The Metaphysics of Negative Action

by

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Standard metaphysical theories of action assume that all actions are events. Such theories have trouble accommodating ‘negative actions’ — (intentional) omissions, refrainments, etc. — since these seem to be, not events, but absences thereof. We must apparently reject event-based theories, or deny that omissions and refrainments form any part of our agency.

Some philosophers try to avoid the dilemma by distinguishing the category of action from the supposedly broader category of manifestations of agency. If ‘negative actions’ are not really actions, then the problem disappears. But this solution is illusory, since the distinction between actions and other manifestations of agency cannot be drawn in a satisfying way.

The better solution is to reject the assumption that negative actions are mere absences, not events. We can do this on the grounds that negative action sentences, no less than ordinary ones, existentially quantify over events of certain kinds. Specifically, they quantify over events that play a certain role: x’s omission to φ, for instance, is not an absence of events in which x φ-s; rather, it is an event whose occurrence ensures that there is no φ-ing by x. This functionalist account of negative actions allows us to identify negative actions with ordinary, positive events: when x omits to φ, and so ensures that she does not φ, the event that plays this ensuring-role consists in the actual movement and position of her body. Negative actions are not negative in any metaphysically suspicious way.

This account faces numerous objections from Leibniz’s Law, since positive events and negative actions do not seem to share all of their properties — how can a negative action be identical to a positive event, when they have different locations, modal profiles, causal roles, etc.? Fortunately, such objections can be shown to be either invalid or unsound. My functionalist account of negative actions is thus metaphysically defensible, and stands as a powerful solution to the problem negative actions seemed to pose for event-based theories of action.
Acknowledgements

Work on this project technically began in the first year of my PhD. I had recently been reading Jesús Aguilar and Andrei Buckareff’s 2010 collection, *Causing Human Actions: New Perspectives on the Causal Theory of Action*, my first foray into the metaphysics of agency. Several papers in that collection touch on the problem of negative action in one way or another, and I was struck by the fact that many of the authors took it to be clear that negative actions could not be identified with positive events, on pain of violating Leibniz’s Law. Arguments of this sort appeared again in Randolph Clarke’s 2012 paper, “Absence of Action,” and I thought I could see my around them. I wrote a brief discussion piece for *Philosophical Studies* which received some positive and helpful feedback, but was not ultimately accepted for publication. At the encouragement of Phil Clark, I decided to make these initial ideas part of a larger dissertation project on the metaphysics of negative action. The basic ideas of that discussion piece have survived all the way to Chapter 5 of the present work (albeit in a much-improved form). In the intervening years I found that I had much more to say, not only about where common objections to the view go wrong, but about why one should want to identify negative actions and positive events in the first place.

Thanks must go, first and foremost, to the members of my committee: Sergio Tenenbaum, Jessica Wilson, Phil Clark, and Michela Ippolito. Sergio and Jessica served as co-supervisors, offering their expertise in the philosophy of action and general metaphysics, respectively. Over the past three years they have offered extensive and helpful comments on drafts, advice on how best to proceed with the dissertation, and on occasion, some much-needed encouragement. Their impact on my work would be difficult to over-estimate. To give just one example: Chapter 4 was born entirely from Jessica’s insistence that, unless I said something about what I took events to be, my thesis that negative actions could be identified with positive events would be left hopelessly unclear. The reader will note that, in developing my views in that chapter, I found it necessary to discuss functionalism in the philosophy of mind, disjunctive properties, determinable properties, and the identity-conditions of tropes. Jessica’s own writings on these topics set a high benchmark, which I do not pretend to have reached, but her example (and her forceful criticisms) got me a little bit closer.

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Apologies to anyone I have forgotten to mention. I can only assure you that this omission was unintentional.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Problem of Negative Action

“Any comprehensive theory of action should have something to say about the ontology of actions” — so writes the late E. J. Lowe (2010a, 3). Lowe intends the term ‘actions’ to mean, not the things we do, but rather our particular doings of the things we do. An account of the ontology of actions, in this sense, is not an account of the ontology of things like brush one’s teeth — which is a thing that (hopefully) we all do — but rather of things like my particular act of brushing my teeth, your particular act of brushing your teeth, etc. A comprehensive theory of action should include an answer to the question of whether there are such things as actions, in this sense, and if that answer is ‘Yes,’ an account of just what kind of thing an action is.

In the twentieth century, the dominant view was that there are such things as actions, and that they are events. The claim that actions are events is intuitive. For an event is, inter alia, something that happens or occurs: e.g. an explosion is an event, and we naturally talk of the occurrence of an explosion, or refer to it as an occurrence. If there are such things as actions, they would seem to be things that occur, as well: e.g. a parade would seem to be a group action, an action of parading down the street, and we naturally talk of parades as things that happen, or occur.

What really seems to have cemented the view that there are such things as actions, and that these things are events, is Davidson’s work on the logical form of action sentences (Davidson, 1967; 2001). Davidson argued that every action sentence — i.e., every sentence which describes an agent as doing something — should be analysed as quantifying over an event which is the agent’s doing of that thing. A standard neo-Davidsonian analysis looks like this:

$$\exists t: t < t^* \left( \exists e \right) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight}$$

1As Lowe notes (2010a, 3), we do not want to simply assume that there are such things as actions, and presumably one thing we could say about the ontology of actions is that there are none.

2Here, $t^*$ is whatever time is picked out in context as the present moment, and the quantifier ‘$\exists t: t < t^*$’ ranges over times earlier than $t$. ‘Agent’ and ‘Patient’ denote thematic roles: the agent of an event, in this sense, is simply whatever is doing the relevant thing, while the patient is whatever is having the relevant thing done to it. This analysis differs from Davidson’s original proposal in several ways. For helpful surveys of the development of neo-Davidsonian semantics, see (Ludwig, 2010) and (Pietroski, 2013).
‘Jones buttered toast in the bathroom at midnight’ says that there is (or was) some event, e, such that e is a buttering of toast by Jones, e occurred in the bathroom, and e occurred at midnight. Thus, applying Quine’s (1948) criterion of ontological commitment — according to which a theory commits its proponents to the existence of all and only those things over which it quantifies — Davidson concluded that the correct analysis of action sentences commits us to the existence of particular actions, understood as events. And many, though not all, philosophers interested in the ontology of action have followed him.3

The standard theories of action and agency in the twentieth-century were event-based, and although there has been resistance to such theories in recent years4, they continue to hold sway. Indeed, the so-called ‘causal theory of action’, according to which an action is an event which is caused (in ‘the right way’) by certain of an agent’s mental states — such as beliefs, desires and intentions — whose contents rationalize the behaviour, is often referred to as ‘the standard story’.5 However, event-based theories have recently run into trouble over so-called ‘negative actions.’

The paradigm cases of negative actions are (intentional) omissions and refrainments: if I decide not to pick up my friend at the airport, I perform an act of omitting to pick him up; if I muster up the willpower to stick to my diet and not take a second helping of dessert, I perform an act of refraining from taking a second helping.6 What makes these actions ‘negative’ is, apparently, that they are understood primarily in negative terms, i.e. in terms of what an agent does not do, as opposed to what she does. If you learn that I omitted to pick up my friend at the airport, then you seem to learn a negative fact about my behaviour, the fact that I did not pick up my friend at the airport. But you do not seem to learn much, if anything, about what I did instead. Thus, omitting to φ, or refraining from φ-ing, seems to consist primarily in not-φ-ing.7

The thought that omitting or refraining primarily consists in not doing something leads naturally to the thought that these things are not events. For according to such theories, what it is for an agent to act in a certain way is for there to be an event that is her action. But if an agent’s doing something is a matter of the occurrence of an event of a certain kind, then surely her not doing that thing is a matter of the absence of any event of that kind. Hence the growing consensus that, while ordinary actions are events, negative actions are absences of events. Or rather, since most philosophers of this persuasion are loathe to accept the existence of such entities as absences, the consensus is that if there are such things as omissions, refrainments and the like, then they are not events, but absences thereof.8

3Of course, not all metaphysicians are quite so willing to go along with Quine’s criterion. These philosophers argue that, even if the best way to interpret a theory, or a language, requires quantification over Fs, nonetheless we might adopt that theory, or speak that language, without taking on board a commitment to Fs — see, e.g. (Azzouni, 2004), (Fine, 2009), and (Wilson, 2010). But Davidson’s argument need not be read, and may not have been intended, as a knock-down argument for the claim that we must either accept action-events into our ontology or give some competing analysis of action sentences. Rather, the argument can be read as giving prima facie reason to believe in action-events: the analysis of action sentences gives us one reason to commit ourselves to these things, although further metaphysical theorizing may overturn that commitment while leaving the analysis in place.

4See (Alvarez, 1999), (Alvarez & Hyman, 1998), (Hyman, 2015), (Steward, 2012a), (Steward, 2013a) and (Thompson, 2008).

5See the many essays in (Aguilar & Buckareff, 2010).

6A brief word on the word ‘refrainment’ is in order. I take it that ‘refrainment’ is the nominalization of ‘refrain’, as ‘omission’ is the nominalization of ‘omit’, and I will use it as such throughout this dissertation. But some have objected that I should not use this word to refer to acts of refraining. The most common objection is that there is simply no such word as ‘refrainment’, an objection that is easily quashed by reference to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refrainment). The word is uncommon in day-to-day conversation, and may be a bit archaic, but it exists, nonetheless.

7I say ‘primarily’ because not all cases of not-doing are cases of omission or refrainment. See Section 1.2.1.

8See especially (Bach, 2010), (Clarke, 2010), (Clarke, 2014), (Moore, 2009) and (Moore, 2010). Clarke’s view is actually more nuanced than the claim that all negative actions are absences of events. For Clarke allows that, in certain cases,
This view of negative actions generates a problem for standard event-based theories of agency. For such theories are typically intended to be comprehensive theories of agency. As Jennifer Hornsby puts it, an event-based theory of action does not simply assume that all actions are events, but “also assumes that the phenomenon of human agency, and not just a category of events, is delimited when it is said which events are actions,” (2004). If these two assumptions are right, then an agent only manifests her agency when she acts, and she acts only when there occurs some event that is her action. By *modus tollens*, if there are no such events as omissions, refrainments and the like, then no so-called ‘negative action’ is really an action at all, and therefore no agent ever manifests her agency by omitting to do something, refraining from doing it, etc. But this conclusion seems intolerable. First of all, it just seems obvious that I can manifest my agency in these ways. If I deliberately omit to pick up my friend at the airport, or refrain from taking a second helping of dessert, I exercise my agency just as much as I would have if I had actually done those things. Furthermore, omissions and refrainments share many of those features of positive actions which, it seems, are indicative of their being manifestations of agency:

Just as one can deliberate about whether to act in a certain way, one can deliberate about whether to refrain from acting in a certain way, for example, about whether to abstain or boycott. There are reasons for omitting or refraining as well as for acting, and they are reasons of the same general kind: practical reasons, considerations bearing on what to do, on whether to act in one way or another. One can omit or refrain for such reasons, just as one can act for them. Omitting or refraining can be commanded (“Don’t move”) or otherwise required, and such a command or requirement can be obeyed or fulfilled or, alternatively, disobeyed or flouted. Omitting or refraining can be something one chooses or intends, and one can intentionally omit to do, or refrain from doing, a certain thing. One can bring things about by omitting or refraining, just as one can bring something about by acting. One can try to refrain, or try to act, and either attempt might succeed, or it might fail. One might be unable to refrain from doing a certain thing, just as one might be unable to perform a certain action. Finally, one can be responsible for omitting to act or refraining from doing a certain thing (Clarke, 2014, 11–12).

Thus, negative actions seem to be precisely the sorts of things that a theory of action and agency is supposed to be a theory of. If a theory of this sort says that all actions are events, and if it turns out that negative actions are not events, but absences thereof, then it seems that theory must be rejected.

We seem, then, to be faced with a dilemma: either we stand by a comprehensive, event-based theory of action, and draw the implausible conclusion that we can never manifest our agency by omitting to do things, or by refraining from doing them; or we stand by the seemingly obvious fact that omissions and refrainments are manifestations of agency, and reject comprehensive, event-based theories of action.

You might think that, while the second horn of the dilemma would have seemed unattractive in the second half of the twentieth century, it is much more attractive given recent developments in the theory of action. As I indicated earlier, there has been some resistance to event-based theories in recent years, with several prominent philosophers arguing that actions belong in the (supposedly) distinct ontology category of *process*, or that actions are manifestations of causal powers, where the manifestation of a

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we can identify an agent’s omission or refrainment with one of her positive actions: “A child’s not moving while playing hide-and-seek might be (identical with) her actively holding very still then. We don’t have here a negative entity, but rather an action described in terms of something it’s not (a moving),” (Clarke, 2014, 37). Nonetheless, he thinks that in most cases, a negative action could only be an absence, and hence in most cases when one omits or refrains there is no such thing as one’s omission or refrainment.
power is (supposedly) not an event. One might be perfectly happy adopt one of these theories on the grounds that event-based alternatives cannot accommodate negative actions. But while I have presented the problem as a problem for event-based theories, since such theories will be my focus, the problem can, in principle, arise for process- or power-based theories, as well. For according to each of these theories, what it is for an agent to manifest her agency, i.e. to act, is for there to exist an entity of a certain kind. And each of these theories can be combined with the further thought that, if doing something is a matter of the existence of an entity of a certain kind, then not doing that thing is a matter of the absence of an entity of that kind. But then the problem of negative actions arises all over again. It seems, then, that the only way to solve the problem of negative actions, on this horn, would be to abandon the search for a comprehensive theory of action altogether, and to develop a disjunctive theory that places positive actions and negative ones in distinct ontological categories. But we should avoid such a disjunctive theory, if we can.

Rather than trying to develop an alternative to event-based theories of agency, I will show how those theories can solve the problem of negative actions. On my view, the common thought that omitting and refraining is a matter of the absence of an event, rather than the occurrence of one, is a mistake. Negative actions are not absences, but events in their own right. Moreover, these events are not ‘negative entities’, if this means that they consist solely in an agent’s not-doing something, or in her possession of a negative property, or in her non-possession of a positive property. Rather, I will argue, each negative action is token-identical to a positive event that consists in the agent actually doing something. Thus, contrary to the consensus view, negative actions can be accommodated by a comprehensive, event-based theory of agency.

1.2 Preliminaries

Before turning to a summary of the chapters to come, I will outline some preliminary points that it will be useful to keep in mind when attempting to understand and assess my view.

1.2.1 Omitting, Refraining, and Not-Doing

As I said, negative actions are primarily understood in negative terms, i.e. in terms of what an agent does not do. But there is more to omitting, or refraining, than simply not doing something. As I write this sentence, there are lots of things I am not doing — I am not doing research on the metaphysics of composition, or driving across town, or running a three-legged race, or... — but few, if any, of these things are things that I am omitting to do, or refraining from doing. What distinguishes cases of omission and refrainment from cases of mere non-doing, and what, if anything, distinguishes cases of omission and refrainment from each other?

Taking omissions first, it is typically thought that whether one counts as omitting to φ at a given time depends on whether one was supposed to φ, or otherwise expected to φ, at that time. Hence, Kent Bach writes that one can only omit to do something “that one is, in a conveniently broad and vague sense, ‘supposed to do’,” (2010, 54), and Randolph Clarke writes that “one seldom if ever counts as having omitted to do something unless there was some norm, standard, or ideal that called for one’s so acting,” (2014, 29). Various kinds of norms and expectations can ground the claim that one has not

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9See (Alvarez & Hyman, 1998, 240), (Hyman, 2015, 33), and (Steward, 2013b, 690–691).
10This does not entail that each negative action is token-identical to a positive action. See Section 1.2.1.
only not-φ-ed, but omitted to φ. Moral norms can ground such a claim, as when I omit to return a stranger’s wallet because there is a moral imperative to do so. Rational norms can ground such a claim, as when I omit to visit a friend because I have formed the intention to visit him, and there is a rational imperative to act on that intention. And the expectation that I φ need not be tied to a norm at all: I can omit to take off my shoes upon coming home simply because it is my habit to take my shoes off, and this habit grounds an expectation that I do so (Bach, 2010, p.54; Clarke, 2014, pp.30–31).

Note that Clarke says we seldom if ever omit to do things that we are in no sense required or expected to do. The exceptions, he thinks, are cases of intentional non-doing, i.e. cases in which one has an intention not to φ — or some suitably related intention, see (2014, 65–73) — and the fact that one does not φ is explained by one’s having that intention (2014, 29, 33). According to Clarke, such cases are cases of intentional omission, and intentionally omitting to φ is the same thing as refraining from φ-ing (2014, 32). And as he rightly notes, one can refrain from φ-ing even when there is no norm or expectation to the effect that one φs. For example, when I refrain from taking a second helping of dessert, there need be no norm or expectation to the effect that I take a second helping. The only norms or expectations in place may be norms and expectations to the effect that I stick to my diet and do not take a second helping. Thus, refrainments seem to be counterexamples to the claim that one can only omit to do things one is, in some sense, supposed to do.

But I think Clarke is wrong to treat intentionally omitting to φ as equivalent to refraining from φ-ing. If we treat ‘omission’ as a quasi-technical term, a catch-all for all non-doings, then Clarke’s treatment might be justified. But I have already noted that this is not how ‘omission’ is ordinarily used, since I am not omitting to do each of the things I am currently not doing. Moreover, as the term is ordinarily used, intentionally omitting to φ is not equivalent to refraining from φ-ing. When I refrain from taking a second helping of dessert, it would be wrong to say that I omit to take a second helping. And it seems that it would be wrong to say this precisely because there is no norm or expectation in place to the effect that I take a second helping.

One might try to explain away the intuitive incorrectness of the claim that I omit to take a second helping of dessert by appealing to Gricean maxims. Generally, it is inappropriate to assert a proposition q when you are in a position to assert the stronger proposition p. If ‘Jonathan refrained from taking a second helping’ expresses the proposition that I intentionally omitted to take a second helping, then that sentence expresses a stronger proposition than does ‘Jonathan omitted to take a second helping’: the former sentence expresses everything the latter does, and more besides. Thus, we can explain why the latter sentence is inappropriate while still taking it to express a true proposition.

But note that, when p is stronger than q, one can render an assertion of q conversationally appropriate by saying ‘q; in fact, p!’ or ‘p, and p entails q, so q.’ But moves of this sort do not render the claim that I omit to take a second helping of dessert appropriate: an utterance of ‘Jonathan omitted to take a second helping; in fact, he refrained from doing so!’ or ‘Jonathan refrained from taking a second helping, and that entails that he omitted to do so, so Jonathan omitted to take a second helping’ do not render the embedded assertion that I omitted to take a second helping of dessert any more appropriate. Explanation: that embedded assertion is false, because refraining from doing something is not the same as intentionally omitting to do it. Omitting requires a norm or expectation, while refraining does not.

It might be thought that Strunk and White’s injunction to “omit needless words” is a counterexample. For surely, there is no norm or expectation to the effect that one include needless words. Quite the opposite, in fact (Clarke, 2014, 32). But even if we suppose that the author is trying to conform to the dictates of good writing — she is not attempting to parody bad writing — it seems to me that we can explain the appropriateness of ‘omit’ in terms of norms or expectations.
If one can only omit to do what one is, in some sense, supposed to do, then it is natural to suppose that one can only omit to do what one is able to do, since an inability to φ generally undermines a norm or expectation to the effect that I φ. For example, if I am unable to leave my house because I have been snowed in, then although I might fail to visit my friend as promised, I do not thereby omit to do so.\footnote{See (Clarke, 2014, ch. 4). Carolina Sartorio (2011) claims that an inability to φ can render one unable to intentionally omit to φ, since in a such a case one’s not-φ-ing cannot be explained in the right way by one’s intentions, but she leaves it open whether one can still omit to do what one is unable to do. However, she does so on the grounds that it may be theoretically useful to count all non-doings as omissions (2011, 32–33), and this is consistent with the claim that, as ‘omit’ is ordinarily used, one only omits to do what one is able to do. Similarly, although Sara Bernstein (in press) claims that one can omit to do the impossible, she counts all non-doings as omissions, and so her position is consistent with my view.}

As a final note on the difference between omitting to do something and merely not-doing it, it seems that one does not omit to φ if one tries to φ but fails. For instance, suppose that I fully intend to pick up my friend at the airport, but I get stuck in traffic on the way. I may be guilty of poor planning, and of omitting to leave early enough to get to the airport, but while I am guilty of failing to pick up my friend, I am not guilty of omitting to do so.

Turning now to the topic of refrainment, there are some respects in which refraining from doing something seems similar to omitting to do it. For instance, just as an inability to φ can render one unable to omit to φ, it can render one unable to refrain from φ-ing. Suppose that I consider whether to have a second helping of dessert, and decide not to. But suppose further that, unbeknownst to me, all of the dessert has already been eaten, so that even if I wanted to take a second helping, I would be unable to. It does not seem right to say that I refrain from taking a second helping in this case. In addition, just as one cannot omit to do what one tries and fails to do, one cannot refrain from doing what one tries and fails to do. Suppose that I decide to have a second helping of dessert, only to find that it has all been eaten already. It does not seem right to say that I refrain from taking a second helping in this case.

So much suffices to distinguish refrainment from not-doing, but what distinguishes refrainment from omitting? We have seen that, while I can only omit to do something if I am, in some sense, supposed to do it, I can refrain from doing something even when there is no norm or expectation that I do it. Thus, there is a condition on omission that is not a condition on refrainment. But there is, furthermore, a condition on refrainment that is not a condition on omission, namely that all cases of refrainment are cases of intentional non-doing: I can only refrain from doing something if I have an intention not to do it (or some suitably related intention) and the fact that I do not do it is appropriately explained by my having that intention (Bach, 2010, 52–54; Clarke, 2014, p.92). For example, suppose that, instead of consciously sticking to my diet and intentionally not having a second helping of dessert, I get distracted by conversation and the thought of having a second helping never even occurs to me. While it is true, in such a case, that I do not take a second helping of dessert, it is not true that I refrain from doing so, since my behaviour is not explained by having a suitable intention. That is also why I do not count as refraining from doing all of the things I am currently not doing. For the vast majority of these things, the thought of doing them has not even occurred to me, and so my not doing them is not explained by my having a suitable intention. This requirement distinguishes refrainment from omitting because,

For the injunction is surely to omit those needless words which one is going to use, or is tempted to use, or already has used. In writing the sentence ‘Toronto is great,’ I do not omit the needless word ‘aardvark’, since there was never any risk of me using it in the first place. But I might have been tempted to write ‘The city of Toronto, one will find, possesses a large number of the qualities one would want a city to have, and indeed possesses enough of those qualities, and possesses them to such a great degree, as to easily overshadow any poor qualities one might find in it, thus truly achieving greatness.’ If I refrain from doing so, then I really have omitted the needless words. The reason is that my temptation, or intention, to write the longer sentence puts in place an expectation that I will do so, an expectation that is flouted when I write the shorter sentence instead.
although I cannot unintentionally *refrain* from $\phi$-ing, I can unintentionally *omit* to $\phi$. For instance, if I simply forget that I am supposed to visit my friend, then I might omit to visit him, and yet my omission is unintentional.

This fact, if it is a fact, suggests that, while all refrainments are actions, because they are all *intentional* refrainments, some omissions (namely, the unintentional ones) are not actions, but mere doings. Is that right?

In assessing this claim, we should remember that it is generally thought that an action can fall under many different descriptions, and that it can be intentional under some of these descriptions without being intentional under all of them.\(^{13}\) Davidson gives an example where I move my hand, thereby flipping a light switch, thereby turning on the lights, and thereby alerting a prowler to my presence. Suppose that I do the first three things intentionally, but that, because I am unaware of the prowler, I do not intentionally do the fourth thing. Does it follow that the event of my alerting the prowler is not an action (i.e., an intentional doing), but a mere event? Davidson says ‘No,’ because my doings of these four things might be (and indeed, he thinks, *are*) one and the same event. Although I do four different things, there is *one* event that is a doing of all of them. For an event to be an action, it must be intentional under some description — it must be a doing of at least one thing that the agent does intentionally — but it need not be intentional under all of them.\(^{14}\)

Now, on my view, negative actions such as omissions and refrainments are events that can be described in different ways. Indeed, each negative action is, on my view, token-identical to a positive event, and hence can be described in both positive and negative terms.\(^{15}\) So, from the fact that I unintentionally omit to $\phi$, it does not immediately follow that my omission is not an action, if by that we mean that it is a mere doing, not intentional under any description. There may indeed be plenty of omissions which are intentional under no description. For instance, if, having forgotten that I need to pick up my friend at the airport, I sleep in and am still fast asleep at the time when I am supposed to pick him up, then my omission is not intentional under any description, since I cannot do anything intentionally while I am asleep. But there will also be plenty of omissions which are intentional under a positive description, while still being unintentional under the negative one. For instance, if, having forgotten to pick up my friend at the airport, I am writing a paper at the time when I am supposed to pick him up, then my omission is intentional under the description ‘writing of a paper.’\(^{16}\)

So, in one sense, the fact that one can unintentionally omit to do something does not show that not all omissions are actions — the fact that not all omissions are actions is shown instead by the fact that one can unintentionally omit to do something without at the same time doing something else intentionally.

It is important to clear up two potential sources of confusion about my view, which arise from these reflections on intentionality. First, the terminology of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ actions suggests that we are concerned with doings that are intentional under a certain positive or negative description. On this way of talking, a positive action is not merely an action that has a positive description, but rather an action which is intentional under a positive description, and *mutatis mutandis* for negative actions. When I say that I am concerned with the metaphysics of negative actions, I mean that I am concerned with...

\(^{13}\)See (Anscombe, 1963; (1971)) and (Davidson, 1971). For recent discussion of just how opposed Anscombe and Davidson are on this and related issues, however, see (Hornsby, 2011).

\(^{14}\)At least, so says the philosopher of action who thinks (a) that doings of distinct things can be identified, and (b) that an action is an intentional doing. See (Goldman, 1970) for the classic exposition of a view opposed to (a), and (Steward, 2009) for a recent exposition of a view opposed to (b).

\(^{15}\)See Chapters 3 and 4 for details.

\(^{16}\)Or at least, it is so provided that my act of writing the paper can be identified with my omission. See Chapters 3 and 5 for further discussion of just which positive events can be identified with negative actions.
with the metaphysics of those doings of ours which are intentional under a negative description. Thus, what I am mainly concerned with are refrainments and intentional omissions, although my view does entail that unintentional omissions, no less than intentional ones, are events.

Second, I say that each negative action is token-identical to a positive event. Does this commit me to the claim that each negative action is token-identical to a positive action? If the terms ‘positive action’ and ‘negative action’ are used as in the previous paragraph, then the answer is ‘No,’ since my view does not require that each negative action is intentional under a positive description. My view only entails that each negative action is token-identical to a positive one if by that we mean merely that each negative action is an action that falls under a positive description, a description under which it may not be intentional.

1.2.2 The Things We Do and Our Doings of Them

At the beginning of this chapter, I distinguished two senses the word ‘action’: one on which it means a thing done; and another on which it means a doing of something. But it should be noted that the things we do encompass more than just actions, i.e. those things which we do, and by doing which we manifest our agency. For some of the things I can do are sneeze, yawn, and fall asleep, but none of these things is an action. Likewise, our doings of the things we do encompass more than just our particular actions, i.e. those events which are manifestations of our agency. For whenever I sneeze, yawn, or fall asleep, there occurs an event that is a sneeze, a yawn, or a falling asleep, and none of these events is an action.

To my knowledge, the importance of the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them was first noticed, and has been most strongly emphasized, by Jennifer Hornsby. This distinction will be important in what follows, especially in Chapter 5, where I will argue that some of the most popular arguments against a view like mine only seem compelling because the distinction is ignored. Thus, it will be helpful to say a bit more about it here.

Following Hornsby, I say that the things we do are, prima facie, universals, in the sense that they are repeatable, shareable entities: if Randy picks up milk one week, and then does it again the next week, then there is one thing, pick up milk, which he does twice; likewise, if Randy picks up milk and Reggie also picks up milk, then there is one thing that they both do. Our doings of the things we do, by contrast, are prima facie particulars, in the sense that they are non-repeatable, non-shareable entities: if Randy picks up milk one week, and then does it again the next week, then although he does the same thing on both occasions, on each occasion there is a distinct doing of that thing; likewise, if Randy and Reggie both pick up milk, then although they do the same thing, their doings of that thing are distinct.

If the things we do are (prima facie) universals, what sort of universal are they? Those who consider this question often seem to say, or implicitly suppose, that the things we do are the types or kinds under which our particular actions fall (Hornsby, 1999, 623–25; Steward, 2012b, 152). We have seen that, if Randy picks up milk one week and then again the next week, then although his particular acts of picking up milk are distinct, there is one thing which he does on both occasions. Likewise, although his particular acts are distinct, they are apparently tokens of the same type; they are both acts of picking up milk or, as we may say, they are both picking-up-milk events. Rather than admit two distinct abstract

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18I say only that the things we do are prima facie particulars, not that they truly are particulars. The point that the things we do appear to be repeatable and shareable is important for clarifying the conceptual distinction between the things we do and our doings of them. Once that point has been made, however, we may leave open the possibility of a reduction of the former to particulars, or classes of particulars (Hornsby, 1980, 4n.4; Hornsby, 1999, 625).
objects in our ontology, we might reasonably suppose that the thing Randy does and the type under which his doings of it fall are, in fact, one and the same thing.

However, I do not think it should be simply assumed that the things we do are identical to doing-types. For our particular doings are events, or if not events, then perhaps processes or manifestations of causal powers. If doing-types are prima facie universals, then they are prima facie properties had by events (or processes, or manifestations of causal powers). But the things we do seem to be properties that we have, not properties that these other things have. Indeed, on an event-based theory of agency, what it is for an agent to perform a certain action (in the sense of a thing she does) is for there to be an event of a certain kind. What it is for Randy to pick up milk is for Randy to be such that there is an event which is a picking-up-of-milk, and to which Randy is related in a certain way (namely, he is the agent of that event, the do-er of that thing of which it is a doing). To simply assume that the thing Randy does (pick up milk) is identical to a certain event-type (picking-up-of-milk) seems no more reasonable than to simply assume that the property of having a brother is identical to the type brother, or that the property of owning a car is identical to the type car.

But although I will not assume that the things we do are doing-types, neither will I assume the opposite. The identity-claim is something we might have reason to accept on the basis of metaphysical theorizing. For instance, suppose we take on board the following commitments:

(i) The things we do are properties that we have.

