoning, they can also influence thinking by making salient certain considerations over others, and thereby effecting choices – thus, my use of the expression 'undue influence'. 'He proposed marriage because he was drunk' points towards this kind of explanation in terms of undue influence; the action, of proposing marriage, was intentional, but the implication is that he would not have made the proposal if he had not been drunk. This is the familiar territory of weakness of will, accidie, and of action that one later regrets. Being drunk can also explain things done and not intended (his dropping the glass), and it can also explain the unintended manner in which an intentional action is done (his wavering as he headed towards the door), but it is on undue influences on thinking that I will be focusing.

Consider being depressed. Her deciding not to go to work today can be explained by the fact that she was depressed. This thick explanation goes beyond the explanation that appeals to her rationalising occurrent mental states. Perhaps what went on in her mind at the time was the thought that she might not be able to handle this large and important deal, and the thought that if she didn't turn up to work, then someone else would assume the responsibility for it. Our thicker explanation – she was depressed – goes beyond this by pointing towards an explanation of *why* she had those thoughts. These two kinds of explanation are not in competition. That she is depressed is not a rationalising explanation; it is more in the territory of an 'excusing' explanation (with the Austinian qualification that some excusing explanations get you on the hook rather than off it).<sup>16</sup> Of course being depressed can feature as a reason in a belief-desire explanation ('She visited her psychiatrist because she believed that she was depressed'), but in the cases I am interested in, it does not; it just unduly influences reason and choice.<sup>17</sup>

With this last point in mind, another example can be given using emotion. Your shouting at your child for not sitting up straight in his high chair, in spite of your loving disposition towards her, can be explained by the fact that you were angry. Your action can also be given a belief-desire explanation: You wanted her to sit up straight, and you believed that shouting 'Sit up straight!' at her was the best means of getting her to do this. But why did you have these thoughts? Because you were angry, and because shouting at people who do not do what one wants is characteristic of angry behaviour.<sup>18</sup>

Sometimes, the explanation does not directly refer to the individual's mental condition (drunkenness, depression, anger) and its influence on thinking, but instead it refers to the particular situation that the individual is in: implying, but not stating, that being in that situation typically brings about a certain kind of influence on thinking. The literature in social psychology these days is replete with examples, many of which are surprising when first encountered. In the so-called endowment effect, people tend to value goods which they own much more than they expect to value them before they are 'endowed' with them. In one experimental study, participants predicted that they would exchange a school mug once they owned it for \$3.73 on average; but after they owned it, their average exchange price was around \$6.<sup>19</sup> So, based on knowledge of this kind of causal influence, it is possible for us to explain someone's apparently 'unreasonable' choices or behaviour in situations of this kind outside the laboratory, by reference to the situation – 'He was a "victim" of the endowment effect' – with the implication that in such situations this is what people typically choose to do, and that this particular person is typical in that respect.<sup>20</sup>

Our everyday psychology is replete with action explanations like these. We come, through experience, through literature and the arts, through reading newspapers and history books, through knowledge of experimental psychology, to know what influences various kinds of factors typically have on people.<sup>21</sup>

#### 6.3.4. *Narrative-historical explanations*

This leads me to my fourth and final kind of thicker explanation, which pulls together the first three, and goes beyond them. We often seek explanations of why someone had a particular motive, or why someone has a particular character or personality trait, or why someone was drunk, depressed or angry. And the explanations that we get are narrative-historical explanations: They locate the motive, the trait, the undue influence on thinking, within a wider nexus, in a way that enables us to explain more deeply why someone did the thing that they did. She acted inconsiderately because she was brought up in a family where considerateness in any form was always taken advantage of. He shouted at his child (in spite of being a loving father) because his job has been under threat and he cannot bear his boss; he is as we say 'taking it out on' his defenceless child. She gave up going to dancing classes because she has post-natal depression and a difficult, neglectful husband.

