

# Trying Slips:

## Can Davidson and Hornsby Account for Mistakes and Slips?\*

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Very absent-minded persons in going to their bedroom to dress for dinner have been known to take off one garment after another and finally to get into bed, merely because that was the habitual issue of the first few movements when performed at a later hour. (James 1890/1983, 119)

My office phone rang. I picked up the receiver and bellowed "Come in" at it. (from J.T. Reason, quoted after Norman 1981, 7)

Several years ago, U.S. President Gerald Ford toasted Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and "the great people of Israel-Egypt, excuse me." Later this incident was reported ...like this: "I heard Freud made a Fordian slip ...[laughs]...wait". (Dell 1995, 183)

Philosophers writing on action have not concerned themselves much with slips. Small wonder perhaps since slips, and mistakes more generally, are not exactly what we take pride in and so not exactly what we really care about. Still they form a part of our lives as agents. In fact, I believe that slips are things we do. They are not things we do intentionally and, I even argue, there is often no description that would render them intentional at all.

Slips are of philosophical interest in part because they help us keep a distinction between two kinds of theories of action in place. On one kind of theory of action, what it is to be an action is intrinsically related to how an action is explained. One might hold that it is characteristic of human actions that they are explained intentionally in terms of the agent's beliefs and desires and, moreover, that the explanation invokes a causal relation (both claims are endemic to a theory of action explanation). One might further believe that what makes a performance an action is that it is explained in a certain way, that it is caused by a belief and a desire. This further claim forms no longer a part of a theory of action explanation but rather a theory of action, which we might call an explanation-based theory of action. These are not the only kind of theories of action there are. G.E.M. Anscombe (1963) has, for instance, resisted the identification of these two issues (despite acknowledging close conceptual connections) by insisting that we can perform actions done for no reason at all, i.e. actions that refuse explanation in terms of reasons, that are still nevertheless actions. In fact, metatheoretical reflection suggests adopting a *prima facie* suspicious attitude toward any explanation-based account: Why should we identify the nature of something with the way that something is explained?

In this paper, I argue that explanation-based theories of action will in general have problems in seeing slips as actions. This is because it is part and parcel of the nature of a slip that there is an unexplainable (at least at a personal level) break in the chain of events leading to the

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slip. To the extent that one believes that slips are actions and gives an explanation-based interpretation of the notion of being intentional under a description, slips constitute a counterexample to the doctrine that to be an action is to be intentional under some description. I begin (§1) with Anscombe's (1963) distinction between two kinds of mistakes: mistakes proper which are due to mistakes in judgment, and slips which are mistakes in performance. I argue that we have some pre-theoretical grounds for thinking that both kinds of mistakes are things we do rather than things that happen to us (§2 and §3). In §4, I consider Davidson's attempt to qualify mistakes as actions. I argue that the sort of account he gives can only qualify mistakes proper as actions. Slips are thus either excluded or need to be reinterpreted to fit the theory. In §5, I apply Hornsby's theory of action to illustrate how it can capture slips by invoking the notion of trying. I argue that there are some tensions in her account dictated by an ambiguity in the notion of trying. Her theory can be successfully applied to slips using one notion of trying, but the cost is a divorce from an explanation-based account, to which she sometimes appears too close.

My aim in this paper is neither to argue conclusively that slips are actions, nor to give an account why. Rather, I want to offer the case of slips as a company to the case of actions done for no reason that would stand as a reminder to all those theorists of action that may be tempted to identify a theory of action with a theory of action explanation too quickly. It is my hope that further reflection about slips will help us to understand these difficult issues better.

### 1. Mistake in Judgment vs. Mistake in Performance

In a section of *Intention* (1963) that received much attention, Anscombe explains the distinction between two kinds of directions of fit that can sharpen the distinction between beliefs and intentions. Intertwined is the distinction between two kinds of mistakes: mistakes in judgment and mistakes in performance.

Anscombe imagines a man with a shopping list. She contrasts it with a list constructed by a detective putting down just what the man bought. The two lists differ in their direction of fit. If there is a mismatch between the shopping list and what the man buys, the mistake is in the performance. If there is a mismatch between the detective's list and what the man buys, the mistake is in the list.

It is the former type of case that will interest me here – the mistake that lies in the performance. But we need to be a little more careful and so is Anscombe. There are at least two ways<sup>1</sup> in which there may be a discrepancy between what the man ought to buy (which is the function of the shopping list to record) and what the man buys.<sup>2</sup> There may be a mistake in the constructing of the shopping list ( $m_1$ ). In one sort of case ( $m_{11}$ ), the agent may construct the shopping list based on a some mistake of judgment (he may put down to buy butter because he mistakenly believes that he has no butter left). In another sort of case ( $m_{12}$ ), the agent may make a mistake in the shopping list itself without it being based on some further mistake of judgment (there are so many things that he needs to buy that he forgets to put down butter, say, even though he believes that he needs to buy butter). Both of these cases are examples of mistakes in judgment that can lead to a discrepancy between what the man ought to buy and what he buys. But Anscombe insists that ( $m_2$ ) the mistake may also lie in the performance itself, where this is not reducible to any mistake in judgment:

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<sup>1</sup> More ways are due to the agent changing his mind, but I ignore this possibility.

<sup>2</sup> For a nice classification, see Soles (1982).

But is there not possible another case in which a man is *simply* not doing what he says? As when I say to myself ‘Now I press Button A’ – pressing Button B – a thing which can certainly happen. (1963, 57)<sup>3</sup>

Let us call discrepancies of the former sort, i.e. discrepancies resulting ultimately from some mistake in judgment, mistakes (*mistaken* performances) proper, and discrepancies of the latter sort resulting from no mistakes in judgment, mistakes in performance or slips.<sup>4</sup> In thinking about the contrast it is useful to bear in mind two connections: the connection between the agent’s beliefs (and other relevant items) and intention<sup>5</sup> (the shopping list), and the connection between the intention (the shopping list) and the action (what the agent buys). Mistakes proper occur because of a mishap in the first connection. Slips occur when the mishap afflicts the relation between intention and action.

Mistakes proper are easier to conceptualize. They involve a slip-up in the mind-to-world fit. What is *mistaken* is usually the agent’s belief about some aspect of the world. The agent may have misidentified an object or a situation (he may have intended to press button A but believed of button B that it is A and so pressed button B; case (m<sub>11</sub>)); he may have drawn an erroneous practical conclusion (the reasons for button pressing may have been so complex that he erroneously decided that what he should do is to press B, which he did, rather than what he in fact had most reason to do, viz. press A; case (m<sub>12</sub>)). In these two cases, given his (granted, erroneous) judgment, there is no further fault in the performance. The performance is just as it should be given the mistaken judgment.

In the case of a mistake in performance, on the other hand, there need not be a fault in the judgment at all. Rather, what happens is that the agent sets out to do one thing (press A) but slips and does something else (presses B). He does so based on a correct decision (to press A) *and* he does so without holding any mistaken beliefs (without in particular believing of button B that it is button A). He simply slips. Just as he is about to act intentionally, his intention slips on reality, as it were, and a different action results. There is a slip-up in the world-to-mind fit. What he does is (because of the slip up) not done intentionally. An agent may switch on the light in the garage with the intention of switching on the light in the kitchen (the switches are next to each other). She may brush her hair with a toothbrush. And so on.

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<sup>3</sup> Her insistence has been challenged by Houlgate (1966), who argues that mistakes in performance always presuppose a mistake in judgment. He appeals to Austin’s (1961) distinction between doing something by mistake and doing something by accident to make his case. Houlgate does not explicitly consider slips as examples of Anscombe’s mistakes in performance. Were he to do so, his conclusions would not be so straightforward. This is because slips escape Austin’s distinction between doing something by mistake and doing something by accident. When intending to press a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor button in an elevator, I slip and press the nearby alarm button, it is not clear what I should say to the elevator manager. It is *prima facie* inappropriate to say “I did it by mistake” since paradigmatic cases of doing that are ones where I erroneously thought that the alarm button was the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor button (but the slip does not involve such a belief). And it is *prima facie* inappropriate to say “I did by accident” for that is paradigmatically read as absolving me from responsibility. But I can believe that I am responsible for doing so. (If my linguistic intuitions are correct, in this case “by mistake” would be favored. However, there are other cases of slips, where “by accident” seems more natural.) It would be wrong to place too much weight on Austin’s distinction, which, though gripping, is introduced by way of illustrating a point about the ordinary language method and in a footnote at that. In particular, Austin never actually says that the distinction is exhaustive. I believe that we have no reason to do so either.

<sup>4</sup> I will assume that slips are the only mistakes in performance there are but nothing substantive will turn on this assumption.

<sup>5</sup> The relevant sense of intention here is the intention with which the agent acts (also called intention in action) not intention for the future (also called prior intention).

## 2. Are Slips Actions?

That there are slips seems unquestionable. Whether they should qualify as actions is, however, no longer so clear. What is perhaps even less clear is exactly how one is to approach a question like this. The answer depends on one's purpose in asking it. One could be asking whether a theory of action one believes in applies to slips in such a way that they qualify as actions.

(T) Do slips count as actions on action theory  $t$ ?

Or, one could try to inquire whether a theory of action (one is deciding whether to believe, say) ought to apply to slips.

(S) Should slips count as actions?

In the latter case, one will presumably seek theory-independent grounds for asking whether slips are actions.