(ii) There are no such things as universals, understood as repeatable, shareable properties. The only properties there are, are non-repeatable, non-shareable entities. All properties are particulars, i.e. tropes.\(^{19}\)

(iii) While there are no such things as universals, understood as repeatable, shareable properties, we may replace talk and thought about such things with talk and thought about the types under which tropes fall. Instead of saying that \(a\) and \(b\) have the same property (which is impossible), we say that \(a\) and \(b\) each have a property of the same type.\(^{20}\) Thus, every trope is an ‘instance’ of a general property.

(iv) Our doings of the things we do are tropes, i.e. instances of general properties.\(^{21}\)

(v) A doing of a thing is an instance of that thing of which it is a doing.

These commitments would justify us in identifying the things we do with doing-types. For if Randy’s act of picking up milk is a trope, and is moreover an instance of the general property \(\text{pick up milk}\), and general properties are just the types under which tropes fall, then the general property \(\text{pick up milk}\) is identical to the type \(\text{picking-up-of-milk}\). As it happens, I will argue in Chapter 4 that we ought to reject the combination of (i) – (v). But these commitments are not rejected on the grounds that they let us identify the things we do with doing-types. Although I distinguish the things we do from our doings of

\(^{19}\)For detailed discussion of trope theory, see (Campbell, 1990) and (Ehring, 2011). I should note that, although trope theorists insist that properties are, in an important sense, particulars, not all will agree that they are non-repeatable or non-shareable, as these claims are intuitively understood. For on some views, the exact same trope can exist at two distinct times, and is in that sense repeatable, and on some views, the exact same trope can be had by two distinct objects (though perhaps not at the same time), and is in that sense shareable.

\(^{20}\)Of course, types are prima facie universals, so the thoroughgoing opponent of such things will replace thought and talk about types with talk and thought about classes of tropes. Instead of saying that \(a\) and \(b\) each have a property of the same type, we say that they each have a property that is a member of the same class.

\(^{21}\)This claim would naturally be motivated by the view that events more generally are tropes. See Section 1.2.3 and Chapter 4 for more discussion of trope theories of events.
them, I do not take it as a datum that the things we do should also be distinguished from the types under which our doings fall.

1.2.3 Events

As I have said, I will be arguing that negative actions are events. There has been much dispute over the metaphysics of events, and here I register my commitments (or lack thereof) regarding some of these disputes.

The first dispute is one between general theories of what events are. While there does not seem to be a consensus view, three theories seem to be dominant. First, there is the property-exemplification theory (Kim, 1976; Goldman, 1970, ch.1), on which a (monadic\textsuperscript{22}) event is an exemplification of a universal by an object at a time. Exemplifications of universals are complex entities: “each individual [monadic] event has three unique constituents: a substance (the ‘constitutive object’ of the event), a property it exemplifies (the ‘constitutive property’ or ‘generic event’), and a time. An event is a complex of these three,” (Kim, 1976, 34). So, for example, if Randy picks up milk, then the event of his picking up milk is a complex entity that consists of Randy, the universal *picking up milk*, and the relevant time.

Some have taken Kim’s talk of ‘complexes’ to imply that, on this view, events are mereological sums of objects, properties, and times. This raises the immediate worry that the property-exemplification view is incompatible with a plausible account of the existence-conditions of events (Bennett, 1988, 90–91). Everyone, including Kim, thinks that the event of *x* $\phi$-ing at *t* exists only if *x* actually has the property of $\phi$-ing at *t* (Kim, 1976, 35). By contrast, on standard mereologies, a mereological sum comes into existence as soon as its parts exist. If events were just mereological sums of their constituents, there would be far more events than there actually are. For instance, the present moment, the property *exploding*, and I all exist, yet there is, thank goodness, no such event as me exploding at the present moment.

Fortunately, we need not think that events are just mereological sums of their constituents. We can think of them as states of affairs, as these are understood in David Armstrong’s (1997) metaphysics. An Armstrongian state of affairs is a complex of an object and a property, and it would be a fairly simple matter to extend this theory to allow complexes of objects, properties, and times. Crucially, the part-whole relation that binds the constituents of a state of affairs is not the part-whole relation as it is understood in classical mereology. The state of affairs that is *a*’s being $F$ does not come into existence automatically with *a* and $F$; rather, *a* must actually have $F$ in order for the state of affairs to come into being.\textsuperscript{23} We can say the same of Kim’s and Goldman’s events, thus giving them the correct existence-conditions.

Another view which understands events in terms of the exemplification of properties is the view that events are tropes, i.e. properties understood as particulars rather than universals (Bennett, 1988, ch.8; Ehring, 1997, ch.3). To see the difference between these two ways of thinking about properties, consider a case where two roses are the exact same shade of red. If we think about this situation in terms of universals, we will want to say that this shade of red is a single entity which is instantiated by both roses. If we think about this situation in terms of tropes, we will want to say that each of our two roses instantiates a different property — the colours of the roses are qualitatively identical, but they are

\textsuperscript{22}Kim distinguishes monadic from polyadic events. The former is the exemplification of a universal by a single object at a time, while the latter is the exemplification of a relational universal by two or more objects at a time. E.g. the event of Shem kicking Shaun is the exemplification of the relational property *kicking* by Shem and Shaun.

\textsuperscript{23}For details, including an account of what having a property consists in, see (Armstrong, 1997, 119–123).
numerically distinct, and there is no need to think of them as both instantiating a single universal.\footnote{In defending this view, Bennett takes himself to be explicating Kim’s own metaphysics. I doubt that Kim would recognize the trope view as his own, not least because, while Kim takes events to have objects, properties and times as constituents, a trope is supposed to just be a property. (Note that, while one might want to individuate tropes by their possessors or by their locations in time, that is not necessarily to say that a trope has its possessor or its location in time as a constituent.) What leads Bennett astray is that he thinks property-exemplifications, understood as complexes, are indistinguishable from facts, and that facts are not particulars. Since Kim is adamant that his events \textit{are} particulars (Kim, 1976, 40), Bennett thinks that Kim must have been groping towards a trope view.} If we think of events as tropes, then it seems that, if Randy picks up milk, the event of his picking up milk is a particular \textit{picking up milk} property.

Finally, there is the view most strongly associated with Donald Davidson, on which events form a \textit{sui generis} ontological category, irreducible to objects and their properties (Davidson, 1969; 1970).

Davidson emphasizes in many places that for him events are concrete particulars, and some have taken him to mean that events belong in the same category as ordinary, material objects. But this is something he explicitly denies:

The undulations of the ocean cannot be identified with the wave or the sum of waves that cross the sweep of the ocean, nor can the complex event composed of condensations and evaporations of endless water molecules be identified with the lenticular cloud. Occupying the same portion of space-time, event and object differ. \textit{One is an object which remains the same object through changes, the other a change in an object or objects} (1985b, 310–311, emphasis added).

The emphasized passage suggests, not only that we can distinguish a particular object from the particular events it undergoes, but that we can distinguish objects and events more generally. The passage comes from an exchange with Quine, and Davidson seems to agree with Quine that events are perduring objects, that is, they are spread out through time and have temporal parts. But whereas Quine had reduced ordinary material objects to events and processes (Quine, 1950), Davidson does not. Material objects are entities that endure through changes, and thus belong in a different category than events and processes. Rather than identify these two kinds of thing, Davidson treats events as “constituting a fundamental ontology category,” (1969, 180).

Rather than attempting to adjudicate the dispute between these views, in what follows I develop an account of negative actions as events that is neutral between these three theories. Whatever view you take about the nature of events, you can adopt my account of negative actions.

It is worth emphasizing my neutrality on the metaphysics of events, since I have often encountered, both in print and in conversation, the idea that I must hitch my wagon to a particular theory of what events are, namely the Davidsonian theory that events are \textit{sui generis}. There are two arguments for this conclusion. First, as I said in Section 1.1, the idea that actions are events is often motivated by a semantics for action sentences which treats them as existential quantifications over events. In Chapter 3, I will turn this into a motivation for thinking that negative actions are events, rather than absences thereof. I argue that the best semantics for \textit{negative} action sentences — that is, sentences which describe an agent as omitting to do something, refraining from doing it, etc. — are best analysed as existential quantifications over omissions, refrainments, and the like, where these are treated as events. Some have taken my commitment to this sort of Davidsonian analysis of action sentences (both positive and negative) to bring with it a commitment to a Davidson metaphysics of events. But that is simply false. The fact that action sentences are best analysed as existential quantifications over events shows, at most,
that there are such things as events. It does not tell us whether events are *sui generis*, or complexes of objects, properties and times, or tropes, or something else entirely.

The second argument is that my claim that negative actions are token-identical to positive ones is inconsistent with property-exemplification and trope theories of events. It is the task of Chapter 4 to deal with this argument. There I argue that the inconsistency arises, not from the view that an event is an exemplification (or particular instance) of a property *per se*, but rather from this view together with the assumption that, if doings are events, then they are exemplifications (or particular instances) of those things of which they are doings. I argue that this assumption can, and should, be rejected, and hence that neutrality can be maintained.

The second dispute concerns whether all events consist in an object changing over time. That is, the dispute concerns whether an object’s being *F* at *t*₁, and continuing to be *F* into *t*₂, should be counted as an *event*, or whether it must instead be relegated to a (supposedly distinct) ontological category, such as the category of *state*, the only legitimate events consisting in an object’s changing from being *F* at *t*₁ to being not-*F* at *t*₂.

The notion of an event is often tied to the notion of change. Thus, Kim says, “The term ‘event’ ordinarily implies change, and most changes are changes in a substance... A change in a substance occurs when that substance acquires a property it did not previously have, or loses a property it previously had,” (1976, 33). But although Kim takes changes to be the paradigm cases of events, he allows that ‘unchanges’ may be events, as well, (1976, 33). And he is right to do so, since the claim that all events involve change seems subject to counterexample. Here, for instance, is Helen Steward:

> If a demonstration is an event, surely a vigil, which can be a kind of demonstration, must be an event too. But it seems most unhappy to say that a vigil is composed of changes. The whole idea is that everyone should be still and silent. Obviously, there will be changes occurring at the region of the vigil during the time at which the vigil takes place — metabolic changes in the participants and breathing, for example — but these do not seem to be parts of the vigil... There might, of course, be changes that were not irrelevant — e.g. flickerings of candles, makings of speeches (assuming that makings of speeches could be regarded as composed of changes in the speaker) — but these do not seem at all essential to the vigil. If nobody remembered to bring a candle, and nobody decided to make a speech, it surely would not endanger in the least the vigil’s status as an event, (1997, 69).

Interestingly, Steward also appeals to refrainments to make her case that not all events involve changes.

> If I deliberately refrain from responding to your question, for example, it seems wrong to say that any change has thereby occurred in me. I may have been silent before and in saying nothing, I simply remain silent. To the extent that such events can be intentional actions, though, it is arguable that we ought not to exclude them from the class of events, (1997, 70).

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25See also (Davidson, 1969, 173) and (Lombard, 1986).

26It might seem that Steward has recently moved away from the claim that refrainments are intentional actions (to say nothing of the claim that intentional actions are events). For she seems insistent that to refrain from doing something is precisely not to exercise one’s power to act, and hence that refrainments are not actions (Steward, 2012b, 176–178; Steward, 2013b, 690–691). On the other hand, it may be that in these contexts, she is using ‘refrainment’ as a semi-technical term, a catch-all for those cases where an agent does not act in a certain way. In that case, she may allow that what ordinarily go by the label ‘refrainments’ are actions, and that these things do not fall under the label ‘refrainment’ as she is using it.
Following Steward and Kim, I will not assume that all events involve change. Thus, when I say that all negative actions are token-identical to positive events, I do not mean that they are identical to events in which an agent moves her body, or changes its position. In Steward’s example, her act of refraining from speaking might consist precisely in her keeping certain parts of her body still.

Finally, I should note that, in what follows, I will often speak of both positive and negative actions as bodily events, i.e. as events in which an agent changes the position of certain parts of her body, or keeps them in place. This is because my focus will be on bodily actions, as opposed to mental ones. There is plenty of dispute over the nature of mental actions. Are there such things? Does our agency over our minds differ in any significant way from the agency we have over our bodies? And if there are mental actions, are they reducible to bodily actions, or must they be treated as irreducibly mental? I will ignore all of these questions in what follows, keeping the focus on bodily actions, both positive and negative.

1.3 A Look Ahead

With those preliminary remarks out of the way, here is a look ahead at the chapters to come.

I have argued that the assumption that omissions and refrainments are not events, but absences thereof, generates a dilemma. Either we stand by a comprehensive, event-based theory of action, and draw the implausible conclusion that we can never manifest our agency by omitting to do things, or by refraining from doing them, or we give up the ambition of a comprehensive theory of action. In posing this dilemma, and particularly when presenting the first horn, I moved freely between the claim that we can manifest, or exercise, our agency by omitting and refraining, and the claim that omissions and refrainments are actions. But some philosophers have argued that this simple picture of agency is a mistake: we can exercise our agency otherwise than by acting, so we can allow that we sometimes manifest our agency by omitting or refraining, without thereby conceding that omissions and refrainments pose a problem for event-based theories of action.

In Chapter 2, I argue that the distinction between acting and ‘merely manifesting one’s agency’ is illusory. The claim that only actions can be manifestations of agency follows from the intuitive claims that agency is the power to act, and that a manifestation of a power is doing of whatever that power is a power to do. And while we might try to understand agency, not as the power to act, but rather as the power to do things intentionally, or to control the movement and position of one’s body, neither of these approaches will allow us to avoid the problem of negative actions. For neither approach allows us to easily distinguish actions from mere manifestations of agency, and to the extent that we can make this distinction, many omissions and refrainments clearly belong on the action side of the divide.

Having argued that the dilemma is genuine, I proceed in Chapter 3 to argue against the assumption that generates it, namely that omissions and refrainments are merely absences of events. I diagnose this assumption as arising from an often implicitly-held thesis about the analysis of negative action sentences, which I call ‘Deflationism.’ Deflationism says that ordinary action sentences are existential quantifications over events, just as Davidson argued, but that negative action sentences are the negations of ordinary ones, and so they are negative-existentials: to report an omission or refrainment is to report, not the occurrence of an event, but the absence of one. I argue that Deflationism is false. In order to best account for certain features of negative action sentences, we must analyse them as existential

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27See, e.g. the papers in (O’Brien & Soteriou, 2009).
quantifications over events that play a certain role: to report that \( x \) omitted to \( \phi \) is to report an event whose occurrence ensured (in a sense to be explained) that \( x \) did not \( \phi \).

In Chapter 4, I argue that this account of negative action sentences allows us to develop a functionalist metaphysics of negative actions, which in turns allows us to identify each negative action with a positive event. A negative action, on my view, is just an event that plays the special ‘ensuring’ role, and because it is positive events that play that role, a negative action is just a positive event. Thus, my view does not require negative actions to be objectionably negative entities, as absences are often thought to be. A large part of this chapter is devoted to showing that this view, which allows a single event to fall under two distinct positive and negative event-types, is compatible with both property-exemplification and trope theories of events, each of which initially seems to rule out token-identity in the absence of type-identity.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I consider some of the most popular arguments against identifying negative actions with positive events. These arguments generally work by appeal to Leibniz’s Law: a given negative action cannot be identical to a given positive event, because these two things do not have all of the same properties. I first consider arguments that appeal to differences in spatiotemporal location, modal profile, and causal role. I argue that my functionalist account of negative actions, together with the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them that I sketched in Section 1.2.2, can avoid all of these objections. I then turn to objections that appeal to properties which are not explicitly spatiotemporal, modal, or causal — e.g. ‘This positive event is fast/slow, or elegant/inelegant, while this negative action is not.’ I claim that the predicates used in these arguments are sort-relative — so that a single event can be, e.g. fast with respect to one kind under which it falls, but not fast with respect to another — and respond to recent arguments against this strategy for defending identity-claims.

The resulting view of negative actions as events is superior to the view that they are mere absences, in several respects. From the perspective of the philosophy of action, it allows us to respect the intuitive claim that to manifest one’s agency just is to act, and hence that an event-based theory of action is, at the same time, an event-based theory of agency. Furthermore, it allows to do so while at the same time accommodating omissions and refrainments within such event-based theories. From the perspective of the philosophy of language, it pairs a picture of what negative actions are with an analysis of negative action sentences, one which does a better job accounting for the behaviour of such sentences than the often-assumed deflationist alternative. Finally, from the perspective of metaphysics, it allows us to identify negative actions with the ordinary, positive events that are in our ontology anyway. Furthermore, it allows us to do so without having to reject plausible property-exemplification or trope theories of events, and without succumbing to arguments from Leibniz’s Law.
Chapter 2

The Need for Negative Actions

2.1 Negative Actions, or Mere Manifestations of Agency?

In the previous chapter, I argued that the assumption that omissions and refrainments are not events, but absences thereof, generates a dilemma. Either we stand by a comprehensive, event-based theory of action, and draw the implausible conclusion that we can never manifest our agency by omitting to do things, or by refraining from doing them, or we give up the ambition of a comprehensive theory of action. In posing this dilemma, and particularly when presenting the first horn, I moved freely between the claim that we can manifest, or exercise, our agency by omitting and refraining, and the claim that omissions and refrainments are actions. That is, I assumed a very simple picture of the relationship between action and agency, according to which manifesting one’s agency just is acting. Call this ‘The Simple Picture’, or ‘TSP.’ If TSP is right, then an event-based theory of action is, at the same time, an event-based theory of agency. That is why, if omissions and refrainments are not events, and hence not actions by the lights of an event-based theory, we must apparently conclude that they are not manifestations of our agency.

But according to some defenders of the view that omissions and refrainments are absences, TSP is false. Acting is just one way in which we manifest our agency, but we can also manifest it by not acting. Call this ‘The Complex Picture’, or ‘TCP.’ If TCP is right, then an event-based theory of action is not an event-based theory of agency, and accepting the former does not commit us to accepting the latter. Thus, we can adopt an event-based theory of action, and deny that omissions and refrainments are actions, while at the same time allowing that they are manifestations of agency (we might say that they are, in contrast with actions, ‘mere’ manifestations of agency).

My purpose in this chapter is to show that this way out of the dilemma is a dead end. I begin in Section 2.2 by developing an argument in favour of TSP, which relies on the ideas that (i) agency is the power act, and (ii) a manifestation of a power is a doing of whatever that power is a power to do. In Section 2.3 I consider how a proponent of TCP might reject (i) by treating agency, not as the power to act, but as the ability to control one’s own body. It seems as though a part of one’s body, and hence a doing that involves that part, might be under one’s control even if that doing is not an action, and so this picture seems capable of motivating TCP. In Sections 2.4 and 2.5 I argue that this appearance is illusory. I argue that, whether the relevant notion of control is cashed out in terms of causation by,

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1See (Clarke, 2010, 151; 2014, 85–86) and (Moore, 2010, 34) for this defence of event-based theories of action.
or sensitivity to, one’s reasons and intentions, or whether it is cashed out in terms of an agent-causal power, only actions can be manifestations of agency. Furthermore, I argue that, even if I am wrong, and we can use the notion that agency is the power of control in order to distinguish actions from mere manifestations of agency, at least some omissions and refrainments must still belong in the category of action.

2.2 An Argument for the Simple Picture

My argument for TSP begins from a very general claim about the nature of agency. Agency, it seems, is a property — it is the property which distinguishes agents from non-agents. More than that, it seems to be a property of a certain interesting kind: namely, it is a power, or a dispositional property. While the nature of the distinction between dispositional and non-dispositional properties is disputed, the following characterization should not be too controversial. First, for an object to have a dispositional property is for it to have the potential to behave in a certain way, or at least to have the potential to behave that way in certain circumstances. Water-solubility is a prima facie dispositional property by this criterion, because for an object to be water-soluble is for it to have the potential to dissolve when placed in water. Being six feet tall, by contrast, is a prima facie non-dispositional property, because for an object to be six feet tall appears to be for it to actually be a certain way, and not primarily for it to have the potential to behave in any particular way in any particular circumstances. Second, a dispositional property is one for which we can distinguish between its mere possession and its ‘manifestation’: to possess a dispositional property is merely to have the potential to behave a certain way; to manifest it is to actually behave that way. Again, water-solubility is a prima facie dispositional property by this criterion: we can distinguish between an object’s merely possessing the property of water-solubility — as when a sugar cube sits on top of a dry surface — and its manifesting that disposition — as when a sugar cube is actually placed in water. Being six feet tall, by contrast, is a prima facie non-dispositional property, because we cannot distinguish between this property’s possession and its manifestation. To possess this property is not merely to have the potential to be a certain way, but to actually be that way, so there is nothing more to the manifestation of this property than its possession.

By these same criteria, agency is a prima facie dispositional property. It seems that we can distinguish between the mere possession of agency and its manifestation — when I am in a deep sleep, for instance, I do not thereby cease to be an agent, but I am not actually manifesting, or ‘exercising’, my agency. And thus it seems that to possess the property of agency, to be an agent, is to have the potential to behave in a certain way, a potential which need not be actualized.

If agency is a power to do something, or at least to do it in certain circumstances, then what exactly is it a power to do? The obvious answer is that it is a power to act. After all, to possess this power is to be an agent, and so possessing this power is what separates agents from non-agents. That means that the thing agency is a power to do is something that agents can do but which non-agents cannot, and it seems that the one thing agents can do but which non-agents cannot do is act. Agents and non-agents alike can do all sorts of things without acting. A volume of water can dissolve a cube of sugar, but it does not thereby act, at least not in the sense in which philosophers of action are interested. Likewise, an agent in a deep sleep can toss and turn, but she does not thereby act. But only an agent is capable of acting.

These points might seem like obvious, and even trivial, points about the terminology of ‘acting’ and
‘agency’, from which no useful insight could be drawn. But it is important to notice that they lend strong intuitive support to The Simple View, on which to manifest one’s agency just is to act. If to possess a dispositional property is to have the potential to do a certain thing, then to manifest this property is to actually do that thing: to be water-soluble is to have the potential to be dissolved by water, and so to manifest that property is to actualize that potential by actually being dissolved by water. Thus, if to possess the power of agency is to have the potential to act, then to manifest one’s agency is to actualize that potential by acting. There is no conceptual space for the possibility of an agent exercising her agency without acting.

It might be objected that this argument assumes a false principle about powers and their manifestations. I assumed that if $F$ is the power to $\phi$, then it is manifested when, and only when, an object that has $F \phi$s. This is the principle that powers and dispositions are individuated by their manifestations (Molnar, 2003, 193; Lowe, 2010b, 10). But one might think that an object can manifest its power to $\phi$ even when it does not succeed in $\phi$-ing. Consider the following example, due to George Molnar: “Two draft horses are pulling a barge by ropes, one from one side of the canal, the other from the opposite side. The direction of the pull by each side is at an angle to the canal itself. The outcome is that the barge moves straight ahead... although nothing pulls it along the straight line,” (Molnar, 2003, 195). Although Molnar himself did not take the case in this way, one might take it to be a case where a power to $\phi$ is manifested even though the relevant object does not $\phi$. Consider the horse on the left side of the canal, and suppose that if it had exerted the same force as it actually does, but there had been no countervailing force from the other side of the canal, the barge would actually have moved towards the left side of the canal, instead of straight ahead. Then, one might say, when the horse exerts that same force in the actual scenario, what it is doing is manifesting its power to move the barge towards the left side of the canal, even though it does not actually succeed in so-moving it.

I do not think this is a plausible thing to say about the case. We can say that, in both the actual and counterfactual scenarios, the horse manifests its power to exert a certain force on the barge, and we can say that whether the manifestation of that power will have, as its effect, a movement of the barge toward the left side of the canal depends on what other powers are at work, and specifically on what other forces are acting upon the barge. There is no clear need to say that the horse manifests its power to move the barge to the left side of the canal in both scenarios — certainly nothing would be gained by way of explanation of the barge’s movement — and so nothing is to be gained by taking the case to be a counterexample to the principle that powers and dispositions are individuated by their manifestations.

Furthermore, even if we suppose that this case, and others like it, are counterexamples to the principle, this will be of no help to someone who rejects TSP on the grounds that cases of omission and refrainment are cases where the power to act is manifested even though the agent does not act. For what drives the supposed counterexamples is the presence of countervailing powers or forces: $x$ manifests its power to $\phi$, but due to the operation of other powers (perhaps powers of some distinct object, $y$, but perhaps not), $x$ is prevented from $\phi$-ing. The parallel case, for the power of agency, is a case where an agent tries to act in a certain way, but is somehow prevented from doing so. Such cases are, at best, highly atypical cases of omission and refrainment. If I attempt to pick up my friend at the airport, but am prevented from doing so, it would be strange to say that I omitted to pick him up. Certainly I did not intentionally omit to pick him up, since I was actively trying to pick him up, and actively trying to $\phi$ seems incompatible with intentionally omitting to $\phi$ (Clarke, 2010, 136). One might think that cases where one refrains from $\phi$-ing, although one tried to $\phi$ and was prevented from doing so, are easier to
come by: if, in the manner of Dr. Strangelove, I attempt to raise my right arm, but use my left arm to hold it in place, might I count as refraining from raising my arm? I doubt it. But even if I do, this is an atypical case. Although refraining from φ-ing may necessarily involve conscious effort not to φ on my part, it surely does not require, and hardly ever involves, actively thwarting one’s own attempt to φ.

A different way to reject the principle is to appeal, not to counteracted powers, but to what Sergio Tenenbaum calls ‘gappy actions,’ (Tenenbaum, 2010, 132). Consider a case where I am going for a walk, and in the middle of my walk I stop to browse the local bookstore. It seems right to say, while I am in the bookstore, that I am still going for a walk — my act of browsing the bookstore is a part of the overall process of going for a walk. Thus, it seems right to say that I am manifesting my power to go for a walk. Nonetheless, there is a stricter sense in which it seems I am not going for a walk, while I browse the bookstore — I am not walking, after all, or at least I need not be walking at every moment while I browse the store. Thus, my act of browsing the bookstore is not at the same time an act of going for a walk. That is why my act of going for a walk is ‘gappy’: although it is true that I went for a walk at some interval \( T \), it is not true that I was going for a walk at every moment in \( t \). Now, if TSP is right, then I can only manifest my power to go for a walk in act of going for a walk, and so TSP seems to suggest that that power is not being manifested while I am at the bookstore. But that conflicts with the natural thought that I am still going for a walk. Should we not say, instead, that what we have here is a case where a non-φ-ing is a manifestation of the power to φ?

There are two ways of responding to this case, each of which shows that everything we want to say about it can be said within TSP. The first response is to say that whatever constitutes a ‘gap’ in an act of φ-ing is not literally a part of that action, any more than a hole in a wall is a part of the wall. My act of going for a walk — that is, my manifestation of the power to do so — consist only of those bits of activity that we can describe as ‘going for a walk’ in the stricter sense. My act of browsing the bookstore cannot be described that way, so it is not literally a part of my act of going for a walk. Thus, we need not think that my act of browsing the bookstore is a manifestation of the power to go for a walk.

It might be objected that this first response conflicts with the natural claim that my act of going for a walk occupies the interval \( T \), since the response implies that it does not occupy the whole interval, but rather occupies (at least) two unconnected sub-intervals. But there is no obvious reason to think that these two claims are in conflict, since the notion of ‘occupation’ or ‘location’ is not univocal. Borrowing Josh Parsons’ terminology (2007, 203), we can distinguish the following four relations of occupation:

- \( a \) is weakly located at \( T \) iff some part of \( a \) is in \( T \). E.g., a New Year’s Eve party weakly occupies both December 31st and January 1st.
- \( a \) is entirely located at \( T \) iff no part of \( a \) is outside \( T \). E.g., an hour-long lecture is entirely located at the day on which it occurs.
- \( a \) pervades \( T \) iff no part of \( T \) is free of \( a \). E.g., an hour-long lecture pervades both the first half-hour and the second half-hour.
- \( a \) is exactly located at \( T \) iff \( a \) is entirely located at \( T \) and \( a \) pervades \( T \). E.g., an hour-long lecture is exactly located at the hour in which it occurs.

The objection assumes that, when we say that my act of going for a walk occupies \( T \), we mean at least that it pervades \( T \), and perhaps moreover that it is exactly located at \( T \). But I see no reason

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{Parsons does not construe these relations as holding only between events or objects and intervals of time, but also as holding between events or objects and regions of space, or regions of spacetime.}\]
to make that assumption. If I say ‘My wife and I played a game of chess today’, that claim is not automatically interpreted as the claim that the chess game pervaded the whole day. At most, it seems, what I communicate is that the game is entirely located on this day. But that is consistent with the game only running for two hours, from 7am to 9am. Indeed, it is consistent with the game running for two non-consecutive hours, from 7am to 8am and then from 5pm to 6pm. Likewise, if we say that I went for a walk between 2pm and 3pm, as we naturally would, we seem to be communicating, at most, that my walk is entirely located in that two-hour interval. There is no obvious reason to assume that my walk pervades that interval, or that it is exactly located at it.

The first way of responding to the problem began with the denial that my act of browsing the bookstore was part of my act of going for a walk. But suppose that we allow that the latter is a part of the former. Still, we can deny that my act of browsing the bookstore is a manifestation of my power to go for a walk. It may be true that, in some sense, I am still going for a walk while I browse the bookstore. But, the second response goes, this does not mean that I am actually manifesting my power to go for a walk at that time. All it means is that my act of browsing the bookstore is part of a longer process which is a manifestation of that power. A manifestation of the power to \( \phi \) need not be composed solely of manifestations of that power.

The argument for TSP stands. A power to \( \phi \) can only have \( \phi \)-ings as manifestations, and therefore if agency is the power to act — which it seems to be — then it can only have actions as manifestations. There is no conceptual room for ‘mere manifestations of agency.’

2.3 Motivating the Complex Picture

2.3.1 Agency and Control

The argument of the preceding section was quite simple, appealing only to the claims that agency is the power to \textit{act}, and that a manifestation of a power is a particular doing of whatever that power is a power to do. Given the simplicity of the argument, and the fact that TSP seems platitudeous, what could motivate us to say that some doings of ours — in particular, our omissions and refrainments — could be manifestations of agency without thereby being actions?

