

IS DAVIDSON A VOLITIONIST IN SPITE OF HIMSELF?

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Even the best of philosophers sometimes contradict themselves, but when they do they usually do so unwittingly. Donald Davidson is certainly one of the best contemporary philosophers. Since he poses, as a central concern in his philosophy of action, the problem of providing "an account of the concept of intention that does not invoke unanalyzed episodes or attitudes like willing, mysterious acts of the will or kinds of causation foreign to science,"¹ Davidson will surely be bewildered to discover that, given some of his most fundamental beliefs concerning action, he is implicitly committed to mysterious acts of the will, that unwittingly he is a volitionist. Such a discovery may also create a little embarrassment, since Davidson *criticized* Chisholm's action theory precisely on the grounds that it is unwittingly volitionistic. Davidson writes: "The second difficulty I raised for Chisholm concerned the question of whether his analysis committed him to 'acts of will,' perhaps contrary to his own intentions. It is clear that Chisholm does not *want* to be committed to acts of the will, and that his analysis does not *say* that there are acts of the will but I believe the question can still be raised."² Unfortunately, however, this same question threatens Davidson's philosophy of action, if Jean Beer Blumenfeld in her article "Is Acting Willing?" has argued correctly.³ The unwanted shoe may now be on the other foot. Blumenfeld's central thesis is that if Davidson is consistent, then he must endorse H. A. Prichard's radical position that all one does in acting is perform an inner act of willing.⁴

On the face of it, Prichard's position, which I call classical volitionism, is an unhappy philosophical theory of action for at least two reasons. First, if all one ever does in acting is

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perform inner acts of will, then what one intuitively, commonsensically, and pre-analytically recognizes as a person's action is not the action at all. One never sees another person's actions at all but only their consequences. This result is all the more counter-intuitive considering the fact that actions are the subject of moral attributions; one never sees the murder that one condemns but only its consequences. Second, explaining physical action by postulating an inner act of will or volition seems to be explaining the less mysterious in terms of the more mysterious. In any case, classical volitionism provides no better account of the problems concerning intentional action than does a less radical view which identifies actions with overt bodily movements. Any problems concerning the nature of intentional action will simply arise for classical volitionism at the point of these postulated inner acts of will. Of course, neither of these considerations establishes that classical volitionism is false. They are nonetheless *prima facie* reasons for not postulating volitions of inner acts of the will with which physical actions are to be identified. Unless one's philosophy of action contains other well-established theoretical principles motivated by concerns independent of volitionism which would commit one to identifying actions with inner acts of will, one ought to avoid this infelicitous view. If Blumenfeld is right, however, then Davidson's philosophy of action involves the theoretical principles needed to commit him to classical volitionism. Is Davidson justified in identifying actions with bodily movements in the ordinary sense or must he, if he is consistent, identify them with some special mental event? Taken literally, Davidson may be committed to classical volitionism on pains of inconsistency, but in this paper, in the *spirit* of Davidson, I will sketch and defend the consistency of a non-volitionistic interpretation of actions as bodily movements. I will propose a modification in a central Davidsonian thesis which will involve a disagreement with him in letter but which will salvage the crucial Davidsonian insight. Physical actions can be identified with some bodily movement performed by the agent. Although bodily movements one performs may be complex events that are in part composed of such inner events as brain firings and muscle contractions, none of this should necessitate the truth of volitionism. Although Davidson may be a volitionist in spite of himself, he need not be.

Before one can confront Blumenfeld's argument, two fundamental Davidsonian theses concerning action must be

elucidated. From these two Davidsonian principles supposedly it follows that all one does in moving one's body is perform an act of willing. Briefly, the first thesis of Davidson is that when someone is said to have ϕ -ed by ψ -ing, ' ϕ ' and ' ψ ' are two different descriptions for one and the same act, or 'he ϕ -ed by ψ -ing' provides just a more in-depth description of the agent's act of ϕ -ing.⁵ This thesis is based upon the intuition that much of the time, one recognizes and describes a person's actions by recognizing and describing the effects of his actions. In the case of a baseball player, one recognizes and describes his action as the hitting of a home run because one observes that an action performed by the player caused the ball to clear the fence. In ordinary English, one might say that the player hit a home run by swinging the bat. The question then arises: in ' $\text{Ag } \phi\text{-ed by } \psi\text{-ing}$ ', how many actions are attributed to the agent?