In this section I'm interested in exclusively the second question (S). (I will turn to (T) in §4 and §5.) I want to argue that there are good reasons for believing that slips are things we do rather than things that happen to us. I can think of three sorts of reasons for this claim. First, slips share important features with other actions despite the fact that they cannot be done intentionally (§2.2). Second, just as we draw a distinction between actions and performances that look like actions but in fact result from certain untoward conditions, so we draw a distinction between slips and performances that look like slips but result from certain untoward conditions (§2.3). Third, there is a class of slips, linguistic slips, which we unproblematically consider as things we (linguistically) do, i.e. say, even though we understand that they are not said (and so done) intentionally (§2.4).

2.1 Before proceeding, it might be worthwhile to say a little bit more about slips. (A disclaimer is in order. The following is meant to bring closer the category of slips by means of a family resemblance, not by way of providing necessary or sufficient conditions.)

A slip usually involves the agent intending to do something and doing something else instead. One may intend to put a soiled T-shirt into a laundry basket but put it into the toilet. One may intend to type a tab and type a space instead. Someone may intend to say "heap of junk" but say "hunk of jeep." It is important to note that the agent need not have *any reason* for doing what she does at all. Her saying so may simply be a slip, as we say. There may be other cases of slips where the agent does have a reason for performing the slip but the slip still may not be done for that reason. A host may introduce a guest-speaker with the words, "It gives me great pleasure to prevent our today's speaker" and it may be that there is a history of animosity between them but she still may have just slipped. And there may be other kinds of slips where we can roughly understand (though not in terms of reasons) how the slips occurs. Here is an example from Norman (1981, 8): "I was using a copying machine, and I was counting the pages. I found myself counting '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Jack, Queen, King.' (I have been playing cards recently)".

Usually the slip will be very close to what is intended. If intending to press the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor button, one presses the 5<sup>th</sup> floor button just above, that is easily understood as a slip. If intending to say "revolution" one says "evolution" that is a slip. But if intending to say "revolution" one starts dancing around in the elevator pressing the 5<sup>th</sup> floor button to the rhythm of the dance, that is not a slip (even if one's doing so were in some peculiar ways caused by this intention).

The agent who performs the slip is quite reliable in performing both the intended action and the action that she ends up performing. The agent who presses the wrong button in the elevator slips. But were she trying to press miniscule buttons with a needlepoint and pressed the wrong one, this would hardly qualify as a slip.

We also understand the typical circumstances under which slips occur as involving absent-mindedness, carelessness, lack of attention, nervousness. We accordingly think that the risk of our slipping is substantially decreased (though not entirely eliminated) if we concentrate on the task at hand.

Let us thus concentrate on the *prima facie* reasons for thinking that slips are actions.

2.2 Slips are not done intentionally. Nor can they be done intentionally. When I want to take out a mug to pour myself coffee, reach into the cupboard and take out a plate instead, I have not done so intentionally. Nor could I have committed the slip intentionally. In this respect, slips, and many other mistakes, differ from other actions (Davidson 1971, 45).<sup>6</sup>

But slips share other features with actions. In the first instance, we take responsibility for them. When I spoil the soup by “salting” it with sugar, I take responsibility for having spoiled the dish. I blame myself for having ruined the dinner and for not having paid closer attention to what I was doing. While I might object to my guests’ criticism, it would not be because I would think it out of place (like blaming me for having suffered a palsy, say). Rather I object to their showing so little understanding and compassion, in view of what I have (indisputably) *done*. This seems to be a clear indication that the slip enters into the evaluative framework of responsibility attribution in the usual way, as actions usually do.

One might think, however, that slips are just not within the agent’s control. This might be true on certain notions of what it means to be in control. But slips are in the agent’s control at least in the sense that they are *avoidable*. I could be truthfully thinking that I would not have slipped and sugared the soup had I only paid more attention to what I was doing. Some slips can be elicited (in subjects whose attention is occupied, for instance, or where tasks are particularly difficult as in repeating tongue twisters) which greatly contributes to their being susceptible to experimental investigation.

Like other actions, slips do (defeasibly, of course) reflect on the agent’s character. So we judge some to be absent-minded, uninvolved, not-caring, indifferent, accident-prone, etc., in part on the basis of the slips they commit.

2.3 Many performances may, on the face, look like actions but if one understands the circumstances of their occurrence, one is willing to withdraw the claim that the agent performed any action at all. Such things just happen to the agent, we think. We might call them mere happenings. The contrast is immortalized in Wittgenstein’s question: What is the difference between my raising my arm and my arm going up? The fact that my arm goes up is not yet an indication of whether I raised it. I could have raised it. But the arm could have gone up of its own accord (as a result of a spasm in some muscle, say). It could have been pulled up by someone else or by a machine. In these latter cases, I would not have raised it – I would not have performed an action at all.

A similar distinction can be drawn between cases of slips and cases of mere happenings. Consider the person who intending to press the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor button, slips and presses a nearby alarm button instead. We readily understand this as a mix-up, a slip. The agent just did not pay enough attention. But our reaction would be very different if we were told that as the finger was hovering over the wrong button, a sudden spasm caused the finger to straighten out and depress the button.

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<sup>6</sup> One could rejoin here by saying that although slips are not intentional under the description which constitutes their character as slips, they are intentional under other descriptions. This is a possibility which would make slips qualify as actions under the *theory* that to be an action is to be intentional under a description. This, however, would be to address question (T), whereas I am asking question (S). I will turn to (T) in sections 4 and 5.

Here, we would not hesitate one bit to say that the agent pressed the button by accident. It merely happened to her. There was nothing she could have done about that.

The fact that we may draw a distinction between these cases can be seen to provide a *prima facie* reason to believe that slips are actions.<sup>7</sup>

2.4 If there remain doubts that slips are things we do rather than things that happen to us, think about linguistic slips. They are clearly things we say. (And sayings, whatever else they are, are doings.<sup>8</sup>) It is just that we do not intend to say them.

Some of them may be counter-intentional in the sense that they are the result of expressing a thought that we did actually have and decided against making public. This might have been the case with the preventer's, excuse me, presenter's introduction as well as with Gerald Ford's toast. Such cases may be revealing if not of the agent's "hidden" wishes as Freud would have it then at least of the thoughts that the agent was preoccupied with (and these may be revealing of the agent's intentions). But there are other cases where the slip just slips, as it were. One meant to say one thing, said another. What one means to say is "You have wasted the whole term" but one says something completely different "You have tasted the whole worm" (Norman 1981, 10). We are usually quite surprised at the slip.

### 3. A Methodological Preamble

So far, I have tried to answer the question whether slips ought to be considered actions or not. I have argued that there are good reasons for thinking that they ought to be so considered. In §4, I will argue that one of the most prominent theories of action fails to capture slips as actions. Lest it appear that I am trying to combat a giant with a pin, I would like to clarify the methodological status of my claims.

The methodological situation here is admittedly peculiar. To understand it better, consider first an unproblematic situation. Suppose I was investigating a class of actions that everyone accepted as actions but for some inexplicable reason no theory of action could account for them. We all know what would happen. Theorists of action would squeal in embarrassment and move on to revise their theories in eternal gratitude for my having noted a shortcoming. Well. The situation here is different. The class of (what I certainly believe are) actions is not uncontroversially recognized as such. (Most *philosophers* of action would first calculate in their heads whether slips counted as actions on their theories before passing judgment. Most ordinary

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<sup>7</sup> A supporter of the view that slips are not actions could argue that cases involving slips are simply not among the paradigmatic cases of defeating conditions and this why we distinguish them from *other* defeating conditions. Such a person could claim further that if one understands the nature of defeating conditions (properly) one will see that they in fact should be classified among defeating conditions. This is a possible theoretical development. So is the opposite one. My point here is to be construed pre-theoretically – the fact that we make a distinction between slips and cases where we are obviously agentively uninvolved is a *prima facie* reason for thinking that we are agentively (though not intentionally) involved in slips.

<sup>8</sup> One could object here that there might be cases of sayings that are not doings. Even if it is unlikely to suffer a spasm that would cause one to say something intelligible (at best, one could manage "Or", "No", "Is") it is possible for one to be wired up to an external control of a scientist, say, who would induce one to say quite complicated things. Such sayings would not be doings. – I do not wish to commit myself to the claim that all sayings are doings. Still, most of our actual sayings are doings. Clearly, uttering words as a result of external stimulation would not qualify as the agent's doing anything. Nor presumably would the agent do anything if she were to utter something in her sleep. But while we clearly think that the agent does not do (and so does not *really* say) anything in such cases, we do not think so in the cases of slips. This objection could in fact be turned around to precisely support the contention that slips are actions by invoking the suggestion made in §2.3.

people might agree that slips are among the things we do and, if pressed hard enough, would point to some of the above considerations, or – more realistically – might be confused by the question.) The methodological peculiarity of my situation is that I have *no* way of *arguing* that capturing slips as actions would be a good thing for a theory of action to do. I think so. But you may not. We will likely differ in our theoretical commitments and perhaps even in our pre-theoretical commitments.

Given what I have said above (§2), it is plausible to think that there are *prima facie* reasons for counting slips as actions. But slips are not as central a category as to merit the dismissal of a theory over them. It may be worth distinguishing two types of criteria of adequacy, at this point. A strict criterion of adequacy is a condition such that if a theory does not meet it, that theory (as is) must be rejected. To say that a criterion of adequacy *C* is weak is to say that of two theories that meet all the strict criteria of adequacy, the one that satisfies *C* is to be preferred *ceteris paribus* over the one that does not.

I should emphasize that to claim the status of weak adequacy for a condition is to claim really little. It may turn out at the end of the day that the best theory we have actually does not meet it – either because it is the only adequate theory or because it is one of a couple adequate theories but it happens to meet more (though different) weak criteria of adequacy. Still, to claim the status of weak adequacy for a condition is to claim something. And I hope I have given enough reasons for thinking that it would be *ceteris paribus* better for a theory of action to account for slips than not to. To repeat, they are everyday performances that do not involve any particularly strange or suspicious goings on. We have no trouble taking responsibility for them and no trouble ascribing responsibility for them. We naturally judge people's character on their basis. They are largely avoidable and so, to some extent, within our control.