A plausible motivation for TCP should, I think, be independent of the metaphysical issue of whether omissions and refrainments are events. Consider the dialectic. Certain philosophers develop what seem to be event-based theories of agency. I say that they seem to be event-based theories of agency, and not just event-based theories of action, because unless concerns are raised about whether negative actions could be events, the theory of action and the theory of agency are rarely, if ever, distinguished. As Jennifer Hornsby puts it, a proponent of a typical event-based theory of this sort “assumes that the phenomenon of human agency, and not just a category of events, is delimited when it is said which events are actions,” (2004, 4). Once it becomes evident that negative actions pose a problem for this sort of picture, however, a proponent of TCP insists that there is a distinction to be drawn between the theory of agency, on one hand, and the theory of action, on the other. What seemed to be an event-based theory of agency, she insists, is in fact only an event-based theory of action. While her theory of action requires all actions to be events, this does not commit her to the more general claim that, whenever an agent manifests her agency, there occurs some event that is its manifestation.\footnote{See, again, (Moore, 2010, 34) and (Clarke, 2010, 151) for examples of this retreat from a theory of agency to a theory of action.}
If this move is going to be anything more than an *ad hoc* attempt to save one’s theory from counterexamples, then we had better have something to say about the difference between acting and merely manifesting one’s agency, beyond the claim that, whenever one acts there occurs an event that is one’s action/manifestation of agency, but that this is not the case when one ‘merely’ manifests one’s agency. If that is all we can say on behalf of TCP, then it seems that the proponent of an event-based theory of action has simply redefined the notion of ‘action’ so that anything which is not an event turns out (conveniently) not have been in the purview of the theory to begin with.

Thus, the distinction between actions and mere manifestations of agency cannot simply be the distinction between those manifestations of agency that are events and those that (supposedly) are not. Rather, we must be able to say something about the distinction that is independent of such ontological concerns. The category of ‘mere manifestations of agency’ must be so-understood that it can, in principle, have instances other than omissions, refrainments and the like, and which are events in their own right. In the remainder of this section, I develop an account of the distinction that meets this constraint, on behalf of my opponent.

The notion of agency is often tied to the notion of control (Bishop, 1989; Frankfurt, 1978; Steward, 2009). An agent is something that has control over at least some parts of its body, and hence some of whose doings are under its control. If I raise my arm, for instance, then I control the movement of my arm; I thereby manifest my agency, and I can be held responsible for the movement of my arm. By contrast, if my arm simply shoots up as the result of a spasm, then I do not control the movement of my arm. I do not manifest my agency, and so I cannot be held responsible for the movement of my arm, unless I foresaw the movement and did nothing to prevent it. Thus, instead of merely saying that agency is the power to act, we can say that it is the power to control the movement and position of (at least some parts of) one’s body.

This connection between agency and control can be used to motivate TCP, since there are different ways in which the movement or position of one’s body can under one’s control, and it seems that not all of them render that movement or position into an action.

My argument for this claim works by analogy. Imagine that I am driving my car down the road. Many parts of the car are under my control while am driving, but they are not all under my control in the same way. There are some parts that I am directly controlling, in the sense that I am affecting their movement or position without having to move or position any other parts of the car in order to do so. For example, as I make a turn, I am directly controlling the steering wheel, since I do not need to move or position any other parts of the car in order to turn the steering wheel. There are also some parts that I am only indirectly controlling, in the sense that I am moving or positioning some other parts of the car in order to affect them. As I make a turn, I am indirectly controlling the wheels of the car, since I am moving the steering wheel in order to affect them. Finally, there are some parts that I am not actually controlling, either directly or indirectly, but which remain under my control in the sense that I could control them in these ways. These parts are, we may say, ‘merely’ under my control. The rear-view mirror typically falls into this category: I am rarely adjusting it, but its movement and position remains under my control, because I could adjust it.

By analogy, we can distinguish those parts of one’s body that one is directly controlling, those one is only indirectly controlling, and those which are merely under one’s control. For instance, if I raise my right arm — where this means that I do not use any other part of my body in order to make it rise, but simply raise it — then I am directly controlling the movement of my arm. By contrast, if I
grasp my right arm with my left hand, and use my left arm to lift it, then I am indirectly controlling the movement of my arm. Finally, there are cases where I am not controlling the movement or position of my right arm, and yet it remains under my control. We might think that a typical case in which my arm is hanging at my side is like this, although one might argue that even then I am directly controlling my arm, since I am keeping it at my side. A clearer case is one in which my right arm is paralysed, so that I cannot exert direct control over it. Even in such a case, my arm is under my control, since I could use my left arm to lift it.

Now, if we tie agency to control, then an action is a controlling: it is an event in which an agent exercises control over the movement or position of her body.\footnote{Here, ‘controlling’ is intended to be neutral between direct controlling and indirect controlling: an event in which I directly move my right arm, and an event in which I move it indirectly through the use of my left arm, both count as actions. One might have other views which require all controlling to be direct. E.g. Davidson argued that there is no such thing as irreducible agent-causation, and that causation is always a relation between events. On his view, an event in which I cause my right arm to rise is, not an event in which I stand in a causal relationship to my arm’s going up, but rather some event that stands in that relationship (Davidson, 1971, 52–53). Thus, he would presumably say that the event in which I raise my right arm using my left arm, and the event in which I raise my left arm directly, are identical, and hence that every indirect controlling is also a direct controlling. I do not assume such an account.} Could the movement or position that is thus controlled count as an action, by virtue of being under the agent’s control?

It seems that a controlled movement or position could only thereby count as action if it was directly controlled.\footnote{I say ‘only if’, not ‘if’, since some views of action will not even allow this much. See below.} The argument for this claim is as follows. First, I take it that, on the view of agency being developed, an exercise of direct control over one’s body will count as an action, and not as a mere manifestation of agency — e.g. when I raise my right arm directly, I exercise direct control over my right arm, and this exercise of direct control is what my act of raising my arm consists in. Now, on some views, an action (i.e. an exercise of direct control) can be identified with its intrinsic doing (i.e. with the event that is directly controlled). Consider, for example, the so-called ‘standard story’, according to which an action is a bodily event that is caused (in the appropriate way) by certain of the agent’s mental states, the contents of which serve to rationalize the behaviour (Davidson, 1963). According to this story, the difference between an event of me raising my arm and an event in which my arm merely rises is purely extrinsic: an arm-raising is just an arm-rising that has the right kind of causal history. When I raise my arm, and so my arm rises, we do not need to posit two distinct events, an arm-raising and an arm-rising. Rather, there is just one event which can be described in two different ways. Thus, on a view of this sort, it is not just direct controlling which count as actions, but also doings which are directly controlled, since every directly controlled doing is identical to a direct controlling.

But note, second, that this reasoning will not extend to those events that are indirectly controlled, or merely under one’s control. In the case where I raise my arm indirectly, using my left arm to lift it, we should not say that the event of my right arm rising is an action, because it does not have the right kind of causal history. It is not a direct effect of rationalizing mental states, but rather an effect of the event of my left arm rising, which is a direct effect of rationalizing mental states. In this case, we have two distinct events: my raising of my left arm (which is, we may suppose, identical to the rising of that arm), which is an action; and the rising of my right arm, which is its effect. Similarly, in the case where my right arm is paralysed, the event of my arm hanging at my side is not an action, because it does not have the right causal history. Thus, on the standard story, directly controlled doings are actions, because they are identical to exercises of direct control, but indirectly controlled doings and doings that are merely under one’s control are not.

Of course, not all views of agency will allow actions to be identified with their intrinsic doings. For
example, according to recent agent-causal theories, the difference between an event (if it is an event) of me directly raising my right arm and an event of my right arm rising is not purely extrinsic, but rather a difference in their natures. The latter is an event in which my arm moves\textsubscript{T} from one position to another, while the former is a manifestation of a causal power, an ‘event’ in which I move\textsubscript{T} my arm. These two are not identical. At best, the latter has the former as a constituent, since it consists in the exemplification of a causal relationship between me the movement\textsubscript{I} of my arm. Thus, a proponent of this sort of theory will not identify exercises of direct control with directly controlled doings, and so she will not allow the latter to count as actions. My point, however, is that a controlled doing is an action only if it is directly controlled. Proponents of both the standard story and agent-causal theories can agree that indirectly controlled doings, and doings that are merely under one’s control, are not actions.

Nonetheless, it can seem as though movements or positions of these latter two sorts can still be manifestations of agency. When I use my left arm to raise my right arm, the event of my right arm rising is a manifestation of my agency, because it is a doing of mine whose occurrence is a consequence of an action of mine. Similarly, in the case where my right arm is paralysed, my right arm’s hanging at my side is a manifestation of my agency, because I could have used my left arm to move my right, and so the position of my right arm is a doing of mine whose occurrence is a consequence of how I choose (or rather, do not choose) to manifest my agency. Thus, these reflections on the nature of control could be used to motivate TCP, on which an agent can manifest her agency without acting — indeed, as we will see, some actual proponents of TCP seem to be motivated by something like the line of thought just sketched.

Moreover, this motivation for TCP is independent of concerns about negative actions. The cases I have considered in which a bodily movement or position is not being directly controlled are seemingly cases in which those movements and positions constitute positive doings rather than negative doings. When I use my left arm to raise my right, the event of my arm rising is a positive event: it consists in my arm actually moving in a certain way. Likewise, when my right arm hangs at my side, the event of my arm’s so hanging is a positive one: it does not merely consist in my arm not moving in such-and-such a way, but rather consists in my arm actually being in a certain position for a period of time. Thus, the sceptic about negative actions need not rest her rejection of TSP solely on cases of omission and refrainment. Instead, she can argue that omissions and refrainments are relevantly similar to positive doings which are ‘mere manifestations of agency’: although negative actions are not constituted by bodily events, they are nonetheless doings which are either indirectly controlled, or merely under the agent’s control.

### 2.3.2 Clarifying the Picture

Before I turn to critical assessment of this picture of agency and its application to negative actions, some points of clarification are in order.

The first point of clarification concerns just what it is that an agent has control over, and what the different varieties of control consist in. In Section 2.3.1 I said that an agent has control over the movement of (at least some parts of) its body, but I did not distinguish the transitive and intransitive senses of ‘movement.’ In the transitive sense, a movement is an event in which one object moves another object (possibly itself), while in the intransitive sense, it is an event in which an object simply moves (possibly as a result of being moved by some other object). Following Hornsby (1980, 2–3), I will use the subscripts ‘\textsubscript{T}’ and ‘\textsubscript{I}’ to mark this distinction. When I say that an agent has control over the movement of its
body, I am concerned with movements\textsubscript{T} — it is particular movements\textsubscript{T} that may be directly controlled, indirectly controlled, or merely under the agent’s control. For example, when I directly raise my arm, the event of my raising my arm is a movement\textsubscript{T}, an event in which I directly control the movement\textsubscript{T} of my arm.

In addition to having control over the movement\textsubscript{T} of their bodies, I claimed, agents have control over the position of their bodies. Sometimes, agents act without moving\textsubscript{T} their bodies (consider a soldier standing at attention, holding her body perfectly still). In such cases, they act by exercising control over the position of their bodies, not by exercising control over a movement\textsubscript{T}.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, there must be a distinction between those events in which agents exercise control over the positions of their bodies and those events which consist of their bodies being in those positions, one which parallels the distinction between movements\textsubscript{T} and movements\textsubscript{I}. The subscripts ‘\textsubscript{T}’ and ‘\textsubscript{I}’ are not well-suited to this purpose.

For an agent to position an object, in the transitive sense, is for it to move\textsubscript{T} that object into a certain position. But while a solider might initially need to move\textsubscript{T} her body into position in order to stand at attention, she does not need to keep moving\textsubscript{T} her body into that position. What she needs to do, rather, is keep her body in that position, without moving\textsubscript{T} it. Thus, we need some other way of marking the distinction.

The solution is to appeal to a more general distinction between actions, ‘intrinsic doings’, and ‘mere doings.’ We can clarify the notion of an intrinsic doing as follows. Let ‘\Phi\textsubscript{A}’ be a variable for action-types, and ‘\phi\textsubscript{A}’ a variable for its tokens. Many, if not all, action-types \Phi\textsubscript{A} are such that there is some distinct event-type, \Psi, such that (i) it is necessary that, if a \phi\textsubscript{A} occurs, then a \psi occurs, but (ii) it is not necessary that, if a \psi occurs, then a \phi\textsubscript{A} occurs. For example, if I raise my arm, and so a raising of my arm occurs, then it follows that my arm rises, that is, that a rising of my arm occurs. But it is not true that if a rising of my arm occurs, then a raising of my arm also occurs, since my arm could rise without me raising it (e.g. a rising of my arm could be an involuntary spasm). When an event of this type occurs, and it follows upon or results from the occurrence of a \phi\textsubscript{A}, then that event is an ‘intrinsic doing.’\textsuperscript{7}

While I just introduced the relationship between action-types and intrinsic doing-types using distinct Greek letters, ‘\Phi’ and ‘\Psi’, it is helpful to use the same letter in order to encode the fact that if an action of this type occurs, then an intrinsic doing of this type occurs. When it is useful to do so, I will use the subscript ‘\textsubscript{ID}’ to distinguish intrinsic doings from actions. Thus, where a \phi\textsubscript{A} is an action, a \phi\textsubscript{ID} is its intrinsic doing. Note that the common variable should not be taken to suggest that, in English or any other natural language, there is always a straightforward transformation from a term referring an action-type to a term referring to an intrinsic doing-type. Sometimes there is, as with ‘raise’ and ‘rise’, but this need not be the case — e.g. there may be no way to describe an event intrinsic to a run\textsubscript{A} other than ‘such-and-such a motion of one’s legs,’ (Ruben, 2003, 46).

With actions and intrinsic doings so-distinguished, we may define the class of mere doings as the class of those events in which agents do things, but which are neither actions nor intrinsic doings. For example, if I kick my spouse in my sleep, then the event of me kicking her is neither an action nor an

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\textsuperscript{6}See Section 1.2.3.

\textsuperscript{7}My distinction between actions and intrinsic doings is also similar to the distinction between actions and their intrinsic events, where any event-type \Psi which satisfies conditions (i) and (ii) above counts as event intrinsic to an action. E.g. the fact that I kill the Queen entails that the Queen dies, but not vice-versa, and so the Queen’s death is an event intrinsic to my act of killing her (Ruben, 2003, 44). My category of intrinsic doings is narrower than the category of intrinsic events: it encompasses only those \psi\textsubscript{N}s that are doings by an agent \textsubscript{N}, such that if x \phi\textsubscript{A}, then a \phi\textsubscript{N} occurs, but not vice-versa. Since the Queen’s death is not an event in which I do anything, it is not a doing intrinsic to my killing of her.
intrinsic doing. When it is helpful to do so, I will use the subscript ‘\text{MD}’ to distinguish mere doings from events of these other kinds.

The distinction between movements\text{T} and movements\text{I} is one instance of this more general distinction between actions, on one hand, and intrinsic doings and mere doings, on the other. When I raise my right arm directly, without doing anything else in order to do so, my raising of my arm is an action, while the event of my arm rising it is intrinsic event. By contrast, when I use my left arm in order to raise my right, the rising of my right arm is not an intrinsic doing, but a mere doing. In such a case, the rising of my left arm is an intrinsic doing which has the rising of my right arm as an effect.

But we can also apply this more general distinction to cases in which an agent acts without moving\text{T} her body. If I keep my right arm at my side — where this does not mean that I do anything else to hold it in place, but rather that I simply keep it at my side — the event of my arm remaining in that position is an intrinsic doing. By contrast, if I use my left arm in order to keep my right arm in place, then the event of my arm remaining in position is a mere doing.

We can use this threefold distinction between actions, intrinsic doings, and mere doings to clarify the notions of an event being directly controlled, its being indirectly controlled, and its merely being under one’s control:

**Direct Control** \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is directly controlled by \(x\) if and only if: (i) \(x\) is \(\phi_A\)-ing; (ii) \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is the intrinsic doing of \(x\)’s \(\phi_A\)-ing, i.e. it is a \(\phi_{ID}\); and (iii) \(x\) does not need to do anything else in order to \(\phi\).

**Indirect Control** \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is indirectly controlled by \(x\) iff: (i) the event of \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is a result (causal or otherwise) of \(x\)’s \(\psi\)-ing, where \(x\)’s \(\psi\)-ing \(\neq\) \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing; and (ii) \(x\)’s \(\psi\)-ing is either the intrinsic doing of \(x\)’s \(\psi_A\)-ing, or a mere doing which is itself a result of an intrinsic doing by \(x\).\(^8\)

**Under Control** \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is merely under \(x\)’s control iff: (i) the event of \(x\)’s \(\phi\)-ing is neither directly nor indirectly controlled by \(x\); and (ii) there is some way \(x\) could have acted such that, had \(x\) acted that way, \(x\) would have ceased \(\phi\)-ing.

Note that, according to this way of clarifying the distinction, the only bodily events that an agent can directly control are the intrinsic doings of that agent’s actions — an agent may have indirect control over her own mere doings, or have her own mere doings under her control, but she cannot control them directly.

The second point of clarification concerns how this picture is to be extended to cover negative actions, such as omissions and refrainments. So far, the notion of an agent’s particular doing of something being under her control has been explained in terms of those doings which are constituted by bodily events, whether these be movements or positions. Thus, it is events that have been said to be under an agent’s control. Can we extend the framework to those doings which, according to my opponent, consist simply in the absence of events of a certain kind, or perhaps in the fact that there are no events of that kind?

To see why this extension might seem problematic, consider how the notion of direct control might be applied to an omission. Following the definition above, we say that \(x\)’s omission to \(\phi\) is directly controlled by \(x\) iff: (i) \(x\) is omitting \(A\) to \(\phi\); (ii) \(x\)’s omission to \(\phi\) is the intrinsic doing of \(x\)’s omission \(A\) to \(\phi\), i.e. it is an omission \(ID\) to \(\phi\); and (iii) \(x\) does not need to do anything else in order to omit \(A\) to \(\phi\). Notice that we have applied the subscript ‘\(A\)’ to the word ‘omission’, suggesting that an omission to

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\(^8\)Here, ‘result’ does not mean ‘proximate result.’ One event can be a result of another even if there is a chain of events connecting them.
ϕ can be an action. But this is exactly what my opponent denies, so shouldn’t she reject this way of extending the framework?

I do not think so. Although my opponent denies that omissions can be actions, she can still extend this framework for understanding the distinct notions of control to cover them — she just needs to insist that no omission actually satisfies the conditions for being directly controlled by an agent. And indeed, if an omission to ϕ is simply an absence of events in which one ϕs, or perhaps the fact that there are no such events, then this is a perfectly sensible position to take. For intuitively, what an agent has direct control over are the actual movement I and position of her body: she exercises direct control over her body by moving it in a certain way, or by keeping it in a certain position. Now, if she moves T or positions her body in a certain way, then this may have as a consequence that she does not move or position it in some other way — e.g. if I keep my hands at my sides, I thereby ensure that they are not also engaged in the movement I that would be required if I were to reach for a piece of chocolate, and I thereby omit to do so — but it seems that this absence, or fact, is indirectly controlled, not directly controlled. It is the result of a movement I or position, which is itself a doing intrinsic to my act of keeping my hands at my sides. I exercise direct control over the movement I and position of my hands by keeping them at my sides, and thereby bring about an absence of events in which I reach for a chocolate, or perhaps the fact that there are no such events.

There is no similar concern that an omission to ϕ will not meet the criteria for being indirectly controlled. Following the definition above, x’s omission to ϕ is indirectly controlled iff: (i) x’s omission to ϕ is a result (causal or otherwise) of x’s ψ-ing, where x’s ψ-ing ≠ x’s omission to ϕ; and (ii) x’s ψ-ing is either the intrinsic doing of x’s ψA-ing, or it is a mere doing which is itself a result (causal or otherwise) of an intrinsic doing by x. In the example above, we said that my omission to reach for a piece of chocolate is an absence, or a fact, which results from an event in which my hands stay at my sides, an event which is itself a doing intrinsic to my act of keeping my hands at my sides. Thus, given that account of what my omission is, the definition confirms that that omission is indirectly controlled.

Similarly, there is no immediate concern that an omission to ϕ will not meet the criteria for being merely under one’s control. x’s omission to ϕ is merely under x’s control iff: (i) x’s omission to ϕ is neither directly nor indirectly controlled by x; and (ii) there is some way x could have acted such that, had x acted that way, x would have ceased omitting to ϕ. We have seen that, given that omissions are not themselves bodily events, it is plausible that none of them are directly controlled. What is required, in order for an omission not to be indirectly controlled, is that this omission not be a result of an intrinsic doing. Suppose that I omit to raise my right arm, but that I am not performing any actions with that arm, such as an act of keeping it in place. The position of my arm is not an intrinsic doing. Then, plausibly, my omission is not a result of an intrinsic doing, and so condition (i) is met. Condition (ii) can also be met, in this case. What it is for me to cease omitting to raise my arm is for me to raise my arm, so all that is required for condition (ii) is that I retain the ability to raise it. Thus, omissions may be merely under one’s control.

Thus, the picture of agency and control that I have sketched in this section can be extended from those doings which consist in a bodily movement I or position to those which (supposedly) do not, with the caveat that a doing of the latter sort cannot be directly controlled, but can only be indirectly controlled or merely under one’s control. Given that doings in the latter two categories are not actions, but mere manifestations of agency, the sceptic about negative actions can apparently adopt this account of agency as a power of control over one’s own body, in order to argue that omissions, refrainments, and
the like are mere manifestations of agency.

In the next two sections, I turn to critical evaluation of this way of fleshing out The Complex Picture. Following Steward (2009), I distinguish two broad ways of understanding the notion of agential control that I have relied on here. According to ‘rationalistic’ theories, a doing is under an agent’s control if its occurrence is appropriately explained by, or sensitive to, the agent’s reasons and/or intentions. The standard event-causal story is one such theory, although I take this category to also include theories on which the explanation of an agent’s behaviour in terms of reasons and intentions is non-causal. According to ‘non-rationalistic’ theories, agential control is not to be understood in terms of sensitivity to reasons and intentions. Agent-causal theories are the most popular such views: according to the agent-causalist, an agent controls her behaviour by causing it, where this is a matter of the agent exercising a causal power that is not reducible to the powers of her mental states. In Sections 2.4 and 2.5, respectively, I will consider how The Complex Picture, as I have just fleshed it out, looks on rationalistic and non-rationalistic theories of control. In both cases, I will argue that the categories of indirectly controlled doings and doings that are merely under one’s control are not good candidates to be manifestations of control, even as these theories conceive of them. I will further argue that, even if such things can be considered ‘mere manifestations of agency’, many, if not all, (intentional) omissions and refrainments ought to be counted as actions, and not mere manifestations of agency.

2.4 Against the Complex Picture (1): Rationalistic Theories

2.4.1 Reasons, Intentions and Control

Rationalistic theories of agential control, and hence of agency, can be traced at least as far back as Anscombe’s (1963) work on the nature of intentional action. Anscombe asked, “What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not?” and answered that “they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why?’ is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting” (1963, §5). While it is not obvious that Anscombe intended her question of what distinguishes intentional actions from unintentional ones to be equivalent to the question of what distinguishes those doings which are manifestations of one’s agency from those which are not, many philosophers took her answer to the former as an answer to the latter. That is, they took it that the distinction between manifestations of agency and mere doings is the distinction between those doings that are intentional and those that are not, and they took it that for a doing to be intentional is for it to be explainable in terms of an agent’s reasons for doing what she did (Davidson, 1971). Thus, the power of agency is the power to do things intentionally, or to do them for reasons (Hornsby, 2004, 4; Clarke, 2010, 151).

At least, that is how a rationalistic theory of control plays out if we assume The Simple Picture, on which all manifestations of agency are actions. Given that assumption, a doing is a manifestation of control, i.e. an action, if its occurrence can be given a rationalizing explanation. But if we adopt The Complex Picture, as I developed it in the previous section, then we must somehow distinguish between actions, directly controlled doings, indirectly controlled doings, and doings that are merely under one’s control.

I will assume that, on a rationalistic theory, every directly controlled doing is an action, and vice-versa. Recall that, on the so-called ‘standard story’, an action is simply a doing with a certain kind of causal
history, and so one and the same event can be an action and a directly controlled doing. The standard story is simply a special kind of rationalistic theory, according to which rationalizing explanations are, or are intimately related to, causal explanations: when the rising of my arm is explained by my reasons for raising it, what this means is that mental states of mine, with those reasons as their contents, caused the rising of my arm. But while not all rationalists agree that rationalizing explanation is a species of causal explanation, they can agree that an action is simply a doing which is subject to a certain kind of explanation.

We can distinguish the ways in which a doing may be under an agent’s control by applying the schemata from the previous section. A directly controlled doing is the intrinsic doing of an action — it is a doing which is directly explained in terms of the agent’s reasons and/or intentions. When I directly raise my arm, and my reason for doing so is, say, that by raising my arm I can hail a taxi, the event of my arm rising can be explained directly by that reason, perhaps in conjunction with my intention to raise my arm. If I am asked why I raised my arm, I can respond, ‘Because I wanted to hail a taxi’ (or some variation thereof), and that explanation is intuitively complete, not requiring any further explanans as an intermediary between my reason and my behaviour.

An indirectly controlled doing is not itself an intrinsic doing, but is rather a result, causal or otherwise, of such a doing. It seems that, on a rationalistic theory, we can say that indirectly controlled doings are those doings which can only be indirectly explained by an agent’s reasons and/or intentions. Consider again the case where I want to hail a taxi, but suppose that I use my left arm to raise my right. In this case, the event of my right arm rising cannot be explained directly by appeal to my reason for raising it. That is, we cannot simply say that my right arm went up because I wanted to hail a taxi. Rather, we must say that my right arm went up because I raised it with my left, where this is a purely causal explanation, not a rationalizing one. Of course, we can give a rationalizing explanation of the movement of my left arm by saying that I wanted to hail a taxi, and perhaps also that I had an instrumental belief about how to raise my right arm using my left. The point is that that rationalizing explanation does not extend to the movement of my right arm: the explanatory connection between my reasons and the movement of my left arm is a rationalizing one, but the explanatory connection between that movement and the movement of my right arm is purely causal.9

Finally, a doing that is merely under one’s control cannot be explained by one’s reasons and/or intentions, either directly or indirectly. How, then, do we explicate this variety of control in rationalistic terms? Recall that, if a doing is merely under my control, then there is some way I could have acted such that, had I acted that way, I would have ceased doing that thing. According to a rationalistic theory, if I perform an action, then that action is explainable in terms of my reasons and/or intentions. Thus, while a doing that is merely under my control is not actually explained by reasons and/or intentions, it is sensitive to my reasons/intentions, in the sense that if I had had certain reasons and/or intentions, I would have acted in such a way that I would have ceased doing that thing. Suppose that I am standing by the side of the road, my arm hanging at my side, and suppose that I do not want to hail a taxi, and that I have no other reason to raise my arm. Assuming that the event of my arm hanging at my side is a mere doing, it is nonetheless a doing that is sensitive to my reasons and/or intentions. For if I had wanted to hail a taxi, and intended to do so, then I would have raised my right arm, either directly or indirectly.

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9Thus, if it is true that the connection between my reasons and the movement of my left arm is itself a causal one, what we have here is a form of causal deviance. See (Bishop, 1989, chs. 4 & 5) and (Davidson, 1973).
So says a rationalist proponent of The Complex Picture. For each of the categories of ‘indirectly controlled doing’ and ‘doing merely under one’s control’, we can ask two questions. First, are such doings properly counted as manifestations of control, i.e. manifestations of agency? And second, even if they are properly so-counted, are all omissions and refrainments properly counted as such doings? In each case, I will argue that the answer to both questions is ‘No.’

2.4.2 Negative Actions and Indirectly Controlled Doings

Are indirectly controlled doings manifestations of the power to do things intentionally? At the very least, it seems, not just any indirectly controlled doing will so-count. It is not enough that my $\phi$-ing be the result of my $\psi$-ing, where my $\psi$-ing is directly explained by reasons and/or intentions. In addition, it seems, my reasons for $\psi$-ing must rationalize my $\phi$-ing, otherwise (since we are assuming that my $\phi$-ing is not directly explained by any reasons or intentions of mine, but is only indirectly explained by my reasons for $\psi$-ing and/or my intention to $\psi$) my $\phi$-ing will not count as an intentional doing.

Consider a case where I flip a switch, thereby turning on the light, thereby unknowingly alerting a burglar to my presence.\(^{10}\) Suppose that these are all distinct doings of mine. Then, it might seem, while my flipping of the switch is an action, and therefore a directly controlled doing — it is a bodily event that is directly explained by my reasons for flipping the switch\(^{11}\) — the other two doings are indirectly controlled, because they are indirectly explained by my reasons for flipping the switch. But while there is a sense in which my alerting the prowler can be indirectly explained in this way — we can say that I flipped the switch for such-and-such reasons, which caused the porch light to turn on (and hence resulted in me turning on the porch light), which in turn caused the burglar to be alerted (and hence resulted in me alerting the burglar) — it is nonetheless clear that I do not intentionally alert the burglar. For although my reasons for flipping the switch in some sense explain my alerting the burglar, this is not a rationalizing explanation. I did not flip the switch in order to alert the burglar.

It seems, then, that my $\phi$-ing is indirectly controlled, in the sense that is relevant on a rationalistic theory of agency, only if I did something else in order to $\psi$: my $\phi$-ing is not merely a doing that is indirectly explained in terms of my reasons and/or intentions; it is a non-action which I intentionally bring about.

Is a doing that one intentionally brings about a manifestation of the power to do things intentionally? That is, is it itself an intentional doing? You might think so, on the grounds that when one intentionally brings it about that one $\phi$s, one does as one intends, and moreover does so because one so-intends. For example, falling asleep is not something I can do as an action — an event in which I fall asleep is not an event in which I exercise direct control over my body. But I can take certain steps, such as taking a sleeping pill, in order to ensure that I fall asleep. If I succeed in bringing it about that I fall asleep, then I do exactly what I intended to do, and moreover I do it because I so-intended. Similarly, sneezing is not something I can do as an action, but I can take certain steps, such as sniffing some pepper, in order to ensure that I sneeze. If I succeed in bringing it about that I sneeze, then I do exactly what I intended to do, and moreover I do it because I so-intended. Don’t these considerations show that, although falling

\(^{10}\)The case is from (Davidson, 1963, 4). Davidson would not make the supposition I go on to make, that these are all distinct events.

