



## Under a Description

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# *Under a Description*

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When I introduced the phrase “under the description” as a tool in the philosophy of action ([1]: 11), I thought it something that couldn’t be called in question or misunderstood. Subsequent history has educated me. Here is a list of the challenges or misunderstandings that I have noted, with some comments on each:

(1) It is supposed by some that “ $x$  under the description  $d$ ” is the form of a subject-phrase. This of course raises the question what sort of object or entity (distinct from an  $A$ ?) an  $A$ -under-the-description- $d$  may be. But “Under the description ‘putting the book down on the table’ my action was intentional, though it was unintentional under the description ‘putting the book down on a puddle of ink;’” has as subject simply “my action” and as predicates “intentional under the description” is ‘*qua*,’ or Aristotle’s ‘ $\eta$ ’ in modern dress. Aristotle too observes ([3: Chapter 8]) that the phrase ‘ $\eta$ . . .’ belongs to the predicate, not to the subject. There aren’t such objects as an  $A$  *qua*  $B$ , though an  $A$  may, *qua*  $B$ , receive such and such a salary and, *qua*  $C$ , such and such a salary.

(2) In view of (1), the recognition that some single object may be  $\phi$  *qua*  $B$ , (or  $\phi$  under the description “ $B$ ”) and not  $\phi$  *qua*  $C$  has nothing to do with Leibniz’ Law. I once wrote that since most human actions consist in physical movements, it couldn’t be that the actions were free (not necessitated) though the movements were determined (necessitated). ([2].) A. J. P. Kenny invented a reason why I thought this, namely adherence to Leibniz’ Law; and (in the first series of Gifford Lectures in which he was one of the lecturers) he criticised me for it, as one can’t safely appeal to Leibniz’ Law in modal contents.

When I complained of this, he apologized in his next book but one ([7]), saying that his criticism was indeed unjustified, as I was known to have rejected Leibniz' Law in my published writings! The truth is that I have never published a word about Leibniz' Law. The 'rejection' consisted only in my saying such things as that an action may be intentional under one description and not intentional under another. But this is no more a rejection of Leibniz' Law than it is to say that Socrates is taller than Theaetetus and not taller than Plato.

(3) I have on occasion stared dumbly when asked: "If one action can have many descriptions, what is *the* action, which has all these descriptions?" The question seemed to be supposed to mean something, but I could not get hold of it. It ought to have struck me at once that here we were in "bare particular" country: *what* is the subject, which has all these predicates? The proper answer to "What is the action, which has all these descriptions?" 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."

(4) On the other hand, some writers have apparently embraced some rather strange idea of 'under a description'; have at any rate used the phrase in a most mystifying way. Thus J. Bogen's interesting article "Physical Determinism" is marred by the use of the expression "done under the description. . ." and "performed under the description. . ." This indeed opens one's eyes to what some people may have found objectionable about the expression. What can be meant, for example, by saying that something happened under one description, but not under another? No natural sense suggests itself for "happening" or "being done" or "being performed" together with the phrase "under the description *d*." At best, the phrase seems redundant—one might say: What happens happens under every description that is true of it! Whereas—and this was the point of the expression—there may be descriptions that are true of a happening, though the happening is not known, or willed, or derived, or explained under those descriptions. It is usually to the point to say that something was not intentional under the description *d*, only when the description *d* is true of it. Certainly one would never say "It was unintentional under that description" unless the description was true of it. However, phrases such as "under a description", "under the description *d*" sometimes occur in hypothetical contexts or in a generalized way, as in: "A reason for an action

is a reason for it under some description." Here the description must be supposed—by whoever has the reason—to be one that will apply to the act if it is done.

