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The Solution to the Problem of the
Individuation of Actions.

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How many possible answers are there to the problem of the individuation of actions? In this dissertation I shall confine myself to but two answers. I will not state categorically that there are no other lines of approach to the problem. I am, however, reasonably confident that no other line is at all feasible and that no one has formulated one. There is the possibility of blending the two answers with which I shall deal, but such a blending would at best be mere temporising. It should become obvious that the two answers are mutually antagonistic and that no such blending could be convincingly defended.

John moved his finger; he pressed a button; he triggered a firing mechanism; he fired a missile; he started a nuclear war. What have we here? The two answers which can be given are the two answers to the problem on the individuation of actions. Either there are many different actions or there is but one action. If we say but one action then we adopt an Identity theory of action. This is the thesis which I shall attempt to defend. I share this endeavour with Donald Davidson,¹ G.E.M. Anscombe,² Eric D'Arcy³ and others. They differ among themselves on certain points and I disagree with some of their views. Despite such

1. D. Davidson 'Individuation of Events'

2. G.E.M. Anscombe 'Intention'

3. Eric D'Arcy 'Human Acts' Ch.1.

disagreements we all hold the basic thesis of Identity in common.

The opposing view is that in the above example there are many actions. I disagree with, and shall attempt to prove untenable, this view. This puts me into conflict with A. Goldman¹ in particular who defends this Many-action thesis and mounts a many-pronged attack upon the Identity thesis. Arthur Danto² is among those philosophers who, without directly applying themselves to the problem of the individuation of action, does put forward conceptions of action which entail acceptance of the Many-act thesis and opposition to the Identity thesis, thus requiring me to attempt to undermine them.

What I propose to defend then is an Identity theory. This does not mean however that I am going to critically analyse the concept of Identity in general or try to solve its problems. I shall assume that Identity is a workable concept, that it can be usefully applied in statements about the world, that every competent language user can utilise identity statements without difficulty in all but inevitable, obtuse, borderline cases which bedevil most, if not all, concepts which we employ. The concrete test of this is that in all (or nearly all)

1. A. Goldman 'A Theory of Human Action'.

2. A. Danto 'The Nature of Human Action'.

meaningful cases where Identity is postulated, anyone given the relevant facts could make a negative or affirmative judgement in agreement with his fellows (who also have the relevant facts). I shall also assume that the critics of the Identity thesis of action accept these conditions without reservation. None of them ever give any indication to the contrary, indeed the arch-critic, Goldman, bases most of his opposing argumentation on the very fact that the concept of Action Identity lacks features which normal Identity (which is largely object identity, though it is extended to event identity in common usage) has. In my own investigations I shall, for the most part, be satisfied if I can show that any problem of Action Identity is equally a problem - or that there is a corresponding problem - for normal Identity. If I can do this then because it is already accepted that normal Identity is an unobjectionable concept, it follows that Action Identity is acceptable also. In following this procedure I am also required to show that a problem of normal Identity is a problem for Action Identity too, unless I can show good cause why it should be otherwise. Occasionally I shall make comments on problems of Identity in general. It may be that consideration of a problem in the context of Action Identity elucidates, and can be carried over into, any branch of Identity

theory; however this would be of secondary importance and I shall attempt to minimise, if not eliminate, such discussions.

The problems of normal Identity and its basic characteristics will of necessity be mentioned during this dissertation. On the whole these too will be assumed to be acceptable to anyone embarking on the consideration of Action Identity and will not usually be defended by supporting argument. This may be considered a drawback, but I feel justified in taking this line. Any such arguments, except in special circumstances, would constitute a lengthy and unjustified digression from the central issue of this dissertation.

Before pressing on with a critical assessment of Action Identity there are a number of preliminary points which must be dealt with.

It must be made quite clear at the outset that we are by no means dealing with an empirical dispute when considering the problem of the individuation of actions. When it is asked whether John's moving his finger is the same or a different action from his pressing the button, it is accepted without question that what happens, be it one action or two, happens at the same time. We cannot look to the world and see two obviously distinct actions as would be the case if the dispute were over John's raising his arm and John's lowering his arm.

This fact is accepted by both sides of the dispute - no empirical evidence will decide the dispute either way. Thus it is not being held by the Many-Action theorists that we will observe first John moving his finger then, at a different time (or perhaps with a different finger), John pushing the button. As far as the movement of John's bodily parts is concerned there is only the movement of his finger, whether or not he has performed one or many actions. This will be made clear in later discussions. Therefore this problem of the individuation of actions can be fairly and squarely laid at the philosopher's door.

It might be asked why I confine myself to actions. Why not consider the individuation of events as a whole? Actions after all are but a species of event. Surely what goes for actions will equally well apply to any sort of event. In fact, many of the problems which will be considered, and the solutions which are proposed could be applied to the whole field of events. But actions are a special type of event; they are a distinct sub-class. This being the case, there must be distinctive features of an action which it does not share with other types of event. These could, in fact do, make the individuation of actions a problem which differs in some aspects from the problem of the individuation of events in general. There are some

problems unique to the contemplation of actions and what is said on these points cannot therefore be extended to cover the whole field of events. This I hope will become evident when such points are considered.

There is a suggestion made by R. Taylor¹ which puts such claims about actions to the test; in fact, if correct, the suggestion will make the claim that there are unique features of actions, over and above other events, untenable. This is the suggestion that "the presupposed distinction between those items of human behaviour which are actions and those which are not may not be a real or natural distinction. It may, on the contrary, be a merely relative distinction men draw for practical purposes - like the distinction between things which are, and things which are not, tools. ...We are, on this view, drawing a distinction which is relative to certain purposes. ...We do not find something (in the actor) ... but rather ... invest his behaviour with the status of an act."

Now we can accept that the distinction between tools and non-tools is relative. Many concepts are relative in the way which Taylor suggests. The most obvious of them is that of size - of bigness. An elephant is big if the context is that of the whole range of animals, it is small in comparison to the members of the whale species.

1. R. Taylor 'Action and Purpose' p.100.

The attribute of bigness is relative to the context in which we consider the object concerned. What Taylor is suggesting is that a bodily movement may similarly be labelled an action in some circumstances, and a non-action in others and that the ascription is correct in both cases. Thus the status of action will be relative to the context, to the circumstances, to the viewpoint of the observer, in some way.

There are, it must be pointed out, two ways in which this relativity can be understood. The first is where one says that an entity of this type is an X while another entity of this type is a non-X (according to context). Thus this stone is a tool but that stone is not - though it could be. Similarly, this dog, a poodle, is big when considered in the company of all other poodles at the dog show. He is at the top end of the size scale when the scale is applied only to poodles. However, the poodle down the road is not big in the context of all the dogs in town. It is in the middle region of the size scale when it is encompassing all the dogs in town.

If we ask whether a bodily movement of a certain type, say an arm movement, is an action while another arm movement is a non-action then we will find that this is in fact the case. I can raise my arm as a traffic signal and thus perform an action, but my arm can rise to the same position as the result of a blow to a certain nerve

centre and yet not be an action. Does this mean that the distinction between action and non-action is relative in much the same way as is that between big and small or tool and non-tool? Such evidence is far from conclusive. It should be made clear that though one member of a type or class E may be an X while another E is a non-X, this does not make the distinction between X and non-X relative. Let X be "a black thing." This box is a black thing, that box is a non-black thing. No one, surely, needs to be convinced that the difference between black things and non-black things is not a relative one. The key to the relativity of a concept, or otherwise, revolves around the question of context dependence. The stone was a tool because of the use to which it was put, not because of any intrinsic property which the stone exhibited and which we could identify. The dog was big in comparison with one group of dogs. The two dogs, the two stones, could be exactly similar in every way; they could be entirely indistinguishable - have exactly similar properties (the only difference between them being spatio-temporal location). Nevertheless it is still the case that one stone is a tool, the other a non-tool and that one dog was correctly called big, the other average in size.

This first way in which a concept exhibits relativity collapses into the second way. This being where one and the same entity is both an X and a non-X according to

context. Any entity which is an X could, theoretically, be a non-X in the right context, and vice versa, if X is a relative concept. That A can be both an X and a non-X is the direct and incontrovertible evidence that the distinction between X and non-X is context dependent in some way - i.e. is relative. This is the test which action must satisfy if its relativity as a concept is to be accepted.

We need then to be able to see any bodily movement in two lights, in a way similar to that in which we can see any dog or any stone etc. Because bodily movements are but transitory events this cannot be done by considering the movement at different times, or by considering it in company with different groups of its fellows, as we could in considering the concept of a tool, or of size. What is needed is that we look at the movement from two viewpoints, or that two people look at it from different points of view, or with two purposes in mind. For instance, John's arm moves. From Henry's point of view the movement is an action; from Peter's it is a non-action. (This should be so if action is a relative concept.) Further, when the situation is explained to John he will be able to agree that the movement of his arm could be correctly considered as both an action and a non-action according to which way one looks at it. If such viewpoints are not possible then the relativity of the concept of action

is effectively disproved. It must be noted that this duality of view should apply to any bodily movement; i.e. any bodily movement could rightly be considered as an action and as a non-action. In the same way, any object could be considered to be big or small according to point of view; any object could be picked up and used to do a job thus becoming a temporary tool.

At first it seems that this could be done. If I see John's arm move I do not know if it is an action or a non-action. There seems to be nothing native to the movement, no characteristic, which when present would enable us to pick it out as an action; when absent, as a non-action.