\(^{11}\)This appearance may be questioned, on the grounds that my act of flipping the switch is not a purely bodily event, but rather an event in which the movement of my finger causes the switch to be flipped. In that case, we should say that my action is the movement $T$ of my finger, which results in a flipping of the switch.
asleep and sneezing are not actions, they are nonetheless things I do intentionally?\textsuperscript{12}

I think the answer is ‘No.’ To see why, recall that, on a rationalistic theory of agency, there is a special sense of the question ‘Why did you do that?’ which only has application to intentional doings, and which is only answerable by appeal to one’s reasons for doing that thing. If that question is shown not to apply — as when I say, ‘I didn’t realize I was doing that’ — then my doing is shown not to have been intentional, i.e. not to have been a manifestation of agency. Compare two cases: in the first, I kick my wife while she sleeps, in full awareness of what I am doing and with every intention of doing so; in the second, I am also asleep, and I kick my wife as a result of an involuntary spasm. Intuitively, while the first kick is an action, and therefore a manifestation of my agency, the second is a mere event, and is not a manifestation of my agency. This is because, in the first case, my wife could ask ‘Why did you kick me?’ — in that special sense which asks after my reasons for kicking her — and that question would be perfectly appropriate, while in the second case that question would not be appropriate. If I say ‘I was asleep,’ or ‘It was involuntary,’ or ‘I didn’t know I was kicking you,’ I will not thereby have answered that special ‘Why?’ question. Rather, I will be insisting that that question does not have application to what I did; the event of my kicking my wife in my sleep is just not the sort of event about which that question can be asked.

The same considerations which distinguish actions from mere events serve to distinguish intentional doings from doings which are merely intentionally brought about. Consider the case where I intend to fall asleep, and take steps to make sure that I do. Presumably, I have reasons for wanting to fall asleep in this case — perhaps I have an early meeting the next day, for instance. But nonetheless, the question ‘Why did you fall asleep?’ does not have application in its special sense, and cannot be answered by appeal to my reasons for wanting to fall asleep. For if you were to ask me why I fell asleep, and I were to answer ‘Because I had an early meeting,’ that answer would suggest that I fell asleep at will, i.e. that I could see the reasons for wanting to fall asleep, and simply fall asleep. Since that suggestion is false, that answer to the question is inappropriate. The correct answer to the question is ‘Because I took a sleeping pill,’ or perhaps ‘I had an early meeting the next day, so I took a sleeping pill.’ But those are not answers to the special kind of ‘Why?’ question that Anscombe and others have in mind. The first is, seemingly, a purely causal explanation, and the second simply adds to the first a rationalizing explanation of my act of taking a sleeping pill. The explanation of the event of my falling asleep is a causal one, not a rationalizing one, and so the special ‘Why?’ question does not apply. Similar remarks apply to the case where I intentionally bring about a sneeze.

So, I think we should deny that those doings of ours which are not actions, but which we intentionally bring about, are themselves manifestations of the power to do things intentionally, or to do them for reasons. It is not simply that they are results of actions. Rather, they are, at best, results of manifestations of agency, and not manifestations of agency in their own right.

But suppose that we allow those doings which we intentionally bring about are themselves intentional doings. Even so, there are plenty of omissions and refrainments that do not fall into this category, since it is not the case that, whenever someone omits to φ, or refrains from φ-ing, they must intentionally do something else, with the further aim of making sure they do not φ. Suppose I see a sign on a wall that says ‘Do not touch! Fresh paint,’ and so I resolve not to touch the wall. It seems that I do not need to form any further intention to do something else with the aim of making sure I do not touch the wall.

\textsuperscript{12}These examples are from (Mele, 2009), although Mele himself does not conclude that falling asleep and sneezing are things that I do intentionally.
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The only intention I need is the intention not to touch the wall (Clarke, 2014, 63). Thus, even though I will, no doubt do, something else — such as stand with my hands in my pockets — and my doing of that thing will result in me not touching the wall, my refrainment is not thereby shown to be indirectly controlled, in the relevant sense.

2.4.3 Negative Actions and Doings Merely Under One’s Control

I turn now to the claim that an omission or refrainment could be a mere manifestation agency by being a doing which is not explained by an agent’s reasons and/or intentions, but is nonetheless sensitive to them. This claim seems to be what some proponents of The Complex Picture have in mind. Hence, Clarke writes, “[U]nless an intentional omission or refraining is itself an action, it isn’t an exercise of the kind of control that we exercise in intentional action,” (2014, 86, emphasis in the original), and he suggests that the reason an intentional omission or refrainment can still be manifestation of one’s agency is that, although one does not thereby exercise control over one’s body, one retains control over one’s body during the omission or refrainment, by retaining the ability to do whatever it is one is omitting to do, or refraining from doing (2014, 85–86).

Similarly, Carolina Sartorio has recently argued against the ‘standard story’ of agency, claiming that an intentional omission to φ is not caused by an agent’s intention to omit to φ, but rather by her omitting to form the intention to φ. Sartorio considers a case where I see a child drowning in a nearby pond, but instead of jumping in to save him, I decide to stand on the shore eating ice cream instead. It seems that it is not my act of eating ice cream, but my omission to jump into the pond, that causes the child to drown. “For, intuitively, the child died because of what I didn’t do, not because of what I did in its place. It seems, in fact, irrelevant that I was eating ice cream on the shore (as opposed to, say, reading a book, or doing anything else but jumping in): all that matters is that I failed to save him,” (2009, 121). The natural way to understand her reasoning is to use counterfactuals: it is not true that, if I had not eaten ice cream, the child would not have drowned, since I might still have done something other than jump in; but it is true that, if I had not omitted to jump in, the child would not have drowned, since what it is for me to not perform that omission is for me to jump into the pond.

But parallel reasoning suggests that it is not my intention not to jump into the pond, but my omission to form an intention to jump into the pond, that causes my omission to jump in. “For, again, I failed to jump in because of what I omitted to intend to do, not because of what I intended to do. It seems, in fact, irrelevant that I actually formed the opposite intention: all that seems relevant is that I omitted to form the intention to jump in,” (2009, 122). Again, the reasoning is intuitively counterfactual: it is not true that, if I had not formed the intention not to jump in, then I would have jumped in, since I might still have failed to form an intention to jump in; but it is true that, if I had not omitted to form the intention to jump in, then I would have jumped in, since what it is for me not to perform that omission is for me to form the intention to jump in. Now, Sartorio does not explicitly takes sides on the dispute between The Simple Picture and The Complex Picture. But one can read her argument as an argument to the effect that (at least some) intentional omissions are doings that are merely under the agent’s control, as a rationalistic theory understands this. For, on her view, an omission is apparently not explained by an agent’s reasons or intentions, but it remains sensitive to them. This is shown in the relevant counterfactual: my omission to form an intention to jump in is what causes my intention to do so, because, had I formed that intention, I would have jumped in.

Thus, the claim in question seems to have some actual supporters. But is it correct? One might
worry, first of all, that a rationalist should not see doings that are merely sensitive to one’s reasons and/or intentions without being explained by them as manifestations of agency. For, on a rationalist view, agency is the power to do things intentionally. But if one’s omission to $\phi$ is not explained by one’s reasons and/or intentions — i.e. it is not rationalized by the reasons one had for omitting to $\phi$, and neither did one omit to $\phi$ because one intended to so-omit — then how can it possibly be intentional?

Sartorio’s own response to this problem is to insist that, in the case she imagines, my omission to form an intention to jump into the pond is itself an intentional omission, on the grounds that “I voluntarily failed to form that intention, after deliberating about whether to do so, after considering reasons for and against doing so, and so on,” (2009, 126). But what she seems to be proposing is that my omission to jump in is intentional by virtue of being the result of another intentional omission, and I have already argued that a doing is not rendered intentional simply by virtue of being the result of an intentional doing.

A better response to the problem would be to argue directly that, although my omission to jump into the pond is not explained by reasons and/or intentions, but rather by their absence, such explanations can still count as rationalizing explanations. After all, as the case is imagined, I presumably failed to intend to jump into the pond because (at least as I saw the situation) I had no very compelling reason to jump in. If one were to ask me why I did not jump in, and this ‘Why?’ question were intended in Anscombe’s sense, my answer would be that I saw no compelling reason to do so. That answer does not seem to show the question to be inappropriate, so does it not constitute a rationalizing explanation?

We need to distinguish two cases. In one case, I see that the child is drowning, and so I am faced with the question of whether to jump in and save him. I weigh the pros and cons, and decide that there is no compelling reason to jump in; that is, I take the balance of reasons to favour eating my ice cream instead. On that basis, I form the intention not to jump into the pond, and to keep eating my ice cream. In this case, it seems clear, I can report the fact that (as I saw it) I had no compelling reason to jump into the pond, and thereby give a rationalizing explanation of my omission. But in this case, it is not true that my omission is not explained by my reasons. For my reasons to act in a given way do not merely include what we may call ‘lower-level’ reasons, i.e. those facts or propositions which are not facts or propositions about further reasons, and which cast acting in that way in a favourable light. They also include ‘higher-level’ reasons, i.e. facts or propositions about the relative weight or strength of my lower-level reasons (Ruben, 2010; Payton, 2015). If I weigh the lower-level reasons for and against jumping into the pond, such higher-level reasons figure in my deliberation and serve to motivate and rationalize my behaviour. Thus, if I answer the ‘Why?’ question by reporting that I had no compelling reason to do so, I am reporting a higher-level reason. My omission is not a doing that is merely under my control. Rather, it is directly explained by my reasons, and so it seems to be a directly controlled doing, an action.

There is a different sort of case, in which I do not see that the child is drowning, and so I am not faced with the question of whether to jump in and save him. In this case, I do not weigh the pros and cons, and so my omission to jump into the pond is not explained by a higher-level reason, a fact about the relative weights of my lower-level reasons. In this sort of case, I can explain why I did not jump into the pond by reporting that I had no compelling reason to do so, without thereby reporting a higher-level reason that figured in my motivation for not jumping in. But by the same token, this does not seem to be a rationalizing explanation. Rather, it has much the same force as the response ‘I didn’t realize I was doing that’; it shows that the special sense of the question ‘Why?’ is inappropriate, by showing that my
omission is simply not subject to the kind of explanation being demanded. (Compare a case where you ask me ‘Why didn’t you get up early this morning?’ and I reply ‘Because I had no reason to.’ That response does not show that, in continuing to sleep, I was somehow acting on a higher-level reason not to get up early.)

So, I think we should deny that those doings which are merely under an agent’s control — where this means that they are merely sensitive to her reasons and/or intentions, and are not explained even by higher-level reasons — are manifestations of the power to do things intentionally, or to do them for reasons.

Even if we did allow that such doings were manifestations of agency, it is clear that plenty of omissions and refrainments will not fall into this category, since we often omit to do things, or refrain from doing them, for reasons, and can offer those reasons as rationalizing explanations of our behaviour. Consider again the case where I refrain from touching a freshly painted wall. If asked why I did not touch the wall, I would not simply answer that I had no reason to do so. Rather, I would appeal to the fact that the wall was freshly painted, a lower-level reason which casts refraining from touching the wall in a positive light.

My conclusion is twofold. First, we should reject The Complex Picture as it is developed on a rationalistic theory of control, since neither those doings of ours which we intentionally bring about, nor those doings of ours that are merely sensitive to our reasons and/or intentions without being explained by them, are properly counted as intentional doings. Thus, we should reject this way of understanding the category of ‘mere manifestations of agency.’ Second, even if we accepted the existence of such a category, we should deny that all omissions and refrainments fall under it. For, first, plenty of omissions and refrainments are subject to rationalizing explanation in terms of lower-level or higher-level reasons, and second, among those omissions and refrainments that are so-explainable, plenty of them are such that there is nothing else that the agent does intentionally in order to make sure that they do not do the relevant thing. Thus, even if we accept the existence of mere manifestations of agency, where agency is given a rationalistic construal, plenty of omissions and refrainments will be counted as directly controlled doings, and hence as actions.

2.5 Against the Complex Picture (2): Non-Rationalistic Theories

2.5.1 Agent-Causation and Control

I turn now to consider non-rationalistic theories of agential control. Such views do not understand agency as the power to do things intentionally, or to do things for reasons, and so do not understand agential control as a matter of the movement or position of the agent’s body being controlled by, or sensitive to, the agent’s reasons and/or intentions. My focus will be on recent agent-causal theories according to which agency is a causal power that an agent possesses — the power to cause certain movements, or positions of (certain parts of) her body. Crucially, this is not a power that can be reduced to the powers of any event or state. When I raise my arm, and thereby cause my arm to rise, the rising of my arm is not caused by any mental event or state. Nor is it caused by any other sort of event involving my body. Rather, the rising of my arm is caused by me (Alvarez, 2013; Alvarez & Hyman, 1998; Steward,
Although some agent-causalists (especially Maria Alvarez (2013)) are sympathetic to The Complex Picture, there is an immediate worry about how that picture could be developed in accordance with their theories. For if agency is the power to directly cause certain movements or positions of one’s body, then the only thing that could be a manifestation of agential control is an event (if it is an event) in which one directly causes a bodily movement or position. Since, on these views, that is what an action is, it seems at first that nothing other than action could be a manifestation of control.

Thus, we must slightly modify these agent-causal theories of agency in order to accommodate The Complex Picture. We should not say that the movement or position of one’s body is under one’s control only if it is actually, directly caused by one. Rather, we should merely insist that the notion of agential control is to be explicated in terms of this irreducible, agent-causal power.

To this end, we can say that an action is an exercise of direct control, a causing of a bodily movement or position. We can then distinguish directly controlled doings, indirectly controlled doings, and doings that are merely under our control, by applying the schemata from Section 2.3.2. A directly controlled doing is the intrinsic doing of an action — it is a doing of mine which I cause, and my causing of which constitutes my action. For instance, when I raise my arm, I cause my arm to rise, and my causing of this event is my action; thus, the event of my arm rising is a directly controlled doing.

An indirectly controlled doing is not itself an intrinsic doing — that is, it is not an event that I directly cause, and my causation of which is an action. Rather, it is a result, causal or otherwise, of such an intrinsic doing. For instance, when I use my left arm to raise my right, my action is an event in which I directly raise my left arm, which has a rising of my left arm as its intrinsic doing. It is this movement of my left arm, not I, which directly causes my right arm to rise. Thus, I indirectly control the movement of my right arm in the sense that I control something else, which in turn controls the movement of my arm.

Finally, a doing that is merely under my control is a doing which I do not cause directly, and which is not a result of anything that I do cause directly. However, a doing is merely under my control is such that there is some way I could have acted such that, had I acted in that way, I would have ceased doing what I did. Thus, while it is not actually caused by me, either directly or indirectly, it is still sensitive to the ways in which I exercise my power of direct control, in the sense that, had I exercised that power in a certain way, I would have done something different. If my arm is hanging limp at my side, then (it might seem) I am not doing anything to cause my arm to hang there, either directly or indirectly. However, the position of my arm remains under my control, in the sense that I could have exercised direct control over some part of my body so as to move my arm, either directly or indirectly.

So says an agent-causalist proponent of The Complex Picture. For each of the categories of ‘indirectly controlled doing’ and ‘doing merely under one’s control’, we can ask two questions. First, are such doings properly counted as manifestations of control, i.e. manifestations of agency? And second, even if they are properly so-counted, are all omissions and refrainments properly counted as such doings? In each case, I will argue that the answer to both questions is ‘No.’

13Recall that, unlike on a rationalistic view, my act of moving my arm in this way is typically distinguished from the movement that I cause. If my movement of my arm is an event at all, it is an event in which I cause the distinct event that is the movement of my arm.
2.5.2 Negative Actions and Indirectly Controlled Doings Again

Are indirectly controlled doings manifestations of the power to control the movement of one’s body, as the agent-causalist conceives of it? Some proponents of The Complex Picture seem to think so. For instance, Alvarez says that a φ-ing can be a manifestation of agency even though one does not exercise one’s agent-causal power in φ-ing, as long as φ-ing is something one does by exercising such a power (2013, 110). Nonetheless, I think this claim is false.

Recall that agent-causalists typically distinguish between causings, i.e. causings of events by agents, and the events that agents cause. When I directly raise my arm, my action is a causing, a movement T of my arm, and it is to be sharply distinguished from the movement T that I cause. What goes for causation goes for control, as well, since control is being understood in terms of causation. When I directly raise my arm, we should distinguish the event (if it is an event) that is my controlling of my arm, and the movement T that I control. But if we ought to distinguish the event of my directly controlling my arm from the movement T that I control, then surely we ought to draw a similar distinction when I indirectly control my arm. Suppose I do not raise my right arm directly, but instead use my left arm to raise it. The event of my indirectly controlling my arm should be distinguished from the movement T that I control. For the latter is not an exercise of causal power, a movement T, but merely a movement T, and it involves only my right arm. By contrast, the former would seem to be identical to my act of directly controlling my left arm, i.e. my exercise of direct causal power, or to be a complex event that consists in my causing a movement T of my left arm, and that movement T in turn causing the movement T of my right arm, an event which involves both of my arms, not just my right.

Given this distinction between my controllings and the movements T and positions that I control, it seems that it is only the former, and not the latter, that could be manifestations of my power to control my body. For just as the manifestation of a causal power is a causing, and not the thing caused — when a quantity of water manifests its power to dissolve a sugar cube, the manifestation of this power is the water’s causing the cube to dissolve, not the dissolution of the cube — the manifestation of my power to control my body is a controlling, not the movement T or position that is controlled.

Although I have made this point with respect to cases where the indirectly controlled doing is an event in which one’s body moves T or is positioned in a certain way, the point extends to omissions and refrainments, even on the assumption that these things are absences of events. For if an omission to φ is merely an absence of φ-ing events, then it is not itself a controlling — although it may be the result of one — and so it is not a manifestation of the power to control one’s body.

Even if we allowed that a movement T, position, or absence that an agent indirectly controls could be a manifestation of her power to control her body, it is far from clear that all omissions and refrainments are indirectly controlled doings. For, if an omission or refrainment is an indirectly controlled doing, then it is a result of an exercise of direct control, and so we must assume that there is agent-causation going on. Suppose that, instead of raising my right arm, either directly or indirectly, I refrain from raising it. Suppose further that there is agent-causation going on in this scenario. Most plausibly, I exercise direct control over my right arm by keeping it at my side, and as a result of my arm’s remaining at my side, my arm does not rise. Why should we say that my refrainment is merely a result of my exercise of direct control, and not itself an exercise of direct control? That is, why should we not identify my refrainment with my act of keeping my arm at my side? The obvious reply would be that my refrainment simply consists in my arm’s not going up — it is the absence of events in which my arm goes up, and this absence is a result of the event of my arm’s remaining at my side. But we are looking for reasons to
accept The Complex Picture which do not assume that negative actions are absences, so this reply is off the table.

A proponent of The Complex Picture needs to give us some reason for thinking that, although agent-causation is going on when an omission or refrainment is an indirectly controlled doing, that omission or refrainment is not itself a manifestation of agent-causal power. Taking a suggestion from Alvarez (2013, 108), we might say that having an agent-causal power consists (in part) in having practical knowledge of how to do something: I only have the agent-causal power to raise my arm, for instance, if I have practical knowledge of how to raise my arm, i.e. knowledge of how to cause my arm to rise. Furthermore, I only have the agent-causal power to directly raise my arm if this knowledge does not consist of knowledge of how to do something else, together with the knowledge that if I do that then my arm will rise. Rather, the power to directly raise my arm is (in part) knowledge of how to raise my arm, without doing anything else in order to raise my arm. By contrast, I have the agent-causal power to indirectly raise my arm if this knowledge does consist of knowledge of how to do something else, together with the knowledge that if I do that then my arm will rise. The power to indirectly raise my arm is (in part) knowledge of how to do something else in order to raise my arm. With this extra bit of machinery in place, a proponent of The Complex Picture might insist (a) that practical knowledge of how not to φ is always indirect — it consists in knowing how to do something else which will ensure that one does not φ — and (b) one’s not-φ-ing is therefore never a manifestation of agent-causal power.

There are two problems with this argument. First, it does not seem as though practical knowledge of how to omit to φ, or refrain from φ-ing, is always indirect. Recall the case where I see the sign that reads ‘Do not touch! Fresh paint,’ and so I refrain from touching the wall. We already saw that, in this case, I do not need to form an intention to do any positive thing, such as keep my arms at my sides, with the further intention of ensuring that I do not touch the wall. I can simply form the intention to refrain from touching the wall, and act on that intention. By the same token, I do not need to exercise practical knowledge of how to keep my arms at my sides, in the knowledge that if I do so then I will not touch the wall.

Second, even if practical knowledge of how not to φ is always indirect — one might insist that, in the imagined case, I do exercise practical knowledge of how to keep my arms at my sides, despite the fact that I need not consciously bring it to mind and perform a practical inference regarding how to go about not touching the wall — that does not show that omissions and refrainments are indirectly controlled doings. For on what grounds should we deny that my refraining from touching the wall consists in my exercise of practical knowledge of how to keep my arms at my sides? That is, why should we not say that omissions and refrainments are themselves manifestations of indirect practical knowledge of how not to φ, and therefore manifestations of direct knowledge of how to do something else in order not to φ? Again, the obvious reply is that my refraining from touching the wall simply consists in my not touching it, and my not touching the wall is not itself an exercise of practical knowledge, direct or indirect. But to assume that is to assume that my refrainment is an absence.

Thus, indirectly controlled doings are poor candidates for manifestations of control, as an agent-causalist conceives of it. And even if they can be considered ‘mere manifestations of agency’, there is no clear reason to think that all omissions and refrainments fall into this category, independent of the assumption that they are mere absences.
2.5.3 Negative Actions and Doings Merely Under One’s Control, Again

I turn now to the claim that a doing is a mere manifestation agency when one’s $\phi$-ing, while neither an exercise of agent-causal power nor a result thereof, is nonetheless sensitive to the ways in which one exercises that power.

I argued in Section 2.5.2 that, if agency is the power to control the movement $I$ and/or position of one’s body, and an exercise of this sort of control consists in causation of that movement $I$ or position by the agent, then a doing that is merely caused by the agent cannot be a manifestation of control. A manifestation of control must be a causing, not merely a thing caused — it must be a controlling, not merely a thing controlled. But if that is right, then surely a doing that is neither a causing nor a thing caused cannot be a manifestation of control. How could a doing which is not a causing, or a result of a causing, possibly be a manifestation of a causal power?

A potential answer comes from the claim that agency is a very special kind of causal power, namely a two-way causal power.\footnote{See (Alvarez, 2009, 2013) and (Steward, 2012b). For a slightly different agent-causalist view which still appeals to the notion of two-way powers, see (Lowe, 2008).} Whereas “one-way powers are characterized by the fact that when the conditions for their manifestation obtain, the power will be necessarily manifested” (Alvarez, 2013, 109), a two-way power is one whose manifestation is not so-determined. So, my power to act in a certain way is two-way if, when I have the ability and opportunity to act in that way, I also have the ability and opportunity not to act in that way (Alvarez, 2013, 108; Steward, 2012b, 155–156). If agency is a two-way power in this sense, does this not show that an omission or a refrainment could be a manifestation of agency?

It might, if we take the notion of a ‘two-way power’ to be the notion of a single power that can be manifested in two distinct ways. In that case, it seems, agency is not simply the power to control the movement $I$ or position of one’s body, but is rather the power to either control the movement $I$ or position of one’s body, or not do so. Thus, both controllings and non-controllings are manifestations of agency.

An initial worry about this account is how actions are to be distinguished from mere manifestations of agency. Presumably, the idea would be that actions are controllings, i.e. causings, while mere manifestations of agency are not. That would seem to give an internally coherent account of how non-actions could be manifestations of agency (although I will say more below about whether the distinction between positive and negative actions can be drawn this way, in terms of the presence or absence of agent-causation).

A more pressing concern about this account is that it obliterates the distinction between the possession of a power and its manifestation. Suppose that I have a two-way power, which I can manifest either by $\phi$-ing or by not $\phi$-ing. Trivially, at any time at which I possess this power, I am either $\phi$-ing or not. Thus, it is trivial that, at any time at which I possess this two-way power, I am also manifesting it. But we saw in Section 2.2 that, in order to think of a property as being a power or disposition at all, we must be able to distinguish cases in which it is manifested from cases in which it is merely possessed.

Fortunately, proponents of two-way powers typically do not conceive of them in this way. Despite the terminology of ‘two-way powers’, the claim is typically not that agency is a power that an agent can exercise in two different ways, i.e. by acting and by omitting or refraining. The claim is, rather, that an agent has various powers to act in certain ways — to raise her arm, for instance — and what makes these powers to act, rather than powers to merely do things, is that the agent possesses distinct powers not to act in those ways. My power to raise my arm is a power to act in a certain way because,
in those very same circumstances, I also have the power *not* to raise my arm, and it is up to me which of these powers gets exercised. Nonetheless, these powers not to act in certain ways are (supposedly) not themselves powers to act, but merely the necessary complements thereof. Omitting to raise my arm, then, is not a way of exercising of my agency, but merely something I must have the power to do, in order for a raising of my arm to be an action.\(^{15}\)

You might object that, with two-way powers so construed, many doings that are merely under an agent’s control *will* count as exercises of a two-way power. Consider a case where I have a two-way power to raise my right arm directly. If this power is two-way, then I must also have the power not to raise my arm, and this power would be manifested if I simply left my arm hanging at my side. But of course, this power not to raise my arm is also two-way, since I also have the power to raise it. So, if I leave my arm hanging at my side, have I not exercised a two-way power, and thereby manifested my agency?

But according to the agent-causalist, agency is not merely a two-way power, but a two-way causal power: it is the power to control the movement and position of one’s body by causing it to move in such-and-such a way, or to be in such-and-such a position. Thus, it is manifested only when an agent actually controls her body. If, when I leave my arm hanging at my side, I do not thereby exercise causal control over my arm, then I do not manifest my agency, although I may exercise a distinct two-way power. Compare: on some views, the a radium atom’s power to decay is a two-way power; when a radium atom has the power to decay, it also has the power *not* to decay, and the circumstances do not determine which of these powers will be manifested (Lowe, 2008, 150). If we suppose that a cat is enclosed in a box with a radium atom, and that poison will be released into the box if the atom starts to decay, then we might say that the atom has a two-way causal power, namely the power to cause the poison to be released into the box. Intuitively, if the atom does not decay, and so does not cause the poison to be released, this is not a manifestation of that causal power.

Thus, even if agency is construed as a two-way power, it is difficult to see how a doing that is merely under an agent’s control can count as a manifestation of that power. For a doing that is merely under one’s control is not a controlling, and is therefore not an exercise of control. A doing that is merely under one’s control may be a manifestation of a two-way power, but it will not count as a manifestation of agency in particular.

But supposing we allowed that doings merely under an agent’s control could count as manifestations of a two-way causal power, could all omissions and refrainments be placed in this category? Remember, if an agent-causalist wants to say ‘Yes,’ then she must give us some reason for thinking that omissions and refrainments are doings that are merely under one’s control, and this reason must not be that omissions and refrainments are assumed to be absences. The obvious reason for thinking this would be that, when an agent omits to do something or refrains from doing it, this omission or refrainment is neither an exercise of agent-causal power nor a result thereof. Cases of omission and refrainment are not cases in which an agent exercises a causal power. In principle, this claim can be made independently of the claim that omissions and refrainments are mere absences, since one can hold that a case where I leave my arm hanging at my side is not a case where I exercise a causal power over my arm, even while

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\(^{15}\)(Steward, 2013b, 691). Note that Steward herself may not be a proponent of The Complex Picture. She is quite insistent that the power of refrainment is a necessary complement of the power of the agency, and it seems she may be willing to draw the conclusion that omissions and refrainments are not manifestations of agency at all. As I noted earlier (see Chapter I, note 26), it is not clear whether, in her recent work on two-way powers, Steward is using ‘refrainment’ as a semi-technical term, and hence it is not clear whether she intends to rule out the idea that what ordinarily go by that label are not really manifestations of agency.
holding that it is a case where an event occurs. But is the claim true?

The obvious cases in which an agent does something without exercising a causal power are cases in which she does something without moving, and hence without causing her body to move. If I leave my arm hanging at my side, it seems that I do not move my arm, and hence that I do not exercise a causal power. But not all omissions and refrainments are like this. Suppose I am visiting the dentist, and she tells me to hold still, but instead I start thrashing about. It seems I have intentionally omitted to hold still, and perhaps refrained from holding still, and yet it seems that this negative action is constituted by my thrashing about, which is itself an exercise of agent-causal power.

Moreover, not all cases of action, even on an agent-causalist view, should be construed as cases in which an agent moves her body. Consider the act of standing at attention. In order for a soldier to stand at attention, it is not enough that she simply not move her body. Rather, she must exercise control over the position of her body, by keeping it in place. She acts, not by causing movements, but by preventing them. Thus, even if an agent omits to do something, and does so precisely by not moving her body, we cannot conclude that she does not exercise the causal power of control. For she may control her body precisely by keeping it in place, preventing it from moving. For example, if I deliberately refrain from raising my arm, it does not seem as though my arm simply hangs limp. Rather, I control the position of my arm by keeping it in place.\[^{16}\]

An agent-causalist might object that, although there is a sense in which I control the position of my arm when I leave it in place, this is because my arm remains under my control. I am in control of the movement and position of my arm, because I could raise it if I wanted to. There is no need to suppose that I am actually causing it to remain in place, by exercising a causal power.

There are two potential motivations for this objection. The first is the idea that, when an agent exercises a causal power, this is a matter of the agent causing a change. Cases where an agent causes her body to move, and perhaps also cases where she causes her body to stop moving, are cases where she exercises a causal power, because they are cases where she causes a change. However, if an agent merely keeps her body in a position it is already in, then even if we say that, in some sense, causation is going on, this is not a matter of the agent exercising a causal power. Thus, if I am in control of my arm when I keep it in place, this can only be a matter of its being merely under my control.

The idea that an agent exercises a causal power only when she causes a change looks, to me, to be unmotivated. Consider a case where two books are propped up, one leaning against the other. It certainly seems like there is causation going on, since each book is preventing the other from falling over. Moreover, this kind of causation is easily and naturally understood in terms of causal powers: each book exerts a force on the other, with the net result that the books remain in place (Mumford & Anjum, 2011, 30). If we can say this about non-agential causal powers, why should we think that an agent-causal power can only be exercised when an agent causes a change?