(5) This readily leads me to the next difficulty. Animals that have no language can have intentions too: how then, it is asked, can it be right to say that an intention is always 'under a description'? (Cf. Bennet, [4].) Again I found the objection puzzling: another non-reason. But I suppose that one who offers it must be taking "it was intentional under this description, not that" to imply that the first description is in some sense written into something inside the agent. And the form of expression I have used at the end of (4) might perhaps suggest something of the sort: it sounds as if the agent had a thought *about* a description. But now let's suppose that a bird is landing on a twig so as to peck at bird-seed, but also that the twig is smeared with bird-lime. The bird wanted to land on the twig all right, but it did not want to land on a twig smeared with bird-lime. If it landed on the twig in order to peck at the bird-seed, can't we say it took landing on the twig to be a way of getting into a position to peck at the bird seed? We can, if we can say that a bird thinks it can escape into the open by flying towards the daylight that comes through a glass barrier. This way of talking does not presuppose that the bird has any thoughts about descriptions. If there is a difficulty, it concerns ascribing those *other* thoughts to the bird; it is about passing from the bird's intentions or aims, to the ascription of belief to it. But someone who says the bird's action was intentional (or voluntary) under one description, not under the other, need not enter into *that* dispute at all. He is giving a rather round-about way of saying that e.g. the bird meant (wanted) to land on the twig, but not to land on the bird-lime. Landing on the twig was landing on bird-lime—we aren't considering two different landings. So if we form definite descriptions "the action (then) of landing on the twig", "the action (then) of landing on a twig with bird-lime on it" we must say they are definite descriptions satisfied by the same occurrence, which was something that the bird did, but under the one description it was intentional, under the other unintentional. That the bird is not a language-user has no bearing on this.

(6) If one says that one and the same action (or other event) may have many descriptions, it is sometimes supposed that this must be said in the light of a theory of event-identity.

Now this appears to me no more true than that one can only say one and the same man may satisfy many different definite descriptions in the light of a theory of human identity. There may be different theories of human identity, yielding different results in curious describable cases. But what would we say of a theory which grants that a certain man, Dickens, wrote *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* and that only this Dickens wrote *David Copperfield*, and only this Dickens wrote *Bleak House*—but does *not* grant that “The author of *David Copperfield*” describes the same man as “The author of *Bleak House*” (as Hughes and Cresswell say that *the top card of the pack* is a different card from any of the fifty two ([6]: 197).)? We’d say that it is a non-starter: any *theory* of human identity has got to fit in with the correctness of calling the author of *David Copperfield* the same man as the author of *Bleak House* (subject to astonishing literary discoveries, which are not our concern here). To say that one must have a theory of human identity if one says that, or that one needs it in order to justify saying that, seems to be absurd. A theory, I suppose, will at least (a) determine answers in obscure or borderline cases; (b) give an interpretation of known facts. It may sometimes also correct generally received statements in the light of new knowledge of a general scientific nature. The Dickens case is affectable only under (b), i.e. not in such a way as to result in a change in the truth-value we assign to the identity statement.

For this reason I always balked at the question “What is your theory of event-identity?” or “What theory of event-identity lies behind saying that (in the imagined case) putting the book down on the table and putting it down on an ink puddle were the same action?” Any ‘theory of event-identity’ had better yield this result: it itself is not a theory or part of one.

But now one may find (or invent) new verbs which are equivalent to old ones with certain complements, or which, with certain complements, are equivalent to old ones. A difference of verb, then, (such as, say, that between ‘pierce’ and ‘stab’) doesn’t have to make a report into a report of a different event, if the omission of part of a complement does not have to.

As Davidson has put it, all that he (or I) meant by speaking of many different descriptions of one action is, e.g., that the executioner of Charles I, having taken his head off, did not have to add any further performances, namely of killing and

of executing to make his act one of killing and executing. What we meant, in short, is something that isn't a philosophical thesis at all, and which no one denies. What is under dispute is whether to  *speak of*  many different actions—perhaps as many as there are (possible?) different descriptions, perhaps fewer than that—in the circumstances where I (and Davidson) speak of only one. For us the question “How many landings did the bird make?” has a straightforward sense; now suppose our answer is “Just two”—what we express in that way will (by others) have to be characterized differently, if landing on the twig and landing on the limed twig are *eo ipso* different landings. Or—in the case where I would call them the same landing—will others call them the same landing but not the same event or action? How many battles were fought at Waterloo in 1815? There seems to be not much doubt who is in the terminological difficulty here.