Narrative explanations, it is generally accepted, are causal explanations.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps, as David Lewis insists, all explanations of events (and thus of actions too) are causal.<sup>23</sup> I am happy to agree to this, and, in fact, it lends some support to my claims about thick action explanations, once we appreciate what Lewis himself emphasises, the 'multiplicity of causes and the complexity of causal histories'; these, he says, 'are obscured when we speak, as we sometimes do, of *the* cause of something'.<sup>24</sup> I want to say something very much like this about the second monopolistic claim about belief-desire explanation of action: It supposes that explanation of action will be sufficient if it refers only to the belief and desire that caused it.

But, except in the special circumstances that I have mentioned, the belief-desire explanation is usually singularly unhelpful or even redundant, true as I accept it is.<sup>25</sup> What we are after, usually, is the thicker explanation, which goes further into the ‘countless distinct, converging causal chains’, which culminate in the action.<sup>26</sup> Some of these explanations, I have been arguing, are person-specific, pointing, for example, to someone’s particular and perhaps unusual mental disposition. Other explanations explain by reference to a typical pattern that people’s lives tend to take, from which particular individuals can, of course, diverge. We know that people often do things like angrily shout at their child when they are tense, tired and a bit drunk; and that people often drink, and get tense and tired, when their jobs are under threat. It is all very human and understandable. He might say that he wants the child to sit up straight and believes that shouting at it is the best means of achieving this end. The two explanations are possibly both true (remember again that I do not reject the truth of belief-desire psychology); but the narrative explanation reveals *why* his child’s failure to sit up straight made him so angry and have the beliefs and desires that he did have. He might himself be able to give this thicker explanation – although most likely only after the event – and in giving it he would not be giving a belief-desire explanation.

One possible response to the line of argument that I have been advancing would be to say that all these thicker explanations do not really explain *action*, for this is what belief-desire explanations do; rather, they name the causes of the causes of the action; they name the causes of the beliefs and the desires. There is some truth in this, but the response misses the force of the point that, in giving the thicker explanation, one is *thereby* explaining the action in a non-redundant way. We know that he left the ice cream on his plate, and, to a rough approximation, we know the thin explanation, that he did this because he desired not to eat the ice cream, believing it to be strawberry-flavoured, and that he desired chocolate flavour and not strawberry. But does his action reveal a certain inconsiderateness towards his host? Or does it reveal a more general and widespread lack of manners? Or does it reveal a kind of compulsion about always getting what he wants? Or does it reveal a lifetime’s loathing of strawberries which can be traced back to, and explained by, that gluttonous day of his sixth birthday?

Answers to questions such as these are very often the concern of our everyday action explanations, going far beyond what is going on in the mind of the person doing the action. And once this is accepted, as I think it should be, we should also come to see that it is a mistake, often made in current philosophy of mind, to focus almost exclusively on trying to solve the mysteries of ‘mindreading’, in order to explain how we ‘gain access’ to others’ mental states. Belief-desire psychology is only a small part of our everyday psychology.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Intention*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Donald Davidson’s ‘Actions, Reasons, and Causes’, together with the other papers in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Thomas Nagel has claimed that, in respect of some actions, appeal to a belief is sufficient to explain it (*The Possibility of Altruism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Rosalind Hursthouse has claimed that actions expressive of emotion do not involve 'the ascription of a suitable belief' ('Arational Actions', *Journal of Philosophy* 88, 1981, pp. 57–68, at pp. 58–59); Michael Stocker has made a similar claim in respect of actions done out of friendship (*Valuing Emotions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For disagreement, see Donald Davidson, 'Problems in the explanation of action', in his *Problems of Rationality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 101–116), Michael Smith, 'The Possibility of Philosophy of Action', in J. Bransen ed., *Human Action, Deliberation and Causation*, Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 17–41, and my *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, pp. 125–129.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', p. 4; Fodor *Psychosemantics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, especially Chapter I; Currie and Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 51; Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich, *Mindreading*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 4. Nichols and Stich do allow for 'thicker' psychological states, such as *schadenfreude*, although their 'boxological' diagrams have boxes only for beliefs and desires; see p. 14, 31, 40 and 41.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Nichols and Stich say that one of the reasons they 'have opted for "mindreading" is that the association with telepathy infuses the term with an aura of mystique, and we think the capacity to understand minds deserves to be regarded with a certain amount of awe' *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> It does not just depend on what that rational person desires (although no doubt it does depend on that too); for example, if you were set on showing how resentful you are at being given the wrong flavour of ice cream, it could still make sense to do any one of the things just canvassed (if you were to eat what you are given, you would need to eat it *resentfully* – something easily done).