The second potential motivation is the idea that, even if we are sometimes justified in saying that

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\[^{16}\] Of course, there are cases in which an agent fails to do something, and yet she does seem to exercise control over her body. Suppose that I need to hail a taxi, but that both of my arms suddenly go limp, and are completely out of my control. If a taxi passes me by while I am unable to get its attention, you might think that I have omitted to hail the taxi. Whether that claim is true or not is controversial. According to some, the word ‘omit’ is only appropriately used if the agent had the ability to do what she failed to do (Clarke, 2014, ch.4). These philosophers would deny that I have omitted to hail a taxi, since by hypothesis I lack the ability to do so. According to others, it is possible to omit to do something one lacked the ability to do — indeed, one can even omit to do the impossible (Bernstein, in press; Sartorio, 2011). These philosophers could accept that I omitted to hail a taxi. But even if my failure counts as an omission, it is surely not the sort of omission that we ought to count as a manifestation of agency, even according to The Complex Picture, because the movement, or position of my arms is completely out of my control.

\[^{17}\] See (Alvarez, 2001, 2013) and (Steward, 2012b, ch. 8) for defences of causal pluralism.
an agent exercises a causal power by keeping her body in place, we are not always justified in doing so, and many, if not all, cases of omission and refrainment will be cases in which the required justification is lacking. Causal powers play a role in causal explanation: we posit them in order to give a causal explanation of goings-on in the world. For example, when I raise my arm, we are justified in positing an exercise of a causal power because that posit plays a role in explaining the movement of my arm. After all, my arm would not have moved in that way if I had not moved it, so my movement serves to causally explain the movement of my arm. Similarly, in the case of the two books, we are justified in positing manifestations of causal powers because they explain the fact that the books remain in place: if either book had not exerted a force on the other (or if it had exerted a different force), then the books would have behaved quite differently than they actually did. But this sort of justification does not seem to be present in the case where I refrain from raising my arm. For it is not the case that, had I not exercised the power to keep my arm in place, then it would not have remained in place. If my arm suddenly went limp, and so was completely out of my control, it still would have remained in place, without me needing to exercise any causal powers. Thus, the agent-causalist says, we have no need to suppose that I exercise a causal power over my arm.

It might initially seem plausible that we should only posit a movement if that posit is needed in order to explain the corresponding movement, where what this amounts to is that, if such a movement had not occurred, then the corresponding movement would not have occurred, either. But such counterfactual tests of causal relevance are notoriously subject to the problem of ‘pre-empted’ or ‘backup’ causes, i.e. events which would have caused the relevant effect, if the actual cause had been absent. In such cases, the effect does not depend on what we take to be its cause (thanks to the presence of the backup), but we are still justified in positing the cause as a cause, because it is a part of the actual sequence of events that brings about the effect. And although such cases are mostly familiar from discussions of event-event causation, we can construct them for agent-causation, as well. To see this, you can run the following experiment. First, use your left arm to move your right arm in a continuous up-and-down motion, without moving your right arm directly. Now, while continuing to move your right arm in this direct way, begin to move it directly, as well. In this case, it seems, we can posit two exercises of agent-causal power: the direct movement of your left arm, which indirectly results in the movement of your right; and the direct movement of your right arm. But the movement of your right arm counterfactually depends on neither of these, since if you had not moved one of your arms directly, that movement would still have occurred.

What this case shows is that we can be justified in saying that an agent causes her body to move in a certain way, or to remain in a certain position, even if her body would still have moved in that way, or remained in that position, without her causing it to. In particular, we can justify in saying this on phenomenological grounds. Without having any knowledge, or even any firm beliefs, about the truth of the agent-causal theory, we can tell the difference between the following three cases: (i) a case where I simply use my left arm to indirectly move my right; (ii) a case where I begin directly moving my right arm and cease directly moving my left, thereby beginning to indirectly move my left arm using my right; and (iii) a case where I begin directly moving my right arm while continuing to directly move...
Chapter 2. The Need for Negative Actions

my left. That is, we can tell the difference between controlling our bodies and merely having them under our control. If we come to believe on philosophical grounds that exercising control is a matter of exercising causal powers, then we can be justified in saying that a causal power is exercised in each of these cases, even if (especially with regards to case (iii)) the very same movement \( I \) would have occurred in its absence.\(^{20}\)

Applying this point to omissions and refrainments, it is clear that in many cases the agent actually exercises control over her body, even when she does not need to move her body in order not to do the relevant thing. In the case where I refrain from touching the freshly painted wall, for instance, it is clear that I am actually controlling the position of my body by keeping my arms at my sides. This case is not like one in which my arms simply hang limp at my sides.

Thus, even if doings that are merely under one’s control could be considered to be manifestations of agential control, we cannot place all (intentional) omissions and refrainments in this category. Indeed, it seems that many omissions and refrainments should be thought of as controllings — that is, they are exercises of an agent-causal power, and are therefore actions, and not ‘mere manifestations of agency.’

2.6 Conclusion

The Complex Picture is a poor way of understanding the relationship between action and agency. It runs up against the seemingly obvious claim that agency is a power or disposition to act, and hence that only actions can be its manifestations. Furthermore, attempts to understand agency as a power of control, in such a way that we can distinguish those of its manifestations that are actions from those that are not, come up short. I conclude that The Complex Picture ought to be rejected, both as a general way of understanding the relationship between action and agency, and as a way of avoiding the dilemma that the phenomenon of negative action raises. The dilemma is real, and so the only real solution is to reject the assumption that leads to it, namely the assumption that omissions and refrainments are not events, but merely absences thereof.

\(^{20}\)It should be noted that this is a conclusion that Alvarez and Steward, in particular, should want to accept, since it is implied by their response to Frankfurt-style cases which purport to show that an agent can act without having the power to do otherwise, and hence that agency is not a two-way power.

Consider the following case: I am deciding whether to raise my arm or not. Unbeknownst to me, a clever neuroscientist named Black has inserted a device in my brain that monitors my decision-making processes and is capable of causing my body to move in various ways, or to keep it in various positions. Black has programmed this device so that, if I decide not to raise my arm, the device will eliminate my control over my arm and cause my arm to rise. As it happens, I decide to raise my arm, and I cause it to rise; the device does not interfere. In this type of case, there are two possible scenarios: either \( I \) cause my arm to rise, or the device does; either way, my arm will rise. The opponent of two-way powers takes this to show that I can act without having the power to do otherwise. Alvarez and Steward insist that I do have the power not to do what I actually do, for what I actually do is raise my arm. Although the same movement \( I \) occurs in both cases, the movement \( T \) does not occur if the device causes me to raise my arm (Alvarez, 2009; Steward, 2012b, ch.7). But notice that, if we agree that I cause my arm to rise in the first scenario, despite the presence of the device, then we are positing a movement \( T \) even though the corresponding movement \( I \) does not counterfactually depend on it, since that movement \( I \) still occurs in the second scenario.
Chapter 3

The Logical Form of Negative Action Sentences

3.1 Actions, Events, and Action Sentences

In Chapter 1, I argued that the assumption that negative actions are, not events, but rather absences thereof, poses a dilemma: we must either accept the seemingly implausible conclusion that we can never manifest our agency by omitting, refraining, etc.; or we must give up the prospect of a unified, event-based theory of agency. In the previous chapter, I argued that we cannot avoid this dilemma — as some have tried to — by distinguishing actions from ‘mere manifestations of agency’, and placing all so-called ‘negative actions’ in the latter category. Thus, the dilemma is genuine. In this chapter, I turn to the task of showing that we can avoid the dilemma by rejecting the assumption that generates it. To the extent that we have reason to think that ordinary, ‘positive’ actions are events, to that extent we have reason to think that negative actions are, too.

My argument proceeds indirectly, through the analysis of action sentences. Recall that the idea that our actions are events was cemented by the apparent success of Davidson’s analysis of action sentences as existential quantifications over events. A standard neo-Davidsonian analysis, you will recall, looks like this:

(1) Jones buttered toast in the bathroom at midnight.

\[ \exists t : t < t^* \left( \exists e \right) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

Many have taken the success of this approach as strong evidence that actions are events. Unsurprisingly, then, those who think that positive actions are events but negative actions are not tend to deny that Davidson’s approach extends to negative action sentences, i.e., sentences which report omissions, refrainments, etc. On their view, negative action sentences are the negations of positive action sentences, and thus are negative-existentials.\(^1\) For example, the sentence ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight’ simply reports that, at midnight, there was no event of Jones buttering toast in the bathroom:

\(^1\)See (Clarke, 2014, ch. 3) and especially (Moore, 2009, 53).
Chapter 3. THE LOGICAL FORM OF NEGATIVE ACTION SENTENCES

(2) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.

\[ \exists t: t < t^* \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast}, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

Call this view, on which ordinary action sentences are existentially quantified, and on which negative action sentences are negative-existentials, ‘Deflationism.’ If Deflationism is true, then it seems that when an agent omits or refrains, this is not a matter of the occurrence of an event, but simply a matter of the absence of one.

I will argue that Deflationism is not true, and that negative action sentences are better analysed as quantifying over omissions, refrainments, etc., where these things are thought of as events in their own right. I begin in Section 3.2 by sketching a problem that any neo-Davidsonian approach must face. Davidson’s analysis of action sentences is motivated by its ability to validate obviously valid ‘adverb-dropping’ inferences. However, where negative action sentences are concerned, a neo-Davidsonian approach seems to validate obviously invalid adverb-dropping inferences, while Deflationism does not. In Section 3.3 I develop an analysis of negative action sentences which does not face this problem, and a corresponding metaphysical account of negative actions as positive events. In Sections 3.4 and 3.5 I argue that this approach is not only workable, but preferable to Deflationism. We must treat negative action sentences as quantifying over events if we are to account for the interaction between negative action phrases and perceptual locutions, and if we are to account for certain uses to which adverbs can be put in such sentences.

Before turning to these arguments, a brief word about my methodology is in order. I noted in Chapter 1 (note 3) that many philosophers reject the Quinean notion of ontological commitment on which Davidson’s argument seems to rely. According to these philosophers, the mere fact that the best analysis of action sentences — whether positive or negative — treats them as quantifying over events does not show that we must accept these events into our ontology. However, my opponent is someone who believes that, although positive actions are events, negative ones are not, and at least amongst philosophers of action, the most popular argument for the claim that positive actions are events is Davidson’s. Thus, while the success of Davidson’s argument is not uncontroversial, it is something to which I take my opponent to be committed. My argument is that if we accept that argument for the claim that positive actions are events, then similar reasoning will lead us to the claim that negative actions are, as well.

3.2 An Argument for Deflationism

In arguing that negative action sentences quantify over events, I seem to be facing an uphill battle. Once we adopt a neo-Davidsonian approach to ordinary action sentences, Deflationism seems to follow naturally. For negative actions are understood in terms of what an agent does not do, rather than in terms of what she does, and so it is natural to think that negative action sentences are the negations of ordinary ones. Moreover, it seems that Davidson’s original argument for treating ordinary action sentences as existential quantifications over events can be turned into an argument for treating negative action sentences as negative-existentials. His argument, you may recall, was that his analysis provides

\footnote{As we will see later, this analysis can only be schematic; even if (2) is a negative-existential, its analysis must be slightly more complicated than this.}
for a simple explanation of the validity of ‘adverb-dropping’ inferences. Consider the following sentences, paired with their neo-Davidsonian analyses:

(3) Jones buttered toast in the bathroom at midnight.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

(4) Jones buttered toast in the bathroom.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

(5) Jones buttered toast at midnight.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

(6) Jones buttered toast.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

Obviously, in their English formulations, (3) entails both (4) and (5), and each of these three sentences entails (6). The neo-Davidsonian analyses explain why these entailments hold: when we infer (6) from (4), we simply drop the conjunct ‘\text{In}(e, \text{bathroom})’ from within the scope of ‘(\exists e)’; when we infer (6) from (5), we drop ‘\text{t = midnight}’ from within the scope of ‘[\exists t: t < t^*]’; and when we infer (4), (5) or (6) from (3), we make one or both of these moves. Thus, each inference is validated by the principle \((\exists x)(Fx \land Gx) \vdash (\exists x)Fx\).

But now compare (3) – (6) with the following negative action sentences, analysed as existential quantifications over events:

(7) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Omission-to-butter-toast}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

(8) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Omission-to-butter-toast}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

(9) Jones omitted to butter toast at midnight.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Omission-to-butter-toast}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

(10) Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*](\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Omission-to-butter-toast}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

It is obvious that, in their English formulations, (7) does not entail (9), for Jones might have omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, and yet succeeded in buttering toast in the kitchen at midnight, in which case (7) is true while (9) is false. And yet, the neo-Davidsonian analyses validate the inference, by the principle \((\exists x)(Fx \land Gx) \vdash (\exists x)Fx\). What’s worse, Deflationism seems to provide an easy explanation of why this inference is invalid. According to Deflationism, (7) and (9) are analysed as negative-existentials:

(7*) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.

\[ [\exists t: t < t^*]^{-}\!(\exists e)\text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]
(9*) Jones omitted to butter toast at midnight.  
\[ \exists t: t < t^* \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

Note that in (7*) the adverb ‘In(e, bathroom)’ is in the scope of ‘\(\neg (\exists e)\)’, so dropping it to get to (9*) would violate the principle \(\neg (\exists x)(Fx \land Gx) \not\equiv \neg (\exists x)Fx\). Thus, the invalidity of this adverb-dropping inference seems to count in favour of Deflationism, and against a more thoroughly neo-Davidsonian approach.

Things are a bit more complicated where (8) and (10), negative action sentences which contain no explicit temporal adverb, are concerned. Note first that these sentences seem to be ambiguous. On one reading, (8) says that there is some specific time such that Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom then. On this reading, (8) intuitively follows from (7), since if Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, then midnight is a time such that Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom then. Similarly, there is a reading of (10) on which it says that there is some specific time such that Jones omitted to butter toast then, and on this reading (10) intuitively follows from (9). The neo-Davidsonian analyses sketched above nicely capture these readings — call them ‘the (a)-readings’ — and the validity of these inferences: we infer (8) from (7) and (10) from (9) simply by dropping ‘\(t = \text{midnight}\)’ from inside the scope of ‘\(\exists t: t < t^*\)’.

There is another reading of (8), on which it says, not that there is some specific time such that Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom then, but rather that Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at any time. On this reading, (8) does not follow from (7), since even if Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, he may still have buttered toast in the bathroom at some other time, in which case (7) is true while this reading of (8) is false. Similarly, there is a reading of (10) on which it says, not that there is some specific time such that Jones omitted to butter toast then, but rather that Jones omitted to butter toast at any time, and on this reading (10) does not follow from (9). The neo-Davidsonian analyses sketched above capture neither these readings — call them ‘the (b)-readings’ — nor the invalidity of these inferences. However, the natural deflationist analyses of (8) and (10) do not capture them either:

(8*) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom.  
\[ \exists t: t < t^* \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

(10*) Jones omitted to butter toast.  
\[ \exists t: t < t^* \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \]

(8*) and (10*) capture the (a)-readings of these sentences, on which they say that there is some time such that Jones omitted to do such-and-such then, and they follow from (7*) and (9*) by dropping ‘\(t = \text{midnight}\)’ from inside the scope of ‘\(\exists t: t < t^*\)’. So, at first glance, the neo-Davidsonian and deflationist analyses of these sentences are on a par: both seem capable of capturing the (a)-readings of these sentences, and of explaining why on those readings the adverb ‘at midnight’ may be dropped, and yet they both face a problem in capturing the (b)-readings, and of explaining why on those readings that adverb may not be dropped. We will see later that there is a reason why one might prefer deflationist analyses of these sentences. But that reason will only emerge once I have developed my neo-Davidsonian alternative to get around the problem that sentences like (7) and (9) pose.
3.3 The Analysis of Negative Action Sentences

3.3.1 The Analysis

The source of the trouble with adverbs is that, in sketching a neo-Davidsonian analysis of negative action sentences, we treated each sentence as containing a single event variable, bound by a single existential quantifier. This treatment leaves nothing for the adverb ‘in the bathroom’ to modify but that variable, and so it allows that adverb to be validly dropped. This treatment is misguided right from the start, for it suggests that ‘in the bathroom’ functions in (7) and (8) the way it functions in (3) and (4), to give the location of some event in which Jones is involved. But that is not its function, since (7) and (8) can be true even if Jones is not in the bathroom, and so even if he is not involved in any event that occurs there. Rather, it is simply meant to give the relevant place at which there is no event of Jones buttering toast (Clarke, 2010, 140). By misrepresenting the role this adverb plays in negative action sentences like (7) and (8), the simple neo-Davidsonian analyses validates invalid inferences.

Fortunately, there is a natural solution to this problem. The phrase ‘omit to butter toast’ is a complex one, constructed from the verbs ‘omit’ and ‘butter toast’. If we adopt a neo-Davidsonian semantics on which verb phrases are treated as introducing event-variables and predicates thereof, then we should not assume that the phrase ‘omit to butter toast’ introduces a single event-variable, of which ‘Omission-to-butter-toast’ is predicated. The more natural proposal is that ‘omit’ and ‘butter toast’ each contribute their own event-variable and event-predicate, that is, that ‘omit’ contributes a variable for omissions while ‘butter toast’ contributes a variable for butterings of toast. If we have these two variables to work with, then we need not predicate ‘in the bathroom’ of the omission-variable, thereby treating that adverb as giving the location of Jones’s omission. Instead, we can predicate it of the buttering-variable, thereby capturing the fact that it gives the location at which there is no buttering-event. From this starting point, we can develop a neo-Davidsonian semantics that gives a satisfying treatment to adverbs in negative action sentences.

Of course, we cannot simply bind both variables with existential quantifiers, since that would have (7) saying, in part, that there was a buttering of toast by Jones, which is not what we want. Whereas the variable for omissions must be bound by ‘(∃e)’, the variable for butterings of toast must be bound by ‘¬(∃e)’.

If we no longer rely on a single event-variable and the one-place predicate ‘Omission-to-butter-toast’, how are we to relate our two variables to show that Jones’s omission is an omission to butter toast, rather than an omission to do something else? Here I take my inspiration from Michael Smith’s (2010) account of what it is to refrain from doing something. Smith considers Hornsby’s (2004) case of an agent, A, who refrains from taking another chocolate. Hornsby thinks that refraining from taking a chocolate is not a matter of the occurrence of an event. Smith disagrees.

When A refrains from moving her arm toward the chocolate box, she clearly does exercise control over the way her body moves, because she makes sure that it doesn’t move toward the chocolate box. Moreover, she has no alternative but to do that in one of the ways available to her...The reason she has no alternative but to [move] her arm in one of these ways is, moreover, obvious. For the only way A can keep her arm from moving toward the chocolate box is by ensuring that it is somewhere else (2010, 49).³

³The original passage has ‘refrain from moving’ where I have put ‘move’. I assume that this is simply a typographical error, since Smith’s declared goal is to show that refrainments are or involve bodily movements, where ‘movement’ is
Extending Smith’s point, I say that to omit to do something, or refrain from doing it, is to ensure—in a sense to be clarified—that one does not do that thing, and negative action sentences quantify over events in which agents ensure that they do not do certain things. Schematically, a negative action sentence of the form ‘\(x\) omits to \(\phi\) at \(t\)’ or ‘\(x\) refrains from \(\phi\)-ing at \(t\)’ can be analysed as

\[(\exists e)\text{Agent}(x, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg(\exists e')\text{Agent}(x, e') \land \phi(e') \land \text{At}(e', t))\]

where ‘\(\text{Ensure}(e, p)\)’ means that \(e\) ensures that the proposition \(\neg(\exists e')\text{Agent}(x, e') \land \phi(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)\) is true.\(^4\) Note that the ensuring-event occurs at the same time at which no \(\phi\)-ing event occurs. This is intuitive: while there is a sense of ‘ensure’ in which Jones can ensure, at an earlier time, that he will not butter toast, it would be odd to describe that earlier behaviour as his omission. To omit to butter toast at \(t\), Jones must ensure at \(t\) that he does not do so.

What is it to ensure that \(p\), in the relevant sense? Smith’s idea seems to be that to ensure that one does not \(\phi\) at a time is to do something else which is incompatible with \(\phi\)-ing at that time. But the things we do are not always incompatible with the things we omit to do. Suppose I am preparing a pasta sauce for my dinner. I chop some onions, heat some oil, add the tomatoes, add the tomato paste... I do everything I need to, except add garlic. It is not true that everything I do is incompatible with adding garlic — I could have done so while adding the oil, or while adding the tomatoes — but nonetheless I omit to add garlic.

The solution to this problem is to distinguish the things I do from the event that is my doing of them (Hornsby, 1980, 33). While nothing that I do is incompatible with adding garlic, the occurrence of my doing of those things is. For, on a plausible view of the individuation of events, the event that is my actual preparation of the sauce has a very narrowly-defined essence: it necessarily consists in my moving my body in precisely these ways at these times. Any event in which I move my body in a slightly different way is not my actual preparation of the sauce. Thus, if I were to have moved my body slightly differently, say by using my right hand to stir the sauce instead of my left, then while I might have done all of the same things — chop the onions, heat the oil, add the tomatoes, and so on — the event that is my actual doing of these things would not have occurred. Similarly, if I were to have added the garlic, then I would have had to have moved my body in some way in which I did not actually move it, and so the event which actually occurred would not have occurred. Thus, although nothing I did ensured that I did not add garlic, my doing of these things did. This idea is captured in my semantics by the fact that ‘\(\text{Ensure}(e, p)\)’ is predicated of an event-variable. It is not the thing that the agent does, but her doing of it, that ensures that the relevant negative-existential is true.

A second respect in which Smith’s idea needs modification is that ‘incompatible’ suggests a very strong relation of exclusion—i.e. that it is impossible for my doing of what I do to occur, and yet for me to do what I actually omit to do. But that relation is too strong. Consider a case where I am in a departmental meeting at which a vote is called. Votes will be counted by a show of hands, and I refrain from voting by keeping my hands at my sides. Does my behaviour necessitate that I do not vote? No, for the incompatibility of my action and voting is the result, not just of the essential, intrinsic features of my action, but of facts about how people in my department cast their votes, and these facts are contingent—there are possible worlds in which the voting rules are different, and members of the department vote precisely by keeping their hands at their sides. If my actual act of keeping my hands

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\(^{4}\)This analysis is only schematic, since it does not take into account the differences between omission sentences and refrainment sentences (see below).
at my sides occurs in one of those worlds, then I will not refrain from voting.

Rather than saying that the ensuring-event is incompatible with φ-ing in all worlds, we should restrict our gaze to worlds in which certain relevant facts about the actual world are held fixed. My act of keeping my hands at my sides is incompatible with voting in the sense that, given the actual voting procedures, if that act occurs then I do not cast a vote.

On my view, then, negative action sentences quantify over events in which an agent ensures that she does not do the relevant thing — that is, they quantify over events whose occurrence is incompatible with the agent doing that thing, given certain relevant facts about the actual world. Before returning to the issue of how this semantics handles adverbs, it is worth noting that my account allows us to identify negative actions with ordinary, positive events, rather than treating them as thoroughly negative entities, like absences. For me to refrain from voting, for instance, is for me to be the agent of some event whose occurrence is incompatible with voting, and so we can say that what my refrainment is is just whatever event plays that role. As we have seen, an event of me keeping my hands at my sides can play that role, so we can identify my refrainment with that event. Generalizing, each negative action can be identified with a positive event whose occurrence is incompatible with the agent doing a certain thing.

Before showing how this approach to negative action sentences blocks invalid adverb-dropping inferences, I should note that any actual negative action sentence will have an analysis that is more complicated than the schematic one given above. Recall from Section 1.2.1 that omitting to do something, and refraining from doing it, differ both from merely not doing that thing, and from one another. Likewise, it seems, omitting to do something, and refraining from doing it, must differ from ensuring that one does not do that thing, as I have here explained it. As I write this sentence, there are lots of things I am not doing — I am not doing research on the metaphysics of composition, or driving across town, or running a three-legged race, or...— and it seems that, for each of these things, I am ensuring that I am not doing it. For each of these things, the actual movement and position of the parts of my body that would be involved in doing that thing constitutes an event, and the occurrence of that event ensures that I am not doing that thing. Nonetheless, I am not omitting to do any of these things, or refraining from doing them. A full analysis of any given negative action sentence must give some account of how the extra conditions on omitting and refraining make it into the meaning of that sentence.

The crucial difference between omitting and merely not-doing, we saw, is that one can only omit to do something that one is, in some sense, supposed to do — that is, there must be some norm or expectation in place, to the effect that one does the relevant thing. How do such norms and expectations get into the meaning of a negative action sentence? It is most likely, I think, that these things are not part of the asserted content of negative action sentences, but are rather presuppositions of them. If I utter the sentence ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight’, I do not assert that he was supposed to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, but rather I presuppose that he was.

Of course, there is a vast literature on the nature of presupposition, and I cannot do justice to it here, but it will perhaps suffice to point to some commonly-cited tests for whether an utterance of S presupposes p. First, if S presupposes p, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to utter S in a context where p is not already part of the common ground of both the speaker and the hearer. This leads to what Kai von Fintel calls the ‘Hey, wait a minute!’ test. If S presupposes p, and p is not part of the common ground, then the hearer can object to S by saying ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know that

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5For an introduction, see (Kadmon, 2001).
This is because, intuitively, the preface ‘Hey, wait a minute!’ effectively signals that what is being called into question is not the asserted content of \( S \). The point of the assertion is to communicate its asserted content, but the speaker is putting that on hold, so to speak, in order to address some other aspect of the meaning of \( S \). Thus, for example, I can reply to an utterance of ‘The present King of France is bald’ by saying ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know France had a King,’ but not ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know he was bald.’ The latter response addresses the asserted content of the sentence, making the preface, ‘Hey, wait a minute!’ inappropriate. The former response, by contrast, addresses a presupposition of the sentence — in using the term ‘the present King of France’ as she does, the speaker is presupposing that that term has a referent — and so that preface is appropriate.

The norms and expectations that lie behind omission sentences pass this test. If I say ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight,’ for instance, you can say ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know he was supposed to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.’

A second test: it is commonly thought that the presuppositions of \( S \) ‘project’ into certain contexts. That is, if \( S \) presupposes \( p \), then if \( S \) is embedded in a sentence \( S^* \), and \( S^* \) is a sentence of a certain kind, then \( S^* \) presupposes \( p \), as well. For instance, if \( S^* \) is the negation of \( S \), then these sentences share their presuppositions: ‘The present King of France is bald’ and ‘The present King of France is not bald’ both presuppose that France has a king. Similarly, if \( S^* \) is a conditional with \( S \) as its antecedent, then these sentences share their presuppositions: the sentence ‘If the present King of France is bald, then there is at least one bald monarch’ presupposes that France has a king, because its antecedent does. Finally, if \( S^* \) is an interrogative that asks whether the content of \( S \) is true, then \( S \) and \( S^* \) share their presuppositions: the question ‘Is the present King of France bald?’ presupposes that France has a king.

The norms and expectations that lie behind omission sentences pass this test, as well. If I say ‘Jones did not omit to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight,’ then I seem to be presupposing that he was supposed to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight. This is confirmed by another application of the ‘Hey, wait a minute!’ test: if I say to you that Jones did not omit to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, you can respond with ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know he was supposed to do that.’ Likewise, the conditional ‘If Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, then I’m going to be mad,’ and the question ‘Did Jones butter toast in the bathroom at midnight?’ both presuppose that Jones was, in some sense, supposed to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.

Thus, it seems that the distinguishing feature of omissions is not asserted to obtain, in an omission sentence, but rather presupposed to obtain. In what follows, I will leave these presuppositions implicit, in order to focus on the asserted content of such sentences.

By contrast, recall that the crucial difference between refraining and merely not-doing is that, when one refrains from \( \phi \)-ing, one does so intentionally, whereas one can unintentionally not-\( \phi \), or omit to \( \phi \) (on my analysis, what this amounts to is that when one refrains from \( \phi \)-ing, one intentionally ensures that one does not \( \phi \)). It is natural to suppose that, when we assert that someone refrained from doing something, we assert, rather than presuppose, that they intentionally ensured that they did not do that thing. After all, you cannot respond to an utterance of ‘Jones refrained from buttering toast in the bathroom at midnight’ by saying, ‘Hey, wait a minute! I didn’t know that he intentionally ensured that he didn’t butter toast in the bathroom at midnight,’ or, as we would more naturally say, ‘I didn’t know that intentionally didn’t butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.’ That is because the intentionality of Jones’ behaviour is part of the asserted content of the sentence: part of its point is to tell you that Jones intentionally didn’t butter toast in the bathroom at midnight. Likewise, an utterance of ‘Jones
did \textit{not} refrain from buttering toast in the bathroom at midnight’ obviously does not presuppose that Jones intentionally didn’t butter the toast — since that is precisely what the utterance seems to deny — and neither does the question ‘Did Jones refrain from buttering toast in the bathroom at midnight?’ — since that is precisely what the question is inquiring about.

Thus, it seems that the distinguishing feature of refrainments is not presupposed to obtain, in a refrainment sentence, but rather asserted to obtain. There is some issue about how information about intentionality is to be added to an action sentence, however. We cannot very easily use a predicate ‘Intentional’, which gets applied to an event, for this ignores the fact that an event can be intentional under one description and unintentional under others (Davidson, 1985a, 296–298). But this issue is not peculiar to neo-Davidsonian analyses of negative action sentences, but affects such analyses for positive ones, too, and I am assuming that my opponent thinks that a neo-Davidsonian approach to positive action sentences is the correct one. Thus, I will leave aside the issue of how a full analysis of refrainment sentences differs from the schematic analysis given above.