(7) Alvin Goldman is a critic who does not accept the sort of result that I say any ‘theory of event identity’ had better yield. He thinks that if I said “Hello” loudly on a given occasion, my saying “Hello” and my saying it loudly were two different actions. This puts the conception that he wishes to explain under the title “identity and difference of acts” right outside anything that I have been considering; the topic is so altered that, if it were not for certain criticisms that he makes, I would have supposed that we passed one another by, and would not have recognized what you could exactly call a *disagreement* between us. What he appears to mean by an “action” is a supposed correlate (other than what I call an action) of an individual action-concept: merely saying “Hello,” for example, on a particular occasion, *in abstraction from* any degree of loudness or tone of voice in which one actually says “Hello.” I would indeed expect such events as these to be as little viable as the intensional objects discussed by Quine in *Reference and Modality* ([8]): but, even supposing that one can maintain a theory of these ‘actions,’ they aren’t what I am talking about.

However, Goldman has some criticism of what he calls the “identity thesis.” It is noticeable that he begins his book ([5]) by saying “Suppose John (1) moves his hand, (2) frightens away a fly, (3) moves his queen . . . [etc. up to (6)]. Has John here performed six acts?” He then ascribes to Davidson and me the answer that John performed only one act in this case. But naturally I can have no views on the case as described. It

reminds me of the would-be sceptical question: can we know that other people see? If one asks which other people, it turns out to be the sighted ones that are meant. Do I say John performed one act? Well, in which case? We quickly guess from his discussion that Goldman means: in a case where he *did* do all that just by what it is rather natural to call one act. He wasn't for example playing half a dozen games of chess at once, in one of which he moved his queen while in another he checkmated his opponent, simultaneously frightening a fly away by blowing a raspberry, etc. But the case as actually specified leaves it open whether John did all those things by 'one' act, specified as "moving his hand," or by any number up to six (or more). When it is taken as Goldman intends, the identity of the act is assumed in giving a lot of different descriptions.

Most of Goldman's objections are rather frivolous—a man paying a collector of two-dollar bills a debt of two dollars with a two-dollar bill, when he could have given him two dollar bills. Naturally I have no difficulty here. Under one description what he did was something he was under no obligation to do and it was nice of him . . . (see (1)).

Again, Goldman dodges about between ostensible singular terms—terms which, whether proper names or definite descriptions, are apparently supposed to function as designations of individual acts—and expressions like "He checkmated his opponent by moving his queen." Since this is different from "He moved his queen by moving his queen," Goldman thinks he has pointed to an asymmetric and irreflexive relation between acts, which shows their non-identity. But one might as well argue that because the U.S. President is the U.S. Commander-in-Chief by being President, while the Commander-in-Chief is not the President by being the Commander-in-Chief, the President and the Commander-in-Chief can't be the same man. (The relevant comment *here* is that definite descriptions in predicative positions are predicates.) The question whether two phrases are true of one and the same action can't be settled by pointing to their non-substitutivity if they are anyway not singular designations. If I say e.g. "In this position moving the queen *is* delivering mate," I am not uttering an identity statement but characterizing a type of move as a mating move. If NN did move so and someone then says that his act of moving the queen was his act of mating, this is a rather stilted way of talking; but the obvious

thing for him to mean is that it was the mating move of the game. Once again, this is predicative; we should not be led by the definite article to speak (yet) of an identity proposition any more than in the case of the President and the Commander-in-Chief. "Mate-delivering move" is *ex hypothesi* a true description of the move that the player made, which therefore satisfies the definite description: "The mating move of that game." But he is certainly not being supposed to have made two moves, and that move also satisfies the definite description "The move [or, to be supercareful, the last move] of *queen to . . .* in that game." If two moves are not in question, then we have an identity: "The mating move" and "The move *queen to . . .*" describe one and the same move. So someone who says the player performed two *acts*, though only one move, must proceed carefully, neither confounding the acts nor dividing the move. It is not so far clear what the point is, of distinguishing in this fashion between the acts and the move when each of the acts being considered is a move.