In order to illustrate Davidson's position on this issue, let us continue with the example of the ball player. In the case of the ball player, it seems natural to say that two actions are attributed to him—(1) the hitting of the home run and (2) the swinging of the bat. One might argue that two actions are involved because something else must have happened in addition to the swinging of the bat in order for the player to have hit a home run. Davidson believes that anyone who argues in this way has been misled by the sentence "The player hit a home run by swinging the bat." According to Davidson, ' $\text{Ag } \phi\text{-ed by } \psi\text{-ing}$ ' only attributes one action to the agent. When the player swings the bat, something else has to happen in order for that action *to result* in a home run. Basically, the ball has to clear the fence. But in the case where the player hits a home run, all that his action consisted of, what he did, was his swinging the bat. Other things had to *happen* in order for that very swing to be the hitting of a home run, but those things were not things that the player had to *do*. He had done all he could have in swinging the bat. Davidson concludes that the description "the hitting of the home run" refers to the same action as does the description "the swinging of the bat." The description "the hitting of the home run" gives us more information about *the results* of the player's action, but it does not pick out a new action of the agent which took place when the ball cleared the fence.⁶ Merely, when the ball cleared the fence, a new description of the action was then appropriate. There was just one action, to which many different descriptions apply. The general thesis can be stated

as follows: when someone is said to ϕ by ψ -ing at a particular time, the two descriptions, ' ϕ ' and ' ψ ' are two descriptions of the same action, or ' $\text{Ag } \phi\text{-ed by } \psi\text{-ing}$ ' just provides a more in-depth description of the agent's act of ϕ -ing.

This Davidsonian view has been misleadingly called "The Identity Thesis." It is important to notice that this thesis is not a theory of the *identity* of actions. As Anscombe, who also endorses this view, says: "Any 'theory of event-identity' had better yield this result: it itself is not a theory or part of one."⁷ The thesis—that ' $\text{Ag } \phi\text{-ed by } \psi\text{-ing}$ ' only attributes one action to the agent—does not presuppose that the details of some particular theory of event identity, or some theory identifying the action with some particular kind of event, have already been established. On the contrary, it is among the data which any plausible theory of identity must explain. The thesis does involve the phrase "same action," but it involves no commitment as to how this phrase will be elucidated. Therefore, calling this thesis "The Identity Thesis" is misleading. How the action is identified or specified is left open by this thesis. One might accept the thesis and identify the appropriate action with a willing, or bodily movement, or a combination of the two. The thesis, clearly compatible with volitionism, leads to another Davidsonian thesis: the need for "primitive actions." Consider the baseball player who hits a home run. He caused the ball to go over the fence by swinging the bat. Certainly, he was the agent of the home run since it was caused by his act of swinging the bat. But clearly one can ask what the relation between the agent and his act of swinging the bat was. If one responds that the *event* of the bat's being swung was caused by his acts of moving his arms and legs, then one can still ask about the relationship between the agent and the movement of his arms and legs. At some point, the causal story must stop. There must be some first member of the causal chain that can properly be described as an action. For this reason, Davidson introduces the notion of primitive acts: "not every event we attribute to an agent can be explained as caused by another event of which he is the agent; some acts must be primitive in the sense that they cannot be analyzed in terms of their causal relation to acts of the same agent."⁸ This means that some events attributed to the agent, events for which he is responsible, are not always his actions, but consequences of them. Primitive actions are the only actions there are—though one many times describes them in terms of their consequences.