The case is weakened when it is realised that there is a class of bodily movements whose members cannot ever be considered actions - e.g. the beating of one's heart. There are bodily movements which are obviously caused by some observable event, e.g. one's leg being struck by a runaway wheelbarrow and moving as a consequence. Even if 'bodily movements' is restricted to rule out heart action and like automatic processes, (as would probably be Taylor's interpretation of the term), which have no observable event as their chief cause, there are still criteria available for making a judgement for or against a movement being an action. We can usually recognise other people's actions and distinguish them from their non-actions. We do this largely by observing

the way in which the movement occurs. It looks to be controlled; it is co-ordinated with other movements, other actions, to form purposive patterns of behaviour. It is usually an observable characteristic of a bodily movement which is an action that the performer is concentrating on - ^{it} this is a trait always absent in the occurrence of non-action movements. We can see that the action movement is not one "without rhyme or reason;" it is purposive. Such factors - usually a combination of them - allows us to readily distinguish actions from non-actions. Granted I can be mistaken, I can also be tricked. A person can perform an action and yet fool me into thinking it was an involuntary movement, but he can only do so by knowing (and knowing that I know) that certain features (such as are outlined above) are typically features of actions, while their absence is characteristic of non-action behaviour. He consciously excludes or suppresses these features from his performance, i.e. he feigns non-action behaviour. For example, he pretends to slip when he deliberately pushes his wife under a bus. Thus he knows and I know - we all know - when any one bodily movement, even when viewed in isolation from extended behaviour sequences, has action features and when not, and hence whether or not it is an action. It is only because of this mutual knowledge that our trickster can attempt to deceive us and that he can

succeed. If we are afforded a clear observation of a bodily movement, and we are concentrating on it, and no deliberate subterfuge is being employed, then we should be able to make a firm (and correct) decision as to whether or not it is an action. Here then are characteristics - though they are rather subtle - which actions have and non-actions lack and which we are all able to recognise. Clearly then the distinction between action and non-action is not merely relative.

There is also a very clear ability in everyone to know when a movement of his body was an action. This is in fact stronger than ordinary knowing; we are aware of performing an action in a way similar to our awareness of pains. In both cases we 'know' in a way which is beyond doubt, beyond the need for proof which is a feature of ordinary knowledge acquisition. (Wittgenstein gives a fuller account of such 'knowing' in "Philosophical Investigations § 246.) This is not to say that for every movement of one's body one will, without hesitation, be able to say whether or not it is an action. There is a border region of difficulty between action and non-action. For instance, I decide to go to the window. I do so deliberately, knowingly, voluntarily. This, we would say, is an action. However, to get to the window I have to walk across the room. The individual steps I take are not so deliberately ^{performed}, yet my crossing the room to

go to the window is no more than the sum total of those steps. Is each of the steps an action or not? This is debatable. One could expect varying answers from a cross-section of the community, (as one certainly would not if one asked about my looking out the window). The same sort of problem exists for pains. Where is the boundary between violent itching and pain? Such border difficulties confront most, if not all, concepts. This by no means brands a concept as an unworkable one.

Besides the observable characteristics mentioned - which alone suffice to make the Taylor suggestion untenable - there are other features of action which are absent in non-action behaviour. It is worthwhile to set up such a feature as a defining criterion and thus give an outline of action characterisation. This might help us deal with the difficult cases and it will certainly be useful in dealing with objections to the Identity thesis. We may intuitively distinguish actions from non-actions but we need to know how this can be done in concrete terms if we are to be able to argue cogently about any aspect of action (as we surely will be in our consideration of the Identity thesis).

The least specific, but still useful, way suggested for differentiating actions from non-actions is by pointing out that, within the sphere of bodily movements, there is a division between things we do and things which happen

to us. Things which happen to us can apply alike to movements of our bodies which are involuntary, non-deliberate, reflex, etc. - e.g. one's heartbeat - and to bodily movements which are caused by some outside agency or event. Unfortunately, not all things we can rightly be said to do can qualify as actions. For example, instances of habitual behaviour are things we do but they are not actions. Also, consider the following, perfectly legitimate answer to a question as to what I do: "I just sit and wait;" again, this is not an action. Thus this distinction is not sufficient to characterise actions. It is useful because, though not all things we do are actions, all actions are things we do, and cognizance of this fact gives us a dependable way of finding out what is not an action.

Taylor suggests the unique property of actions is responsibility, or rather, that it is a movement for which the owner of the body is responsible.¹ This though is a word which features in, and always has overtones of, moral discourse. Though we might seem sometimes to use "responsible" other than in connection with morality - i.e. with actions having foreseen consequences (or which are expected to) which have an effect on other people's welfare (on the sphere of human relations) - it is, even in such instances, used

1. op.cit. p.100.

to convey reproof. "Who is responsible for this mess?" puts the actor on the defensive or makes him feel guilty. "Responsible" is a moral-context word. In fact it is more concerned with the consequences of an action than an action itself. "You are responsible for moving your finger," (when there are no consequences) is a misplaced comment. This property while being peculiar to the sphere of action, is not a successful defining characteristic of action because it cannot rightly be applied to all actions.

Shwayder suggests that "an act (be) provisionally defined as an item of behaviour with a purpose."¹ This definition is also deficient. Again it is more concerned with the consequences than the action. For an action which has no consequences it presents a problem. What was the purpose of my raising my hand to touch my nose? Suppose that I did not intend to make a signal, or scratch an itch, or in fact have any other purpose. The only candidate for a purpose in such a case would be to touch my nose with my hand. Which is the more correct answer in such a case to a query about purpose? - (i) "I had no purpose" or (ii) "to touch my nose with my hand?" I think it must be agreed that (i) is the correct response. (ii) would be a poor attempt at humour, or something of the kind. The consequence

1. D. Shwayder 'The Stratification of Behaviour' p.31

of an action, (or at least the expected consequence), is what we refer to when we speak of the purpose of an action; the purpose will not be the bodily movement itself. But as has been demonstrated, there are actions with no intended consequences which produce no noticeable results. These are "idle" actions, which are intuitively accepted as actions and must be accommodated into our theory as such, but cannot properly be said to have any purpose whatsoever.

Closely akin to "purposes" are reasons for an action. If one does an action to achieve a purpose, the desire to achieve that purpose was the main reason for the action. Here too an idle action would slip through the net. There was no real reason for performing it, it was done on a whim, done on the spur of the moment for no reason, we would say. Thus reasons fail as a defining characteristic for much the same reasons as do purposes.

These "idle" actions which we have uncovered must be captured in the action characterisation and in that they are those actions which are the most elementary - the closest true actions to the border between action and non-action - they are the sub-class of actions upon which to concentrate our attention when searching for the defining characteristic. They are after all entitled to be called actions only because they have the defining characteristic, whatever it is. They

lack the other typical (though not universal) properties of more "full fleshed" actions.

I think that the necessary property is that the bodily movement be deliberate or intended. One could balk at intended; for instance, one might intend to harm John, but help him instead, by one's action. Thus my action - i.e. helping John - was not intended, but an action nonetheless. Remember however that we are dealing here with bodily movements - with items of human behaviour - and attempting to discover a criterion for separating those items which are actions from those which are not. If I intend to move my arm but my leg moves instead, then the movement of my leg could not be considered an action (in fact I doubt that it is even a possibility for a normal person - for any person at all). If I decide to move my arm then my arm alone will move - unless it is somehow restrained. Thus if we confine ourselves to the simplest and most direct type of descriptions of actions, (tokens of which could describe any action), i.e. as a bodily movement, then the objection to saying that an action is intentional is overcome because we are merely saying that all actions are intentional bodily movements, which is true of all actions and false of all other bodily movements. (This problem is further examined later.)

The logical grammar of deliberate performance is

similar to that of intentional performance though it may be superior in some respects. Deliberateness is something which characterises the action as it is performed. Intention is usually something which precedes the action. Deliberateness, though closely related to intention does therefore fit better than the latter. Some action descriptions present it with the same problem as confronted intention, but the same retort will rescue it.

Thus we have arrived at a succinct and accurate definition of an action as a deliberately performed bodily movement. Thus we are now able to identify actions and know how we identify them. We know that they are intrinsically different from other bodily movements (types of behaviour), or any other type of event. Thus, in this study of the Identity thesis of action we know just what we are dealing with - what we are claiming to be identical with one another (forgive the built in bias towards the visualising of two or more actions where there is only one, in this locution). By establishing this we avoid possible complications and difficulties which might apply to certain events, but not to actions, (a point we may otherwise have overlooked).

This definition of action rests on the assumption that all actions are bodily movements and therefore events. Even speech acts can be interpreted as such.

However, there is the so-called "act of restraint" which is hard to reconcile with this requirement. I am not talking about acts of will, mental acts which are divorced from the physical world. The whole concept of mental acts and mental events is suspect. It is a hotly disputed question in contemporary philosophy as to whether they even exist or not. To discuss this issue would entail a lengthy and complicated procedure. By the above definition of an action they would not be actions. I will not state categorically that there is no such thing as a mental act, but I am concerned only with physical acts and will assume for the purposes of this dissertation that there are only physical actions. If you balk at this then just read "physical act" wherever I have written "action."

There is a physical variety of restraint act. They do involve actual physical forces. Suppose an external force is applied to my arm. If I do nothing my arm will move. However I can do something, I can resist the force and keep my arm in the same position, or at least retard the movement. This restraint provides an acceptable answer to the question "What did you do?" - a question which can be asked (and answered) of any action. It is done deliberately and would be considered an item of behaviour. Common usage would favour its being called an action, and indeed it seems to qualify as such in all

salient respects except that of being a bodily movement and hence an event. I assumed earlier that actions were but a species of event. It is important that this be so because much of what I shall say about actions in the discussion of the Identity thesis depends upon their being events also - though of a special kind, with a unique feature(s).