Some people don't like recognizing events or actions as individuals. There is, they point out, no answer to the question "How many actions did you do this morning?" or "How many events have taken place in this room in the last hour?" This however merely shows that neither "action" nor "event" is much use as a count-noun, but there are many count-nouns that apply to actions and events, e.g. "death", "kiss", "explosion." Just the same holds for *material objects*, or *things*. "How many things are there in the room?" is unanswerable unless contextually specified. A difficulty about how events or actions may be uncountable, while deaths which are events, and kisses which are actions, are countable, is paralleled by the corresponding difficulty about material objects or things, which may be uncountable, while pies and bicycles and men, which *are* material objects, may be perfectly countable. Both difficulties are spurious. Being countable or uncountable is, as Frege would tell us, not a property of objects; and there is not some curious character of 'being an act' or 'being an event' which justifies the erection of unheard-of principles of individuation which would never be applied to sword-thrusts or dinners.

There is one noteworthy general point of method that has come up here. Given an argument about the individuation or identity of an event or action, we can often construct a parallel argument about the individuation of concrete things,

which would be sound if the argument about events and actions were so, but which is patently unsound. Where an argument about events or actions can be tested thus it should be; we shall often be able to reveal latent nonsense in this way.

I now come to the one argument of Goldman which seems to me to be not merely frivolous. Indeed I suspect this argument may actually bring out why he wants to distinguish as two acts what he would surely not distinguish, as, say, two moves made in some historic chess game. It is his first argument: suppose someone, John, pulls a trigger, the gun goes off, the bullet hits Jim and he is killed. The act of pulling the trigger caused the event of the gun's going off. Also, John has killed Jim. If "John's act of killing Jim" is another description of the act also described as "John's act of pulling the trigger," then it ought to be just as possible to say "John's act of killing Jim caused the gun to go off" as "John's act of pulling the trigger caused the gun to go off." But it sounds quite bizarre. Therefore, Goldman concludes, "John's act of killing Jim" can't be another description of the same act as satisfies the description "John's act of (then) pulling the trigger."

It is true that the sentence sounds strange. However, it is obvious that whether a certain description is true of some event (or of some object) may depend on what happens at other times and places. It may sound bizarre to say that a man married his widow, or fought a duel with his widow's second husband, at a certain date. The reason is that we are using descriptions which had not come true of the people in question at the time of the event being reported.

The same may be true of the description of an event. It is indeed not particularly odd to say "The widow stuck a knife into her husband," though it may amuse one to reflect that this might be paraphrased as "The thereby widowed lady stuck a knife into her husband." This would be precisely parallel to "The thereby act of killing Jim caused the gun to go off." If we say that John's act of killing Jim caused the gun to go off, the description in the subject position is "proleptic," applied by anticipation in view of what happened later: only when Jim was dead (or sure to die)<sup>1</sup> did the description "act of killing Jim" come true of the act of pulling the trigger; and, of course, it came true through the train of cause and effect. That is the feature that is not present in "He married his widow." It is however present in "The widow stuck her husband with a knife"—when it was *because* she stuck her husband with a knife

that he died and she became a widow. Similarly it was because John caused the gun to go off that Jim died, and this somehow makes the proleptic definite description of his act sound inappropriate and out of key. But there is no logical difficulty, and the odd sound is removed by the paraphrase:

That act which (as things turned out) was the killing of Jim by John caused the gun to go off.

(8) Judith Jarvis Thomson ([9]) thinks that some difficulties about time and tense prevent our identifying, say, Sirhan's shooting of Kennedy with his killing of Kennedy. If *A* shoots *B* at *t* and *B* dies of it at *t'*, between *t* and *t'* it is true to say that *A* shot *B* but not that *A* killed *B*.<sup>2</sup> There is no difficulty in this for my account. If it is not true to say between *t* and *t'* that *A* has killed *B* that will be because *B* isn't dead till *t'*. So much is agreed. But it merely means that although that act has occurred which, as things turn out, will prove to have been an act of killing, things have not yet turned out so.

Quite analogously a father can't truly be called a grandfather before the birth of any grandchildren of his. Thomson herself makes this comparison: "something further has to happen, the children have to have children," and "something further has to happen after the shooting in order for the killing to have taken place—*B* has to die." The only difference between us here seems to be that I would say "in order for the shooting to have been an act of killing," rather than "in order for the killing to have taken place."