With this claim, one again has a thesis which seems compatible with volitionism. This can be pointed out by considering Prichard's volitionist position on action. Prichard believed that all one ever does in acting is to perform an act of will. Bodily movements which accompany actions are simply the causal results of these primitive acts of will. According to Prichard, when one moves something one causes that thing to move. If one moves one's arm what one does is cause one's arm to move. Therefore, the action, because it causes the arm movement, cannot be identified with that movement, but must be identified with some inner mental event that Prichard called a "willing." It should be clear how the thesis of primitive actions is compatible with volitionism. Willings, when they are identified with actions, are not caused by something else done by the agent. Davidson, however, does not sanction acts of the will. He locates primitive actions in a different place—physical movements. Apparently, the argument for the need for primitive actions does not help establish which events will be identified with actions. The apparent conflict between Prichard's view and Davidson's is precisely over the location of primitive actions. But given the Davidsonian thesis concerning "by" sentences and the thesis of primitive actions, a surprising conclusion logically follows. If one accepts these two Davidsonian theses, one must conclude that all the actions one ever performs are primitive actions. Of course, most of the time one describes an agent's action in terms of some of its consequences, but such descriptions which pick out actions in terms of their results nevertheless refer to the one action of the agent. All the agent had to do was perform the primitive action. What results from the act, what can happen given that act is, as Davidson puts it, "up to nature." This conclusion is again illustrated by the ball player who hit the home run. The sentence "The player hit the home run by swinging the bat" was said to attribute only one action to the player. The one action must have been the primitive action. Was the primitive action the swinging of the bat? It seems not. The bat's swinging was the causal result of a more primitive act. One could easily say "The player swung the bat by moving his arms and legs in the appropriately coordinated way." This sentence would suggest that the primitive action was the player's movements of the body. This issue of the location of the primitive action is, however, apparently, left open by these two Davidsonian theses: (i) there must be primitive actions, and (ii) 'Ag ϕ -ed by ψ -ing' attributes only one action to the

agent. The volitionists' apparent disagreement with Davidson is over the location of what Davidson calls the primitive action.⁹ Davidson locates the primitive action in the bodily movements. The classical volitionist locates them in the willings of the movements. So, within the Davidsonian framework, the status of volitionism rests on the force of the arguments that construe primitive actions as identical to willings or acts of the will.

According to Blumenfeld, these two Davidsonian principles, along with some uncontroversial causal claims, lead directly to volitionism. Davidson's rejection of volitionism is apparently inconsistent. As I have emphasized, when a person acts, it is quite common to describe his action in terms of its causal consequences. If one describes a person's actions in terms of his bodily movements, is one still specifying his action by its consequences? This question is the one raised by Blumenfeld's considerations. For Prichard, the physical movements appropriate to some act ϕ are simply results of a willing, which is ϕ . Davidson suggests that the act of ϕ -ing is merely the physical movement appropriate to ϕ . Blumenfeld's case depends on the following passage from Davidson's "Agency":

I can imagine at least two objections to this claim [that the primitive action is a bodily movement]. First, it may be said that, in order to point my finger, I do something that causes the finger to move, namely contract certain muscles; and perhaps this requires that I make certain events take place in my brain. But these events do not sound like ordinary bodily movements. I think that the premises of this argument may be true, but that the conclusion does not follow. It may be true that I cause my finger to move by contracting certain muscles, and possibly I cause the muscles to contract by making an event occur in my brain. But this does not show that I must do something else that causes it. Doing something that causes my finger to move does not cause me to move my finger; it is moving my finger (pp. 49-55).

Blumenfeld's interpretation of this passage is straightforward. If someone moves his finger by contracting certain muscles, and he contracts his muscles by making a certain event occur in his brain, then the primitive action must be the making of that event occur in his brain. The making of that brain event, she thinks, is probably a brain event which could quite rightly be called the willing of the finger movement. Thus, the willing or the brain event, not the finger movement, must be the primitive action on this reading of Davidson. Moreover, this is how Davidson's position must be interpreted if it is to be consistent.

Although Blumenfeld's may be a consistent reading of Davidson, there is another consistent way of construing the argument that concludes that the primitive action is the finger movement and not the brain event or willing. Davidson begins by saying that the argument against his position might have true premises but that the conclusion is not necessary. The two premises are:

- (a) In order to move my finger, I do something that causes the finger to move, namely contract certain muscles.
- (b) Contracting certain muscles requires that I make certain events occur in my brain.

What exactly does accepting these premises as true entail? First, (a) says that I do something that causes the finger movement. In order to reach Blumenfeld's Prichardian conclusion, one must read (a) to mean: in order to move my finger, I must perform an act of contracting my muscles. Similarly for (b), one must read it to say that contracting certain muscles requires that I perform an act of making certain events occur in my brain. But (a) and (b) do not entail these respective readings. That I can be said to do something does not mean that the doing is an action of mine. When brain events do occur or my muscles contract, these may be things I can be said to do, but these may not be *actions* that I perform. Of course, when my finger moves, the movement is caused by muscles contracting and brain events. This does not mean that the primitive action that I perform is not the movement of the finger. The primitive action may be the movement of the finger, and this finger movement may involve a certain brain event and muscle contraction. But this does not make the finger movement that the agent intentionally performed simply a brain event. As Davidson says, the conclusion that bodily movements are not primitive actions does not follow from the truth of (a) and (b).