In acts of restraint there is always an interplay of forces. Could we say that an event, in the broadest sense, is an interplay of forces? Unfortunately this is not of itself sufficient to characterise an event. Consider a stone at rest on the ground. Here we have a situation which involves an interplay of forces. The force of gravity constantly attracts the stone towards the centre of the earth; the bodily resistance of earth and stone (ultimately describable in terms of inter-molecular forces) resists any further falling of the stone. The forces are in equilibrium. What is further needed for an event to occur is that the equilibrium be disturbed. But in acts of restraint there seems to be an equilibrium set up, (or maintained) not one disturbed. However, this setting up of a static equilibrium is enforced by the agent. An intrusive force is applied to my arm. An event - the movement of my arm - should naturally follow. It does not; the act of restraint intrudes into the arena and forcibly maintains the

equilibrium. This restraint is an event. I deliberately oppose natural forces; I intrude into the "free-flow" of the natural chain of events and bring about consequences which the natural world - left alone - would not have produced. This is equally true of normal acts and acts of restraint and makes any attempt to seriously distinguish the two as distinctly different categories, in any important sense, highly misguided. Both types are events, the only difference being that one sort initiates events which would not otherwise have occurred, the other sort interrupts and suppresses events which would otherwise have occurred. They are the two sides of the same coin.

I previously said that all actions constitute bodily movements. I think we can legitimately stretch a point and say that the muscular effort comprising acts of restraint be considered as bodily movements. (We have shown that they are events, and clearly they are items of behaviour.) Thus they are able to fit into the definition of action which we have formulated.

Another problem to be faced before a detailed investigation of the Identity thesis of action is undertaken stems from a suggestion of Davidson's.¹ According to this suggestion neither "John moved his finger" nor "John pressed the button" picks out an identifiable action. He says "The temptation to treat a sentence

1. D. Davidson 'The Individuation of Events' p.222.

like "Doris capsized the canoe yesterday" as if it contained a singular term referring to an action (is incorrect and) we should be steadfast in resisting it."

This is how he justifies his claim: "... ordinary sentences about events, like 'Doris capsized the canoe yesterday,' are related to particular events in just the same way that 'There is a mosquito in here' is related to particular mosquitoes: It is no less true that Doris capsized the canoe yesterday if she capsized it a dozen times than if she capsized it once; nor, if she capsized it a dozen times does it make sense to ask, 'Which time are you referring to?' as if this were needed to clarify 'Doris capsized the canoe yesterday' ." The point being that sentences like this do not name or describe any particular action, and do not contain any elements which do so, and hence that they do not refer to any one action in particular.

This is an important issue in the context of the Identity thesis because if "Doris capsized the canoe yesterday" and "Doris tipped us all into the water yesterday" are not both about a specific event, a particular action, then how could it possibly be said that there is but one action here, the same in both cases? One could not. Identity between specific entities only can be postulated. One must be able to go through the process of identifying a particular entity before its

identity with another entity (or rather, as that which two utterances refer to), can even be postulated. Identity necessarily depends upon the prior possibility of definitely identifying each entity which is represented by a term in the Identity statement. If Davidson is right then this essential prior step is impossible and the Identity statement could not therefore be meaningfully made. Unless the sentences involved describe or name - and in so doing refer to - a particular action, then any postulation of identity is misguided. I am prepared to differ with Davidson on the nature of these sentences. He wants to say that only when what is said is constructed so that we have such phrases as "the capsizing of the canoe by Doris yesterday," "the pressing of the button by John," etc., can identity claims be attempted. Then the identity could be phrased thus: "The pressing of the button by John was the launching of the missile by John." Here the "the..." phrases refer to a specific action just as "the third man from the left" and "Sir Francis Drake" refer to the same object.

Is it not however the case that in almost any conversation in which it would be uttered, "Doris capsized the canoe" would be assumed by both speaker and hearer to be about one particular event? A typical example would be:

Question: "Why are you late?"

Answer: "Doris capsized the canoe."

Question: "Where did she do it? Not out by the point?"

Answer: "Yes that's right. She turned too sharply and we capsized."

Questioner: "Just as I thought. It's the third time she's done that this week."

I think it is quite evident that what both questioner and answerer are concerned with and are talking about (and mutually recognising the fact) is a definite, specific action. This is conveyed by the context.

Whether we want to say that a sentence such as "Doris capsized the canoe" can refer or describe, or not, we must say that it is about something. To this extent Davidson and I agree. However Davidson assumes that if what it is about is explicitly stated, it will be an "a ..." phrase; e.g. "a capsizing of the canoe by Doris." In point of fact it could well be, and in most cases would be, a "the ..." phrase; e.g. "the capsizing of the canoe by Doris." Which it is will be conveyed by the context - by the rest of the conversation or explanation or whatever of which it is a part. Taken in isolation we would not know whether an "a ..." or a "the ..." interpretation was indicated. In other words, in isolation such a sentence is ambiguous.

If we were trying to construct a formal identity statement of the "A = B" form then we would need two explicitly referring phrases as substitution instances

of A and B. We can assert that "the pressing of the button is identical with the launching of the rocket." We clearly cannot assert "John pressed the button is identical with John launched the rocket" and hope to make sense. The only way to make this assertion meaningful is to place quotation marks thus: " 'John pressed the button' is identical with 'John launched the rocket' " which, while meaningful, is not an action identity statement, and is false anyway.

Though there is this trouble about making a formal identity statement this does not prevent us from making the identity claim that what each of the two sentences is about - what it tells of (which is undeniably an action) - is one and the same thing. This we can do when we assume (or when we know) that the context makes what the sentence is about a specific, not an unspecified action. Thus when we look at a number of different sentences, with different meanings, each about an action, we can meaningfully ask (on many occasions) whether they are about one or many actions.

I think it permissible to say that such sentences as "John pressed the button" are descriptive. In fact, a blend of a descriptive and a referring element. Consider the question "What did X do?", this can be asked in connection with any action. Depending on context, it could be asking when and where the action

was performed, e.g. Everyone at the party shuns John and mutters such reproaches as "What a cad; chap should never have gotten away with it." Peter then asks "What did he do?" He expects the answer to pick out a certain action or actions of John from his past history. In other words he wants the answer to refer to an action. Also called for is a descriptive element. One could even say that when the reply to the question is "He killed Jack" or "He insulted the queen" etc., then it is in some way naming the action - to the extent that any action can be named. One can ask "What did you call what he did?" and receive the reply "murdering Jack," which is a common procedure for eliciting the name of a person, an object, or an event. In such sentences as "He killed Jack" we cannot say there is a full-fledged naming; there is though something which performs much the same function. There is definitely a reference to a particular action.

Combined with this referring - perhaps naming - element is descriptive material (which is not so common in the outright naming of objects etc.). The same sentence, while doing the referring job, also imparts a lot of descriptive detail of the action. By the very mention of the word "murder" we know that there was a victim who died, and died as a result of a bodily movement of the actor, and that the actor had intended

this movement to have this result.

The main problem with claiming that "X did Y" is a description, or rather contains a description, is that a descriptive passage always has to be a description of something (obviously), and that thing which is described must be named or referred to in the sentence in which the description is embodied. There must always be a name or referring phrase 'A' to which the descriptive detail can be conjoined. This seems to be absent in the case of typical action sentences. If "John pressed the button" contains descriptive detail about an action, where is the 'A' which refers to the action? 'John' is a name, but of a person, not of an action. What we need then, and seem to lack, is the 'A' to stand for the action. However, as we have already noted, we do have a naming function performed which allows us to realise what entity the descriptive details are describing. We can say that the button pressing by John is the action referred to. The descriptive element is indistinguishable from the referring one. To show that a similar state of affairs can occur in connection with objects, consider "The large, flat, well-worn old cap...", where much descriptive detail is built into the reference to the object.

Consider what we do when discussing a happening. We say "John pressed the button." We do indicate an

event. After the event we can refer to "John's pressing of the button." This is similar to the procedure of numbering soldiers in a line. The N.C.O. goes down the line, stopping at each man, saying "You are six from the end" etc., making a seemingly pure factual statement but doing so in order that he can later refer to "the sixth man from the end" etc.

In the action statement we also undoubtedly convey something about the happening to the listener because after he hears that John pressed the button then he knows about the happening, who and what were involved and also what sort of event it was, i.e. an action, further, a pressing action. In that one learns something about the happening from the sentence, it must, broadly speaking, include a description. Whether we can capture the mechanics of the descriptive method so employed within a framework of formal logic or not does not alter this fact. The speaker wishes to convey information about an entity - an action. The hearer gains information about an entity. Some sort of description undeniably has been made. The fact that we may not know just how this was done makes no difference to this fact. Thus I am justified in saying that such a sentence is a description of an action or that it refers to an action.

It must be pointed out that our Identity statements are not primarily concerned with the actor. Though an

Identity statement such as "Sam Clement's shaking of the President's hand is identical with Mark Twain's shaking of the President's hand" is identity of actions, this sort of statement is not what the Identity thesis of action is postulated to explain. Such an Identity statement revolves around the identity of persons. It is primarily a problem in object identity, though one can be misled because it is couched in terms of action identity.

The preliminary points have now been made. They have paved the way for the main task - the critical assessment of the Identity thesis of action. The limits within which discussion of this thesis should be confined have been discovered. Possible avenues of digression have been closed off and initial problems overcome. We have set the stage, so to speak, for our main task.

Let us now turn to the supposed problems which confront the Identity thesis of action.