This difference is not quite trivial. For Thomson, there is something other than the act of shooting, the hit, the wound, the death, or anything in that line: it is *the act of killing*, which is an act that had not happened until *B* was dead. This does seem to be a case for applying Ockham's razor, lest philosophy become a pseudo-science discovering imaginary entities. It certainly leads Thomson into a problem which, after some labour, she recognizes as senseless. Or, as she puts it, there's no true answer to the question: *just* when did this act happen? She also gets involved in problems of continuity which, though interesting in themselves, have little to do with action-descriptions.

In another argument she refers to passives: The death came after the shooting; so, if the shooting was the killing, *B* died after *A* killed him—and so he died after he was killed!

There is nothing in this. Even allowing the transition from “*B* died after that act of *A*’s which (as things turned out) was an act of killing him” to “*B* died after *A* killed him,” the change to the passive in this sentence does not generate an equivalent to it. *Pace* Noam Chomsky,<sup>3</sup> passivisation often does not produce an equivalent sentence. E. g., “In New York, *A* was informing *B* that *p*” isn’t equivalent to “In New York, *B* was being informed by *A* that *p*.” Thus the absurdity of a passivisation is not generally a proof of the absurdity of the original sentence. Nor is it in the particular case we are considering. For of course a man dies *after* the performance of any act that could ever be called an act of killing him; and equally he can’t be called “killed” *until* he is dead. These matters are a source of perplexity to Thomson, but raise no difficulty on a proper understanding of the many descriptions of an action, which depend on a variety of circumstances and other happenings—just as do the many descriptions of the same object. Thomson indeed seems to be in some difficulty even about these, from her strange language of “the time of realisation of the father of quadruplets,” and “the time of realisation of the man who shot *B*,” and from her speaking of *A*’s *becoming* the man who shot *B*; after all, he was that man all along. What he became was: a shooter of *B*; also, it came about that “the man who shot *B*” was true of him.

Only of a (then) living man do we say he became a father or grandfather; but it can *come about* that someone was a father or grandfather, even though he is dead. This is a harmless form of change of the past: a mere ‘Cambridge change’: the difference in truth-value between “He was a grandfather” said in 1970 or “As of 1970, he was a grandfather,” and “He was a grandfather” said in 1975, or “As of 1975, he was a grandfather,” where it is the same long dead man that is being spoken of. And similarly, though an act is over, many things come to have been true of it, or there are many things it comes to have been as further happenings unfold.

Thomson’s final argument is that “*A*’s shooting of *B*, is *A*’s killing of *B*” requires that we regard “the time of completion of *x*’s [verb]ing of *y*” as a non-extensional expression. If “completion” means “consummation” it is non-extensional. For then it would mean “the time by which it had come about that [a given act of *x*] was a [verb]ing of *y*,”<sup>4</sup> and, since the time would vary with the verb, the original expression “the time of completion of *x*’s [verb]ing of *y*” will be non-extensional. That

is not a 'heavy price to pay' but on the contrary an obvious truth. And the non-extensionality disappears when we expand our statement according to the explanation just given. If, however, we refer to the time of completion of an act, we usually mean the time by which the agent had completed his activity in the matter. Under that interpretation, the expression is extensional. For it is agreed that the agent doesn't have to engage in anything further; he has completed his part when he has pulled the trigger, and the consummation of the act under the description "killing B" is left to circumstances, or, as Davidson puts it, to nature.

In conclusion: I may seem to have let myself off too easy, not giving any account of the 'individuation' of actions or events. But it is not possible to do that, if it means fixing criteria for what is a single action or event. This is a natural consequence of the uncountability which is characteristic of the concept of action or event. On the other hand, suppose we take a countable concept of an action or event like, say, administering poison. Such an event will split up into a lot of sub-events or sub-actions; there might even be a gap in the process, which yet counts as one administration of poison—the administration being interrupted, say, by a fit of coughing on the part of the administerer. However, we are willing to count the whole episode as just *one* time that person administered poison, one administration. So here we have one action, and if what happens in consequence of it without any further contribution from the administerer yields reports using active verbs, "poisoned NN", "killed NN," which are true of him, the latter at least will yield a definite description of an action on his part, which is satisfied by that one original act of administering poison. There is here no promise of a theory of what is absolutely one and what are many, actions and events; rather it appears that there is no such thing.