Although this is a possible reading of the two premises which makes bodily movements primitive actions, this is not Davidson's response. Consideration of his conclusion will show that by "doing something" in this passage he means an action. It is at this point that my modification of the Davidsonian by-thesis will be in conflict with Davidson's literal position. Davidson says that the sentence

"I cause my finger to move by contracting certain muscles."

may be true, as well as the sentence

"I cause the muscles to contract by making an event occur in my brain."

However, if these two sentences are true when I move my finger, it is difficult to see how, on Davidsonian principles, the finger movement could be considered the primitive action. According to Davidson's thesis concerning the by-relation, "the contracting of my muscles" in this case is simply a different description of the same act as described by "the moving of my finger," and "the making of an event occur in my brain" is merely a different description of the same act as described by "the contracting of my muscles." Seemingly, the two descriptions "the contracting of my muscles" and "the moving of my finger" pick out the action in terms of its causal consequences. The primitive act, it appears, is the making of the brain event occur. Davidson has explained his thesis, that primitive actions are bodily movements, by saying that bodily movements are things like making brain events occur and contracting certain muscles. His response is to the objection "but these do not sound like ordinary bodily movements" (*Agency*, p. 49). A volitionistic reading of Davidson might continue as follows. Of course, on the face of it, they do not appear to be ordinary movements. But again, language has misled us. If the sentences "I cause my finger to move by contracting my muscles" and "I contract my muscles by making an event occur in my brain" are true when I move my finger, then it must be the case that the act of moving my finger is the same act as making an event occur in my brain. This conclusion does not mean that the moving of my finger is not a primitive action. The moving of my finger is the primitive action, but the moving of my finger is identical with the making of an event occur in my brain. Therefore, primitive actions are bodily movements but only if one considers brain events and muscle contractions bodily movements. That Davidson includes such events in the class of bodily movements is suggested in a passage three paragraphs later:

A man who raises his arm both intends to do with his body whatever is needed to make his arm go up and knows that he is doing so. And of course, *the cerebral events and the movements of the muscles are just what is needed*. So, though the agent may not know the names or locations of the relevant muscles, nor even know he has a brain, what he makes happen in his brain and muscles when he moves his arm is, under one natural description, something he intends and knows about ("*Agency*," p. 50, emphasis added).

With bodily movements so liberally interpreted, primitive actions are bodily movements. Davidson concludes, "doing

something that causes my finger to move . . . is moving my finger" (p. 50).

With bodily movements so liberally interpreted, it is not hard to understand how one might take this position as leading to volitionism. Primitive actions are brain events, and what is a more likely candidate for a willing than a brain event? Contrary to Davidson, however, I believe that such a construal of bodily movements is unnecessary for an adequate theory of action. I suggest that in most ordinary cases of bodily action, the action can be identified with the overt bodily movement. It may not be clear in all cases just what the bodily movement is to be identified with, but it will not be simply a brain event. That the bodily movement may be a complex event which extends from the brain to the motion of the arm should not make us conclude that the action performed was such a brain event. Expanding the point made earlier in defense of Davidson, ordinarily when one performs a bodily movement, one is not usually thought of as performing an act of making a brain event occur which causes the bodily movement. In ordinary cases, it seems, one performs the bodily movement and does not intentionally perform some other act that causes the arm movement.

The volitionistic Davidsonian response to this talk of performing would be to invoke the notion of a variety of descriptions. Of course, one performs acts of moving one's finger and it is not appropriate to say one performs acts of making brain events occur. Yet performing an act of moving one's finger is, under one natural description, making certain brain events occur. If the act performed is a bodily movement, it is so in the liberal sense of being a brain event. Although this represents the most plausible volitionistic response, such a drastic answer is not necessary. When the sentence is construed as "I moved my finger by making a brain event occur," it seems that the moving of the finger was the making of the brain event occur. When it is written "I performed an act of moving my finger by *performing an act of making a brain event occur*," the response is to recognize that performing brain events is odd, but to insist that, under one natural description, the performing of the finger movement is the making of a brain event occur. This reply is controversial however, because when the sentence is put in terms of performing acts, it is not at all clear that it is appropriate to say that the act is "under one natural description" a brain event. The point is that, in ordinary circumstances, it seems quite inappropriate to say that "under one natural description" the act is a brain event.