### 3.3.2 Solving the Problem of Adverbs

As noted, my semantics contains two event-variables instead of one, and so it can give a satisfying treatment to adverbs and block patently invalid adverb-dropping inferences. For instance, instead of (7), we now have (leaving aside the complications discussed in note 1 and note 9):

\[(7^{**}) \text{ Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight.} \]
\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e')) \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast}, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{In}(e', \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e', t)) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

Here, ‘in the bathroom’ is predicated of the variable for buttering-events, and so it has the function of giving the relevant location at which there is no buttering of toast by Jones. Just as on Deflationism, to drop the adverb ‘in the bathroom’ from this sentence is to drop a conjunct from within the scope of ‘\(\neg (\exists e)\)’, in violation of the principle \(\neg (\exists x)(Fx \land Gx) \not\implies \neg (\exists x)Fx\). Thus, (7**) does not entail (9**):

\[(9^{**}) \text{ Jones omitted to butter toast at midnight.} \]
\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e')) \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast}, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

In addition, this neo-Davidsonian approach, like the simpler one from Section 3.2, easily captures the (a)-readings of (8) and (10), on which they say that there is some specific time such that Jones omitted to do such-and-such \textit{then}, and on which they intuitively follow from (7) and (9):

\[(8^{**a}) \text{ Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom.} \]
\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e')) \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast}, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{In}(e', \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e', t)) \]

\[(10^{**a}) \text{ Jones omitted to butter toast.} \]
\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e')) \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast}, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)) \]

(7**) reports that at some specific time, namely midnight, Jones ensured that he did not butter toast in the bathroom then, and thus it entails (8**a), that at some specific time, Jones ensured that he did not butter toast in the bathroom then. (9**) entails (10**a) for a similar reason.
But what about the (b)-readings of (8) and (10), on which they say that Jones omitted to do such-and-such at any time? As we saw, neither the simple neo-Davidsonian nor the deflationist analyses from Section 3.2 capture these readings. The obvious way to do so is to replace the existential quantifier over times with a universal one. Thus, the deflationist says that, on the (b)-readings, what (8) and (10) say is that at all relevant times, there was no event of Jones doing such-and-such then.

(8*b) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom.
\[
[\forall t : t < t^*] \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e, t)
\]

(10*b) Jones omitted to butter toast.
\[
[\forall t : t < t^*] \neg (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t)
\]

(The quantifier must be restricted to relevant times, otherwise ‘Jones omitted to butter toast’, for instance, would mean that Jones never buttered toast in his life, which it does not. If omission reports presuppose that the agent was supposed to do the relevant thing, then we have a natural account of how the quantifier in that sentence gets restricted: it ranges only over that interval of time in which Jones was supposed to butter toast.) On my own approach, we say something slightly different: on their (b)-readings, (8) and (10) say that Jones ensured that he did not do such-and-such at any relevant time.

(8**b) Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom.
\[
[\forall t : t < t^*] (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(toast, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{In}(e', \text{bathroom}) \land \text{At}(e', t))
\]

(10**b) Jones omitted to butter toast.
\[
[\forall t : t < t^*] (\exists e) \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(toast, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t))
\]

On this analysis, the inferences from (7) to (8) and from (9) to (10) are invalid, just as we wanted. (7**) reports that at some time, namely midnight, Jones ensured that he did not butter toast in the bathroom then. It does not follow from this that Jones ensured that he did not butter toast in the bathroom at every relevant time, so (7**) does not entail (8**b). The move from (9**) to (10**b) is blocked for similar reasons. Thus, my neo-Davidsonian approach invalidates each of the invalid inferences from Section 3.2.

It might seem that Deflationism still retains an advantage over my view, where the (b)-readings of (8) and (10) are concerned. Recall that on my account, an omission report is a report to the effect that, at some time, an event occurred which ensured that the agent did not do such-and-such then. That is, the ensuring-event is located at the relevant time at which there is no event of such-and-such a kind. But on the (b)-readings of (8) and (10), the relevant time is not a particular moment, but rather a potentially long interval — if we suppose that Jones was simply supposed to butter toast at some point during the night, not specifically at midnight, then the universal quantifier in (10**b) ranges over the whole night. Thus, Jones’s omission seems to occupy, not a particular moment, but this entire interval — it seems to be an event that lasts all night. But it does not seem right to say that Jones was omitting to butter toast the whole night — it would be wrong to say, at 6pm, that Jones is omitting to butter toast — so it seems strange to suppose that Jones’s omission could be an event that lasts all night. The deflationist analysis, (10*b), does not have this strange result, and so one might take Deflationism to
have the upper hand with this sentence, after all.\footnote{Randolph Clarke has mounted a version of this argument against the view that negative actions are events. Suppose I am expected to pull the weeds in my garden at some point in June, but that there is no specific point such that I am expected to do it then. If I omit to pull the weeds, then the relevant time at which there is no pulling-of-weeds event seems to be all of June, and so, on my view, the omission itself lasts the whole month. But surely, the thought goes, it cannot be right to say, at every moment in June, that I am omitting to pull the weeds in my garden (Clarke, 2014, 27).}

Fortunately, we can explain the strangeness of saying that Jones was omitting to butter toast all night while still maintaining that his omission was an event that lasted all night. While Jones’s omission may have lasted all night, it does not follow that he was omitting to butter toast at each moment that night. For recall, one can only be said to omit to do what one is in some sense supposed to do. Thus, one can only be said to omit to do something at a certain time if one is supposed to do it \emph{at that time}. But it is built into the objection that Jones is only supposed to butter toast at \emph{some} point during the night, and there is no specific time during the night such that he is supposed to butter toast \emph{then}. That is why it is strange to say that he was omitting to butter toast at every moment, even though, once the night is through and the toast remains unbuttered, it is correct to say that Jones omitted to butter toast that night. Jones is the agent of an omission-event that lasts the whole night, but it does not follow that every proper part of that event is itself an omission. Thus, the deflationist does not have an advantage in analysing the (b)-readings of (8) and (10).

We have good reason to think that a neo-Davidsonian approach to negative action sentences is workable. I now turn to the task of showing that my approach is not only workable, but preferable to the deflationist alternative.

### 3.4 Seeing Negative Actions

Consider the following pair of sentences, in which action phrases occur alongside perceptual locutions:

(11a) I see Brutus stab Caesar.
(11b) I see that Brutus is stabbing Caesar.

These sentences have two interesting features. First, the names ‘Brutus’ and ‘Caesar’ occur in a transparent context in (11a), but they occur in an opaque context in (11b). If (11a) is true and Brutus is the tallest person in the room, then it follows that I see the tallest person in the room stab Caesar. But if (11b) is true and Brutus is the tallest person in the room, then it does \emph{not} follow that I see \emph{that} the tallest person in the room is stabbing Caesar. For seeing that \emph{p} is a way of knowing that \emph{p} (Williamson, 2000, 33–41) — it is, roughly, knowing that \emph{p} by virtue of visual perception — and I may not know that Brutus is the tallest person in the room. (Of course, not all uses of ‘see that’ express perceptual knowledge, but I am only concerned with such uses here.)

Second, neither one of (11a) and (11b) entails the other. In a case where I see Brutus stab Caesar but do not recognize either of them, (11a) is true but (11b) is false. A more complex scenario can be constructed where (11b) is true but (11a) is false. Seeing that \emph{p} is true does not generally require seeing the objects and properties involved in the truth of \emph{p} — e.g. I can see that my wife is home by seeing her shoes in the front hallway, even though her shoes being in the hallway is no part of the fact that my wife is home (since that same fact could obtain even if her shoes were in the closet, or out for repairs). So, it seems, (11b) can be true even in a case where I cannot see either Brutus or Caesar. Suppose that Brutus has a variety of weapons laid out on a table. Unable to watch the assassination, I avert my eyes.
If I look at the table, and see that out of all of Brutus's weapons only the knife is missing, I can come to know by what I see that Brutus is stabbing Caesar. Hence, it seems to me, I can see that Brutus is stabbing Caesar, in this case, without actually seeing him do it.

If we take a neo-Davidsonian tack and analyse ‘Brutus stabs Caesar’ as quantifying over stabbing-events, then we can explain these two features (T. Parsons, 1990, 15–17). First, we analyse ‘Brutus stabs Caesar’ as:

\[
(\exists e). \text{Agent}(\text{Brutus}, e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{Caesar}, e) \land \text{Stabbing}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*)
\]

(12) reports the occurrence of an event, a stabbing of Caesar by Brutus. Given this analysis, we can treat (11a) as reporting that I see this event:

\[
(\exists e)(\exists e'). \text{Agent}(\text{me}, e) \land \text{Patient}(e', e) \land \text{Seeing}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \text{Agent}(\text{Brutus}, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{Caesar}, e') \land \text{Stabbing}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*)
\]

(11a) I see Brutus stab Caesar

By contrast with (11a), (11b) reports that I have a certain attitude, seeing that, to the proposition that Caesar is stabbing Brutus. We can thus give it the much simpler analysis

(11b) I see that Brutus is stabbing Caesar.

\[
\text{See}(\text{me}, p)
\]

where ‘See’ is a two-place predicate which relates individuals to propositions, the relation of seeing that such-and-such is true, and ‘p’ denotes the proposition that Brutus is stabbing Caesar. (I leave aside the difficult issue of how to analyse the progressive ‘stabbing’ in a neo-Davidsonian framework.)

This semantics explains the transparency of (11a) and the opacity of (11b). In (11a), ‘Brutus’ and ‘Caesar’ are components of the description of an object seen — namely, the event of Brutus stabbing Caesar — and, in general, co-referring names and descriptions can be substituted salva veritate in reports of object-perception. If ‘I see Tibbles’ is true, then so is ‘I see the youngest of my cats,’ provided Tibbles satisfies that description. By contrast, (11b) reports a de dicto propositional attitude; the description of the event as a stabbing of Caesar by Brutus occurs within the embedded proposition, and descriptions occurring within the scope of a propositional attitude operator generally occur in an opaque context. It also explains the independence of (11a) and (11b). (11a) says that I see an event satisfying a certain description, which does not entail that I see that there is such an event. (11b) fails to entail (11a) for a similar reason. Seeing that \( p \) is coming to know \( p \) by way of visual perception, so (11b) reports perceptual knowledge. But (11b) does not require that what allows me to know that Brutus is stabbing Caesar is perception of the actual stabbing.

---

8I assume a present-tense reading, on which (12) says that Brutus stabs Caesar at the contextually-specified present moment, \( t^* \).

9King (2002) discusses verb phrases which have two distinct meanings, on one of which they denote relations that a person can stand in to any ordinary object, and on the other of which they denote relations that a person can stand in only to propositions. E.g. in the sentence ‘Jody fears that first-order logic is undecidable’, ‘fears’ denotes a relation between Jody and a proposition, but this is not the same relation ‘fears’ denotes in the sentence ‘Jody fears my dog’; Jody is not afraid of the proposition that first-order logic is undecidable, but is rather afraid that it is, or might be, true. King lists ‘fears’, ‘remembers’ and ‘hears’ as examples; I would add ‘sees’ to the list.

10Some might find it odd to refer to an event as an object, on the grounds that objects exist but do not occur, or on the grounds that objects and events persist through time in different ways. However, by ‘object’ I simply mean something that falls within the scope of a first-order quantifier, as this is all that is required for the notion of object-perception, and in this sense events are objects. We need not concern ourselves with metaphysical disputes about how, if at all, events differ from other things that fall within the scope of first-order quantifiers.
Now compare (11a) and (11b) to these sentence-pairs:

(13a) I see Randy omit to pick up milk.
(13b) I see that Randy is omitting to pick up milk.
(14a) I see Theresa refrain from smiling.
(14b) I see that Theresa is refraining from smiling.

Each of these sentences is well-formed, and the resulting pairs are syntactically similar to the pair of (11a) and (11b). Furthermore, each pair exhibits the features of (11a) and (11b) which drew our attention in the previous section. The names ‘Randy’ and ‘Theresa’ occur in transparent contexts in (13a) and (14a), but they occur in opaque contexts in (13b) and (14b). And the (a)-sentences and the (b)-sentences do not entail one another. The (a)-sentences obviously do not entail the (b)-sentences, since I can see Randy omit to pick up milk, or Theresa refrain from smiling, without realizing that it is Randy or Theresa that I am seeing. To see that (13b) does not entail (13a), suppose that I am hiding in the milk cooler at the grocery store, and that the milk cartons are arranged on a conveyor, so if Randy takes one from the front the rest of them will slide down to fill in the gap. I cannot see Randy from my vantage point, but I will be able to see if he picks up milk by watching the cartons on the conveyor. Finally, suppose that I can hear Randy whistling as he walks around the store, and I hear him walk past the milk. By watching the milk cartons I see that none of them are removed, and hence I see that Randy is omitting to pick up milk. But since I do not see Randy himself, I do not actually see him omit to pick up milk. To see that (14b) does not entail (14a), suppose I am walking behind Theresa, so I cannot see her face. Suppose also that I know that Theresa has a peculiar habit of rubbing the back of her head when she smiles. Now Bill comes walking in our direction. It seems that by watching her arms and/or the back of her head, I can know whether or not Theresa is smiling at Bill. If she does not rub the back of her head, I can thereby see that she is successfully refraining from smiling at him. But because I cannot see her face, I do not actually see her refrain from smiling.

A neo-Davidsonian analysis of negative action sentences, on which they quantify over omissions and refrainments, explains these features. First, we analyse ‘Randy omits to pick up milk’ and ‘Theresa refrains from smiling’, schematically, as:

\[
(15) \text{Randy omits to pick up milk.}
\]
\[
(\exists e) \text{Agent}(\text{Randy}, e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(\text{Randy}, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{milk}, e') \land \text{Picking-up}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*)
\]

\[
(16) \text{Theresa refrains from smiling.}
\]
\[
(\exists e) \text{Agent}(\text{Theresa}, e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(\text{Theresa}, e') \land \text{Smile}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*)
\]

Since (15) reports the existence of an event of Randy omitting to pick up milk, we can analyse (13a) as reporting that I see that event, and likewise for (16) and (14a):

\[
(13a) \text{I see Randy omit to pick up milk.}
\]
\[
(\exists e)(\exists e') \text{Agent}(\text{me}, e) \land \text{Patient}(e', e) \land \text{Seeing}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \text{Agent}(\text{Randy}, e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*) \land \text{Ensure}(e', \neg (\exists e'') \text{Agent}(\text{Randy}, e'') \land \text{Patient}(\text{milk}, e'') \land \text{Picking-up}(e'') \land \text{At}(e'', t^*)
\]

\[\text{If this is not obvious for (13a) and (13b), this may be because, while ‘omit’ and ‘omission’ are common in the philosophical literature on action, they are less common in ordinary speech.}\]
(14a) I see Theresa refrain from smiling.

\[(\exists e)(\exists e') Agent(I, e) \land Patient(e', e) \land Seeing(e) \land At(e, t^*) \land Agent(Theresa, e') \land At(e', t^*) \land Ensure(e', \neg(\exists e'') Agent(Theresa, e'') \land Smile(e'') \land At(e'', t^*))\]

By contrast, (13b) and (14b) report that I have a certain attitude towards the propositions expressed by (15) and (16), respectively.

(13b) I see that Randy is omitting to pick up milk.

\[See(me, p)\]

(14b) I see that Theresa is refraining from smiling.

\[See(me, q)\]

The explanation of the semantic features of (13a) – (14b) works just as before. (13a) and (14a) are reports of object-perception, and since ‘Randy’ and ‘Theresa’ are parts of the descriptions of the objects seen — namely, Randy’s omission and Theresa’s refrainment, respectively — they occur in a transparent context. By contrast, in (13b) and (14b) these names occur inside the scope of a propositional attitude operator, and so they are in an opaque context. Further, because (13a) and (14a) simply report that I see an event satisfying a certain description, they do not entail that I see that there is such an event. And while (13b) and (14b) do report perceptual knowledge that there is such an event, they entail nothing about what it is I see which gives me that knowledge.

Such considerations do not suffice to show that a neo-Davidsonian semantics for negative action sentences is correct, since a deflationist might be able to account for the features of (13a) – (14b) on her own terms. The deflationist faces no serious obstacles in analysing the (b)-sentences. She can agree that they are reports of propositional attitudes, and simply insist that the relevant propositions get negative-existential analyses. The trouble comes with the (a)-sentences. The deflationist must try to get the benefits of treating these sentences as reports of object-perception, without treating them as reporting that I see certain events, namely Randy’s omission and Theresa’s refrainment. But then, what sort of object do these sentences report me as seeing?

It might seem obvious what a deflationist should say: the (a)-sentences report that I see absences. But this answer faces two problems. First, it requires a commitment to realism about absences, which most philosophers, deflationists included, would rather avoid. Second, this answer gets the truth-conditions for the (a)-sentences wrong. If absences can be seen then they must apparently be located in space and time, and anyone who sees an absence must have perceptual access to that spatiotemporal location. Now, intuitively, an absence of Fs is located at the relevant place where there are no Fs, so if Randy’s omission to pick up milk is an absence, it must be located at the relevant place where there is no event of his picking up milk, and for me to see this absence I must have perceptual access to that location. But this line of reasoning suggests that (13a) is true in cases where it is intuitively false. Recall that, in order to see Randy omit to pick up milk, I must see Randy (that, after all, is why I cannot see him omit to pick up milk when I am hiding in the milk cooler). Now suppose that I am waiting for Randy at the grocery store, but this time I am not hiding in the milk cooler, but out on the main floor with a clear view of the milk shelf. It seems that I am in a very good position to see the absence of events in which Randy picks up milk — if that absence is located at the grocery store, it is surely located more specifically at or around the milk shelf. But now suppose further that Randy is not in the grocery store. It seems that, precisely because I cannot see Randy, I cannot see him omit to pick up milk — although
I can see that he is omitting to pick up milk. This is a case where (13a) should be false, but, because I apparently have a clear view of the absence, the deflationist proposal counts it as true.

Likewise, this answer counts (13a) as false when it is intuitively true. Modify the above case so that, instead of waiting for Randy at the grocery store, I am sitting in the passenger seat of his car as he drives home. It seems that, precisely because I can see Randy, I can see him omit to pick up milk. But because I am nowhere near the grocery store, I cannot see the absence of picking-up-milk events at the grocery store. Thus, the deflationist proposal counts (13a) false when it should be true.

There is a variant of this proposal, on which the (a)-sentences report perception of particular properties i.e. tropes, or perhaps their exemplifications. E.g. (13a) reports that I perceive Randy’s property of *not picking up milk*, or his exemplification of this property. If properties and their exemplifications have spatial locations, then they are presumably co-located with the objects that exemplify them, so this variant could actually get the truth-conditions of the (a)-sentences right: (13a) reports that I see a negative property of Randy, or perhaps the exemplification thereof, and so it requires that I see Randy himself.

Unfortunately, this variant still faces metaphysical problems. First, it is apparently committed to realism about negative properties like *not picking up milk*, and it is generally thought that such things do not belong in a realist account of properties. Second, it is not clear why negative actions do not still count as events, on this proposal. I noted towards the beginning that neo-Davidsonian semantics does not commit us to Davidson’s metaphysics of events as *sui generis* entities. So, the view that Randy’s omission is a particular negative property, or the exemplification of a negative property, is consistent with my claim that his omission is an event — it just develops that claim in an inferior way, by not identifying Randy’s omission with a positive event.

A second answer that a deflationist might give is that (13a) and (14a) report that I see the relevant *person*, at the time that they omit/refrain:

(13a*) I see Randy omit to pick up milk.

\[ (\exists e) \text{Agent}(me, e) \land \text{Patient}(Randy, e) \land \text{Seeing}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(Randy, e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{milk}, e') \land \text{Picking-up}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*) \]

(14a*) I see Theresa refrain from smiling.

\[ (\exists e) \text{Agent}(me, e) \land \text{Patient}(Theresa, e) \land \text{Seeing}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t^*) \land \neg (\exists e') \text{Agent}(Theresa, e') \land \text{Smile}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t^*) \]

This semantics captures the fact that I must see Randy in order to see him omit to pick up milk. It also places ‘Randy’ and ‘Theresa’ in transparent contexts, and it explains the logical independence of the (a)- and (b)-sentences, since I can see Randy while he omits to pick up milk without seeing that he is omitting to pick up milk, and vice-versa.

Unfortunately, this proposal still gets the truth-conditions of the (a)-sentences wrong, because while seeing the relevant agents is necessary for their truth, it is not sufficient. Recall the example where I am walking behind Theresa and cannot see her refrain from smiling, but can know by looking at her arms and the back of her head that she is refraining from smiling. This is a case where (14a) should be false. But (14a*) comes out true in this case, since as Theresa refrains from smiling, I see her by virtue of seeing the back of her. So (14a*) cannot provide the right analysis of (14a). Similarly, (13a*) cannot be right analysis of (13a).
down to his feet. It is clear that, in this case, I can see Randy. But it is equally clear that I cannot see
him omit to pick up milk. Even if I see that the milk cartons remain undisturbed, and hence can see
that he is omitting to pick up milk, it would be wrong to think that I actually see him do this. Thus
(13a*) can be true while (13a) is false.

It is not sufficient, for seeing someone perform a negative action, to see them while they perform it.
Rather, one must see certain parts of the agent. If I can see Theresa’s face, and in particular her mouth
and cheeks, then I can see her refrain from smiling, but if I am walking behind her and unable to see her
mouth or cheeks, then I cannot see her refrain from smiling. Likewise, if I can see Randy’s arms, then I
can see him omit to pick up milk, but if I am hiding in the cooler and unable to see anything above his
knees, I cannot.

Note that the same point holds for positive actions. It is not sufficient, for (11a) to be true, that I
see Brutus at the time that he stabs Caesar; if my view is obscured so that I cannot see anything above
Brutus’s knees, then although I see Brutus as he stabs Caesar, I do not actually see him stab Caesar. This
suggests that a similar explanation for the insufficiency applies to both positive and negative actions.

In the case of positive actions, the natural explanation why seeing someone while they φ does not
suffice for seeing them φ appeals to the idea that actions are events: seeing someone while they φ is not
generally sufficient for seeing the event of their φ-ing. For instance, in the scenario where I cannot see
anything above Brutus’s knees, I see Brutus but I do not see the event that is his stabbing Caesar. For
that event does not involve all parts of Brutus’s body, but only those parts that he actually uses to do
the stabbing. Since he does not use his legs to do the stabbing, they are not involved in the event, and
so seeing them does not allow me to see that event.

If negative actions are events — and in particular, events of the sort I claimed they are in the previous
section — we can give a parallel explanation why the truth of (13a*) and (14a*) does not suffice for the
truth of (13a) and (14a). When Theresa refrains from smiling, she does something her doing of which
ensures that she does not smile at that time, and it seems that only her mouth and cheeks are involved
in this ensuring-event. After all, smiling is something Theresa would do with our mouths and cheeks: in
order to smile, she must move the muscles in and around her mouth in certain ways; it does not matter
what she does with any other parts of her body, so none of those parts are involved in an act of smiling.
Thus, in order to ensure that she does not smile, she must do something with her mouth and cheeks, her
doing of which is incompatible with smiling. Since that doing is her refrainment, I must see her mouth
and cheeks in order to see her refrain from smiling.

Likewise, when Randy omits to pick up milk, he does something his doing of which ensures that he
does not pick up milk at that time, and it seems that only his arms are involved in this ensuring-event.
After all, picking up milk is something Randy would do with his arms: in order to pick up milk, he must
move at least one of his arms in a certain way; it does not matter what he does with any other parts of
his body, so none of those parts is involved in an act of picking up milk. Thus, in order to ensure that
he does not pick up milk, he must do something with his arms, his doing of which is incompatible with
picking up milk. Since that doing is his omission, I must see his arms in order to see him omit to pick
up milk.

So, not only do (13a*) and (14a*) get the truth-conditions of (13a) and (14a) wrong, but the natural
explanation of why they do so is that negative actions are events. My account gets the truth-conditions
right, and moreover gets them right for the right reason.
We have increasingly compelling reasons to think that (13a) and (14a) report that I see an event of some kind. In particular, we have good reason to think they report me as seeing an event which ensures that the agent does not do the relevant thing. As a last-ditch effort to account for the semantic features of these sentences, a deflationist might try to accept that conclusion while denying that the event I see is a negative action, thereby denying the need to construe simpler negative action sentences as quantifying over events. In making this move, the deflationist adopts my own semantics for (13a) and (14a), but she maintains that ‘Randy omits to pick up milk’ and ‘Theresa refrains from smiling’ have negative-existential form and that (13b) and (14b) report an attitude toward these negative-existential propositions.

It is precisely this combination of commitments — that the (a)-sentences quantify over ensuring-events while simpler negative action sentences do not — that generates the first problem for this proposal, namely, that it cannot give a satisfactory account of how the meanings of (13a) and (14a) are constructed from their parts.

Consider again (11a), ‘I see Brutus stab Caesar’, and (12), ‘Brutus stabs Caesar.’ As we saw, a compelling analysis of (11a) treats it as quantifying over (at least one) event which is a stabbing of Caesar by Brutus. I left it as an intuitive point that we can achieve this analysis by likewise treating (12) as quantifying over such events, but in fact the neo-Davidsonian analysis of (11a) strongly constrains us to give this analysis of (12), in order to give an account of how the meaning of (11a) is constructed from the meanings of its parts. In particular, we must say which word or phrase in that sentence accounts for the presence of the event-variable for stabbings of Caesar by Brutus. We obviously cannot treat the word ‘see’ or the phrase ‘I see’ as contributing this event-variable, since not every sentence that reports a seeing, or a seeing by me, quantifies over such events — the sentence ‘I see the Statue of Liberty’ does not, for example. By analysing (12) as an existential quantification over stabbings of Caesar by Brutus, we can treat the phrase ‘Brutus stab Caesar’ in (11a) as contributing that variable. Thus, a neo-Davidsonian analysis of (11a) constrains us to give a neo-Davidsonian analysis of (12).

The same reasoning applies to (13a) and (14a), on one hand, and (15) and (16), on the other. (13a), ‘I see Randy omit to pick up milk,’ is analysed as quantifying over (at least one) event which is an ensuring, by Randy, that he does not pick up milk, and so we must say which word or phrase in that sentence accounts for the presence of the variable for such events. We obviously cannot treat the word ‘see’ or the phrase ‘I see’ as contributing this event-variable, since not every sentence that reports a seeing, or a seeing by me, quantifies over such events. By analysing (15), ‘Randy omits to pick up milk,’ as an existential quantification over ensurings, we can treat the phrase ‘Randy omit to pick up milk’ in (13a) as contributing that variable. Similar remarks apply to (14a) and (16). Thus, if we accept a neo-Davidsonian analysis of (13a) and (14a), compositionality constrains us to give a neo-Davidsonian analysis of (15) and (16). The deflationist proposal under consideration violates this constraint by accepting my analysis of (13a) and (14a) as existential quantifications over ensurings, while denying that the simpler negative action sentences (15) and (16) quantify over such events.

The second problem with this deflationist proposal is that, while it can get the truth-conditions of the (a)-sentences correct by piggybacking on my account, it makes those truth-conditions mysterious. If, as the deflationist insists, the fact that Randy omits to pick up milk is not a matter of the occurrence of an event, then why should the fact that I see him omit to pick up milk be a matter of my seeing an event?

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12See Section 3.7 for details.
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The deflationist might try for an epistemological explanation. Seeing $x \phi$ is distinct from knowing, on the basis of perception, that $x$ is $\phi$-ing. Nonetheless, it seems that seeing $x \phi$ often puts one in a position to know that $x$ is $\phi$-ing. So, the deflationist might say, seeing Randy omit to pick up milk is being in a position to know that he is so omitting, and to be in this position by virtue of seeing Randy. And the obvious way to achieve this is by seeing those parts of Randy’s body that would be involved in an act of picking up milk, were he to perform such an action.

Unfortunately for the deflationist, seeing those parts of $x$ that would be involved in a $\phi$-ing event is generally neither necessary nor sufficient even for being in a position to know on the basis of visual perception of $x$ that $x$ is not $\phi$-ing. My original case in which (14b) is true but (14a) is false shows that it is not necessary: neither Theresa’s arms nor the back of her head would be involved if she were smiling, but I am still in a position to know that she is not smiling by seeing these parts of her body — indeed, I actually know this.

To see that it is not sufficient, consider a case in which I am on the main floor of the grocery store with a clear view of the milk shelf, but that this time Randy has actually come to the store. I see Randy stop in front of a shelf holding both cartons of milk and cartons of cream, but that I am far enough away that I cannot distinguish between the two kinds of carton. I can see both of Randy’s arms, and hence can see the parts of his body that would be involved in an act of picking up milk, were he to perform one. I see Randy grab a carton, put it in his basket, and walk on. If Randy has just omitted to pick up milk, then I have just seen him do so. And yet I am not in a position to know, on the basis of perception, whether or not Randy has picked up milk. Thus, unlike my neo-Davidsonian account, the proposal does not provide a satisfying explanation of the truth-conditions of (13a) and (14a).

I have considered three ways in which a deflationist might account for the semantic features of (13a) – (14b) without taking negative action sentences to quantify over omissions and refrainments. From a semantic perspective, my view outmatches any of these deflationist proposals. Thus, taking a neo-Davidsonian approach to negative action sentences is not just one way of accounting for the data. It is also the best way.

3.5 Adverbs Again

We saw in Section 3.2 that adverbs seem to pose a problem for a neo-Davidsonian approach to negative action sentences, since they are often used in such sentences, not to describe the agent’s omission or refrainment, but rather to describe the kind of event that does not occur. I have argued that by treating these sentences as containing two event-variables instead of one, we can capture this usage. But it seems that adverbs in negative action sentences are not always used in this way. In the sentence ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom’, ‘in the bathroom’ tells us the relevant place at which there was no buttering of toast by Jones. However, we can move the adverb towards the beginning of the sentence, generating ‘Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast,’ or ‘In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast.’ Here, it seems, ‘in the bathroom’ is not primarily describing the relevant place at which there is no buttering of toast by Jones. For what makes that place relevant is the presupposition that Jones was supposed to butter toast there. That is why, if there was in fact no such expectation, an utterance of ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom’ would be inappropriate. By contrast, neither ‘Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast’ nor ‘In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast’ is inappropriate in such circumstances. If Jones was merely supposed to butter toast, never mind
where, then while ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom’ is inappropriate, ‘Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast’ and ‘In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast’ are perfectly appropriate. Thus, ‘in the bathroom’ is not being used to describe the relevant place where there was no buttering of toast by Jones.

What, then, is the adverb doing? I suggest that it is describing the location of Jones’s omission. Disambiguating these sentences as we did (8) and (10) — distinguishing ‘Jones omitted to do such-and-such at some particular time’ from ‘Jones omitted to do such-and-such at all’ — we get:

(17a) Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast. / In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{ Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg(\exists e')) \]
\[\text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(toast, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)\]

(17b) Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast. / In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[\forall t: t < t^* \exists e \text{ Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land \text{In}(e, \text{bathroom}) \land \text{Ensure}(e, \neg(\exists e')) \]
\[\text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land \text{Patient}(toast, e') \land \text{Buttering}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)\]

Note that ‘in the bathroom’ is predicated of \(e\), the ensuring-variable, rather than \(e'\), the buttering-variable. The adverb thus gives the location of Jones’s omission, not the location at which there is no event of him buttering toast. If this suggestion is right, then sentences like (17a) and (17b) provide a further argument against Deflationism. For according to Deflationism, these sentences are pure negative-existentials. They contain no variables for ensuring-events, but only variables for buttering-events, and so the adverb ‘in the bathroom’ can only be used to describe the kind of act that Jones omits to perform; it cannot describe Jones’s omission itself. Thus, while my approach can capture both uses to which that adverb can be put, Deflationism can apparently capture only one.