Nevertheless, even if a concept *F* isn't associated with a rule for counting *F*'s, it is often still possible both to speak of the same *F* and even to attach numeral adjectives to the term, as when we say "But those were three distinct episodes!" So it might still be right to ask for a criterion of identity of *F*'s, in spite of *F*'s being an 'uncountable' concept. Davidson's offer: "events are the same if they have the same causes and effects" was made with warnings that he thought not much was achieved by it, just as not much is achieved by talk of 'spatio-temporal continuity' as a criterion of identity for *material ob-*

*jects*. I think that even so he overestimates what is achieved in both cases. Since objects can travel and alter, a path from any region to any region which doesn't go through a vacuum will give us the identity at times  $t$  and  $t'$  of occupants at either end of it. We may of course prissily add the restriction: So long as the travel involved is no faster than the speed of light, not being bold enough to use the identity and the travel involved to refute current physics. Spatio-temporal continuity is satisfied by such 'material objects'; it is therefore worthless as a criterion. Davidson's criterion of identity for events isn't a criterion in the sense of a 'way of telling.' It is rather a condition which must be met by identical events. Or, one would suppose, identical anything. Therefore what we are to glean from the 'criterion' is that if events  $x$  and  $y$  stand in the equivalence relation 'having the same causes and effects,' then everything that is true of  $x$  is true of  $y$  and vice versa. But note that this would not serve to resolve a disagreement between Davidson and someone like, say, Goldman; Davidson will say the condition is met by John's speaking and his speaking loudly (for they are the same event) and the other will deny it.

I maintain that the demand for a criterion of identity of particular occurrences *just as such* is not a reasonable one. This can, I think, be seen in the following way. Suppose I say "There is a child magician." That is as much as to say that someone is a child and the same one is a magician. Quite generally we can read "For some  $x$ ,  $\phi x$  and  $\psi x$ " as "Something is  $\phi$  and the same thing is  $\psi$ ." But if you ask for a criterion of identity *here*, at any rate you won't be able to offer one in terms of the same predicates holding. Further, the use of "the same" here does not imply that we can give any definite description of an object which verifies our statement. (There may be several child magicians.) It is the same with events. The crucial question is e.g. "Can one *predicate* 'being a blow' of a certain movement of a fist?" If so, and if one speaks truly, something was a movement of a fist and the same thing (event) was a blow. If we *can* construct a definite description of the fist movement and the blow being reported (if a particular one was being reported) then we can say that the fist movement and the blow satisfy these two definite descriptions and so also that here are two definite descriptions of one and the same event. But the use of 'same event' that I made in commenting on the *predication* stands independent of this business of constructing an identity statement.

Thus enemies of what I have said about these identities will then have to deny the predications which lie behind the identities. These considerations do allow me to give an account which has a pattern suiting a *large number* of cases where two descriptions are descriptions of the same event and these are indeed exactly the ones which interest people. Did the subject make only one fist movement of a certain kind on an identifiable occasion? or did he strike only one blow then? Was his fist movement a blow? or, if he struck only one blow, was that blow with his fist? If so, we can construct straightaway either the description "The fist movement which. . ." or "The blow which. . ." Say we can't do both immediately. Then we can take the one we can construct, and use it to construct the other.

Jaegwon Kim's enquiries, as I have indicated, seem to me to have a different target; I hope it may not be an illusory one. There is a use of the term 'event' in talking about probability<sup>5</sup> in which one would for example distinguish between an event or outcome (come to think of it, etymologically speaking event = outcome): getting a 6 and a 5 in a toss of two dice, and the event of getting a 6 on die A and a 5 on die B. Now let us suppose that I toss, and there are bets on both these different outcomes. The toss comes up 6 on die A and 5 on die B. This was just one toss and just one fall of the pair of dice on this occasion—but the event (in my sense) is an exemplification of those two different events (in the probability theorist's sense). It ought to be obvious that I have no quarrel with this way of talking about probability. But now, what does Kim do? He wishes, apparently, to speak of single events as particular occurrences, such, for example, that the same event can't (as a matter of grammar) happen twice. What can happen several times, I think he calls a generic event. If I understand him, then, he seeks to give an account of the identity of events that are 'particulars' such that the exemplification of two different 'generic events' is *eo ipso* two different events. Naturally a vast proliferation of Kimian particulars is achieved by this terminology. He need not regard it as a criticism of his position to say so (though such a criticism has been made). But all we have here is the point that there is a large number of events (in the probability theorist's way of talking) that any particular happening is. This is harmless and obvious, though perhaps it only has a useful application where your field of possibilities is nicely cut and dried. But if this is all, if I have hit the nail on the