<sup>7</sup> It is also a weakness, in that it becomes very hard to pin down exactly what rationality is, and what the relation is between some notion of ideal rationality, and the sort of rationality that we need to ascribe to people in order to explain what they do. As Adam Morton puts it, 'Rationality seems both vital and irrelevant to what we actually do' (in *The Importance of Being Understood*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 40). Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich are highly critical of Daniel Dennett's interpretive presupposition of rationality; see their *Mindreading*, pp. 142–148.

<sup>8</sup> *Intention*, Sect. 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Sect. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*.

<sup>11</sup> I discuss this in some detail in my *On Personality*, London: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion, see my *On Personality*, pp. 8–10, and David Lewis, 'Causal Explanation', in his *Philosophical Papers Volume II*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 214–240, at p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Gilbert Harman, 'Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99, 1999, pp. 315–331, and his 'The Nonexistence of Character Traits', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100, 2000, pp. 223–236, and John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> See my *On Personality*, Chapter 3.

<sup>15</sup> These kinds of influences on thinking are discussed by Jane Heal in 'Replication and functionalism', in M. Davies and T. Stone, eds, *Folk Psychology: The Theory of Mind Debate*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 45–59. I discuss them in *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, pp. 167–175.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Austin, 'A Plea For Excuses,' reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 175–204.

<sup>17</sup> Christine Korsgaard discusses related issues in her 'Skepticism About Practical Reasoning', *Journal of Philosophy* 83, 1986, pp. 5–25.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss examples like this one, and the notion of how emotion can 'skew the epistemic landscape', in 'Emotion, Reason, and Virtue', in P. Cruse and D. Evans, eds, *Emotion, Evolution and Rationality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 247–266.

<sup>19</sup> Nichols and Stich, *Mindreading*, p. 138.

<sup>20</sup> There is something of an asymmetry here between first-personal and third-personal explanations, and where the action being explained is actually going on at the time that the explanation is being given. He is shouting at his child because he is angry, but I am shouting at my child because he *must* learn to

sit up straight. But when we are looking back on our past actions, this asymmetry tends to drop away (I'm sorry, it wasn't fair, I was angry). I discuss this in relation to planning in 'Imagination and the Distorting Power of Emotion', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12, 2005, pp. 130–142.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Davidson makes what I think is a similar suggestion in 'Hempel on Explaining Action', in his *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 261–275. He writes of the importance of 'general knowledge of the nature of agents', but insists, as I do, that 'such knowledge is not used in giving reason explanations' (p. 272). Davidson's position differs from mine, however, in part because he also insists that reason explanations are 'satisfying and informative', and that they are made 'more valuable by letting us fit them into a larger scheme' (p. 272, 273). Perhaps this is just a matter of emphasis; I am not sure.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Noel Carroll, 'On the Narrative Connection', in his *Beyond Aesthetics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 118–133, and David Velleman, 'Narrative Explanation', *Philosophical Review* 112, 2003, pp. 1–25.

<sup>23</sup> See his 'Causal Explanation'.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215. Lewis' example is of the car crash: 'we have the icy road, the bald tire, the drunk driver, the blind corner, the approaching car, and more'; 'The roots in childhood of our driver's reckless disposition, for example, are part of the causal chain via his drunkenness, and also are part of other chains via his bald tire'. *Ibid.*, p. 214 and 215.

<sup>25</sup> Compare the true statement that the cause of the crash was the car leaving the road.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.