The primary requirement for any Identity statement to hold true is that it obey Leibniz's Law. Thus if A and B are identical then A must have all and only the properties that B has. Such a characterisation can lead to trouble because there is a tendency to confuse the actual action with the names or phrases which stand for it. In fact it is weighted against Identity. If we talk in this way, we refer to "the two actions (or objects etc.) A and B which are identical." What more

confusing statement could confront one? In the same breath it is said that there are two actions, and that there is only one, (if A is identical with B then there is only one entity). To overcome this confusion it is advisable to revise Leibniz's Law, or rather to restate it in a manner which captures its essence more accurately, less opaquely. The recast Law becomes: "If what 'A' refers to is identical with what 'B' refers to, then what 'A' refers to must have all and only the properties which that which 'B' refers to has."¹

There are a number of instances where this Law does not appear to hold if we uphold the Identity thesis of action, (which I have, and shall, refer to as simply the Identity thesis). That is, there appear to be a number of cases where the Identity thesis would allow that action A is identical with action B, but it seems that they do not share all the same properties. (Forgive the lapse into a confusing mode of expression about Identity. This is done from habit and for brevity. The mode of expression employed in the recasting of Leibniz's Law should always be kept in mind.) Unless we are prepared to dispute Leibniz's Law then such seeming anomalies in the properties of identical actions must be cleared up - shown to be mistaken. I have no intention of disputing Leibniz's Law - this is part of the theory about Identity

1. Logically symbolised the Law states
 $(x)(y) \wedge (x = y) \supset (\phi)(\phi x \equiv \phi y)$.

which I have pledged to presuppose. Therefore my defence of the Identity thesis must depend upon my ability to demonstrate that no such anomalies stand up to rigorous scrutiny.

Many of these so-called property anomalies are found in Goldman¹ who mounts a concerted attack on the Identity thesis. Let us now attempt to topple his arguments (and some others) and demonstrate that in fact no property anomalies exist when the Identity thesis allows that two actions are identical.

The first example is based on Goldman's failure to separate the consequences of an action from the action itself, in his mind. He asks us to "Consider the act of John's killing Smith and consider the event consisting in the gun's going off. Is it true to say that this act caused this event, that John's killing Smith caused the gun to fire? Surely not."²

This conclusion of Goldman's is wrong. He is right to maintain that a statement such as "John's killing Smith caused the gun to go off" would be very odd; in normal speech we would not run across it. This oddness can however be explained without resorting to the denial of the Identity thesis. Such a statement is strictly speaking true, though useless.

Goldman seems to be unaware of the fact that

1. A. Goldman 'A Theory of Human Action' Chapter 1.
2. op.cit. p.2.

"to kill" means no more and no less than "to cause the death of." When we realise this we can recast our statement thus: "John's act which caused Smith's death caused the gun to fire." We are assuming that the cause was an action of John's. Thus what we are claiming here is that one action of John's both caused the death of Smith and caused the gun to fire. Obviously this could be the case. John's act - i.e. his deliberately performed bodily movement - could have caused the gun to fire and Smith to die. The action would have been a movement of his finger in such a way as to cause the trigger to move, which in turn caused the gun to fire, which in its turn caused a projectile to strike and bring about the death of Smith. Thus we have a causal chain in which the first link is John's action, the third is the firing of the gun and the last is the death of Smith. It is a matter of judgement as to whether John's action is the primary cause of Smith's demise; i.e. whether it initiated a train of events which resulted in Smith's death (which would not otherwise have occurred). This judgement is already made, (we shall assume correctly), when John's act is described as a killing. It is also, of course, the primary cause of the gun's firing. There is nothing wrong with saying that some event caused a series of other events (and hence caused events further along the causal chain). It only immediately caused

the movement of the trigger, but saying that an event is the cause of another is not synonymous with saying that it is the immediate cause. It could be a mediate (though still primary) cause. I think we can all agree that in this case John's action undoubtedly qualifies as the cause of Smith's death even though it is but a mediate cause. It is also agreed, I am sure, that John's action was the cause of the gun's discharging. Thus technically it is unobjectionable and true to say that John's act of killing Smith was also the act which caused the gun to fire.

The reason why we do not find such statements in normal discourse (i.e. why they are so odd) is that when we state the cause of an event - here the discharge of the gun (the event, not the action) - we are almost always giving an explanation; we are tracing the history of events which led up to this event. We are telling what event or events caused it. If one "explained" that what caused the gun to go off was what caused the gun to go off one would be making an empty statement; it would be a tautology void of explanatory content. In that we are supposed to be explaining, we have made a redundant statement; it is an odd statement, a misguided one. It is nonetheless a true one. It would be even more odd if we stated that the cause of B was the cause of C when B itself is less advanced in the causal chain than C.

As an explanation it is absolutely worthless. What is required is explicit mention of A, the event in the chain preceding B. An explanation requires us to trace the causal chain back, not bring up what else occurred later in the chain (always remember that the reference is to A in the case both of "the cause of B" and "the cause of C", but it is an opaque reference). An explanation which fails to do this is not explanatory; it is odd and redundant; it is a pseudo explanation. In some contexts though it could be useful. The utterer may have reason to believe that the event is known to the listener under the description "cause of Smith's death" though not under the description "cause of the gun's discharge."

It is clear then that such statements, while on most occasions being understandably odd, are nonetheless true. What Goldman was trying to prove was that though John's pulling the trigger and John's killing Smith would be identical according to the Identity thesis, they in fact failed to have one property in common - namely, being the cause of the gun's discharge. We have seen that this is mistaken, that the same bodily movement can be the cause of Smith's death, the cause of the moving of the trigger and the cause of the gun's discharging and that when John's pulling the trigger and John's killing Smith are identical under the Identity

thesis, then whatever one causes, the other causes.

The second problem is based on the supposed disparity in the causes of two identical actions. "If A and A' are one and the same action, then they are one and the same event. And if they are one and the same event, one would expect them, if they were caused at all, to be caused by the same set of events or states of affairs. If we find, on the contrary, that A and A' have somewhat different causes or causal factors, that would give us reason to conclude that A and A' are not the same after all."¹ Goldman expresses the requirement very well. How does he demonstrate that it is contravened?

His best example is as follows. George replaced a burned-out light bulb just before John comes along and flips the switch. John then claims to have turned on the light.² As Goldman sees it, George's screwing in the light bulb was a necessary factor "enabling" or "making possible" John's turning on the light. He hesitates to call this factor a cause but whatever it is, it is a property of John's turning on the light but not of his flipping the switch.

Let us look more closely at this persuasive example. When we say John turned on the light here, we mean that some action of his caused the light to go on. Thus a valid substitute for "...turned on the light" is "caused

1. op.cit. p.3.

2. op.cit. p.4.

the light to go on." Likewise a clumsy substitute for "flipping the switch" would be "causing the switch to assume the 'on' position." These both involve events which are not actions (i.e. consequences) - the coming on of the bulb and the movement of the switch to a new position. Any event must have as its primary cause another event (with the possible exception of an action - if the Agency theory of act causation is accepted). One might list necessary conditions among its causal factors, but these - I hope we all agree - are at best but secondary causes. However this may be, once we expand the descriptions of the two actions in contention we can see that both of them are claimed to be causes of certain events. The Identity thesis proclaims that both these causes coincide - are in fact but one event, one action. If George claimed that he turned on the light (or at least helped to do so) then he is claiming that his action was a primary cause of the event - the brightening of the bulb. He has every right to do so, though I am confident in saying that he is mistaken in this case as his action merely provided one of the necessary conditions in which John's action could become the primary cause of the light's brightening. Be that as it may, even if George is right in his claim, he is still not claiming to be causing or in any way bringing about John's action, which was just a

certain bodily movement. All he can claim, right or wrong, is that he helped bring about the consequence which John had claimed was due to his action alone. He is able to dispute that John's action had all the effects claimed for it, but as to the action of John's itself, he had no part whatsoever in it. To claim to do so would not make sense. It would entail George somehow bringing about a movement of John's body which John performed deliberately which is more than impossible; it is not even conceivable. It is contradictory. George neither caused nor made it possible that John performed his action. This he could only claim to do for the claimed consequence of that action - a distinct event in its own right. George could claim, with some justice, that his action made possible, or enabled, John's action to be described as that which caused the light to come on (i.e. as turning on the light). Granted his action could not likewise be said to have made possible the description of the same action as the cause of the switch's being on (i.e. of flipping the switch), but the way in which the action is described is not a property of the action. If it is a property of anything, it is a property of the way in which we regard the action and its effects on the world. This is entirely different from being a property of the action itself.

We still have not found a disparity in properties between "two" actions which would qualify as identical

under the Identity thesis.

Goldman has another example along the same lines.¹ He maintains that the reason a man says "Yes?" when he answers the phone, and the reason he says it loudly, are not the same. He says "Yes?" because he wants to know who is calling; he says it loudly because he is angry. I think I need do more than draw attention to a parallel case for objects which would have to be accepted as identical if the notion of Identity is accepted at all, in any manner or form (which Goldman certainly does).

"This is a ball." "This is a heavy ball." We are talking about what no one for a moment would doubt is one and the same object. Yet it is a ball because it is spherical; a heavy ball because it is made of lead. This in no way leads us to postulate the presence of two balls. Nor does the parallel case of answering the phone lead us to believe that there are two actions. All that is involved is a difference between the reason for doing something and the reason for doing it in the way in which it was done. It is definitely not a case of A and A' failing to have a property in common. There is I think an "A", but no "A' " present. If we did have A identical to an A' then any reason for one would be a reason for the other, however this case does not even aspire to have two names, "A" and "A' ". Goldman fails, with this type of example

1. op.cit. p.3.

of "contraventions" of Leibniz's Law, to do any harm to the Identity thesis.