When the description is put in terms of the notion of "performing an act," this inappropriateness is manifest.¹⁰ One does not perform finger movements by performing brain events. "Performing a brain event" is deviant here. When an agent performs an act of moving his finger, what is the primitive action over which he has control? Apparently it is the physical movement of the finger, which may involve brain events or muscle contractions. But the primitive action in ordinary circumstances need not be identified with simply a brain event.

However, in order to motivate how this view is plausible in light of the two Davidsonian principles, certain qualifications must be made about his principles. It is in these principles, after all, that volitionism is supposedly to be found. The problem for the non-volitionist arises from the claim about sentences like 'Ag ϕ -ed by ψ -ing'. Although I believe the Davidsonian thesis concerning these "by" sentences is basically correct, the subtleties of this claim require some qualification. In motivating these qualifications I will make plausible a non-volitionistic alternative concerning bodily movements. What I suggest is that the Davidsonian thesis concerning the by-relation must be curtailed when the description of the action ϕ is given in terms of basic bodily movements. In ordinary circumstances it will not be the case that an agent performs an intentional bodily movement ϕ by performing some inner intentional act, although ϕ might involve some inner events. Consider a sentence like "He moved his finger by making certain muscles contract." Since the first predicate is in terms of bodily movement, the result will be different from usual cases. Usually, the two descriptions derived from the two predicates will refer to one and the same event. This result need not hold, however, in cases like the above sentence. In order to understand why such cases are exceptional, it is necessary to recognize that bodily movements are bodily processes comprising many event components. Some of these events that compose the event of bodily movement may, in fact, be brain events or events of muscle contraction. However, the truth of a sentence like "He moved his finger by making a brain event occur" does not mean that "His making a brain event occur" refers to the same event as "His moving of his finger." "His making a brain event occur" seems to refer to a brain event that was part of the complex event of finger movement referred to by "His moving of his finger." As was suggested earlier contrary to Davidson, "His making a brain event occur" may be taken as referring to

something *done* by the agent, but this event need not be an action *performed* by the agent. So, if my constraint is well-motivated, then such sentences should not force one to believe that all one does in acting is perform some brain event or willing. The constraint reads as follows:

- (c) In by-sentences such as 'Ag ϕ -ed by ψ -ing', where ' ϕ ' is a description of an action in terms of bodily movement and ' ψ ' is a description of an event that "takes one inside the body" or where ' ϕ ' is a basic-act description and ' ψ ' is a description of the action in terms of a basic bodily movement, the two descriptions *need not* and *many* times will not refer to one and the same event.

A "basic-act description" is a description that is applicable to the agent's action without implying that what the agent did caused any other event in terms of which the action might be described.¹¹ The following are examples: "His moving his arm," "His swimming," "His walking." The upshot of this constraint is that the Davidsonian thesis is true mainly of action where the action is described in terms of its consequences. With a sentence like "Brutus murdered Caesar by stabbing him," the Davidsonian thesis will still hold true: "Brutus' murdering Caesar" and "Brutus' stabbing Caesar" refer to one and the same event. Therefore, the Davidsonian thesis retains its applicability to those instances that it was initially formulated to explain, and the thesis of primitive acts remains intact. In fact, I believe this constraint, or something like it, best represents Davidson's intentions. My anti-volitionistic position, which identifies physical actions with bodily movements, recognizes that brain firings and muscle contractions "are just what is needed"¹² for bodily movements to occur, but it does not identify all bodily movements simply with brain events.

Immediately, the volitionist may question the motivation of this constraint. To a volitionist, the constraint may appear to be motivated solely by the desire to avoid volitionism. As it stands, it appears to be an *ad hoc* response. The constraint is not *ad hoc*, however. In fact, it seems that one should accept it regardless of how one stands on volitionism. To show this, I will consider an example which is irrelevant to the issue of volitionism. Like the sentences considered before, it will involve a complex, but basic, bodily process—walking. Consider the sentence "He walked down the street by moving his left leg." If the agent is normal (he has two legs), then this statement will be true when he walks down the street. (Given what Grice calls the "conversational implicature" of