Of course, a deflationist might object to my suggestion that in these sentences ‘in the bathroom’ is describing the location of an event, Jones’s omission. The obvious alternative is to say that the adverb does not describe an event in which Jones is involved, but rather describes Jones himself — (17a) and (17b) report that Jones omitted to butter toast while he was in the bathroom, so ‘in the bathroom’ is a predicate that gets applied to Jones:

(17*a) Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast. / In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[\exists t: t < t^* \exists e \text{ In}(Jones, \text{bathroom}) \land \neg(\exists e) \text{ Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t)\]

(17*b) Jones omitted, in the bathroom, to butter toast. / In the bathroom, Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[\forall t: t < t^* \exists e \text{ In}(Jones, \text{bathroom}) \land \neg(\exists e) \text{ Agent}(Jones, e) \land \text{Patient}(toast, e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t)\]

Unfortunately, some of the arguments of the previous section tell against this proposal. Consider the sentence ‘I saw Jones omit, in the bathroom, to butter toast’, on either of its readings. Here, ‘in the bathroom’ is not used to describe the relevant place where there is no buttering of toast by Jones. Could it be used, as this deflationist proposal suggests, to describe Jones, rather than an event that is his omission? If so, then the sentence presumably means that I saw Jones while he was in the bathroom omitting to butter toast — (17*a) and (17*b) do not report the occurrence of any event, and so there is nothing else for this sentence to report perception of than Jones himself.
(18*a) I saw Jones omit, in the bathroom, to butter toast.

\[
\exists t: t < t^* \text{In}(\text{Jones, bathroom}) \land \neg(\exists e) \text{Agent}(\text{Jones, } e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land (\exists e') \text{Agent}(\text{me, } e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{Jones, } e') \land \text{Seeing}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)
\]

(18*b) I saw Jones omit, in the bathroom, to butter toast.

\[
\forall t: t < t^* \text{In}(\text{Jones, bathroom}) \land \neg(\exists e) \text{Agent}(\text{Jones, } e) \land \text{Patient}(\text{toast, } e) \land \text{Buttering}(e) \land \text{At}(e, t) \land (\exists e') \text{Agent}(\text{me, } e') \land \text{Patient}(\text{Jones, } e') \land \text{Seeing}(e') \land \text{At}(e', t)
\]

But we have already seen that this treatment of sentences in which negative action phrases interact with perceptual locutions is inadequate. Seeing Jones while he does not butter toast does not suffice for seeing him omit to butter toast. If I can only see Jones’s legs as he omits to butter toast, then although I see him while he omits to butter toast, I do not actually see him do so. In order to actually see him perform the omission, it seems that I must see certain parts of his body, in particular his arms and hands. The best explanation of this fact, I have argued, is that seeing Jones omit to butter toast is seeing an event in which those parts of his body are involved. Thus, my analyses of (18a) and (18b) get their truth-conditions right, while these deflationist analyses get them wrong. The best way to capture this use of adverbs, on which they are not used to describe the kind of event that does not occur, is to treat them as predicates of certain events, namely omissions and refrainments.

### 3.6 Conclusion

I conclude that a neo-Davidsonian semantics which treats negative action sentences as existential quantifications over events is superior to a deflationist alternative, on which such sentences are treated as negative existentials. Of course, there are more directly metaphysical objections against treating negative actions as events, and it will by task in the remaining chapters to answer those objections, and thereby show that a view on which negative actions are events is metaphysically satisfying. My task in this chapter has been more modest: to argue that Deflationism does not give the correct account of negative action sentences, and should be rejected in favour of a neo-Davidsonian one. To the extent that neo-Davidsonian ideas motivate the idea that ordinary, positive actions are events, they motivate the idea that negative actions are events, as well. Thus, we need not see omissions and refrainments as absences, and we can, in principle, accommodate them in event-based theories of agency.

### 3.7 Appendix: Deflationism and Compositionality

In Section 3.4, I considered a deflationist view according to which, while simple negative action sentences are negative-existentials, sentences like (5a) and (6a) in which negative action phrases interact with the phrase ‘I see...’ (or ‘x sees...’) quantify over ensuring-events, just as I say they do. I argued that this view gives an inferior account of how the meanings of (5a) and (6a) are constructed from their parts. Here I provide the technical details. In making the semantics more explicit, I will use the broadly Fregean approach of (Heim & Kratzer, 1998). While that work does not give a neo-Davidsonian treatment to action sentences, and there are competing frameworks which do (Pietroski, 2005), I will use Heim and Kratzer’s approach because of its general familiarity amongst linguistically-minded philosophers.

The framework is intensional rather than extensional. For any phrase \( \alpha \), \([\alpha]^t\) is the extension of \( \alpha \), while \([\lambda t.[\alpha]^t]\) is its intension, i.e. a function from times to extensions of \( \alpha \) at those times. (Technically,
the intension of \( \alpha \) will take worlds into account as well as times, but for our purposes I will ignore worlds.) The semantics makes use of the following semantic types:

**Recursive Definition of Types**

(a) \( e \) is a type.
(b) \( s \) is a type.
(c) \( t \) is a type.
(d) If \( \sigma \) and \( \tau \) are types, then \( <\sigma, \tau> \) is a type.
(e) If \( \sigma \) is a type, then \( <i, \sigma> \) is a type.
(f) Nothing else is a type.

Here, ‘\( e \)’ is the type of all entities other than events, ‘\( s \)’ is the type of events, and ‘\( t \)’ is the type of the two truth-values, 1 and 0. In addition, it uses the following rules derived from (Heim & Kratzer, 1998):

**Lexical Terminals (LT)**

If \( \alpha \) is a terminal node occupied by a lexical item, then \( [\alpha]^t \) is specified in the lexicon.

**Functional Application (FA)**

If \( \alpha \) is a branching node whose daughters are \( \beta \) and \( \gamma \), then if \( [\beta]^t \) is a function whose domain contains \( [\gamma]^t \), then \( [\alpha]^t = [\beta]^t([\gamma]^t) \).

**Intensional Functional Application (IFA)**

If \( \alpha \) is a branching node whose daughters are \( \beta \) and \( \gamma \), then for any time \( t \), if \( [\beta]^t \) is a function whose domain contains \( \lambda t \cdot [\gamma]^t \), then \( [\alpha]^t = [\beta]^t\lambda t \cdot [\gamma]^t \).

Following (Kratzer, 1996), I take it that eventive VPs do not have the agent-role built it — e.g. \( [\text{run}]^t \) is \( [\lambda e \cdot e \text{ is a run and } e \text{ is at } t] \), not \( [\lambda x \cdot [\lambda e \cdot \text{x is the agent of } e \text{, } e \text{ is a run and } e \text{ is at } t]] \). The agent-role is introduced by a separate ‘Voice’ head, by way of the following rule (Kratzer, 1996, 122):

**Event Identification (EI)**

If \( \alpha \) is a branching node whose daughters are \( \beta \) and \( \gamma \), then for any time \( t \), if \( [\beta]^t \) is a function whose domain contains \( \lambda t \cdot [\gamma]^t \), then \( [\alpha]^t = \lambda x \cdot [\beta]^t\lambda t \cdot [\gamma]^t\).

This framework gives a satisfying account of how the sentences in which action phrases interact with perceptual locutions are constructed, and in particular gives a satisfying account of how all of the event-variables in such sentences get contributed by their constitutive phrases. To see this, consider how the simple action sentence (4), ‘Brutus stabs Caesar’ is constructed, using the following lexicon:

\[
[\text{Brutus}]^t = \text{Brutus} \\
[\text{Caesar}]^t = \text{Caesar} \\
[\text{stab}]^t = [\lambda x \cdot \text{x is a stabbing}, \lambda e \cdot \text{e is at } t] \\
[\text{Agent}]^t = [\lambda f \cdot \lambda x \cdot [\lambda e \cdot \text{x is the agent of } e \text{ and } f(e) = 1]] \\
[\text{Closure}]^t = [\lambda f \cdot \lambda x \cdot \lambda e \cdot \lambda t \cdot [\lambda x \cdot [\lambda e \cdot \text{x is the agent of } e \text{ and } f(e) = 1]]] \\
[\text{PRESENT}]^t = [\lambda p \cdot \lambda t \cdot \lambda x \cdot [\lambda e \cdot \text{e is at } t \text{ and } f(e) = 1]]
\]
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(The appeal to \[\text{Closure}\] in order to bind lingering event-variables with an existential quantifier is, I take it, fairly standard amongst neo-Davidsonians). Given this lexicon and our composition rules, the logical form of (4) is:

\[
\text{St}_t \ \text{IP}_t \ \text{PRESENT} \ \text{St}_s \ \text{VP}_t
\]

\[
\text{Closure} \ \text{VP}_t \ \text{Ne}_t \ \text{Brutus} \ \text{VoiceP}_t \ \text{Agent} \ \text{VP}_t \ \text{V}_t \ \text{stab} \ \text{Ne}_t \ \text{Caesar}
\]

and the sentence has the truth-condition that there is some event, e, such that e is a stabbing of Caesar by Brutus.\(^{13}\)

We can now give an account of how (3a), ‘I see Brutus stab Caesar’, is constructed. We can see that the denotation of the phrase ‘Brutus stab Caesar’ = \[\text{Agent}t(\text{stab}t(\text{Caesar}t)) (\text{Brutus}t) = \lambda e_s.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e, \text{ and } e \text{ is at } t \}\]. This is a function of type \(<s,t>_t\), and so in addition to adding the first-person pronoun ‘I’ to our lexicon, we must add a phrase ‘see’, whose denotation can interact with functions of type \(<s,t>_t\).

\[
[\text{I}]^t = x^* \quad [\text{see}]^t = [\lambda e_s.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e, \text{ and } e \text{ is at } t ]
\]

Here, \(x^*\) is the contextually-determined referent of the first-person pronoun (typically, the speaker).

\(^{13}\text{Proof:}\)

1. \[\text{[PRESENT} \ \text{Closure} \ \text{Brutus Agent} \ \text{stab} \ \text{Caesar}]^t = \text{[PRESENT]}^t(\text{[Closure]}^t(\text{[Agent]}^t(\text{[stab]}^t(\text{[Caesar]}^t))(\text{[Brutus]}^t)) = [\lambda e_s.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e, \text{ and } e \text{ is at } t ]\]

2. By (FA) = \[\lambda p_{<s,t>_t}.p(t^*) = 1][([M_{<s,t>_t}.\text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1][[\lambda x_s.\text{le}'_s.x \text{ is the agent of } e']][[\lambda y_s.\text{le}''_s.x \text{ is a stabbing, y is the patient of } e'' \text{ and } e'' \text{ is at } t ]](\text{Caesar})(\text{Brutus}))\]

3. By (EI) = \[\lambda p_{<s,t>_t}.p(t^*) = 1][([M_{<s,t>_t}.\text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1][[\lambda x_s.\text{le}'_s.x \text{ is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ is at } t ]](\text{Brutus}))\]

4. By (FA) = \[\lambda p_{<s,t>_t}.p(t^*) = 1][([M_{<s.t>_t}.\text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1][[\lambda e_s.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ is at } t ])(\text{Brutus}))\]

5. By (IFA) = \[\lambda p_{<s,t>_t}.p(t^*) = 1][([M_{<s,t>_t}.\text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1][[\lambda e'.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e \text{ and } e \text{ is at } t ])](\text{Brutus})\]

6. By (IFA) = \[\lambda p_{<s,t>_t}.p(t^*) = 1][([M_{<s,t>_t}.\text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1][[\lambda e'.\text{Brutus is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e \text{ and } e \text{ is at } t ])](\text{Brutus})\]

= 1 iff there is some e such that Brutus is the agent of e, e is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of e and e is at t*.
takes as its argument a function f of type <s,t> and yields another function of that same type, which is true of some e just in case e is a seeing of some e′ which satisfies f. Given this expanded lexicon, the logical form of (3a) is:

\[ [\text{see}]^t \] takes as its argument a function f of type <s,t> and yields another function of that same type, which is true of some e just in case e is a seeing of some e′ which satisfies f. Given this expanded lexicon, the logical form of (3a) is:

and its truth-condition is that there is some e and some e′ such that e′ is a stabbing of Caesar by Brutus and e is a seeing of e′ by me. Not only do we get the right truth-conditions, but we have an account

You might wonder why the variable e′ is already bound by a quantifier, rather than being bound by a λ-operator. That is, why not treat [see]t as an entity of type <s,t>, <s,<s,t>>, as follows:

\[ [\text{see}]^t = [\lambda_{<s,t>} \cdot [\lambda \text{e′}, \lambda \text{e}, \text{e is at t and there exists some e′ s.t. e is a seeing of e′} \text{ and } \lambda(t) = 1]] \]

The answer is that at some point ‘see’ is going to need to interact with ‘Agent’ so that the sentence will have as its truth-condition that x* sees Brutus stab Caesar. On the general approach being taken in this Appendix, [Agent]1 interacts with entities of type <s,t> by (EI), and so [see Brutus stab Caesar]1 must be of type <s,t> (which it is, on my favoured approach). However, [see2 Brutus stab Caesar]1 will be of type <s,t, t>>, and so [Agent]1 will not interact with it by (EI). Adopting [see2]1 would require a whole new rule to account for how the agent gets into sentences about seeings.

Proof:

1. [PRESENT Closure I Agent see Brutus Agent stab Caesar]1
   \[ = [\text{[PRESENT]}^t \cdot [\text{Closure}]^t \cdot [\text{Agent}]^t \cdot [\text{see}]^t \cdot [\text{Brutus Agent stab Caesar}]^1] \cdot [\text{I}^t] \]
   \[ = [\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t^\star) = 1]([M_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t) = 1](x^\star)))))

2. By (FA) = [\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t^\star) = 1]([M_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t) = 1](x^\star))))

3. By (EI) = [\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t^\star) = 1]([M_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t) = 1](x^\star))))

4. By (FA) = [\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t^\star) = 1]([M_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t) = 1](x^\star))))

5. By (FA) = [\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t^\star) = 1]([M_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e′}) = \lambda(\text{e}), \lambda(\text{e′}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}, \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(\text{e}′) = \lambda(\text{e}) = \lambda(\text{e}′)]([\lambda_{<s,t,t>} \cdot \lambda(t) = 1](x^\star))))
of where the stabbing-variable in (3a) comes from: it is contributed by the phrase ‘Brutus stab Caesar’. This is just what you would expect since, as I argued in Section 3.4, it is not plausibly contributed by ‘I see...’

My neo-Davidsonian approach to negative action sentences mimics this approach. Consider how (7), ‘Randy omits to pick up milk’ is constructed. We use the following lexicon:

\[
\text{[Randy]}^t = \text{Randy} \\
\text{[pick up milk]}^t = [\lambda e_s.e \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e \text{ is at } t] \\
\text{[omit]}^t = [\lambda f_{<s,t>}.[\lambda e_s.e \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e \text{ ensures that there exists no } e' \text{ s.t. the agent of } e \text{ is the agent of } e' \text{ and } f(e') = 1]]
\]

Some points about \([\text{omit]}^t\) are in order. First, \([\text{omit]}^t\) operates on functions of type \(<s,t>\). This allows it to operate on a VP, \(\alpha\), as you would expect. Second, it might seem odd that \([\text{omit]}^t\) contains a reference to ‘the agent of \(e\)’, even though no \(x\) has yet been placed in the agent-role. But \([\text{Agent]}^t\) will interact with \([\text{omit]}^t\)(\([\alpha]^t\)) by (EI), and the resulting VP will have an argument-place for the agent of \(e\). Finally, although \([\text{omit]}^t\) has it that \(e\) is at \(t\), it does not predicate any particular temporal location of \(e\). This is because that temporal location will be contributed \(\alpha\). The resulting logical form of (7) is:

![](image)

and its truth-condition is that there is some \(e\) such that Randy is the agent of \(e\), \(e\) is at \(t^*\) and \(e\) ensures that there is no \(e''\) such that the agent of \(e\) is the agent of \(e'''\), \(e'''\) is a picking-up of milk and \(e''''\) is at \(t^*\).

\[\text{16} \text{Proof:}\]

1. \([\text{PRESENT]}^t \text{ Closure Randy Agent omit pick up milk}]^t = [\text{PRESENT}]^t \text{ Closure}^t \text{ Agent}^t \text{ [omit]}^t \text{ [pick up milk]}^t \text{ [Randy]}^t)\]

\[= [\lambda p_{<s,t>} . p(t^*) = 1][\lambda e_{<s,t>} . \text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } x^* \text{ is the agent of } e, e \text{ is at } t' \text{ and there exists some } e'' \text{ such that } e \text{ is a seeing of } e''', \text{ Brutus is the agent of } e''', e''' \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e''' \text{ and } e'''' \text{ is at } t']\]

\[
= 1 \text{ iff there exists some } e \text{ such that } x^* \text{ is the agent of } e, e \text{ is at } t^* \text{ and there exists some } e''' \text{ such that } e \text{ is a seeing of } e''', \text{ Brutus is the agent of } e''', e''' \text{ is a stabbing, Caesar is the patient of } e'''' \text{ and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*.
\]
The construction of (5a), 'I see Randy omit to pick up milk', mimics the construction of (3), as does the derivation of its truth-conditions:  
\[ e''^m \quad \text{and} \quad g(e''^m) = 1\] 
\[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''^m \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

2. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

3. By (EI) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

4. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

5. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

6. By (IFA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda x'. \text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } f(e) = 1\] \[ (\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ is the agent of } e'''' \text{ and } e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*)((\text{Randy})) \]

\[ = 1 \text{ iff there exists some } e \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e, e \text{ is at } t^* \text{ and } e \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*. \]

17 Proof:

1. \[ \text{[PRESENT Closure I Agent see Randy Agent omit pick up milk]} = \text{[PRESENT]}([\text{Closure}]([\text{Agent}][\text{see}][\text{Randy Agent omit pick up milk}]))(\text{[II]}) \]
\[ = [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ is the agent of } e'''' \text{ and } e'''' \text{ is a seeing of } e'''' \text{ and } f(e''') = 1\] \[ (\lambda e''''^m. \text{Randy is the agent of } e'''' \text{ and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*)((\text{Randy})) \]

2. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t))((\text{Randy})) \]

3. By (EI) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*))((\text{Randy})) \]

4. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*))((\text{Randy})) \]

5. By (FA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda e''^m. e''^m \text{ is at } t \text{ and } e''^m \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*))((\text{Randy})) \]

6. By (IFA) = \[ [\lambda p_{<t,>} \cdot p(t^*) = 1]\] \[ ((\lambda x'. \text{there exists some } e \text{ such that } x^* \text{ is the agent of } e, e \text{ is at } t^* \text{ and } e \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*)((\text{Randy})) \]

\[ = 1 \text{ iff there exists some } e \text{ such that } x^* \text{ is the agent of } e, e \text{ is at } t^* \text{ and } e \text{ ensures that there exists no } e'''' \text{ such that the agent of } e'''' \text{ is the agent of } e''^m, e'''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e'''' \text{ is at } t^*. \]
Note that this neo-Davidsonian account gives a natural explanation of how the variable for ensuring-events gets into (5a): it is contributed by the phrase ‘Randy omit to pick up milk’, whose denotation is \[\lambda e. \text{Randy is the agent of } e, \text{e is at } t \text{ and e ensures that there exists no } e' \text{ such that the agent of } e \text{ is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e' \text{ is at } t\].

Things are not so straightforward for the deflationist. In constructing (5a), she obviously cannot take the denotation of the phrase ‘Randy omit to pick up milk’ to contain a variable for ensuring-events, for then that variable will be in the simple negative action sentence ‘Randy omits to pick up milk,’ as well, contrary to Deflationism. Thus, she cannot accept my account of \(\text{omit}\), either, and must propose an alternative.

As a first attempt, the deflationist might follow me in treating \(\text{omit}\) as a function that takes a function of type \(\langle s,t\rangle\) as its argument, thus respecting the intuitive thought that \(\text{omit}\) operates on VPs. Perhaps the most natural thought is that it takes a VP to the proposition that there is no event that satisfies that VP:

\[\text{omit}_2 = \lambda f. \text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } f(e)\]

However, this generates a problem when we try to construct the meaning of ‘Randy omits to pick up milk’: 
We apply \(\text{omit}_2\) to \([\text{pick up milk}]^1\) by (FA), thus yielding an entity of type \(t\), the proposition that there is no \(e\) such that \(e\) is a picking-up of milk and \(e\) is at \(t\). Not only is it odd to have \(\text{omit}_2\)\([\text{pick up milk}]^1\), which ought to be a VP, in that category. But what is worse, none of the rules we have introduced so far will also allow us to compute the VoiceP head. \([\text{Agent}]^1\) typically applies to VPs by (EI), but that rule requires the VP to be of type <\(s, t\)>. Unless we introduce a new rule, the computation simply stops.

The deflationist can get around this second problem by denying that \(\text{omit}_2\) applies to a VP that occurs below the VoiceP head. Instead, she can insist that \(\text{omit}_2\) occurs higher up the tree, after the agent and the agent-role have already been introduced:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{S}_1 & \quad \text{Agent}_t \quad \text{V}_t \quad \text{pick up milk}_t \quad \text{Randy}_t \quad \text{VoiceP}_t \\
\text{IP}_{<t,t,t>} & \quad \text{PRESENT} \\
\text{V}_{<t,t>} & \quad \text{omit}_2 \\
\text{VP}_{<t,t>} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

While this does not get around the problem that a VP is being assigned the type \(t\), the computation does go through,\(^{18}\) so a deflationist might find that problem easy enough to live with.

Although the deflationist can, with some ingenuity, give an account of the composition of ‘Randy omits to pick up milk,’ she faces yet more trouble when she tries to give an account of the composition of ‘I see Randy omit to pick up milk’. For on the current proposal, the denotation of the phrase ‘Randy omits to pick up milk’ is of type \(t\):

\[
\text{omit}_2^1([\text{Agent}]^1([\text{pick up milk}]^1)(\text{Randy}^1)) = \text{the proposition that}
\]

\[18\text{Proof:}\]

1. \([\text{PRESENT}\ \text{omit}\ \text{Randy}\ \text{Agent}\ \text{pick up milk}]^1\)
   \[
   = [\text{PRESENT}]^1([\text{omit}_2]([\text{Agent}]^1([\text{pick up milk}]^1)(\text{Randy}^1)))
   \]
   \[
   = [\lambda p_{<t,t,t>}.p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}.\text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } f(e)][(\lambda e'.\text{Randy is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e' \text{ is at } t})(\text{Randy}))
   \]

2. By (EI) \(= [\lambda p_{<t,t,t>}.p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}.\text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } f(e)][(\lambda e'.\text{Randy is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e' \text{ is at } t})(\text{Randy}))\)

3. By (FA) \(= [\lambda p_{<t,t,t>}.p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}.\text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } f(e)][(\lambda e'.\text{Randy is the agent of } e', e' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e' \text{ is at } t)}(\text{Randy}))\)

4. By (FA) \(= [\lambda p_{<t,t,t>}.p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}.\text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } f(e)][(\lambda e'.\text{Randy is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e \text{ is at } t)}(\text{Randy}))\)

5. By (IFA) \(= [\lambda p_{<t,t,t>}.p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda t'.\text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } \text{Randy is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e \text{ is at } t'])\)

\[= 1 \text{ if } \text{there exists no } e \text{ such that } \text{Randy is the agent of } e, e \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e \text{ is at } t'.\]
there exists no e such that Randy is the agent of e, e is a picking-up of milk and e is at t. None of the rules we have in place will allow $[\text{see}]^{3}$ to interact with this entity, so the computation fails at the first step:

$$[\text{see}_3]^3 = [\lambda p_1. [\lambda e. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that } p]]$$

$[\text{See}_3]^3$ is of the right semantic type, so the computation can go through.\(^{19}\)

\(^{19}\)**Proof:**

1. $[\text{PRESENT Closure I Agent see omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1$
   
   $[\text{PRESENT}]^1 ([\text{Closure}]^1 ([\text{Agent}]^1 ([\text{see}]^1 ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1) ([\text{I}]^1))))$
   
   $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e' \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that } q]) ([\lambda e_{<t,t>} e'' \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e''' \text{ such that } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t]) ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1 ([\text{I}]^1))$

2. By (FA) $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e' \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that there exists no } e''' \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e''' \text{, } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t]) ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1 ([\text{I}]^1))$

3. By (EI) $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e' \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that there exists no } e''' \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e''' \text{, } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t]) ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1 ([\text{I}]^1))$

4. By (FA) $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e' \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that there exists no } e''' \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e''' \text{, } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t]) ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1 ([\text{I}]^1))$

5. By (FA) $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t \text{ and there exists some } e' \text{ such that } e' \text{ is a seeing of } e' \text{ and } e' \text{ ensures that there exists no } e''' \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e''' \text{, } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t]) ([\text{Omit Randy Agent pick up milk}]^1 ([\text{I}]^1))$

6. By (IFA) $= [\lambda p_{<t,t>, 1} . p(t^*) = 1]([\lambda e_{<t,t>}. e \text{ is at } t' \text{ and there exists some } e'' \text{ such that } e'' \text{ is a seeing of } e'' \text{ and } e'' \text{ ensures that there exists no } e''' \text{ such that Randy is the agent of } e''' \text{, } e''' \text{ is a picking-up of milk and } e''' \text{ is at } t'])$

   $= 1$ if there exists some e such that x* is the agent of e, e is at t* and there exists some e''' such that e is a seeing of e''' and e''' ensures that there exists no e''' such that Randy is the agent of e''' , e''' is a picking-up of milk and e''' is at t*.
Note also that this account explains how the variable for ensuring-events gets into (5a), even on the assumption that it is not contributed by ‘Randy omit to pick up milk’: the variable gets contributed by $\text{see}_3$.

However, this solution has its own costs. First, $\text{see}_3$ does not generate the right truth-conditions for ‘I see Randy omit to pick up milk.’ In particular, it does not require that Randy be the agent of the ensuring-event (see the derivation), and so it does not explain why, in order to see Randy omit to pick up milk, I must see some event involving him. Perhaps this problem can be solved by complicating the meaning of ‘see’ still further, but the deflationist is still left with a second problem, which is that her semantics requires two lexical entries for ‘see’, where mine requires only one. The deflationist, recall, adopts a neo-Davidsonian approach to positive action sentences, and so she will construct the meaning of (3a), ‘I see Brutus stab Caesar’, along the same lines I sketched earlier. Thus, she already has $\text{see}_3$ in her semantics. However, while my neo-Davidsonian approach allows me to construct the meanings of (5a) and (6a) using $\text{see}_1$, the deflationist must introduce ‘see$_3$’ or some other lexical item simply in order to explain why they each contain a variable for ensuring-events, even though the simpler negative action phrases from which they are constructed do not. Parsimony thus counts against the deflationist.

Of course, I cannot survey all possible implementations of this deflationist proposal. But it seems clear that any implementation will be more complex than my own view, requiring additional composition rules and/or additional lexical items. Thus, from a semantic perspective this deflationist account is inferior to my neo-Davidsonian one, which explains more using fewer resources.
Chapter 4

Negatives as Positives: A Functionalist Account of Negative Actions

4.1 Absences and Negative Actions

In the previous chapter, I argued that negative action sentences are best analysed, not as negative-existentials, but as existential quantifications over events. Thus, rather than thinking of negative actions as merely absences of events, we should think of them as events in their own right.

Simply thinking of negative actions as events will not solve all of the metaphysical problems that they seem to pose, however. Part of the metaphysical problem with absences is that they do not seem to be entities in their own right but, simply, absences of entities. Even if, as we say, there is an absence of beer in my fridge, surely this does not require there to be an extra entity in my fridge, an absence of beer. All that is required is that there be no beer in my fridge.

One might worry that similar reasoning applies even if we say that negative actions are events. Suppose that we adopt a property-exemplification view, on which an event is the exemplification of a property by some object(s) at a time, and has the object(s), property, and time as constituents. Then it might seem that, if Randy omits to pick up milk, this omission has the negative property not picking up milk as a constituent: the omission consists of Randy exemplifying this property at the relevant time. But positing negative properties to be the constituents of negative events seems problematic. If Randy does not pick up milk, then surely this does not require there to be a universal, not picking up milk, that he exemplifies. All that is required is that he not exemplify the universal picking up milk. One might instead think that, if positive actions are exemplifications of positive properties, then negative actions are non-exemplifications of those properties, and so Randy’s omission to pick up milk is a non-exemplification of the universal picking up milk. But if anything, positing non-exemplifications is even stranger than positing negative properties. As Clarke (2014, 41) says, “When objects possess properties, the objects are genuinely tied in some way to those properties. When objects lack properties, they aren’t so tied to them. It seems confused to think of this as their being tied to the properties in some different

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1 See Section 1.2.3.
A similar problem arises on a trope theory, according to which events just are properties, understood as particulars.\(^2\) If we think of events as tropes, then it seems that Randy’s omission to pick up milk is a particular not picking up milk property, but once again positing such negative properties seems problematic. If Randy does not pick up milk, then surely this does not require that he has a not picking up milk trope. All that is required is that he does not have a picking up milk trope.

So, if we think of events as either property-exemplifications or tropes, then the mere claim that negative actions are events does not make them any more metaphysically appealing than absences. One might try to avoid these problems by adopting an alternative conception of events, such as Davidson’s. On that conception, events are sui generis entities, not to be understood in terms of the possession of properties by objects. If events are not understood in terms of properties, then positing negative events does not require positing negative properties, or non-exemplifications of positive ones. In fact, if events are sui generis entities, then it seems there is nothing informative to say about the natures of negative events as opposed to positive ones, and so nothing to say about their nature which could possibly render the former more problematic than the latter.