#### 4. Some Strategies for Mistaking Slips

Donald Davidson (1971) has claimed that all actions are intentional under some description.<sup>9</sup> But there are three different attitudes one might take toward this claim. On the one hand, one might think it to reflect a more or less contingent fact about human actions.

(A) All actions are (as a matter of fact) intentional under some description.

Such a person would think that while there actually are no actions that are intentional under no description, there might be such actions.

However, one might think that a stronger claim is in order. One might think that there is a conceptual connection between the concept of an action and the concept of being intentional under a description. On that sort of view, it is *impossible* for there to be actions that are intentional under no description:

(□A) All actions are, necessarily, intentional under some description.

Depending on how friendly one is with conceptual analysis, one might take (□A) either to define what actions are or to merely characterize what they are. Someone who has a friendly disposition toward conceptual analysis and who thinks that he has a good grasp of what it is for a performance to be intentional under some description, will think that what makes a performance an action is that it is intentional under some description:

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<sup>9</sup> G.E.M. Anscombe (1963) is sometimes credited with (A). However, while it is certainly true that Anscombe coined the unhappy though useful term 'intentional under a description', it is less clear that she held that all (rather than most or most paradigmatic) actions are performances that are intentional under some descriptions. She is quite clear about distancing herself from Davidson on this point in her Medalist's Address (1982).

- ( $\alpha$ ) The agent's performance is an action in virtue of being intentional under some description.<sup>10</sup>

In this section, I argue that someone who adheres either to ( $\alpha$ ) or only to ( $\square A$ ) cannot account for slips as characterized in §1.<sup>11</sup>

4.1 The crux of the matter is to understand what it means for a performance to be intentional under a description. One of the most prominent ways of understanding what it is to act intentionally relates it to the way in which the performance is to be explained<sup>12</sup>:

- (1) Action *A* is intentional under description *d* if it has been caused in the right way by the agent's primary reason, which "consists of a pro attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that *A*, under description *d*, has that property." (Davidson 1963, 5)

Note that (1) specifies a sufficient not a necessary condition for being intentional under description *d*. In view of the corrections Davidson (1978) introduced later, another sufficient condition would be:

- (2) Action *A* is intentional under description *d* if it has been caused in the right way by the agent's intention to perform *A* under description *d*.

It is arguable that Davidson does not intend his characterization of what makes a performance intentional under a description as an analysis in view of the possibility that causation can occur in wayward ways; hence the clause "in the right way" (1973).<sup>13</sup>

Conditions (1) and (2) amount to the claim that the performance *A* must be entertained by the agent (whether in belief or in intention) under description *d*. Davidson also believes that the description *d* must be true of the action (Davidson 1971, 46).

- (3) Action *A* is intentional under description *d* only if *d* is true of *A*.

The point can be brought out using Davidson's example. The agent intends to spill a cup of tea. She holds the erroneous belief that the cup in front of her contains coffee. So she spills the cup of coffee, by mistake, unintentionally. If Davidson did not require that *d* be true of *A*,<sup>14</sup> he could say

<sup>10</sup> I will abstain here from the question whether Davidson accepts ( $\alpha$ ). There is little question that it is common wisdom that Davidson accepts ( $\alpha$ ), but it is always a question whether common wisdom is wisdom or just common. I will nonetheless use some of the arguments Davidson provides that might be taken to support ( $\alpha$ ).

<sup>11</sup> By contrast, someone who merely holds (*A*) can modify the claim by weakening it (to hold for "most" rather than "all" actions) so as to take account of slips. Unlike someone who accepts ( $\alpha$ ), such a person does not have a principled reason for denying slips the status of actions.

<sup>12</sup> In what follows I consider Davidson's explanation-based understanding of what it means for a performance to be intentional under a description. My conclusions are thus limited to such a conception. This is an important limitation in view of the possibility suggested most prominently by Wilson (1989) that one may understand what it is to act intentionally not in terms of the causal (or even explanatory) history of a performance but in terms of what the agent *intends* of his performance. I do not discuss Wilson's proposal here for two reasons. My primary purpose is to argue that in order to account for slips a theory of action must not confound a theory of action with a theory of action explanation. I do not think that Wilson's proposal is guilty of such confounding. Moreover, it is quite clear that Wilson does not in fact offer a theory of action (he presupposes the notion of a voluntary performance), his intention is to offer an account of what it is to act intentionally. His project is thus properly classified with the kinds of theories I discuss in §5.

<sup>13</sup> Others have tried to provide such analyses. See Bishop (1989), for an account and an overview.

<sup>14</sup> A voice of dissent on this point is due to Brandom's (1994, see esp. 524) proposal to use the notion of being "intentional under description *d*" in such a way that a performance may be judged to be intentional under



that her spilling the cup of coffee is intentional under the description ‘spilling the cup of tea’. But this would lead to a result that most would consider quite absurd, viz. that on this occasion the agent intentionally spilled a cup of tea.

Why are mistakes actions then? According to Davidson, although they are not intentional under the descriptions under which they are mistakes, they are nonetheless intentional under some other description. What description? I will investigate three possibilities. The first possibility is that the description appeals to a mistaken belief of the agent (§4.2). The second appeals to the fact that the agent may have had a more general intention (reason) to perform the action in question (§4.3). The third appeals to the fact that the agent intended to do something as a means to doing what she made a mistake in (§4.4).

Davidson does not explicitly say which of these possibilities he is committed to. What he says (and he says little) could be read as suggesting the second or the third possibility. The most charitable reading of Davidson would see him as committed to the third possibility. I will explore all three here because these are all possible ways for arguing that a performance is intentional under a description. None of them allows one to capture slips as actions.

4.2 Consider Davidson’s example of an agent who spills coffee, by mistake, thinking it is tea. The event is not intentional under the description ‘spilling coffee’. If her spilling coffee is an action, it must be intentional under another description. She wanted to spill the tea, mistakenly thought that the cup in her hand contained tea, she believed of the cup of coffee that it was a cup of tea and so she intentionally spilled what she believed to be a cup of tea.<sup>15</sup> More generally, the agent  $\phi$ s by mistake when she  $\phi$ s because she intends to  $\psi$  (she believes that it is rational for her to  $\psi$ ) and she has reasons to believe of her  $\phi$ ing that it is her  $\psi$ ing.<sup>16</sup> Let us call this the Mistaken-Belief Method of showing that mistakes are intentional under some description.

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description  $d$  even though  $d$  is *not* true of it. He proposes that it suffices that a performance be produced by a reliable capacity that usually produces those actions the agent intends to produce. As Brandom (1994, 524) puts it, “it does not matter if that particular case is one in which the usually reliable capacity misfires.” If intending to pick up the bread the agent spills the wine, there need be nothing that she both intended to do and succeeded in doing (e.g. moving an arm). Her spilling the wine is something she has done for it is intentional under some description, viz. ‘picking up the bread’, that is not true of it (as it happens the agent is so embarrassed that she ceases trying to reach for the bread altogether).

I believe that Brandom is right that the agent’s spilling the wine is something she has done. But it is also clear that Brandom’s notion of what is “intentional under a description” is a purely technical notion whose only function is to, in effect, use Davidson’s formula to render a performance an action. In particular, it seems completely unmotivated to think of the agent who spills the wine (and embarrassed abandons her attempt to reach for bread) that her spilling the wine is intentional under the description ‘picking up the bread’ and so that she *intentionally* picks up the bread. Brandom could, of course sever the connection between “ $\alpha$ ’s action is intentional under a description ‘ $\phi$ ’” and “ $\alpha$   $\phi$ s intentionally” but the motivation for doing so is misplaced. The problem lies in Brandom’s alliance with Davidson’s formula. Brandom does *not* think that a performance is an action in virtue of being intentional under a description at all (where this is to employ something like the usual notion). Rather he thinks that a performance is an action in virtue of being an exercise of a reliable capacity of responding to one’s intentions with appropriate action. His theory of action is properly classified with the second group of theories I discuss in §5.

<sup>15</sup> Davidson himself considers the case as intentional under the description “spilling the contents of [her] cup” (1971, 46). At least two strategies of arguing that the performance is intentional under the description are possible here. I consider them in §4.3 and §4.4, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> There is a delicate question in the vicinity concerning the role of *de re* and *de dicto* beliefs in action explanation. Lynne Rudder Baker (1982) has argued, for instance, that we must not construe action explanations as involving *de re* beliefs. I will assume that *de re* beliefs can figure into action explanation for the sake of argument in this section. In § 4.4, I show that Baker’s preferred way of circumventing their use is not going to help in rendering slips intentional under some description.

In general, this will not work for slips, however. Consider the following example (to which I will keep referring). Kerstin asks Martin for a glass of water. Martin is getting some orange juice for himself. He places two glasses, one in front of her, one in front of himself. He takes out the water, places it on the counter. He takes out the orange juice and pours it into Kerstin's glass, then into his own. What did Martin do? He poured orange juice into Kerstin's glass. He did something. He performed an action. Is there a description under which the action is intentional? From that limited description we do not yet know. If the situation were to be completed by saying that Martin believed of the jug he was holding that it contained water then we would have a description under which that action was intentional (according to the Mistaken-Belief Method). However, if the situation were to be completed by saying that Martin did not hold such a belief, but rather that his pouring in the orange juice was a slip – he did it automatically, absent-mindedly, then the situation is no longer so clear. It is natural to imagine the case in such a way that there is no mistaken belief of Martin's that would patch up the gap between the intention and the action as the mistaken belief that the cup contained tea did in Davidson's case.<sup>17</sup>

This case differs from the one Davidson discusses precisely in it being *inappropriate* to attribute an incorrect belief to the agent. There is thus no rationalizing bridge that would patch up the gap between an intention (to pour in water) and action (pouring in orange juice).<sup>18</sup>

4.3 At this point, one could try to argue that although Martin's pouring of orange juice is not intentional under the description 'pouring in orange juice' it is intentional under the more general description 'pouring in some liquid'. This is one way of reading Davidson's suggestion that "spilling the coffee is the act of a person who does it by intentionally spilling the contents of his cup" (1971, 46) – whatever they actually are, one might add. This is an implausible strategy, however.