A property which A and A' do not seem always to hold in common is being intended. I wave goodbye; I knock over my glass. I did both by moving my arm, hence I would say that the actions are identical. The one arm movement both constituted a farewell gesture and caused the glass to fall over. The problem is that it was my intention to make the farewell gesture, but it was not my intention to cause the toppling of the glass. This can be dealt with. While I might not have intended that my action have a certain consequence, I did, if it was indeed an action (i.e. a deliberate bodily movement) intend to make the bodily movement in question. Thus there was but one action which I fully intended to make, I also intended that it be a farewell gesture, though I did not foresee - therefore did not intend - that the glass would fall over. This question ties in with considerations of action descriptions, which I shall come to later, therefore I will take up the task of further explanation of this type of case at that time. Just suffice it to say here that the bodily movement was intended, though one of its effects was not. This though does not constitute a missing property in the action - knocking over the glass - itself, which waving farewell has, then this is not a case of A having a property which A' lacks.

Consider $A = B$ where A is morally wrong but B is morally neutral. A = John's striking George on the head. B = John's swinging his arm. The property of being morally wrong does not seem to be common to them both, though we wish to say that they are identical. If we consider the matter carefully however, we will see that in fact moral wrongness is "shared." Remember that Leibniz's Law is more accurately stated as "If what ' A ' stands for is identical with what ' B ' stands for, then what ' A ' refers to has all and only the properties which what ' B ' refers to has." With this in mind we can see that this problem of moral values cannot harm the Identity thesis.

What ' A ' refers to is an arm movement which had the consequence of George's head receiving a knock. ' B ' refers to just the same movement with just the same consequence. Now ' A ' mentions this consequence (and let us assume that the word "strike" implies that it was an intended consequence), where ' B ' does not. Therefore, if we know of this action through description ' B ' alone (and have not observed the act itself) then we will not be able to make a moral judgement. If we hear description ' A ' then we can make that judgement. This just shows that ' A ' is a fuller description than ' B '. The action is morally wrong regardless of the description employed, but our ability to make this judgement is dependent on the completeness

(at least from the point of view of mentioning intended consequences) of the description of it with which we are supplied. Again there is no property of the action referred to in 'A' which the action referred to in 'B' fails to have, if there is but one bodily movement referred to by both (i.e. if they are identical).

'B' fails to imply a property of the action which 'A' implies. This is to do with the descriptions not with the action or actions they describe.

D'Arcy, a supporter of the Identity thesis, has a theory about a concept he calls elision. Though he does not realise it, if this concept is a tenable one then it presents a serious difficulty for the Identity thesis. His theory is that "We may say that MacBeth stabbed Duncan and, as a consequence, killed him: but we also simply say that he killed him..... We may often elide one possible description (of an action), the term X, into another term Y, where (1) Y is the result or consequence of the agent A's doing X; (2) A is nevertheless said to be doing Y, e.g. entertaining people; (3) the elision is so complete that Y gives no hint of the specific nature of X." ¹.

The reason why elision fits into this discussion of possible breaches of Leibniz's Law is that, if it indeed captures the actual state of affairs, then we have A and A' supposedly identical but with a difference in consequences. If A and A' are identical then any consequence

1. E. D'Arcy 'Human Acts' p.16-17.

of one must be a consequence of the other. According to D'Arcy, MacBeth's stabbing of Duncan has the consequence of MacBeth's killing of Duncan. However, MacBeth's killing of Duncan cannot have the consequence of MacBeth's killing of Duncan. If A' is the consequence of A then it is surely quite evident that A cannot be (be identical with) A'. I am sure that no one needs persuading that nothing can be a consequence of itself. A consequence is an event or state of affairs which follows from something preceding. Obviously then the consequence and what it follows from cannot be identical.

A does X with the result Y. This is acceptable. A is nevertheless said to be doing Y. This cannot be so. MacBeth stabs Duncan. What is the result of that stabbing? The stabbing is an event. What other event or state of affairs follows from it and would not otherwise have occurred (at least not at that time and place) had not this action been performed? D'Arcy says the event would be MacBeth's killing of Duncan. This is where he is mistaken. If on this occasion the killing and the stabbing are identical actions then one does not follow from the other. What does result is the death of Duncan. Thus MacBeth's stabbing Duncan had the result that Duncan died. Thus MacBeth cannot be said to be doing Y here, as Y is the death of Duncan, or Duncan's dying. Occasionally Y could be an action, e.g. John's dropping a hammer on

his toe (X), has the consequence that John swears (Y). However, it could never be, and the Identity thesis would never allow, that here X and Y are identical. This is clearly not the sort of case in which elision is supposed to be operating anyway.

We can now see that the phenomenon of elision as envisaged by D'Arcy is a fictitious one. It does not afford the feared counter-example to the Identity thesis. D'Arcy's mistake originates in his failure (which is rather common in the philosophical discussion of action), to realise that a Y-type description is not a description of a consequence of an action, but rather a description of an action (a reference to it) in terms of consequences, i.e. as the cause of those consequences. In the case of "to kill" (and many other descriptions) this is disguised by the fact that the description is a conventional 'short-hand' for "to cause the death of."

Discussion of elision leads naturally into the consideration of the doctrine of basic actions. This theory, which divides actions into two distinct classes - basic and non-basic - can be construed as a problem of property disparity of so-called identical actions because a basic action has some property which makes it basic which a non-basic action lacks (or vice versa), yet the Identity thesis often - in fact typically - allows that a basic action and a non-basic action are identical.

I hope to show that the distinction is fictitious, indeed that all actions are basic, none non-basic; that all have only the properties of basic actions, none of the properties credited to non-basic actions over and above these. This would allow cases of identity between a basic and a so-called non-basic action to be upheld in accordance with the Identity thesis. If the basic/non-basic distinction is upheld then the Identity thesis is automatically disproved because this distinction presupposes the Many-Act thesis. Thus this is a more direct problem for the Identity thesis than property disparity, though the latter is involved and would of itself suffice to undermine the Identity thesis.

According to Danto:^{1.} "(1) B is a basic action of a if and only if (i) B is an action and (ii) whenever a performs B, there is no other action A, performed by a, such that B is caused by A.

"(2) B is a non-basic action of a if there is some action A, performed by a, such that B is caused by A."

We can see the relation this has to elision. It is in fact dealing with much the same subject matter, but Danto is coming to a different conclusion - one based on the Many-Act thesis rather than the Identity thesis. The property which is unshared if say A(the basic action) is John's punching Jim and B(the non-basic action) is

1. A. Danto 'What We Can Do' p.435-6.

John's killing Jim, is that of having A for a cause. The concept of elision was not so clearly expressed but we discovered that it entailed an action A causing (or resulting in) an action B and yet wanted to hold that A was identical with B. If such a causal relation holds between A and B then the basic action theory is obviously the right one, and the Many-Act thesis wins the day. Thus we can see that this discussion is the next step in a logical train of enquiry, after consideration and repudiation of elision.

When I press the button this is not a basic action. I moved my finger which caused my pressing of the button. The hand movement is a basic action. This is Danto's view of action. Clearly, in his view, all bodily movements which are deliberately performed (i.e. qualify as actions) are basic actions; all other actions are non-basic. In defence of the Identity thesis it must be shown that there is no such thing as a non-basic action. The idea of a basic action is acceptable, with the proviso that it is extended to all action, i.e. that all actions are acknowledged to be basic.

X swings his arm; X punches Y; X kills Y. Danto would allow the first to be called a basic action, the other two he would call non-basic. They are, for him, three separate, distinct actions. Let us try to discover how they differ one from the other.

Clearly they are not different in the obvious way

that X's punching Y and X's kicking Y are. X's punching is unambiguously a separate event from X's kicking. There is a different bodily movement involved. Danto would say that each was caused by a different basic action. With our three actions Danto would assume a causal chain, starting with the hand movement and ending with the act of killing. Undoubtedly only one basic action occurred; we would say only one action variously described. Now if the arm movement caused the punching then the arm movement cannot be, cannot constitute, the punching. We have established that any act must be an event. Therefore the punching must be an event, but it must be a different event from the arm movement. Danto is supported in this view by J. Cornman: "... people do such actions as sinking ships, and, it seems clear, such actions are not 'mere movements of the body.' "¹. This is a common view amongst opponents of the Identity thesis and, at first encounter, seems a reasonable one. Let us consider however the simpler case of the punching. How could this be an event different from the movement of one's arm? A punching is never anything more than a striking with the fist. It just is an arm movement utilised in a certain way. There is no other event, a punching, which follows from the arm movement. Thus we have only one event which can be described in two ways. The arm movement and the punching are identical.

1. J. Cornman. Reply to D. Davidson's 'Agency' p.28.

What of more 'complex' actions though? What of the killing? Could this be a separate event from the arm movement, and be caused by the arm movement? Well, X could kill Y just by looking at him; by employing some occult force. We find this hard to believe, but even if it is so, it does not help Danto. If X kills Y in this mysterious fashion then the arm movement has no place in the picture. It could in no way claim to cause the act of killing. What Danto would then have to say is that the occult act caused the killing, but again we need only ask where is the event - the act of killing - which is distinct from this 'act', the employment of the occult force. Once again there is no separate event. There is only one event and the act of killing is identical with the occult act. Thus even by entering into the realms of fantasy and utilising the dubious concept of a mental act Danto would be unable to defend his Many-Act schema.