head, I fear it is pursuing a mere will o' the wisp to try and make out the account in connexion with, say, someone's *having strolled* and his *having strolled in a leisurely fashion*. The material needs cutting and drying in order for us to get any worthwhile events in the probability theorist's style and, to my mind, one should not regard its moist and uncut state as posing metaphysical problems. Further: will not Kim himself want to be able to express what I express by saying that such and such different outcomes were exemplified together in a particular occurrence? He ought to see, then, that he has no disagreement with me but is engaged in another enterprise.

It will be seen that while I am in agreement with Davidson that there are many descriptions of an action, we part company when it comes to his 'theory of event-identity.' Or again, his theory of adverbial modification. This really doesn't go at all well with the idea of many descriptions. For the adverbial modification that suits one verb may not consort well with another, and yet the two verbs may occur in different descriptions of the same action. Then you can't really break the connexion between the adverbial phrase and the verb. Or a phrase may consort very well with both verbs and it may have different meanings—say different things—when you tie it to the one and to the other. Thus consider how *A* might have made a purchase from *B* *with cash*, and how this action might have been a bribing of *C*. (*C*, we will suppose, is *B*'s brother and a judge.) Then, adopting Davidson's style: There is an *x* and a *y* such that *x* is a purchasing of *y* from *B*, and *x* is a bribing of *C*, and *A* does *x* and *x* is with cash. The "with cash" belongs too closely with the purchasing to do that. You can say if you like that the bribing, as well as the purchasing, was an act done using cash, but that's not what "with cash" means in "purchase with cash" and "bribe with cash." In our story *A* did *not* bribe *C* with cash. Nor can one say: Well the account of adverbial modification doesn't work *everywhere*, but it is of some value wherever it does work. For it may work merely because there are not currently two verbs in the language, with which an adverb associates with different effects. But one cannot be sure that there never will be two such verbs, or lay it down that there *shall* not be. The only adverbial phrases which are clearly immune to this possibility are specifications of place and time. For these we may gladly accept Davidson's treatment.

Thus I too treat events and actions as individuals, and there is agreement about the many descriptions of the same.

But it seems impossible to accept the main further features of Davidson's logical theory of action sentences; we should reject his theory of event identity (none such being called for), while it seems to be demonstrably wrong in principle to separate adverbial phrases from their verbs in most cases.<sup>6</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>If someone is not dead yet but sure to die as a result of what I have done, someone may say to me "You've killed him."

<sup>2</sup>Except (as in the Sirhan case) in what Thomson calls "the Hollywood use." This use is more extensive than that designation suggests: consider how we say "You've ruined the plan", "He's done for himself", "They'd blown it"—all of which relate to expected developments. But the point is not important because there are plenty of cases where it does not apply. Nothing here hangs on it.

<sup>3</sup>This is now recognised among linguists where quantifiers are involved. E.g., "Few boys like few girls" is not equivalent to "Few girls are liked by few boys."

<sup>4</sup>There would be nothing wrong with giving the act in the same way in the two places, so that we speak of 'the time which it had come about that  $x$ 's  $\phi$ -ing of  $y$  was a  $\phi$ -ing of  $y$ .'

<sup>5</sup>But the trouble is, writers on probability have the most damnably various terminology.

<sup>6</sup>I have an indebtedness to Kripke in connexion with the final point; indirect in two ways. One, that I profited from a conversation with Robert Hambourger, who told me an example of Kripke's, and two, that Kripke's example (which I will not reproduce) constructs an absurdity for Davidson, arising precisely out of the multiple description.