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<sup>17</sup> In support, consider the following reasonably intuitive conversation:

"I don't believe it. I asked for water! You know I hate orange juice."

"Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't realize what I was doing."

After a while, when Kerstin assembled her philosophical thoughts together after the trespass:

"I wonder how you could do it. You must have believed that the jug you were holding contained water. So you poured it thinking you were pouring water."

"I really do hate to disappoint you, but frankly I was thinking about the bridge I'm designing. I told you about it, didn't I? And really if I did have any belief about the jug, it was the long-standing one that the jug I was taking out of the refrigerator contained orange juice. Since I did not change the jugs and I did not have a belief that I changed the jug, and I did not have a belief that the orange juice turned to water, or any other beliefs that you will start attributing in a minute, I think the only reasonable explanation is the true one: my mind wandered off. I did it absent-mindedly. It was *my* mistake and I'm sorry. And there is really no more to say, except perhaps: Mistakes happen. And you better get used to it!"

<sup>18</sup> One might object here that Martin does too have the requisite belief: he believed (of his pouring in orange juice) that he was pouring in water. Two responses are appropriate here. First, while it is possible for Martin to have this belief, it is not clear that he must have it (he may have no beliefs as to what he is doing at the present moment). Second, even if Martin did have this belief, it would not suffice to render the performance intentional. The idea behind the Mistaken-Belief Method is that the mistaken performance ought to be rendered reasonable (from the agent's point of view) given his beliefs. If Martin believed that the jug of orange juice was in fact a jug of water, it would be only rational for him to pour in orange juice given that he wanted to pour in water. The relevance of the belief is that it makes a certain practical conclusion rational, which then can issue in action. But the belief about what he is doing at the present moment has an entirely different function. It may be still relevant in the agent's acting intentionally. This is sharply evident in a view like Anscombe's or on any account that requires some form of agent-guidance (Frankfurt 1978). What is not clear is that the agent's mistaken belief about what he is doing at the present moment suffices to render his performance intentional under some description.

There are two possibilities here. Either one believes that there is a logical connection between the two intentions or reasons (the more specific and the more general) or not. In the former case, one holds that anyone who has the intention to pour in water *eo ipso* has the more general intention to pour in some liquid. This would solve the problem. For if Martin intends to pour in some liquid, pouring some liquid he does. If the agent intends to spill the contents of the cup whatever they are, spilling the contents of the cup she does. If one then argued that the intention caused the performance in the right way, then although Martin will not have poured in orange juice intentionally, he would have done something intentionally, viz. pour in some liquid into the glass. The problem with this strategy is that intentions are notoriously not closed under disjunction and there is no logical connection between an intention to do something specific and an intention to do something more general. I may intend to win a contest but not intend to either win or lose it. (The same is true for ‘having reasons’.)<sup>19</sup>

One could hold, however, that while there is no logical relation between the mentioned intentions there could be an empirical one. Martin could, as a matter of fact, have had not only the intention to pour in some water for Kerstin but also the intention to pour in some liquid for her. This again would solve the problem. But this solution is contingent on that fact. One may grant that Martin *could* have the more general intention but at the same time insist that he did not on this occasion. After all, he intended to pour water for Kerstin, which is what she specifically asked for. He had no reason and no intention to pour *some* liquid for her (he knows that she hates orange juice).<sup>20</sup>

This is also the reason why Davidson’s treatment of mistakes such as misreading, misinterpreting, etc. is inadequate. Davidson suggests that misreading the sign is intentional under the description ‘reading the sign’.<sup>21</sup> The problem lies in understanding exactly why to misread a sign is to read it. Verbs like ‘read’, ‘interpret’, ‘calculate’ sometimes function as success-verbs in which case they contrast with the failure-verbs (‘misread’, ‘misinterpret’, ‘miscalculate’) and other times they are used in ways that are indifferent to success or failure. For instance, when in response to a challenge “How do you know Davidson says this?” one answers “Because I have read his paper” one implies that one has read it *correctly*. But one can also use ‘read’ in the sense in which to read is to make sounds (for instance) that roughly correspond to the marks on paper.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, the agent reads whether she reads correctly or

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<sup>19</sup> In general, this strategy is bound to misfire. For there is no apparent reason why we should not generalize further. Any kind of intention may be generalized to the intention to do something. If so then the strategy allows us to let in evident cases of nonactions. Take the intention to eat the steak. It implies the intention to do something. The event corresponding to your intention to eat the steak (which is identical to the event corresponding to your intention to do something) causes the mouth to water. Your mouth’s watering can be described as your doing something, and so as your fulfilling your intention to do something. Hence, your mouth’s watering is your action. This is not a good result.

<sup>20</sup> My objecting to the thought that Martin must have this general intention should not be read as an objection to the thought that Martin has *other* general intentions. Martin might well (need not but might) not only have the intention to pour water for Kerstin but also have the more general intention to be nice or helpful to her. Such a general intention would support the more specific intention to fulfill Kerstin’s requests as well as the even more specific intention to pour water for Kerstin. But the invocation of those more general intentions is not going to help render his performance intentional under a description. None of these intentions are satisfied by Martin’s slip.

<sup>21</sup> “These mistakes are not intentional, then; nevertheless, they are actions. To see this we need only notice that making a mistake must in each case be doing something else intentionally. A misreading must be a reading, albeit one that falls short of what was wanted; misinterpreting an order is a case of interpreting it (and with the intention of getting it right); underestimating is estimating; and a miscalculation is a calculation (though one that founders).” (Davidson 1971, 45)

<sup>22</sup> Note that reading is *globally* a success-verb. It would not make sense to suppose that one could misread everything. This would hardly be different from not reading at all, or pretending to be reading.

incorrectly. It is only in this weaker sense that from the fact that the agent has misread a sign it follows that she has read it. (For clarity, let me mark the occurrence of the word ‘read’ with appropriate subscripts: ‘read<sub>(correctly)</sub>’ will stand for ‘read’ in the stronger sense implying success, and ‘read<sub>(correctly/incorrectly)</sub>’ for ‘read’ in the weaker sense implying either success or failure.)

Davidson is right to suggest that a case of misreading is a case of reading<sub>(correctly/incorrectly)</sub> just as a case of reading<sub>(correctly)</sub> is a case of reading<sub>(correctly/incorrectly)</sub>. But it simply does not follow from this that the agent who intends to read<sub>(correctly)</sub> also intends to read<sub>(correctly/incorrectly)</sub>. (Just as the agent who intends to win a contest does not thereby intend either to win or to lose it.) And it seems implausible to think that the agent has the more general intention as a matter of fact. It seems relatively clear that the agent has only the intention to read the sign correctly. It is surely not her intention to either read the sign correctly or to read it incorrectly. She would not at all be satisfied if she read it incorrectly; her sole intent is to read it correctly. But she fails to read the sign correctly (she does not read<sub>(correctly)</sub> it). She only succeeds in reading<sub>(correctly/incorrectly)</sub> it. Again, there is an unbridged gulf here.

4.4 One might argue on behalf of Davidson that what is important is not that the agent intends to read the sign in the sense in which it is indifferent to being read correctly or incorrectly, but rather that she intends to read it in the sense in which reading it is a *means* to reading it correctly. She intends to read the sign in the sense in which she intends to focus her eyes on the sign in order to read it. This would indeed allow one to claim that a person who misread the sign did something intentionally. Likewise, the agent who intends to spill the cup of tea may intend to spill the contents of the cup as a means to spilling the cup of tea.

This suggests yet another recipe for describing the action as intentional after all. Let the agent intend to  $\phi$ . As it turns out the agent does not manage to  $\phi$ , she fails to  $\phi$ . But her failing to  $\phi$  may be an action if she intended to  $\phi$  by  $\psi$ ing and she succeeded in  $\psi$ ing intentionally.<sup>23</sup> Let us call it the Accidental-Consequences Method.

One could quibble about whether this is the right way of thinking about the mistakes Davidson worries about. Does the agent *really* spill the cup of tea *by* spilling the contents of the cup? Or is spilling the cup of tea (coffee) something she *simply* does by doing nothing else? Whether or not the Accidental-Consequences Method provides a way of understanding as intentional under some description the mistakes Davidson considers, it is not going to help render slips as intentional under some description.

It is arguable that pouring in orange juice or pouring in water should qualify as basic actions. If this is so, then Martin’s slip is not intentional under any description (according to either the Mistaken-Beliefs or the Accidental-Consequences Method). But one could argue that Martin pours in the orange juice by grasping the jug and lifting it in an appropriate way. Here presumably one would have to claim that Martin’s grasping the jug (which is not something he does by doing anything else) is intentional under some description.