Danto attempts to prove that raising one's hat must be a non-basic action. If he were successful he would establish the existence of a very extensive class of non-basic actions. He is convinced that proof of the basic nature of the act of raising one's hat depends on "... whether it is possible that we might move hats the way we do move our arms, not by causing them to move but by just moving them - the way we move our arms: as basic actions."¹ We need not argue along the lines he assumes

1. A. Danto. 'What We Can Do' p.439.

we must. Any Identity theorist will, I am sure, readily accept that we could never raise a hat without causing it to rise. Raising a hat just is causing it to rise. Danto is falling into the same trap as so many of his fellow philosophers. He is failing to distinguish between the act of raising one's hat and the movement of the hat, just as D'Arcy failed to distinguish between the act of killing and the event which it caused - the death of the victim. Danto fails to realise that my raising my hat does not entail that the upward movement of my hat be a part of my action. It is not an action or any part of an action; it is a consequence of an action, something brought about or caused by an action. It is not something I do. By my arm movement I caused my hat to rise. I did nothing besides move my hand, I just did it in such a way as to cause my hat to rise with it. By his own argument Danto shows that we can do nothing, as opposed to cause something to happen, which is not a bodily movement. He does realise that nothing we do (as opposed to things we cause to happen) can be anything other than a bodily movement, but he fails to realise how this disproves the notion of non-basic actions.

Let us try to construct a weaker case than Danto's which salvages some distinction between basic and non-basic actions. Let us say that basic actions are always involved in - are a part of - non-basic actions, but that non-basic

actions incorporate elements which are not present in basic actions. This would provide the contravention of Leibniz's Law which is all that is needed to be able to successfully deny the Identity thesis. Consider the act of moving one's hand and the act of killing. "Killing" involves the death of the victim, "moving one's arm" does not. Does this provide the required difference between these two acts to warrant denying that they are identical? The answer lies in the arena of action, in the world itself in which the action is performed. We need to be able to find something over and above what I did when I moved my arm which I did when I killed. Of course no such extra something will ever be found. If we look at the event which was my action we will see that it was an arm movement and that it had the consequence that my arm struck someone and that he then died. It is the same event referred to in the description of my act as a killing and in the description of it as an arm movement; the event referred to by each description has the same consequences. As we have seen before, the difference is in the description, not in the actions themselves. Thus even this very much weaker thesis of non-basic actions fails.

It is worth noting that descriptions of actions can be divided into direct descriptions, i.e. descriptions of the bodily movement itself, and descriptions in terms of the consequences of the bodily movement, (shall we call

them indirect descriptions of the bodily movement.)

The latter can themselves be divided into (i) descriptions in terms of consequences which the act was intended to cause, and which occurred; (ii) descriptions in terms of consequences which the act was intended to cause, but which failed to eventuate, and (iii) descriptions in terms of consequences caused by an act which were not intended (accidental).

In the example of moving one's arm, punching, and killing, "X swung his arm" is a direct description of the bodily movement (the action), "X punched Y" is an indirect description of type (i), i.e. the consequence of one's fist contacting another's body was both planned and eventuated. "X killed Y" could be an indirect description of type (ii) or of type (iii) depending on whether the consequence of his action - the death of Y - was intended or not. If it was intended then his act could be redescribed as murder, if not then it was accidental and could only be described as manslaughter. We cannot tell, from the information embodied in the description of the act as a killing, which of these further descriptions is warranted. A type (ii) indirect description would be "X bungled the catch." Each of the four types of description brings a different aspect of the total context of events in which the action occurred, to the fore. We draw upon these distinctions within action description at a later stage.

Before leaving basic actions it is worth looking closely at the type of case which would most influence one in favour of belief in the existence of non-basic actions. Such an action description would be "A moved stone S." The problem is that though in fact we have both cause, i.e. a hand movement, and effect, i.e. movement of the stone, these two are contemporaneous. The cause-effect pattern with which we are most familiar (and into which we are inclined to think all cause-effect situations should fit) is one where the cause event ends where the effect event begins. For example, the cause event is the Q-ball striking the Eight-ball. The effect event - the movement of the Eight-ball - occurs directly after the cause event (following on from it). However, many cause-effect situations start and finish together.

When such a contemporaneous cause-effect situation occurs we are perfectly entitled to look upon the entire happening as but one event which features both the movement of the hand and the movement of the stone. In fact this is the normal way of looking at what has occurred in such a case. Thus we seem to have only one event, yet according to the Identity thesis we should have both an action and its consequence (i.e. a cause and an effect) occurring here. Since there is only one event though, and it must be accepted that an action has been performed, we seem forced to conclude that here there was in fact no

consequence, but just an act. But since the event incorporates more than a simple bodily movement - i.e. the movement of the stone - the action (which is the event) must be a non-basic action, because it is an action but it fails to qualify as a basic action (i.e. a bodily movement only). Whether or not any basic action can be said to have caused this non-basic action is highly debatable, but this need not concern us because it can be shown that there is already a mistake made in the above argument which invalidates it and allows us to uphold the position that all actions are basic.

What has been overlooked is that the notion of an event is an elastic one. There is in fact no way of counting the number of events which occur in a certain place during a certain time and hoping to get an absolute answer. The number of events counted would be relative to the viewpoint or purpose of the counter. If we ask how many events occurred in that landslide we may get the answer, just one, the whole landslide, or we may be told that the sliding of each rock was a separate event, or that each bounce of each rock on the way down was a separate event, and so on, thus we could be confronted with many different answers to our questions, all of which could claim to be equally correct.

The concept of 'event' shares this feature of relative countability with the concept of an object. It is

similarly impossible, in other words, to ever count the correct number of objects at any time and place. For instance, if we consider an occupied carpark and ask how many objects are in it, we may be given the number of cars there, or we may be given the number of component car parts present, and both answers would be correct.

Applying this knowledge to our problem case, we can now understand that though we normally count only one event when we see A moving stone S, when we consider what occurs as an instance of a cause-effect situation, we are entitled to count two events; one being the movement of A's hand, the other being the movement of stone S. To suppose that there was no consequence present but only some feature of the action, when the stone moved, as we did above, is to suppose that the stone's movement was not caused by A, but done by A, which has already been shown to be impossible (while considering Danto). Thus we must allow that there are two events here if we are to preserve the very well-tried and basic notion that we have of the cause-effect relation as it operates in the macroscopic world.

Even this last-ditch defence of non-basic actions has failed. Non-basic actions do not and cannot exist. I will go so far as to say that a possible example of a non-basic action as defined by Danto cannot even be imagined. The notion of it does not make sense. All

actions are basic actions. Once again a problem which seemed to face the Identity thesis has been disposed of.

With this discussion of basic actions we have moved beyond those problems based on property disparity and possible contravention of Leibniz's Law. In all cases where it has been claimed that two identical actions fail to have all properties in common, we have seen that the claim has been a false one. The principle of indiscernability of identicals has not been shown to be violated in any way.

Let us now look at other types of problems confronting the Identity thesis.

It is another very basic feature of Identity that it is a symmetric, reflexive and transitive relation. Goldman¹. thinks that he can present examples which prove that so-called Identity between actions fails to have this feature (at least as far as symmetry and reflexivity are concerned). He considers the way in which "we often say of a person that he performs one act 'by' performing another. We say, for example, that John turned on the light 'by' flipping the switch.As used in these contexts, the term 'by' expresses a relation which holds between acts..... The important point to notice about this relationship is that it is both asymmetric and irreflexive." This is true. If S does A' by doing A

1. op.cit. p.5

then he cannot be said to be doing A by doing A'. Let us expand this. In examples of this kind A' will always be a description which makes mention (or includes words which are defined with mention) of consequences of the action, i.e. one of the types of indirect description. They could always be recast, without relevant change of meaning, into the form "caused to occur" (in place of "did A' "). Thus when expanded, "S does A' by doing A" becomes "S caused E to happen by doing A" (where E is some event which is a consequence of A). In a paradigm case A will be a direct description, i.e. purely of a bodily movement (e.g. "X moved his hand"), though we often find that it is still an indirect description, but at a more primitive level (i.e. in terms of less far-reaching consequences), than A'. To clarify; if the action originates a causal chain, then "A' " will always be a description in terms of consequences further along that chain than are the consequences in terms of which description "A" is couched (though A need not be a direct description, i.e. of the bodily movement itself). For example, if A' is a killing then A will be a manner of killing - a stabbing or a shooting etc. As Goldman points out, "we explain how act A' has been performed by citing A."¹ A' just says that in some way the agent caused this consequence. A tells us (to some extent) what that

1. op.cit. p.5

way was. That we cannot say that an agent did A by doing A' is not at all difficult to grasp, nor are the reasons for this being so. (Note that this has been discussed previously in connection with the locution "John's killing Smith caused the gun to fire.") You cannot explain how X stabbed Y by saying he killed him. As has been explained (and needs no further explanation), A must be at least one step back in the causal chain from A' for "S does A' by doing A" to be a sound explanation (or any sort of explanation at all). Thus the relation which exists here, cannot, understandably, be symmetric.

Similarly with the irreflexivity of the relation, we can clearly see how, though "S did A' by doing A" is an explanation, "S did A by doing A (did A' by doing A') is not.

Thus one can fully understand why this relation between A and A' is both asymmetric and irreflexive. But does this prove that A and A' cannot be identical actions? No. The relation is not actually one between actions themselves. Actions are a bodily movement of a certain type. One action can never explain another, or itself (with the exception of speech acts). Explanations are necessarily items of language. The relation of explanation holds between the statements "S did A' " and "S did A' by doing A." If one looks outside of language

(including conventional gestures) in search of a relationship of explanation; if one looks for it in the world, existing between things of any kind, be they actions, other events, or any sort of object, then it will never be found because it does not exist in this realm, it only exists in language.

Even if we did not have the above argument to refute Goldman's claim, we still would not need to worry about this problem. What in fact is maintained to be a feature of Identity is that it is a symmetrical and reflexive relation, i.e. that if $X = Y$, then $Y = X$ and $X = X$ and $Y = Y$. That there are other relations of some sort between X and Y which are not reflexive and symmetrical is not affected by this stipulation, i.e. if such relations pertain their presence will not disprove an identity claim because of this stipulation. Our arguments have more than sufficed to prove that this is not a problem for the Identity thesis.