this sentence, this is an odd thing to say of an agent when he has two legs and is walking normally. The sentence is true nonetheless.) But would anyone want to say that "His moving his left leg" refers to one and the same event as "His walking down the street"? Of course not, but without the added qualification, the Davidsonian thesis would lead to this result. The problem is that walking down the street is a complex bodily event composed of other events, one being the movement of the left leg. The constraint recognizes this and allows, in such cases where a sentence of this kind is true, that the two descriptions derived from the predicates on either side of the "by" do not refer to the same events. As the example of walking points out, this constraint can be motivated by reasons independent of the volitionist controversy. There are other examples that are neutral with respect to volitionism: "I swam across the lake by kicking my feet." "My kicking my feet" does not refer to one and the same complex bodily event as "My swimming across the lake" refers to. Also consider, "I talked by moving my tongue." This sentence will be true of me when I talk, but "My moving my tongue" refers to an event that is only part of the more complex bodily event referred to by "My talking." Like these examples, "He moved his finger by making a brain event occur" is an exception to the unqualified Davidsonian thesis. But this result is only as it should be, given that bodily movements are complex bodily events composed of various other events like brain firings and muscle contractions. When one recognizes the needed qualification on the Davidsonian thesis concerning "by" sentences, one will understand that the Davidsonian thesis need not necessarily confirm volitionism. On the contrary, with this reasonable constraint, one realizes that a non-volitionistic interpretation of bodily movements is quite plausible. Bodily movements may well consist, in part, of brain events and muscle contractions, but this does not entail that all acting is an inner event of willing.¹³

NOTES

¹ Donald Davidson, "Intending," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford, 1980): 83-102, p. 83.

² Davidson, "Criticism, Comment, and Defense," in *Essays on Actions and Events*: 122-148, p. 128.

³ Jean Beer Blumenfeld, "Is Acting Willing?" *Noûs* 62 (May): 183-195. A similar line of argument is found in Jennifer Hornsby, *Actions* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁴ H. A. Prichard, "Acting, Willing, Desiring," *Moral Obligation* (Oxford, 1949): 187-198.

⁵ ‘ ϕ ’ and ‘ ψ ’ are schematic letters which are placeholders for action predicates. A schema beginning and ending in corners denotes any expression obtained by replacing the Greek letters with action predicates. Strictly speaking, one must also be said to have ϕ -ed by ψ -ing at a particular time. In this and all subsequent formulations of this thesis, I omit temporal indicators as tacitly understood. Of course, this is a controversial aspect of the formulation. Philosophers like Alvin Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action* (Princeton, 1970), insist that when one ϕ -s by ψ -ing, the ϕ -ing and the ψ -ing need not, and many times do not, occur at the same time. For criticisms of his views that support the Davidsonian thesis see G. E. M. Anscombe, “Under a Description,” in *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers* Vol. II (University of Minnesota Press, 1981): 208-219, and also Hornsby’s *Actions*, appendix to Chapter 1.

⁶ To say that the added description gives us more information about the action is not to say that this new information is based on *causal consequences* of the action. For instance, the fact that the player hit a home run when the ball cleared the fence depends on the conventions of baseball. Goldman has emphasized such distinctions introduced by the “by-relations” in Chapter 2 of *A Theory of Human Action*.

⁷ Anscombe, “Under a Description,” op. cit., p. 210.

⁸ Davidson, “Agency,” in *Essays on Actions and Events*, 43-61, p. 49.

⁹ In terms that I have called misleading, one might say that the volitionists agree with Davidson on the “Identity Thesis” but seem to disagree with him over his *identification* of actions. This statement of their agreements and disagreements makes obvious why such terminology is so misleading.

¹⁰ I have been using the notion of *performing an act*. I am explicitly endorsing the notion and its consequences for bodily movement developed by George M. Wilson in *The Intentionality of Human Action*, 2nd and revised edition (Stanford University Press, 1989). I do not wish to deny that one may sometimes be rightly said to perform brain events but this talk will only be appropriate in the most outfe of circumstances, not in ordinary cases of bodily movement. See my paper, “Trying Without Willing” (forthcoming).

¹¹ This definition of “basic-act description” does not imply that basic-act descriptions are more important than other act descriptions or that there is only one basic-act description of an action. The notion of basic-act description is entirely neutral on the issue of volitionism. Constraint (c), of course, is not. But (c) is compatible with volitionism. It only rules out the kinds of argument for volitionism which appeal to Davidson’s “by” thesis. If one individuates actions in the manner of Goldman, (c) will be compatible with volitionism, but I am not concerned with such views in this paper.

¹² Davidson, “Agency,” p. 50.

¹³ I would like to thank Bill Taschek, George Wilson, and an anonymous referee of this Journal for their helpful comments on earlier versions of these arguments.