We should be careful at this point. One might be tempted to settle the issue by suggesting that if one properly settles on the basic action in question, one will be able to see that Martin actually does carry out the intention to perform the basic action. Such a strategy is advanced by Lynne Rudder Baker (1982) in not so different a context. She argues that we should think of the agent as intending to reach and grasp the object directly in front of him. It is imaginable that Martin would reach and grasp the jug of water in exactly the same way as he would reach and grasp the jug of orange juice. In such a case we would have found what is wanted. If Martin

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<sup>23</sup> That this will show that the agent’s  $\phi$ ing was an action is depends on an account of individuation of actions (e.g. Davidson 1971), in particular on the belief that the particular event of the agent’s  $\phi$ ing is identical to the event of the agent’s  $\psi$ ing.

intends to pour in water by reaching and grasping the object directly in front of him then, given that the jug of orange juice happens to be the object directly in front of him, reaching and grasping the jug of orange juice and consequently pouring orange juice for Kerstin is something that Martin does – it is intentional under the description ‘reaching and grasping the object directly in front of Martin’.

Such a “reduction” to the “within-the-body” basic action of the intended and the actual performances in the case of the slip is misleading and is not going to help in general. Consider first the more complex case of the absent-minded person who intends to change for dinner and ends up in bed. The slip is certainly not to be explained in terms of the agent’s having any mistaken beliefs about the bed being a dinner table, her night-gown being her evening dress, her lying in bed being her sitting at the table, the book she is holding being a spoon she is holding and her reading the book being her eating with a spoon. Correlatively, there just do not seem to be common-denominator basic “within-the-body” actions in play at all.

It is likewise relatively easy to resist such a reduction in Martin’s case. It suffices to imagine that the basic action of reaching and grasping that Martin would have to perform in order to reach and grasp the jug of orange juice is *different* from the basic action of reaching and grasping the jug of water. To assume that they must be the same on this occasion is presumably to assume that the jugs are identical save for their contents. But surely they need not be. Just imagine that one of them (say, the water jug) has a broken handle, this will ensure that the reaching and grasping of each is going to be a *basically* different reaching and grasping. At the very least, to grasp the jug of water Martin needs to use two hands, to grasp the jug of orange juice he may use just one. Let us speak of grasping<sub>(unbroken-jug)</sub> and grasping<sub>(broken-jug)</sub>. So, on this occasion, Martin would have the intention to pour in water by reaching and grasping<sub>(broken-jug)</sub> the jug directly in front of him. But he does not do this. He grasps<sub>(unbroken-jug)</sub> the jug of orange juice and pours it into Kerstin’s glass.

So, the very same problem emerges. Martin intends to grasp<sub>(broken-jug)</sub> the jug of water but he slips and grasps<sub>(unbroken-jug)</sub> the jug of orange juice instead. There is no description under which the slip is intentional according to the Mistaken-Beliefs Method (he still does not hold the requisite mistaken beliefs, see §4.2). It is plausible to think that Martin does not have a more general intention to grasp a jug of some fluid (see §4.3). By assumption, the Accidental Consequences Method will not help because we are considering a basic action. And there is no reason (on Davidson’s account) to think that any of the other ways *must* work for basic actions.

If this is still unconvincing, it may pay to switch the example to cases of linguistic slips. Take the person who says (v) “It gives me great pleasure to prevent our today’s speaker” (with the intention of saying (s) “It gives me great pleasure to present our today’s speaker”). This is a (Davidsonian) basic action if anything is. The Mistaken-Belief Method will be of no help. She does not believe of her saying (v) that it is saying (s). Nor does she have the more general intention to say either (v) or (s). She just slips. Still, saying (s) is something she has done. It is an action of hers but one that is not intentional under any description.<sup>24</sup>

4.5 I want to mention but only in passing why I believe that calling on intentions in action will not be helpful either. I will use Searle’s (1983) account as an example.<sup>25</sup> For Searle, every action

<sup>24</sup> One last line of resort is to invoke tryings. In saying (v), the person was *trying* to say (s). And Martin was *trying* to pour water for Kerstin. I will treat this suggestion in §5. It will become apparent there that slips can be treated as actions by appeal to tryings. However, it will also turn out that such an appeal will not render them intentional under any description.

<sup>25</sup> Roughly the same conclusions apply to accounts that appeal to proximate intentions (e.g. Brand 1984; 1989; Mele 1992).

is the causing of a bodily movement (rising of an arm) by an intention in action. Searle distinguishes intentions in action from prior intentions. Prior intentions cause some actions but not all. All actions, however, involve causally efficacious intentions in action. The agent may be just (for no reason) humming a tune in a shower. She may not even be aware of doing so. Still such a performance is an action because her intention in action causes the constellation of movements that results in her humming. On Searle's view, such an intention in action is self-referential: its content pictures itself causing such movements.

There are two ways of accounting for slips on Searle's account depending on whether one thinks of the slip-up as occurring between the prior intention and the intention in action or between the intention in action and the movement. Consider the first possibility of interpreting Martin's slip. Martin's prior intention to pour in water causes his action of pouring orange juice. More specifically, it causes the intention in action ("that this intention in action cause me to pour in orange juice") to cause him to pour in orange juice. This would mean, however, that, contrary to appearances, Martin pours the orange juice *intentionally*. But this is a strange result. If Kerstin heard that he did it intentionally, she would be furious. One might, of course, try to explain to her that though he did it intentionally, he did not have a prior intention to do it but I doubt that this would console her.<sup>26</sup>

The alternative way of construing Martin's slip seems *prima facie* more plausible. The slip-up occurs not in the connection between the prior intention and the action but rather in the connection between the intention in action and the bodily movement. Martin has an intention in action that it cause him to pour in water but it causes him to pour in orange juice instead. If I understand the theoretical intentions behind Searle's framework, this is indeed the correct way to apply his account to slips (in order to preserve their characterization in §1). The inescapable consequence then is, however, that slips just are not actions.

I conclude that the appeal to the notion of intention in action is not going to be of much help. This is so as long as one requires that there be a rationalizing match between the intention and the action. To let go of the requirement that there be such a match, however, is to let go of the claim that to be an action is to be intentional under some description. This is indeed what we must do if we want to capture slips as actions.

4.6 I have argued that slips (as characterized in §1) seem to resist all attempts to cast them as intentional under some description. However, it is important to recognize that someone who adheres to ( $\alpha$ ) will have a sense of dissatisfaction, which is only natural at this point. It presumably derives from the fact that when we look at what the agent is doing when she is slipping is just like what she is doing when she is acting intentionally. Think of the agent who intends to change for dinner and ends up in bed. Her undressing, putting on night-gown, reading glasses, stepping into bed may be well-nigh indistinguishable from her intentionally doing so. Her movements may be just as smooth and organized. The intuition here is so strong that we might feel like saying that if she is acting intentionally (when she intends to go to bed), she must be

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<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this interpretation seems to deny the phenomenon. The slip occurs at the last minute (of the agent's exercise of agentive guidance, as it were) taking the agent by surprise. *Prima facie* this indicates that the slip is contrary to the agent's intentions tout court not just to his prior intentions. This point is manifested in the fact that this way of construing slips destroys the contrast between slips and intentional actions not done on prior intentions at all or even ones that are done contrary to prior intentions. Suppose that the agent has a habit of munching on potato chips – a bowl of which is constantly on display in the secretary's office. The agent decides one day to break with junk food and resolves not to pick up any chips when she enters the office. Lo and behold, she enters the office and *just* (in the same sense in which one can be *just* humming in the shower) picks up the chip. This is also a case where there is a break between the prior intention and the action, but the intentional action here is not a slip in the sense in which Martin's is.

acting intentionally (when she intends to change for dinner). Her movements have the same intentional-like goal-directed quality after all. But, of course, there is *a* difference. The difference lies in the causal history of those goal-directed movements. To see these movements as the same in both cases is, in effect, to abstract from their causal history and, more generally, from the way in which they are explained. Those theories that trace actionhood to the causal history of the movements will not be able to see slips as actions.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Jennifer Hornsby's Theory of Action

So far, I have ignored what might appear to be an obvious candidate description of Martin's slip that would show it to be intentional under that description after all: Martin was *trying to* pour water for Kerstin. In this section, I will call onto Jennifer Hornsby's theory of action, which identifies all actions with tryings and which is also viewed by its author as an extension of Davidson's theory. I argue that Hornsby's theory does indeed allow her to capture slips as actions but at the cost of rejecting the formula that to be an action is to be intentional under some description. I argue that there are two concepts of trying, only one of which allows her to capture slips as actions and it is this concept of trying that dissociates her account from an explanation-based theory of action.

In §5.1, I give a brief summary of some of the main theses put forward by Hornsby, in particular her claim that whenever an agent does something intentionally, he tries to do that thing. In §5.2, I consider how one could apply her account to Martin's slip and show that one has to distinguish two concepts of trying. In §§5.3-5.4, I clarify the relation between Hornsby's and Davidson's criterion of agency. In particular, I argue that slips *can* be accommodated as actions under her criterion of agency because, for Hornsby but not for Davidson, what makes an action action is independent of how it is explained (§5.5).

5.1 Hornsby believes, with Davidson, that actions can be described in terms of sometimes long-reaching consequences. If my telling a friend how beautiful Prague is sends her on a journey to Prague two weeks later, my action acquires then yet a new way in which it could be described, viz. as my having instigated her going to Prague. Davidson and Hornsby both believe that it would be a mistake to take such descriptions as somehow picking out complex actions that reach out to those different times and places. What is doing the reaching is the description, my action (a particular) occurred when my words were uttered (according to Davidson) or just before they were uttered (according to Hornsby).

Whereas Davidson believes that all actions are bodily movements of the ordinary sort (like tying one's shoes, speaking, smiling), Hornsby believes that ordinary bodily movements are themselves the effects of actions, which occur deeper inside the body. Her argument parallels Davidson's (1971) argument about identifying all actions with movements of the body. *Prima facie*, instigating someone's going to Prague involves more than telling someone how beautiful Prague is. But the "more" here is due to nature (broadly speaking) taking its own course and not to some involvement of the agent. Once I tell my friend how beautiful Prague is there is nothing more that *I* need to *do* before my action can be described as having instigated her to go to Prague.