Wiggins, in a volume on Identity, outlines a D thesis which states that "if someone tells you that $a = b$, then you should always ask them 'the same what as b?' "¹. The "what" which must be provided is a covering concept under which both a and b can be subsumed. This is a sound thesis. If we just say that A and B are the same we may mean many things. We may

1. D. Wiggins. 'Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity' p.1.

mean they are the same person, or the same character-type, and one of these could be true while the other is false. Most statements have the covering concept built in, either explicitly (e.g. "The Block mechanism is the stabilizing mechanism"), or implicitly, i.e. the referring phrases a and b being conventionally reserved for members of a certain class, e.g. "John Smith is the same as (is identical with) Lord Lush." Here the use of a Christian/surname pair is conventionally restricted to people, thus we automatically register that the covering concept in this case is "person."

Clearly the D thesis will apply to any identity statements. But consider the following case. X is playing Y at chess. Just before he makes his move a fly settles on the chess board but is unnoticed by X. Then X sees a way to win the game and moves his queen into a position where it checkmates Y. In so doing he scares away the fly. Now the Identity thesis dictates that X's checkmating Y and X's scaring away the fly are identical actions. However, with the D thesis in mind, we seem to have a problem. The defining characteristic of an action which differentiates it from other items of behaviour is that it be deliberate. This is satisfied by the act of checkmating Y. X had foreseen that his move would bring about the end of the game according to the rules of chess. But this is not the case with his scaring the fly. He did not even know that the fly was there, hence his

scaring it away was entirely accidental. It was not something he did deliberately it seems. This being the case, it would seem that what he did in scaring the fly cannot be called an action, therefore *f*, the covering concept in the identity statement "X's checkmating Y was the same *f* as X's scaring the fly", cannot be "action." Which of course means that we cannot say that these are identical actions, they are identical somethings, but not actions. If this line of argument is sound then the Identity thesis cannot be accepted, at least not in its present form, because it would allow that these are two identical actions. The covering concept in this case would have to be "bodily movement" (as both a and b can qualify as descriptions of a bodily movement), and we may be better advised to call our thesis the Identity thesis of bodily movement. Of course, even this is doubtful. If a is an action (which checkmating Y is) and b is not, and there is a real (not a fictitious or relative) difference between actions and non-actions (as we have determined is the case), then b must lack something which a has and therefore they surely cannot be identical.

The point which the above argument has overlooked is that the two descriptions refer to one movement and it is the inclusion or otherwise of a certain feature - i.e. deliberate performance - in the makeup of that movement which determines whether or not it is an action. This

issue is not in any way effected by the inadequacies of the descriptions of the event concerned. It does not matter that the description of the event as scaring a fly does not, in isolation, allow one to determine whether the event described is an action or not. Because the necessary defining characteristic is not mentioned in this description, it does not mean that it does not occur in the event which it describes. Thus we can see why we need not worry about "A" and "A'" not being subject to the same problems (e.g. of being unmistakably action descriptions) in this, and like, cases.

This explanation also allows us to uphold the covering concept "action" for the identity statement and thus preserve the unamended Identity thesis. It is not disputed that what is described by A and A' is the same bodily movement. From the description of the movement as a checkmating it is clear that the movement was deliberately performed (assume so at least), and was therefore an action, and an action with a purpose. This allows us to state that any description of that movement will necessarily be describing an action, though in the case of many such descriptions we would not if we encountered them in isolation, be able to infer from them that they did in fact describe an action. Their occurrence in a context may often render such an inference possible. Thus, in an action identity statement,

in any sort of identity statement at all, we only need to know of one description of the object or event, or whatever, which is definitely that of an action (i.e. conveys the presence of the required defining characteristic) to be able to use the covering concept "action", or "person" or whatnot in any identity statement about that entity under any (true) description whatsoever.

The description which can be unmistakably recognised as action descriptions regardless of context (i.e. the unambiguous action descriptions), are small in number. There are the basic ones such as "John moved his arm forward deliberately" which are direct descriptions. There are the indirect ones such as "John murdered Bill" which identify some movement of an agent as one which was deliberately designed to have certain consequences. Murders, defraudings, assaults, promises cannot be accidental by definition. Killings, stabbings, insults, could be either deliberate or accidental. They could be descriptions in terms of unforeseen consequences of an action which can be unambiguously described as another type of action (in terms of intended consequences, whether the intention was realised or not) or in terms of foreseen and eventuating consequences, or descriptions of movements which were not even actions at all - e.g. I could be said to have killed a man if I fell over and in so doing bumped into a bystander, knocking him under a bus.

When an identity statement includes two of these ambiguous descriptions, e.g. "John's killing Bill is identical with John's pushing Bill under a bus" we must have additional evidence before we can determine whether this is an action identity statement, or merely a bodily movement identity statement. We must be able to describe the event concerned with an unambiguous action description (e.g. as murder) and every action must be able to be so described, though it may be a rather contorted description for many actions.

Thus one description, or even both, in a statement of identity between actions need not be a self-evident action description so long as we know the event under some such self-evident action description.

An identity statement involving one description in terms of unforeseen consequences, and another in terms of foreseen and intended consequences can employ the covering concept "action." The introduction of the D thesis has not presented an insurmountable problem for the Identity thesis.

Another problem which revolves around descriptions concerns conventional behaviour (of which language is the major part, in fact one could class all items of conventional behaviour as a form of language, or at least as a primitive precursor or substitute for it). An item of behaviour, a bodily movement (a characterisation which

can be interpreted loosely enough so that speech acts can be included) can conventionally have a certain meaning, be interpreted in a certain standard way. The problem is that an exactly similar movement may not have been performed as a conventional act. It may not even have been an act at all. This may need explanation but it does not affect the Identity thesis because although exactly similar, the two actions concerned are still distinct actions. There is no suggestion that they be identical. A closely related case does however provide the desired example. What if it were one and the same movement in the above case? Let us try to imagine such a case.

Suppose Stanley had come across a tribe of primitive natives. They jabber threateningly at him because, unbeknown to Stanley, he has offended against one of their taboos. In great fear his teeth begin to chatter, and for some reason the natives become suddenly very friendly. Stanley does not realise it, but for this tribe, the chattering of one's teeth signifies that one comes in friendship bearing great gifts. Thus as far as they are concerned, he has made the conventional sign that he is friendly etc. They would describe the chattering of Stanley's teeth as the act of friendly greeting. Stanley would deny that he has performed any action at all. As far as he is concerned something has happened to him, namely he has been affected by uncontrollable fear.

Could it be said that Stanley's teeth-chattering is identical with the act of friendly greeting? If so, we cannot use the covering concept "action" here. If there is a real distinction between actions and non-actions then we could not even claim identity between these two because the act of friendly greeting must be something more than the teeth-chattering which is a mere bodily movement lacking the defining characteristic of an action.

The solution is in recognising the fact that Stanley performed no act whatsoever. The natives mistakenly thought that he was ritually greeting them in a friendly fashion. He was not. What must be kept in mind is that one can only act conventionally knowingly. One must know the conventions and intend to act in the required way and believe that those watching (or listening) also know the conventions. Thus one must know the meaning of the word "promise" and its status as a conventional act and have reason to believe that those conventions hold jurisdiction over the society you are acting in, if one is actually to perform the act of promising by uttering "I promise to..."

Like other acts then, a conventional act must be deliberate, intended, and, to have the consequences which entail that it is a conventional act, it needs the further features that it be understood by both actor and audience to be an item of behaviour with conventional significance.

Goldman cites speech acts as a counter-example to the Identity thesis.¹ In How To Do Things With Words Austin picks out a variety of acts in language. The three basics are locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Goldman is convinced that Austin would support him in saying that when a man makes a language noise he can be performing three distinct acts. In fact Austin did not consider whether there might be identity or not between these acts - i.e. whether there was on such an occasion only one act, or three separate acts. If we look carefully at them however we can see that they are all but different descriptions of the same act. A man makes a language noise, he utters a sentence which has meaning; this is a locutionary act. If he makes the utterance for some purpose - e.g. to command, announce, order - then it also qualifies as an illocutionary act. If it evokes a response from a person who hears it (even if it is not the one the utterer had hoped for, e.g. I may warn you, but you laugh, finding it a joke) then it also qualifies as - and deserves the title of - perlocutionary act. Examples are deceiving, irritating, impressing. This is a roughly sketched outline of the Austin thesis. In fact these labels just fix one and the same speech act in a progressively broadening context of intention and consequence and can be explained in much the same

1. op.cit.p.10.

way as we explained various descriptions of ordinary actions. Thus speech acts fit neatly and without fuss into the general body of actions and put no new stumbling blocks in the way of the Identity thesis.

The point might be raised, as a criticism of the Identity thesis, that in many cases one ends up saying that one action is identical with a number of actions. For instance, one says "Launching the boat is identical with removing the chocks, cutting the ropes, breaking a champagne bottle on the bow, and pushing the boat down the ramp." This is not though a unique feature of action Identity. Do we not likewise say "The Smith family is identical with Jim, and Molly, and Clyde."? We can postulate identity between sets of actions. It just happens that we can say that the launching of a boat is a set of actions, or a single action, depending on how we want to look at it. In much the same way we can look at the same vista and see it as one mountain range or as many separate peaks. We know that we can get various totals if we count a group of events, and as actions are a species of event, the same, naturally, applies to actions. The number of actions, events, or objects which we choose to say are present at any place and time will be relative to our point of view, though we can not proliferate actions - and therefore events - in the way the Many-Act thesis would allow. (Note also that

this relativity does not apply to the distinction between actions and non-actions, objects and non-objects - these are real and fixed boundaries - and we are not here saying that it does.)