But ordinary bodily movements (the motion of an arm, say) are likewise effects of some events within the agent. Someone whose motor control has been impaired can try to raise an arm,

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<sup>27</sup> This is not to claim that these are the only theories that cannot accommodate slips. It is certainly not clear that theories taking inspiration from Frankfurt's (1978) idea of agent-guidance, say, can (or can easily) accommodate slips.

but his exertion will not cause the usual movement of the arm. Hornsby discusses a case of a patient who lost sensation in his arm. When asked to raise his arm, he would raise it without any problems. When this request was repeated but unbeknownst to him (he had his eyes closed) his arm was held by another person (so that it did not rise), he was quite surprised to learn that he has not in fact raised the arm. Hornsby argues that we should think here that the agent tried to raise the arm (as usual) but that his trying to raise the arm did not cause his arm to rise. In the normal case, the agent tries to raise an arm and his trying causes his arm to rise.

It is useful at this point to mention the distinction between two kinds of bodily movements to which Hornsby calls attention. There is a difference between saying that the agent raises an arm and saying that the arm rises. The distinction is both philosophical and grammatical. In the former case, we are concerned with what a person does (we are making a personal-level claim; see Hornsby 1997); in the latter case, we are concerned with what a bodily part does (we are making a subpersonal-level claim). Hornsby points out that this difference is reflected in the linguistic difference between the transitive and intransitive uses of the verb. In the case of arm raising/rising, the verb itself manifests the difference, but there are other cases where this is less perspicuous. Hornsby adopts the convention of subscripting the verbs with 'T' for transitive and 'I' for intransitive occurrences. So, someone moves<sub>T</sub> his leg and his leg moves<sub>I</sub>. I will follow this convention at times (most of the time, I will only mark the intransitive uses of the verbs; it is reasonable to treat the transitive uses as default in the discussion of action).

If the normal case is to be understood as suggested above, in terms of the agent's trying to raise an arm (trying to move<sub>T</sub> his body) causing his arm to rise (his body to move<sub>I</sub>), then it is natural for Hornsby to identify the agent's action with the agent's trying to raise his arm. After all, once the agent tries to raise his arm there is nothing more that he needs to do – the trying will cause his arm to rise. This means, however, that actions take place deeper inside us than we think – they are not identical with the manifest bodily movements<sub>I</sub> (which given Hornsby's distinction between movement<sub>T</sub> and movement<sub>I</sub> would be an outrageous claim any way) but rather with the causes of those movements<sub>I</sub>.<sup>28</sup> (Hornsby does allow that actions are identical with bodily movements<sub>T</sub>, but argues that these are identical with tryings.)

One could try to resist the thought that the normal case is to be understood in terms of the agent's trying to do anything. One might argue that an agent who intentionally drops a pen does not *try to* drop the pen at all – he just drops it. This is tantamount to insisting that the vocabulary of trying is only applicable in cases of breakdown. Hornsby admits that it is applicable in breakdown cases but resists the conclusion that it is *only* applicable to those cases (1980, esp. 34-36; her position is opposed, e.g. by Jones 1983). For the purposes of this paper, I simply accept her position on this point. Whenever an agent does something intentionally, he also tries to do that thing. We feel disinclined to say that he tries to do it for pragmatic reasons, in view of the fact that his attempt is successful. A reporter who cared to report that an athlete who beat the world record also (on that occasion) tried to beat it, would surely seem overzealous.

5.2 Let us now consider how Hornsby's account will apply to Martin's slip. I will first argue that the case presents something of an anomaly in that it can be argued that the agent tries to do two things. How Hornsby's account applies to the case depends on exactly how one sorts these two tryings. I will suggest one way of working out the account that I find most plausible and interesting. But there might be alternative ways.

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<sup>28</sup> While Hornsby argues that all actions are tryings, she does not believe that all tryings are actions. Only those tryings that cause bodily movements<sub>I</sub> are actions. Only then is the agent doing something, otherwise he is only trying to do something.



If we looked at Martin's action and its context and, moreover, understood that Martin's pouring in of orange juice for Kerstin is really a slip not an expression of a controlling attitude, say, then the most natural reaction is to say that what Martin was trying to do is to pour water for Kerstin but that he slipped. In support of this, we might cite the fact that he actually took out two jugs from the refrigerator, one with water, one with orange juice. So, Martin was trying to pour water for Kerstin.

If we focus on his actual pouring of the orange juice, Hornsby's arguments support the claim that Martin was also trying to pour in orange juice.<sup>29</sup> Despite the fact that this is not what he wanted or intended to do, he was as a matter of fact trying to pour in orange juice. It suffices to look at what he was actually doing that this is so. (Recall that Hornsby does not think that the attribution of trying is limited to contexts of failure.) To enforce her point as it applies to this case, we might reflect on a counterfactual situation. Imagine that as Martin is raising the orange juice jug, moving it over Kerstin's glass, bending it gently as if ready to pour, just then Kerstin sharply yanks the jug out of his hand. When Martin looks askance at her, she explains "You were trying to pour orange juice into my glass! I asked for water!".<sup>30</sup> It is natural for Hornsby to think that Martin is trying to pour in orange juice into Kerstin's glass in the actual case too, it is just that his trying is successful.

There are thus reasons, though different reasons, for thinking that in this case Martin tries both to pour in water for Kerstin *and* to pour in orange juice for her. We are inclined to say that Martin was trying to pour in water for Kerstin because of his state of mind as well as the way in which it partially managed to get realized. We are inclined to say that Martin was trying to pour in orange juice for Kerstin by focusing on what he was actually doing.

The question that we must ask is how are we (within Hornsby's account) to think about these tryings. There are three *prima facie* viable possibilities – three possible causal chains involved in Martin's slip as depicted in Fig. 1.

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<sup>29</sup> I should emphasize here that this is an extension of Hornsby's position. I am not saying that she is *committed* to applying the concept of trying in this way.

<sup>30</sup> I think that it is indisputable that this is a legitimate use of 'try' as it is indisputable that to allow it in a theory is to open the proverbial can of worms. For, one might ask, are we to understand that we are committed to saying that the agent is trying to  $\phi$  whenever 'she  $\phi$ s' is a true description of what she is doing? That result might well be quite absurd. But nothing I say here indicates that this need be so. It would seem plain awkward to think so in the case of Davidson's agent who flips the switch to switch on a light thereby unintentionally frightening the burglar. Were one to interrupt her switching, it would be inappropriate to say "Look! You were trying to frighten the burglar". This might be because the consequence (frightening the burglar) is too far removed (to be foreseen) not so much that it is not intended. For consider an agent who intends to flip the switch, but who does not intend to switch on a light (perhaps she does not know what the switch is for). It is not as clearly counterintuitive to say "Look! You were trying to switch on the light" especially in a case where she actually intends not to switch on the light because her grandmother is sleeping in the room. I am not suggesting that the examples help us understand this use of 'try'. Clearly, they raise a lot of questions. My point here is to indicate that there is such a use of 'try' and it is not necessarily (or obviously) subject to the objection just mentioned.

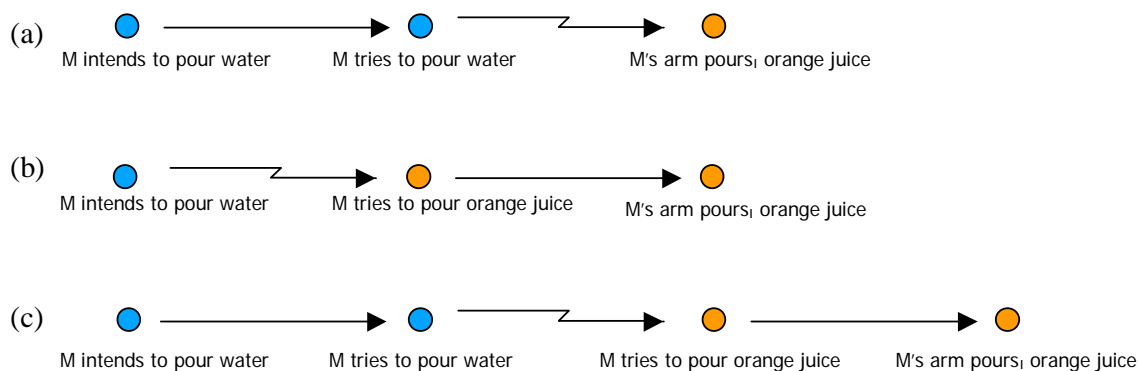


Figure 1. Three ways of interpreting the structure of Martin's slip in terms of Hornsby's account. The dots represent events. The arrows represent causal relations. The broken arrow represents the place where the slip-up occurs.

On the face of it, it might appear that Hornsby is committed to interpretation (c). Her analysis is causal, there are two tryings at stake so one might think that they are causally related too. I think that this is ultimately an implausible possibility, as is interpretation (a). To see this, we need to realize that the two tryings are really not on a par – they are tryings in a different sense. In one sense, trying to do something is roughly equivalent to intending to do it (e.g. McCann 1986, 201; Hunter 1987, esp. 395). I will disambiguate such uses by superscripting them with an 'i'. Clear cases when this concept applies involve the agent doing something because he intends to do it. In such cases, to ask what is the agent trying<sup>i</sup> to do is to ask what his *purpose* is in doing what he does.<sup>31</sup> Hornsby, however, is concerned with a different sense of trying; I will use superscript 'a' to mark this concept. Trying<sup>a</sup> is the basic action that starts the chain of consequences. We can convince ourselves that the agent tries<sup>a</sup> to do something in this sense not necessarily by inspecting his intentions or his mind more generally, but rather by reflecting on breakdown cases, where his activity is interrupted in some way (as in Kerstin's yanking the jug from Martin).

It might be useful to consider the nervous mountaineer case (Davidson 1973) to illustrate the contrast again. A mountaineer intends to let go of his partner whom he holds on a rope. This thought makes him so nervous (his hands begin to sweat) that the rope slides out of his hands. Even though the mountaineer did not perform an action here – he was trying<sup>i</sup> to do something. All of this happened as he was trying<sup>i</sup> (in the sense of “had the intention”) to let go of his partner. But the mountaineer did not try<sup>a</sup> to let go of the partner in the sense that matters to Hornsby. There is no action done here – and no trying<sup>a</sup> either. Although the agent was trying<sup>i</sup> to do something, he did not yet manage to set out to doing it – he did not try<sup>a</sup> to do anything. If someone interrupted the event and handed the rope back to him saying “Here! You were trying (read: trying<sup>a</sup>) to let go of your partner here,” he might blush and mutter (truthfully): “I was not actually *just now* trying (read: trying<sup>a</sup>) to do anything. It just happened. The rope slid out.”

<sup>31</sup> One need not think that ‘intend’ and ‘try<sup>i</sup>’ are synonymous or even coextensive. It is more plausible to think that the agent actually needs to do something before we can ask what he is trying<sup>i</sup> to do. So the formula here would be that an agent tries<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$  only if the agent does something ( $\psi$ ) because she intends to  $\phi$  (see also Hunter 1987). But it is not even clear that the doing something,  $\psi$ , needs to be agentic, i.e. that it needs to pick out an action. Davidson's mountaineer case illustrates this point (as I show shortly).

I am going to assume in what follows that there are two different concepts of trying.<sup>32</sup> It is reasonable to assume also that the attribution of trying<sup>i</sup> to an agent does not pick out any separate event from the event that is picked out by the attribution of the agent's intention. If I am right, there is a logical connection between intending to  $\phi$  and trying<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$  and there is no independent reason to believe that any additional event is picked out. If ' $\alpha$  tries<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$ ' picks out any event, it is the same event that is picked out by ' $\alpha$  intends to  $\phi$ ' (even though the description of the event as 'trying<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$ ' will only be available *after* the agent started doing something). If intentions are mental (or intention-like) then tryings<sup>i</sup> are mental (or intention-like) too. But tryings<sup>a</sup> are not mental (or intention-like), they are action-like – in fact those tryings that are not causally mute just *are* actions.

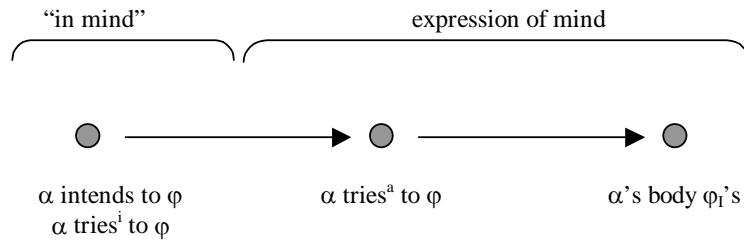


Figure 2. The structure of intentional action on Hornsby's account given the distinction between trying<sup>i</sup> and trying<sup>a</sup>: an agent  $\alpha$   $\phi$ s intentionally. (See Figure 1 for explanation of representational conventions.)

If this is right then readings (a) and (c) are implausible. The fact that we find it intuitive to say that Martin tries to pour in water for Kerstin does not show that his trying to pour in water is a causally separate event from his intending to pour water. In fact, it is most plausible to think that Martin only tries<sup>i</sup> to pour in water but not that he tries<sup>a</sup> to pour in water. Were Kerstin to yank out a jug from Martin's hand, she would hardly say "Look! You were trying to pour in water into my glass!".

Case (b) in fact depicts a paradigmatic slip. The slip-up is between the agent's intention and his action. This is also why it leads to problems for the doctrine that to be an action is to be intentional under some description. I want to now claim that Hornsby's theory allows her to capture slips as actions.

5.3 In view of the distinction between tryings<sup>i</sup> and tryings<sup>a</sup>, we should ask about the fate of the doctrine that actions are intentional under some description. The initial suggestion was to treat a performance as intentional under some description as long as the agent was trying to do something. The question is whether we ought to say "as long as the agent was trying<sup>i</sup> to do something" or "as long as the agent was trying<sup>a</sup> to do something"?

Suppose we settle on the first possibility. A performance is an action as long as the agent was trying<sup>i</sup> to do something. In view of the connection between trying<sup>i</sup> and intention, this would fit in nicely with the view that to be an action is to be intentional under some description. The trouble, however, is that as understood the concept of trying<sup>i</sup> does not even require that the

<sup>32</sup> Consider one final point of support for this contention. A student of mine was objecting to Richard Dawkins' defense of the theory of evolution. Dawkins considered the probably that a monkey would type "Me thinks it is like a weasel". She objected that this "monkey was trying to reach that specific phrase". What she meant was false since she took the claim to establish that the monkey was trying<sup>i</sup> to type that phrase. But in fact there is a sense of trying that her claim may be true on.

performance that is, say, caused by the trying<sup>i</sup> be an action. We can apply this minimal concept of trying even in the nervous mountaineer case after all!

It therefore looks as if it is the second possibility that needs to be taken seriously. A performance is an action as long as the agent was trying<sup>a</sup> to do something. Martin's slip is an action not because of what he intended to do (not because he was trying<sup>i</sup> to pour water for Kerstin) but because he was trying<sup>a</sup> to pour orange juice for her. This view, however, constitutes a departure from the notion that to be an action is to be intentional under some description, and more generally, from the view that seeks to understand the status of an action in its mental aetiology.

5.4 On the face of things Hornsby simply adheres to Davidson's formula that all actions are intentional under some description.<sup>33</sup> But this claim, as I noted, ought to be distinguished from an explication of the concept of action:

- ( $\alpha$ ) An action is a person's doing something intentionally. (Or: A performance is an action just in case there is a description under which it is intentional.)

In her (1980) book, Hornsby defends the thesis that actions are tryings. This suggests an alternative way of delimiting what actions are:

- ( $\beta$ ) "An action is a person's doing something in *attempting* to do something" (1993, 60). (Or: A performance is an action just in case there is a description under which it is the agent's trying<sup>a</sup> to do something and it causes her body to move.)

In a later paper (1993), Hornsby says quite explicitly that she is committed to ( $\beta$ ), though she does not flatly reject ( $\alpha$ ). There is some tension here in seeing exactly to what she is committed. She remarks that "criterion ( $\alpha$ ) of actionhood *might* be *replaced* with ( $\beta$ )" (1993, 60, *emphases mine*). This remark is striking in its ambivalence. The use of 'replace' suggests that there is competition between ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ); the use of 'might' indicates a lack thereof.<sup>34</sup> As we will see shortly, she deduces ( $\beta$ ) from ( $\alpha$ ) though does not even attempt to (and could not, as will become evident) show that ( $\alpha$ ) follows from ( $\beta$ ).

It is important to appreciate that on the face of things ( $\beta$ ) makes a *very* different claim than ( $\alpha$ ). According to ( $\alpha$ ), what it is to be an action is related to the question whether the performance is intentional under a description. This question is likely to be decided by invoking the agent's reasons. As Hornsby says, "whether someone did something intentionally is, in a certain sense, a question about her [and more precisely] ...about her states of mind" (1993, 66). According to ( $\beta$ ), on the other hand, the agent's *mind* is not in sight. All that ( $\beta$ ) appeals to is the agent's trying to do something, which – in Hornsby's view – is the first action-like event (action, if the trying does cause something, mere trying otherwise) that can start a chain of consequences. But trying *in this sense* (trying<sup>a</sup>) is not something mental at all (see esp. 1980, 58-60).<sup>35</sup> She concludes:

<sup>33</sup> She says so explicitly in her book (1980, 36). She makes room for an exception for cases where the agent does something intentionally (the agent intentionally tries to  $\phi$ ) but no action results because the agent's trying does not cause any bodily movements<sub>1</sub>. See note 28.

<sup>34</sup> This is further supported by the fact that she takes herself to have made it "plain that an account which puts 'attempt' or 'trying' at centre-stage does not have to be a rival to one which does not." (1993, 60)

<sup>35</sup> In holding to this point, she parts company with other contemporary volitionists, among them: Ginet (1990); McCann (1974); O'Shaughnessy (1973); Prichard (1945).

Equipped with ( $\beta$ ), we see that we could, if we wanted, say (in English) what an action is without using the word ‘intention’ or any of its cognates at all. This shows that *intention* does not have to be the concept around which everything else turns. (Hornsby 1993, 60)

Hornsby does believe that ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) are linked, and conceptually at that (Hornsby 1993, 58), in virtue of the following three principles:

- (1) If someone did something *intentionally*, then there is an *explanation* of why she did it, which mentions that she thinks something and that she wants something – that is, which mentions a *belief* and a desire (or *pro-attitude*) of hers. (1993, 57, original emphases)
- (2) Someone who has a *belief* and a *desire* that are relevantly related, has a *reason* for doing a particular thing. (1993, 57, original emphases)
- (3) A person who acts because she has a *reason* to do some particular thing, *attempts* to do that thing. (1993, 58, original emphases)

If (1)-(3) are true, it follows that:

- (4) If someone did something intentionally, then she attempted to do that thing.

So far, what is established is that ( $\beta$ ) follows from ( $\alpha$ ). This provides a solid foundation for ( $\beta$ )’s acquiring some of the support that ( $\alpha$ ) has. But in view of the distinctness of the two claims, we might be somewhat suspicious of the other direction of implication. *Is it true that*

- (5) If someone attempted to do something, then she did that thing intentionally?