Before moving on it should be noted that there is a distinction between actions and activities. When one explains what one does, did, or will do, one need not be describing an act (or any single movement such as rolling over in one's sleep). One could say that one works at Woolworths, runs a farm, which are activities, not actions. Such examples as slapping someone's face, saluting, throwing a stone, are undoubtedly actions. However, there is a large region between such examples where it is difficult to decide whether one is dealing with cases of actions or activities, i.e. whether one can still apply the term "action" to something one does or whether it must always be considered a number of actions(which, broadly speaking, is an activity). The yardstick by which the judgement is made is time span. Something which persists will be an activity. Something which is relatively shortlived is an action. I cannot give any more accurate idea of what the limit of an action time span is, however we all seem to be able to apply the distinction between actions and activities with reasonable common agreement regardless of its rather vague nature.

Rightly or wrongly a Relativity thesis has been postulated in connection with "normal" (mainly object)

identity. The same sort of case should be able to be built for action identity. In fact it is not. But if actions are identical in the same sense of the term as objects are identical then corresponding cases should be forthcoming. The lack of them can be explained however without our having to accept that identity between actions is somehow a different concept from identity between objects.

The examples upon which the Relativists base their case are mainly those involving objects at different stages in their long life spans.¹ The boy John is the same person as the Mayor, Sir John Smith, but he is not the same man - because he is not a man, only a boy. Such examples clearly depend on the persistence of objects. Corresponding cases are lacking in the field of actions because, as noted above, actions are short-lived, are not persisting. Anything which we do which is persisting, which does last for a reasonably lengthy period of time, is an activity, not an action.

There are cases, such as certain killings, which seem odd. For example, suppose I purposely injected a man with a compound which I knew would induce a fatal cancer in him. Now my one act - the injecting of this compound into the man - was the very same act as my killing the man, but I could not call this act killing

1. see Wiggins. Part II & III.

for a long time after I could call it an injecting of the compound. This need not upset the Identity theorist if he remembers that "to kill" means "to cause the death of." Obviously the act cannot be described as causing a death until the death occurred. This is no mystery, and nor is the fact that I do not know that this description is warranted without some evidence. Thus we can now see that there is no real oddness about this example if we persist in upholding the Identity thesis.

On the other hand, if the injecting and the killing were two separate actions, as anyone who rejects the Identity thesis would be forced to maintain, there is a considerably more persistent oddness about this example. Unless I gain additional evidence - e.g. I see the man die, or read of his death in the newspapers - I will not even know that I have performed this distinct action of killing. But by definition an action is deliberately performed. This entails that we know we are performing any and every action. In fact, for most actions, as was previously explained, the awareness that we have performed an action is stronger than just knowing. Those borderline cases where we are uncertain are very different sorts of examples than the one we are dealing with here. There is no doubt here, if we accept the Identity thesis, that we have performed the action, only doubt as to whether it has a certain consequence. If the Identity thesis is

rejected, there will be a time, after the man's death, when we are much more certain of having killed than we ever are that we have performed one of the borderline actions. Anyway we are doubting in a different way. We have no doubt that the killing is an action, we are only doubtful as to whether we have performed it (if we are Many-Act theorists), in a borderline case we know when whatever happened happened, but we are not sure whether or not it was an action.

Thus if the Identity thesis is rejected (while the normal definition of an action is accepted) we have the contradiction of having performed an action and not knowing that we have done so. This is much more than mere oddness. The Identity thesis allows us to avoid this contradiction and to explain away any oddness, thus proving that it is much superior to the Many-Act thesis. To deny the Identity thesis in this case is to fall into contradiction, unless a different characterisation of action is produced - a task which Goldman and Co. do not attempt, and a task which I am sure would end in failure.

If we return to the case of X checkmating Y and X scaring the fly and amend it a little we strike a new problem. What if X knew that the fly was on the chess board and wanted to scare it away. He also saw the opening for his queen and wanted to checkmate Y. Being a

lazy fellow he calculates that he could achieve both these purposes by moving his queen to kings-knight three. He makes the move and proves his calculations correct. He both scares away the fly and checkmates Y. Both the departure of the fly and Y's admission of defeat were foreseen consequences of something X did. Both were intended. Did X perform two actions or only one? This is a very important question because if he has performed two actions then we have a case of two actions corresponding to but one bodily movement, one event. If this could be upheld then the Identity thesis would be seriously undermined, because it is basic to my conception of the Identity thesis (I think any conception of it) that an action be merely a type of bodily movement, that every action should be a distinct event in its own right. If it can be shown that there can be two actions performed where only one event occurred, then it can no longer be said that an action is an event - a bodily movement of a special sort. Most of my argumentation in defence of the Identity thesis would collapse because it is based on, and depends for its soundness on, the supposition that actions are a species of event.

One cannot argue that there are two events to account for the two actions by subdividing the movement which X made into two parts. He need not have raised the queen and waved it at the fly before moving it to its new

location on the board, or made any such gesture with the piece. We will assume that he made a smooth and uninterrupted movement with his hand, just as he always does when moving a chess piece, and that it was the whole movement which alarmed the fly and caused it to fly away. This leaves no possibility that the first half of the movement scared the fly and the second half repositioned the queen so that it trapped Y's king (a poor argument in any event). Even if, taking advantage of the aforementioned property of events which allows one to count them in different ways with different results, we artificially divide the hand movement into a number of events (saying for instance that the queen's passing over each square of the board is a separate event) it will not avoid the consequence of there being more actions than events because each of these events would have its share of responsibility for the scaring of the fly and the checkmating of the king, thus being in the same predicament.

If we look to common usage we will often encounter the claim "I killed two birds with one stone." Can we not similarly say that one can accomplish two purposes with the same action? Sir Gawain killed the villain and won the heart of a fair lady with one stroke of his sword. Surely a chronicler of the scene would say that with one mighty action Sir Gawain accomplished both his intentions?

With our definition of an action as a type of bodily movement we can "stick to our guns" and claim that this is just what should always be said and that there is nothing wrong with fulfilling two intentions with one action. Surely most actions which we perform do have more than one purpose? X moved his queen so that he would defeat Y, whom he disliked, and so humiliate him, and also so that he could collect the prize money, which he needed to pay for his new yacht. A similar duality exists for most actions.

The fact is emerging that the dispute between the view that each action is a separate event (under at least one legitimate method of counting events) and the view that there need be no one - one correspondence between events and actions (i.e. that actions are not a species of event) is to some extent a dispute over rival conventions, with neither side absolutely correct. If one chooses one convention one maintains that one action can have more than one purpose; if one adopts the other convention one maintains that there can be only one purpose for each action but that there can be a number of actions corresponding (somehow) to one event and hence that actions are not a species of event.

When one deals with other disputes over conventions which arise in philosophical discussion, it is notable that the adoption of either of the rival conventions

leads to no repercussions. Either of the two would fit comfortably into our present conceptual framework (with the exception of the concept which fails to accommodate either convention in its original form, but it can be slightly amended in one way or the other to accommodate one or other of the conventions). This does not apply with the dispute we are considering here. The convention of one act having many purposes rests on the prior assumption of the Identity thesis. The convention that one act can have only one purpose assumes the Many-Act thesis. Our investigations have shown us that the Many-Act thesis is incompatible with our world view - and the conceptual framework which supports it - in a number of ways. On the other hand, the Identity thesis has presented no such problems. It is perfectly compatible with all our other concepts and the world picture which these enable us to construct. Thus the convention which presupposes the Identity thesis is a convention which fits the requirements for it to be a candidate for inclusion into our conceptual schema. The rival convention, based on the Many-Act thesis, cannot meet such requirements. Its acceptance would entail at least a major overhaul of some of our most cherished concepts (perhaps even the discarding of them) and there is no guarantee that any such overhaul would or could result in a coherent and self-consistent conceptual schema to

rival the one which we have now. Hence, in the accepted philosophical sense (outlined above) of a clash of conventions, the case we are dealing with here cannot be construed as a dispute between rival conventions.

One action can have many purposes. This is the conclusion which the above discussion leads us to come to. We can have confidence in the soundness of this conclusion, though it is not necessarily the only correct one. There still, I suppose, remains the very remote possibility (though we may be highly sceptical of this) that a rival world picture of comparable explanatory power and lucidity could be constructed which would accommodate the Many-Act thesis, and consequently the restriction that one act can have but one purpose. This though would be to reverse the obvious rational procedure (even in the very unlikely event that it did prove possible) - one might say that it constitutes setting a mackerel to catch a sprat.

The overhaul of our whole conceptual framework (which must follow from the radical alterations entailed by the Many-Act thesis) thus presents Goldman, and anyone else who denies the Identity thesis, with the means for a very extreme and far-fetched last-ditch defence. However, no such defence has been offered. All the philosophers - whose arguments touching this dispute I have encountered - who directly or indirectly oppose the Identity thesis,

have chosen to come to the enemy as it were. They all accept without question our present world picture. They are all convinced that their Many-Act thesis is compatible with this world picture while the Identity thesis is not, and all their arguments are designed to show this. We have discovered that in fact, quite the contrary is the actual state of affairs.

In considering all the problems which were said to confront the Identity thesis it was found that they actually presented no insurmountable difficulties. On the other hand, it soon became obvious that many such difficulties beset the Many-Act thesis - which is the only logical alternative to the Identity thesis.

The inescapable conclusion of our investigations is that the Many-Act thesis is incompatible with the body of concepts with which we operate, and that the only viable solution to the problem of the individuation of actions, within the limits accepted by both sides of the dispute, is to accept the Identity thesis.

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