Certainly not. For one thing, trying to  $\phi$  is necessary but not sufficient for the agent to  $\phi$  intentionally, on Hornsby’s view. Actions are those tryings that *cause* some bodily movements<sub>I</sub>. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that a Davidsonian “in the right way” condition would have to be imposed on the causal connection in order to make true the claim that the agent did whatever she did intentionally.

My concern here is with a different set of issues. Suppose that the agent did something because she tried to do it, where this is understood in terms of her trying<sup>a</sup> to  $\phi$  causing (in the right way) her body to  $\phi$ <sub>I</sub> (but not in terms of trying<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$ ). Has the agent  $\phi$ ed intentionally? I submit that there is *no reason* for Hornsby to think so. Thinking that the agent  $\phi$ ed intentionally involves (by her acceptance of (1)) the invocation of a further claim about how the action is to be explained which would presumably call into the picture yet another causal relation between the agent’s reasons and the action (the trying<sup>a</sup>). But ( $\beta$ ) does not mention reasons at all – it speaks just about the action, the trying<sup>a</sup>. The causal history of the trying<sup>a</sup> is nowhere in sight of ( $\beta$ ).

The reason why it might be tempting to think that (5) (appropriately conditioned) is true and that ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) are in fact closer than they are, is due to running together the two kinds of tryings. For suppose that the agent  $\phi$ ed because she tried<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$ . This presumably is to be understood in terms of her trying<sup>i</sup> to  $\phi$  causing in the right way (her to try<sup>a</sup> to  $\phi$  causing in the right way) her body to  $\phi$ <sub>I</sub>. If I am right about tryings<sup>i</sup>, this is tantamount to saying that the agent’s intention to  $\phi$  caused the agent to  $\phi$  (in the right way). And this is, of course, a classic case of an intentional action. If we focus on this sense of ‘try’ then (5) can be made true given that the provisos are satisfied. But this sense of ‘try’ is not the sense of ‘try’ that is central for Hornsby’s account.

That ( $\alpha$ ) is not equivalent to ( $\beta$ ) is also made plain by considering some performances that qualify as actions under ( $\beta$ ) but not under ( $\alpha$ ). Consider slips. I have argued that slips cannot

be captured if one accepts ( $\alpha$ ). But they can clearly be captured as actions if one accepts ( $\beta$ ). Martin may have slipped in intending to pour water for Kerstin but his pouring orange juice for her is something he does because it is something that was caused by his trying<sup>a</sup> to pour orange juice for her. Yet, he does not do so intentionally. Nor is there any description under which his slip is intentional. If we need an adverb to qualify his performance, we might say that he does so voluntarily, where

- (v) The agent  $\phi$ s voluntarily (the agent's performance is voluntary under the description ' $\phi$ ') just in case the agent tries<sup>a</sup> to  $\phi$  and his trying<sup>a</sup> to  $\phi$  causes (in the right way) his body to  $\phi$ .

(It should be understood that I introduce this as a technical concept within the context of the kind of metaphysics of action with which Hornsby works.<sup>36</sup>) If this is right then what makes an action an action is that it is voluntary under a description not that it is intentional under a description. On such a view, slips count as actions because even though they are not intentional under any description, there are descriptions under which they are voluntary.

Anscombe's actions done for no reason also qualify as actions under ( $\beta$ ) but not under ( $\alpha$ ). We have grown accustomed to insisting that when an agent acts for no reason, he acts on a desire after all (Mele 1988; 1992, ch. 6). This is all the more easy that we have been assured that the concept of desire is so thin that it amounts to barely claiming anything (Hornsby 1993; Smith 1987, 1994). But it pays to ask what was the *motive* for saying that actions done for no reason are to be explained by appeal to an intentional explanation (albeit one that may be impoverished or not really in competition with the description "for no reason"). Was it not perhaps that otherwise their status as *actions* would be threatened? If one accepts ( $\beta$ ), one should no longer feel any pressure to deny that *some* actions done for no reason (and no desire either) are really *actions* done for no reason.

In sum, ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ) are different claims. Hornsby has established in her (1980) book that someone who accepts ( $\alpha$ ) can accept ( $\beta$ ). She has not established that someone who accepts ( $\beta$ ) should (or can) accept ( $\alpha$ ).

5.5 None of this is to say that Hornsby may not accept yet another claim to the effect that it is *typically* the case that an agent who does something because she tries<sup>a</sup> to do it will do so intentionally. In fact, Hornsby does believe that "an agent who in fact attempts to do something, typically has a reason to do the thing" (1993, 59).<sup>37</sup> But this is to make a claim about *how* actions are explained, not about *what* actions are. This is a contrast that tends to get blurred on accounts that have become common wisdom.

In a famous (1963) paper, Donald Davidson has revived a causal theory of action explanation. He argued that we cannot understand the explanatory force of reasons explanations unless we think that reasons cause actions. Since then it has slowly become orthodox to take Davidson to have laid the foundation for a causal *theory of action*, or actionhood as Hornsby puts

<sup>36</sup> (v) is not intended as an analysis of what 'voluntary' means. At best, it can aspire to being an explication in Carnap's (1962) sense: it should be read as partially legislating the meaning of 'voluntary'. And there are reasons to think that the term is (close to being) appropriate here. For one, the etymological link to volitions is striking. (What plays the role of volitions for Hornsby are tryings – this is not to identify her with any volitionist view only those that think of volitions as actions.) For another, there are some uses of voluntary that go beyond what is intentional. (This point is made explicitly by Anscombe (1982), though some performances that Anscombe would describe as voluntary cannot be captured by (v).)

<sup>37</sup> She seems to think that this claim is bound up with her adherence to (3). It seems clear, however, that it is a separate claim.

it, not just a *theory of action explanation*. If the causal theory of action explanation is right then all actions done for a reason are caused by the agent's reasons. If the causal theory of action is right, what makes actions actions is that they are explained in a certain way (caused by the agent's reasons in the right way).<sup>38</sup>

So, there is a gulf between ( $\alpha$ ) and ( $\beta$ ). Someone who accepts ( $\beta$ ) allows (conceptual) room for actions that are intentional under *no* description. Actions done for no reasons as well as slips stand as useful reminders that there is a need for such a room. On the other hand, those who believe that to ask *what* actions *are* we must first ask *how* they are *explained* (which includes adherents to ( $\alpha$ )) will not be able to see them as actions.<sup>39</sup>

## 6. Conclusion: Much Ado about Not Very Much?

One could take the above discussion as an argument for Hornsby's account of action. Of the theories *mentioned*, hers alone captures slips as actions without turning them into mistakes proper. But the emphasis is rightly put on 'mentioned'. What is required for an account of action to capture slips as actions is that it not confound the account of action explanation with the account of action. A slip-successful account of action will take deeply to heart Anscombe's admonition that actions (i.e. performances with respect to which it is appropriate to ask the special Why-question) can be done for *no* reason, where this is not just a way of saying for no good reason, but for no reason period. And no desire either. And no... But there are numerous theories that have this feature (as e.g.: Anscombe 1963; A. Baier 1971; Brandom 1994; Hart 1951). Such theories have no problems in accounting for slips (without needing to reinterpret them). Such theories have no problems in accounting for arational actions (Hursthouse 1991), without needing to reinterpret them. Such theories have no problems in accounting for actions done for no reason (without needing to reinterpret them). This is all because what makes an action an action is independent of the way it is explained.

At the end of the day, I have made a weak plea for slips in this paper. I have claimed that the condition that a theory of action account for slips should only be construed as a weak condition of adequacy – certainly not something to reject a theory over. However, if the above diagnosis of why many theories of action do not account for slips is correct, the case made in this paper together with other cases that could be made regarding other “aberrations,” could provide a stronger reason for preferring such theories over explanation-based theories of action. For *if* the primary motivation for rejecting the thought that performances such as slips are actions is due to the fact that a theory of action is based on a theory of action explanation, one might want to wonder *what reason* there is for preferring explanation-based theories of actions over those that are not so constrained? I know of no systematic answer to this question. Until such an answer is provided, the case for counting slips as actions does not look so bad after all.

I have said at the beginning that slips are such a marginal category of our doings that it would border on the outrageous to reject a theory of action for not capturing them. And slips are not alone in this category. But I have also began by remarking that this may not be so very surprising given the fact that we do not think that our mistakes represent us as agents. What we

<sup>38</sup> Hornsby's approach is predicated on deep suspicion about this kind of approach (see 1980, pp. 50-51).

<sup>39</sup> Such a dissociation between the theory of action and the theory of action explanation raises important issues about the extent of the independence of action from its explanation. The extreme that has been occupied by most intentionalist thinkers was to claim that all actions have intentional explanations. With the replacement of ( $\alpha$ ) by ( $\beta$ ), the corresponding extreme position becomes conceivable, viz. the claim that it might be possible for our actions to (as a matter of fact) never have intentional explanations. Thinkers such as Anscombe and Hornsby appear to hold some middle-ground: actions that are intentional under no description will, necessarily, constitute the exception rather than the rule. But the reasons for such a position would require some reevaluation.

care about, what we are proud of are our successes, our intentional doings, those that demonstrate how our minds change the world. But perhaps we focus on this aspect of our agency beyond what is intellectually healthy for us. Perhaps we could come to care about the fact that we also make mistakes and that we slip. Perhaps we could even come to see our failures as offering us a profound insight into and reason to feel humble about our own place in the world. When we do, we will have all the more reason for thinking that the latter group of theories is not just better for managing to capture slips but better for giving us a less concealed picture of ourselves.



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