While that is certainly one way to respond to the problem, I find it unsatisfying. First, the claim that events are sui generis entities is far from uncontroversial, and it would be better if a theory of negative actions as events did not have to be tied to it. Second, it is not clear that this response distinguishes the view that negative actions are events from the view that they are absences. For one might take absences to be sui generis entities as well. Indeed, one might say about absences everything that Davidson says about events: they are particular things located in space and time; they are mind-independent, causally relevant things; and they are neither properties nor complex of objects, properties and times (Kukso, 2006). If that is a defensible view of what absences are (or would be, if there were such things), then it is not clear what distinguishes Davidsonian negative events from absences. But then we again face the problem that positing absences, or any sort of entity that consists in the non-existence of some other entity, is otiose.

Rather than taking sides on the metaphysics of events, or trying to show how Davidsonian negative events could be distinguished from absences, I will show that the view of negative actions defended in the previous chapter avoids the worries raised above. We can accept a property-exemplification or trope theory of events, without treating negative actions as exemplifications or instances of negative properties, or as non-exemplifications of positive ones.

In Section 4.2, I develop a functionalist account of negative actions, in accordance with the discussion in the previous chapter. This view allows us to identify a token negative action as an event that plays a certain role, and — since positive events are capable of playing this role — thereby identify it with a positive event. In Section 4.3, I consider arguments which purport to show that this functionalist account, which allows a single event to fall under two distinct positive and negative event-types, is incompatible with both property-exemplification and trope-views of events, the very same views that motivate the concerns of this section, and which my functionalist account was suppose to avoid. These arguments each appeal to (i) the often-assumed principle that if events are property-exemplifications (or tropes) then a doing is an exemplification (or instance) of the thing done, and (ii) a seemingly plausible identity-condition for property-exemplifications or tropes. I argue that the identity-conditions cannot plausibly be rejected in a way that would save my account, and so I argue in Section 4.4 that doings are

\(2\)See, again, Section 1.2.3.
not exemplifications (or instances) of things done. I develop an alternative account of those properties of which our doings are exemplifications (or instances), which both coheres with my functionalist account of negative actions and allows a single event to be of two distinct types.

### 4.2 A Functionalist Account of Negative Actions

Recall that, in the previous chapter, I did not merely argue that negative action sentences quantify over omissions, refrainments, and the like, where these are understood as events. In addition, I argued that they are quantifications over events that play a certain role, namely the role of ensuring that one does not do a certain thing (at a certain time). Now, in the case of positive actions, we tend to think that the event quantified over by an action sentence is the agent’s action, her doing of the relevant thing. Thus, when the sentence ‘Jones buttered toast in the bathroom at midnight’ is analysed as reporting the occurrence of a buttering-of-toast event which occurred in the bathroom at midnight, we identify this event with Jones’s action. But then, if a negative action sentence like ‘Jones omitted to butter toast in the bathroom at midnight’ is analysed as reporting the occurrence of an event which played the role of ensuring that Jones did not butter toast in the bathroom at midnight, then we ought to identify this event with Jones’s negative action. More generally, to perform a negative action (in the sense of the thing one does) is to be involved in an event that plays a certain role, and so one’s negative action (in the sense of one’s doing of that thing) just is the event that plays that role.

The claim that a negative action is just an event that plays a certain role can help us get around the worries about negative events that I raised at the beginning of this chapter. For suppose that, whenever an agent performs a negative action, and so there occurs an event that plays a certain role, we can say that a positive event plays that role, where a positive event is understood as an exemplification of a positive property, or perhaps as a positive trope. In that case, since the negative action just is whatever event plays that role, the negative action just is the positive event. Moreover, it seems that this supposition is true. Recall, when Randy omits to pick up milk, or Theresa refrains from smiling, what happens is that a certain event occurs, an event involving certain parts of Randy’s and Theresa’s bodies, and whose occurrence ensures that Randy does not pick up milk and that Theresa does not smile, respectively. In principle, these events are describable in positive terms: we can describe them by describing the actual movement and position of the relevant body parts, rather than by describing the ways in which those parts don’t move, or the ways in which they aren’t positioned. Thus, we can identify Randy’s omission and Theresa’s refrainment with these positive events, and thereby avoid positing such strange things as exemplifications or instances of negative properties, or non-exemplifications of positive properties. The difference between positive and negative actions is not a deep metaphysical one, but rather a difference of conception: to conceive of some event as a negative action is to conceive of it in terms of the role that it plays, and that role is specified largely in negative terms, i.e. in terms of what it is that the occurrence of that event ensures the agent does not do; nonetheless, that same event can be described in positive terms.

An analogy can help make the point clearer. Consider the thesis of functionalism in the philosophy of mind. According to the functionalist, to be in a certain mental state is just to be in a state that plays a certain role in one’s psychology, typically thought to include a causal role — e.g. to be in pain is to be in a state that is typically caused by certain kinds of events (like putting one’s hands on a hot burner), and typically causes certain other events (like pulling one’s hands away from the burner). Now,
if we accept that to be in pain, for instance, is to be in some state that plays the role associated with pain, we are left with a choice about the metaphysics of token states of pain: are we to say that a token pain-state is a state that plays the role associated with pain, or are we to say that a token pain state is a higher-level state, namely, the state of undergoing some token state that plays the role associated with pain? This is the choice between token-realizer functionalism and token-role functionalism:

**Token-Realizer Functionalism** A token state is of mental type M if and only if that state plays the associated M-role.

**Token-Role Functionalism** A token state is of mental type M iff it is a state of being in a (distinct) token state which plays the associated M-role.

Token-realizer functionalism is attractive to a reductive physicalist, who thinks that every token mental state is a physical state. For if every token pain state is a state that plays a certain role, and if in every case it is in fact a token physical state that plays that role, then we can apparently identify each token pain state with a token physical state. By contrast, token-role functionalism is attractive to a non-reductive physicalist. For on this view, every token pain state is ‘realized’ by a token physical state, in the sense that one is only in the former by virtue of being in the latter, and yet the two states remain distinct.

My view is an analogue of token-realizer functionalism. I say that negative action sentences quantify over events which play a certain role, namely the role of ensuring that the agent does not do the relevant thing. Since, on standard event-based theories of agency, our positive actions are identified with (some of) those events quantified over in positive action sentences, I identify our negative actions with (some of) the events quantified over in negative action sentences — a negative action just is an event which plays the role of ensuring that the agent does not do the relevant thing. Moreover, since it seems that, in each case, we can find a positive event that plays this role, I identify each negative action with a positive event. That is not to say that I must deny the existence of a state or event which is one’s undergoing a distinct event which plays the ensuring role. I can allow that such higher-level states or events exist, but I deny that they are our negative actions. Rather, they are states that we are in, or events that we undergo, in virtue of our negative actions.

One objection to this view should be dealt with right away. Just as we can distinguish realizer and role functionalisms about token mental states, we can distinguish realizer and role functionalisms about mental state types. In the mental case, these functionalisms are sometimes understood as follows:

**Type-Realizer Functionalism** Mental state type M is that state-type whose tokens play the associated M-role.

**Type-Role Functionalism** Mental state type M iff is the higher-level state type of being in a (distinct) token state which plays the associated M-role.

Token-realizer functionalisms pair naturally with type-realizer functionalisms, while token-role functionalisms pair naturally with type-role functionalisms: if a token of mental state-type M is just a state that

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3 Cynthia and Graham MacDonald (2006, 550n.23) helpfully distinguish higher-level properties from higher-order properties: while the latter are properties of properties (e.g. red has the property being a colour), the former are properties had in virtue of the possession of other properties.

4 See (McLaughlin, 2006, 43–45) for discussion of the distinction.

5 Compare Lewis’ distinction between the state of pain and the state of being in pain: “the former is whatever state it is that occupies a certain definitive causal role; the latter is the attribute of being in whatever state it is that occupies that causal role,” (1966, 101).
plays a certain role, then surely \( M \) is that type whose tokens play that role, rather than the higher-level type of being in some distinct state that plays that role; but if a token of type \( M \) is a token higher-level state, then surely \( M \) is a higher-level state-type. So, by adopting realizer functionalism for negative action tokens, I seem to be committed to realizer functionalism for negative action types: the negative act-type \( \text{omission to } \phi \) is that act-type whose tokens ensure that their agents do not \( \phi \).

Why is that a problem? Because type-realizer functionalism in the philosophy of mind apparently allows us to identify, not just mental and physical state tokens, but mental and physical state types: \( M \) is the state whose types play a certain role, and this might be a physical type.\(^6\) Whether or not we find such type-type identity claims plausible, surely the analogous claim about positive and negative event-types is false. When Randy omits to pick up milk, for example, he might do so by accidentally picking up cream instead, or by walking right past the section of the store where milk is kept, or even by driving right past the store altogether, without ever going in. In each case, it seems, a different type of positive event occurs, and so there is no single positive event-type which we can identify as the type \( \text{omission to pick up milk} \), i.e. as that type whose tokens play the right ensuring-role. But if there is no such type, then no type plays the relevant role, and so there is no such type as \( \text{omission to pick up milk} \). That looks like eliminativism about negative actions. Thus, type-realizer functionalism seems to land us on the horns of a dilemma: either adopt implausible type-type identities, or deny that there really are such things as negative actions.\(^7\)

This objection is based on a misunderstanding of what type-realizer functionalism requires. The objection assumes that, in order for us to say that there is some type, all of whose tokens play the role of ensuring that their agents do not \( \phi \), there must be some further way of specifying this type, otherwise than by the role its tokens play. But that overlooks the possibility that this type just is the type \( \text{event that plays that role} \). The negative action type \( \text{omission to pick up milk} \) can simply be the type \( \text{event whose occurrence ensures that the agent does not pick up milk} \), and there need be no suggestion that every event that falls under this type also falls under a single positive type. Thus, while type-realizer functionalism allows us to identify negative action-types with positive event-types, it does not require us to do so in order to vindicate the thought that the former are genuine event-types. We can reject implausible type-type identities without adopting role-functionalism for negative action types or tokens.

Thus, on my view, every token negative action is identical to a token positive event, but not every negative action type is identical to a positive event type. This allows us to say that every negative action is an exemplification, or instance, of a positive property, without committing ourselves to implausible type-identities.

This is only the first step in my defence of the view that negative actions \( \text{qua} \) events are metaphysically unproblematic. I have argued that, by adopting my functionalist approach, we can accept that negative actions are events, while adhering to a property-exemplification or trope theory, without committing ourselves to problematically negative entities. But now an even worse problem arises. In order to make this approach plausible, I insisted that we can accept token-identity in the absence of type-identity.

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\(^6\) Hence, David Lewis writes,

The definitive characteristic of any (sort of) experience as such is its causal role, its syndrome of most typical causes and effects. But we materialists who believe that these causal roles which belong by analytic necessity to experiences belong in fact to certain physical states. Since those physical states possess the definitive characteristics of experience, they must be the experiences (Lewis, 1966, 100).

This picture is complicated in (Lewis, 1980), where mental state-type are relativised to populations. On this view, pain-in-humans may be a different physical state-type than pain-in-Martians.

\(^7\) This dilemma is based on an analogous one posed in the philosophy of mind (McLaughlin, 2006, 44).
But this crucial claim is arguably inconsistent with both property-exemplification and trope theories of events. Such theories of events seem to rule out the possibility of a single event falling under two distinct types, and so my functionalist approach seems to be incompatible with precisely those theories it is meant to appease.

4.3 The Nature of Events and Token-Identity

4.3.1 Property-Exemplifications

Take the property-exemplification view first. Recall that, on this view, every event is an exemplification of a property, where an exemplification of a property is a complex entity consisting of an object (or objects), a property had by that object(s), and a time at which the object(s) has that property. This leads naturally to the thought that two (monadic) events are identical iff they consist of the same object, property, and time:

\[
\text{Property-Exemplification Identity (PEI)} \quad x\text{'s exemplification of } F \text{ at } t \text{ = } y\text{'s exemplification of } G \text{ at } t' \iff x = y, \ F = G, \text{ and } t = t'. \quad (\text{Kim, 1976, 35}).
\]

If we accept (PEI), then a negative action and a positive event can only be identical if they are exemplifications of the same property, by the same object, at the same time. It is easy enough to see how, on my view, when an agent performs a negative action, that negative action could have the same constitutive object and time as some positive event.\(^8\) When Randy drives right past the store, and thereby omits to pick up milk, it seems that we have an omission-to-pick-up-milk event, and a drive-past-the-store event, both of which have Randy as their constituent object, and both of which occur at the same time. But do these two events have the same constitutive property? Do Randy’s omission and his act of driving past the store both consist in his exemplifying one and the same property?

A typical proponent of the property-exemplification view would say ‘No.’ For it is typically thought that, if events are exemplifications of properties, then the following schema holds. Letting ‘\(\phi_V\)’ be a variable for act-properties, or things done, ‘\(\Phi_N\)’ be a variable for event-types, and ‘\(\phi_N\) ’ be a variable for event tokens of type \(\Phi_N\):

\[
\text{Property-Exemplification Schema (PES)} \quad \text{For every } \phi_V \text{ and corresponding } \Phi_N, \text{ every } \phi_N \text{ is an exemplification of the property } \phi_V.
\]

(PES) encodes a certain relationship between the things we do, our doings of those things, and the types under which those things fall:\(^9\) every particular doing of some thing is an exemplification of the property that is the thing done, and token doings fall under the same type by virtue of being exemplifications of the same property. Thus, because Randy’s omission to pick up milk is a particular doing of *omit to pick up milk*, it is an exemplification of that property, while his act of driving past the store, because it is a doing of *drive past the store*, is an exemplification of *that* property. By (PEI), the events are identical only if these two properties are identical. But it seems obvious that these two properties are not identical, since it is possible for Randy to have one without having the other — he might not have driven right past the store, and yet still have omitted to pick up milk while he was inside. Thus, (PES) and (PEI) conspire to show that Randy’s omission is a distinct event from his driving past the store.

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\(^8\)Although see Section 5.2.2 for concerns about the temporal location of negative actions.

\(^9\)See Section 1.2.2 for more on these categories.
We might try to get around this argument by holding onto a conception of events as exemplifications of universals while rejecting (PEI). One strategy for doing this is due to Kim himself. While Kim accepted (PEI) in his early work, he later became sceptical of its left-to-right direction. That is, he allowed the exact same object, property and time could not constitute two distinct events, but he allowed that one and the same event could be constituted by distinct sets of constituents. This suffices to block the argument against events that fall under distinct types: while (PES) entails that if $\Phi_N \neq \Psi_N$ then $\phi_V \neq \psi_V$, we need the left-to-right direction of (PEI) in order to infer that no exemplification of one of these properties can be an exemplification of the other.

Unfortunately, Kim’s argument against the left-to-right direction of (PEI) is uncompelling. Rather than arguing for this new conception of the identity-conditions of events on the basis of distinctively metaphysical considerations, he appeals to semantics. The phrase ‘$x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t$’ is, he says, a functor: it is a “term for a function from triples consisting of a property, a substance, and a time to property-exemplifications,” (Kim, 1991, 642). This suffices, he thinks, for the right-to-left direction of (PEI), for if ‘$x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t$’ is a well-operating functor, then each set of inputs should yield a single output. But it does not suffice for the left-to-right direction, since it is no condition on well-operating functors that distinct sets of inputs should yield distinct outputs.

Even if it is true that ‘$x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t$’ is a functor, and that this fact about its meaning does not suffice for the left-to-right direction of (PEI), these claims are of dubious metaphysical relevance. Why should we ground our thinking about the identity-conditions for events solely on the meaning of ‘$x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t$’?

A better approach, it seems, is a more distinctively metaphysical one which looks at the nature and existence-conditions of property-exemplifications. (PES) encodes a certain conception of the nature of property-exemplifications: a $\phi_N$ is an exemplification of the property $\phi_V$, and it simply consists in some object, $x$, exemplifying $\phi_V$ at some time, $t$. This conception pairs naturally with the standard existence-conditions for property-exemplifications: $x$’s exemplification of $\phi_V$ at $t$ exists iff $x$ exemplifies $\phi_V$ at $t$ (Kim, 1976, 35). But then, it is hard to see how distinct sets of constituents could constitute the same property-exemplification. In particular, if $\phi_V \neq \psi_V$, and so $x$ could $\phi_V$ without $\psi_V$-ing, or vice-versa, then $x$’s exemplifying the one property at $t$ would seem to consist in something over and above $x$’s exemplifying the other property at $t$. (E.g. Randy’s act of driving past the store consists of something more than his exemplifying omit to pick up milk, since he could have exemplified that property without driving past the store). And if $x$ could have one of these properties without having the other, then it seems that $x$’s exemplifications of these properties must have different existence-conditions. (E.g. if Randy had not driven past the store, then his drive past the store would not have existed, but his omission to pick up milk still would have.) Thus, Kim’s rejection of (PEI) is not only under-motivated, but it sits very poorly with his conception of events as property-exemplifications.

A second strategy is due to Cynthia and Graham MacDonald (2006). The MacDonalds retain (PES), the claim that a $\phi_N$ event is an exemplification of $\phi_V$, and they retain the idea that this means that every $\phi_N$ event has $\phi_V$ as a constituent. However, contra Kim they insist that it is possible for a single event to have multiple exemplifications of different properties. This is possible because the property-exemplification is a functor that takes as input a property, a substance, and a time, and outputs a proposition.

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10Of course, not everyone will accept these existence-conditions for events. Regarding the case where Randy omits to pick up milk but does not drive past the store, one might think that we are not entitled to conclude that the very same omission occurs in the absence of a drive past the store — all we are entitled to conclude is that some event of Randy omitting to pick up milk occurs in the absence of a drive past the store, which is consistent with the claim that this is a distinct event from the one that occurs when Randy does drive past the store. Indeed, this is something I will defend in Chapter 5. But the point is that if one retains the standard conception of property-exemplifications, then Randy’s omission and his drive past the store have distinct existence-conditions.
event to be an exemplification of two properties (provided these properties are suitably related), and so
they allow that a $\phi_N$ event may have some $\psi_V$ as a constituent, where $\psi_V \neq \phi_V$. This re-imagining of
property-exemplifications provides us with a distinctively metaphysical reason to reject the left-to-right
direction of (PEI): for, provided that $\phi_V$ and $\psi_V$ are suitably related, an exemplification of one can
just be an exemplification of the other.

There are two problems with this strategy. To see the first, consider the MacDonalds’ argument for
the possibility of events that are exemplifications of two distinct properties:

That this is possible is apparent from determinate/determinable examples, such as that of
being coloured and being red. The most natural understanding of the relation between these
properties is that for an object to instance the latter (being red) just is for it to instance
the former (being coloured): nothing further is required, once the latter is instanced, for the
former to be instanced (2006, 561).

This argument seems to be an appeal to the principle that we ought not to posit truthmakers beyond
necessity. Let ‘$a$’ be the name of a particular rose, and suppose that the proposition $a$ is red at $t$ is true.
That proposition (according to some) requires a truthmaker, and $a$’s exemplification of red at $t$ is a strong
candidate. But now consider the proposition $a$ is coloured at $t$. It, too, requires a truthmaker, and $a$’s
exemplification of coloured at $t$ is a strong candidate. But, intuitively, we do not need to add anything
extra to our ontology to account for the truth of this proposition. Once we have $a$’s exemplification of
red on the scene, and so have accounted for the truth of $a$ is red at $t$, it simply follows as a matter of
necessity that $a$ is coloured at $t$. Thus, the MacDonalds conclude, we should identify $a$’s exemplification
of red with $a$’s exemplification of coloured.

So interpreted, the argument is unconvincing. For the MacDonalds assume that the proposition that $a$
is coloured is made true by $a$’s exemplification of coloured. Finding that that proposition intuitively needs
no truthmaker beyond $a$’s exemplification of red, they conclude that these two property-exemplifications
are identical. But if $a$’s exemplification of red makes it true that $a$ is coloured, why do we need to posit
an exemplification of coloured at all? Indeed, if we generalize the MacDonalds’ reasoning beyond this
case, we can apparently eliminate the universal coloured altogether, along with its exemplifications —
after all, that universal is apparently not needed to explain why any particular object is coloured.

The second problem is that, even if we accept the MacDonalds’ argument, and allow there to be
some events that are exemplifications of two distinct properties, it is not clear that the argument will
apply to negative and positive doings, in particular. The paradigm case of two distinct properties being
exemplified in a single property-exemplification, we are told, is a case where those two properties are
related as determinate to determinable. Roughly, $F$ is a determinate of $G$ when to have $F$ is to have $G$
in a particular way — borrowing the MacDonalds’ example, red is a determinate of coloured, because
to be red is just to be coloured in a particular way. More specifically, a determinable property and its
determinates characterize an object “with respect to only a limited number of features” (Funkhouser,

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11The argument is familiar from truthmaker theory. $a$ cannot be the truthmaker for $a$ is red at $t$, since presumably $a$
could have failed to be red at $t$. Similarly, the universal red cannot be the truthmaker, since it presumably could have
existed without being exemplified by a at $t$. What would make that proposition true is an entity that simply consists in a
exemplifying red at $t$, since, necessarily, if that entity exists then a is red at $t$. This is one of David Armstrong’s favourite
arguments for states of affairs, which do not seem importantly different from property-exemplifications (see Section 1.2.3).

12Of course, this same argument would apply to red as well, since red is also a determinable property, and so the
propoition $a$ is red would properly be explained by $a$’s exemplification of some determinate property, like crimson or
scarlet. This reasoning would lead to the view that, although we may distinguish between determinates and determinables
at the level of thought, in reality all properties are perfectly determinate (Armstrong, 1978, 118).
2006, 550). For instance, colour properties like red, green, and blue characterise an object with respect to hue, brightness, and saturation; to have one of these colours is to have a one’s hue, brightness, and saturation fall within a certain range.\[^{13}\] Because red, blue and green each characterise an object with respect to these features, and these features only, they are determinates of the determinable coloured (Prior, 1949, 13).\[^{14}\] So, the thought is that when F and G are so-related that F specifies an object with respect to a limited range of features, and thereby specifies its G-ness, an exemplification of F can also be an exemplification of G.

But the negative things we do are not related to the positive things we do as determinables are related to their determinates. First, whenever F₁ and F₂ are distinct determinates of the same determinable, G, an object that has F₁ and an object that has F₂ will differ with respect to their G-ness. This is simply a consequence of the fact that F₁ and F₂ are distinct specifications of G. For example, a crimson object and a scarlet object differ with respect to their redness, because crimson and scarlet specify these objects’ redness in different ways, and likewise a red object and a blue object differ with respect to their colour, because red and blue specify these objects’ colour in different ways. But now, suppose that the positive properties drive past the store and walk past the milk aisle are determinates of omit to pick up milk, so that each of these properties is a distinct specification of omit to pick up milk. Then, if Randy drives past the store while Reggie walks past the milk aisle, Randy and Reggie must differ with respect to their ‘omit to pick up milk-ness’. But Randy and Reggie do not seem to differ at all with respect to their ‘omit to pick up milk-ness’: each of them omits to pick up milk, and that is that.

Second, if F is a determinate of G, and so F is simply a specification of G, then, necessarily, any object which has F also has G. But it is simply not true that, whenever an agent omits to φ_V, or refrains from φ-ing, and intuitively does so by virtue of ψ_V-ing, then ψ_V is a property such that, necessarily, if an agent ψ_V-s then she omits to φ_V, or refrains from φ_V-ing. Recall the case where I refrain from casting a vote by keeping my hands at my sides. It is not true that, necessarily, if I keep my hands at my sides then I will refrain from casting a vote, since there are possible worlds in which people vote by keeping their hands at their sides, not by raising them. Therefore, the positive thing I do, keep my hands at my sides, is not a determinate of the negative thing I do, refrain from voting.

While the MacDonalds’ view of events as exemplifications of two or more properties allows us to reject (PEI), it does not do so in way that helps my token-identity view of negative actions and positive events.\[^{15}\]

\[^{13}\]Jessica Wilson (2009) argues that colour properties are not determined solely by these features, but also by their physical constitution. Nothing I say hinges on whether this is correct, so I will stick with the more traditional characterization of colours, for the sake of simplicity.

\[^{14}\]This is why the conjunctive property red and square is not a determinate of red, even though it is in some sense a way of being red. Since to be red is to have one’s hue, brightness and saturation fall within a certain range, determinates of red, like crimson and scarlet further specify where in that range the object falls — that is why, just as red determines an object within respect to its colour, crimson determines an object with respect to its redness. But to be red and square is not merely to have one’s hue, brightness and saturation fall within a certain range. It is, in addition, to have a certain kind of shape. Since an object’s having a certain shape is intuitively something over and above its having a certain hue, brightness and saturation, red and square is not a determinate of red (Funkhouser, 2006, 550).

\[^{15}\]The MacDonalds only intend the determinate/determinable relation to be the paradigm case of a relation such that, whenever F and G are so-related, an exemplification of one just is an exemplification of the other. They actually defend a broader claim, that if G is higher-level property than F, and F realizes G, then an exemplification of F just is an exemplification of G (2006, 564). But they also say that realized properties are necessitated by their realizers (2006, 565) — indeed, they must say this, since if F does not necessitate G, it is hard to see how an exemplification of the latter could be nothing over and above an exemplification of the former. Since the negative things we do are not necessitated by the positive things we do, this broader application of the MacDonalds’ view is of no help.
4.3.2 Tropes and Trope-Exemplifications

There is a third strategy for holding onto a property-exemplification view of events while rejecting (PEI). This strategy, like the second, requires a re-imagining of the nature of property-exemplifications. Rather than insisting that a single property-exemplification could have two or more universals as constituents, we might reject the supposition that property-exemplifications have universals as constituents at all. Instead, we might say, an exemplification of the property $\phi_V$ consists of an object, a time, and a particular instance of $\phi_V$; that is, the constituent properties of events are not universals, but tropes. Thus, instead of (PEI), we have:

**Trope-Exemplification Identity – (TEI)** $x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t = y$’s exemplification of $G$ at $t'$ iff $x = y$, $f = g$, and $t = t'$, where $f$ and $g$ are instances of $F$ and $G$, respectively.

And one might think that, even if $\phi_V$ and $\psi_V$ are distinct general properties, it does not follow that no trope can be an instance of both. Thus, Randy’s omission to pick up milk and his drive past the store might be exemplifications of the same trope, which is an instance of both *omit to pick up milk* and *drive past the store*.16

Can a single trope be an instance of two distinct general properties? Not if we accept

**Trope Identity (TI)** An instance of $F = \text{an instance of } G$ only if $F = G$.

(TI) is a plausible principle. Surely, you might think, if tropes are just instances of general properties, then two tropes are identical only if the corresponding general properties are identical. Property-identity is property-identity, whether we are considering general properties or their particular instances. But then, since the properties *omit to pick up milk* and *drive past the store* are not identical, their instances are not identical either, and so, by (TEI), Randy’s omission is distinct from his drive past the store.

At this point, the trope theory of events also becomes relevant, for (TI) poses a problem for it, as well. According to that theory, an event is not a complex object which has a general property, or universal, as a constituent. Rather, an event *just is* a property, thought of as a particular rather than a universal. Thus, instead of (PES), we have:

**Trope Schema (TS)** For any general property $\phi_V$ and corresponding event-type $\Phi_N$, every token $\phi_N$ event is an instance of $\phi_V$.

Every particular doing of some thing is a particular instance of the property that is the thing done; that is, it is the thing done, thought of as a particular rather than a universal. Furthermore, on this view it is plausible to simply identify the thing done with the doing-type, since, as we have seen, it is plausible to treat the general properties of which tropes are instances as trope-types. Thus, because

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16This view is distinct from a trope theory of events, on which events just are tropes. One might worry that the trope-exemplification view is ontologically extravagant: ‘If we have tropes in our ontology, why do we need trope-exemplifications?’ But suppose that one feels the urge to posit truthmakers for true propositions, and furthermore that one does not individuate tropes either by the objects that possess them or the times at which they are possessed — that is, although a given trope is actually possessed by some $x$ at $t$, it is *possible* for that trope to be possessed by $y$ at $t$, or by $x$ at $t'$ (Ehring, 1997; 2011). Then one should be persuaded to posit trope-exemplifications by the following argument. Let ‘a’ be the name of a particular rose, and suppose that the proposition *a is red at t* is true, so that $a$ has some red trope at $t$. What could the truthmaker for this proposition be? Not $a$ itself, since presumably $a$ could exist at $t$ without being red. Nor could it be the red trope, since we have allowed that that trope could be possessed by a different object at $t$, or that it could be possessed by $a$, not at $t$, but at some other time. But if there were such an entity as $a$’s exemplification of that red trope — then the existence of that entity would account for the truth of the proposition. Thus, if one has this conception of tropes, one can motivate trope-exemplifications (provided the demand for truthmakers is legitimate, a question I will not settle here).
Randy’s omission to pick up milk is a doing of *omit to pick up milk*, it is a particular instance of that general property, while his act of driving past the store, because it is a doing of *drive past the store*, is a particular instance of *that* general property. But then, by (TI), Randy’s omission is distinct from his drive past the store.

A seemingly natural line of resistance to (TI) begins by diagnosing its appeal as arising from the assumption that the general properties of which tropes are instances are universals. Suppose, for instance, that *red* is a universal — it is a ‘nature’: it is a way for objects to be, and it makes a certain contribution to the natures of the objects that possess it, namely, it makes them red. If a particular *red* trope is simply a particular instance of this universal, then it is natural to think that they must be ‘of the same nature’, in the sense that they make exactly the same contribution to the natures of the objects that possess them. A *red* trope contributes exactly what the universal *red* contributes: no more, no less. This view motivates (TI). For suppose that the general properties *F* and *G* are distinct. Then *F* and *G* must make different contributions to the natures of the objects that possess them: there must be more to being *F* than simply being *G*, or vice-versa. If the contributions of *F* and *G* are distinct, and the contributions of tropes exactly match the contributions of the properties of which they are instances, then the contributions of any *f* and *g* must be distinct, as well. But then, since no trope can make a different contribution than itself, no *f* can be identical to any *g*. Thus, the only way an *f* can be identical to a *g* is if *F* = *G*.

Given this diagnosis, we might try to reject (TI) by rejecting the picture that motivates it. And indeed, most believers in tropes do reject that picture. On a standard trope theory, general properties (if they are countenanced at all) are analysed as types or classes of tropes — e.g. the general property *red* is just the class of (actual and possible) *red* tropes, and to exemplify this general property is simply to possess a trope that is a member of that class (Campbell, 1990, 32; Ehring, 2011). But then the motivation for (TI) is weakened, if not lost altogether. If general properties are simply classes of tropes, then (TI) is properly understood as the claim that no trope can fall under two distinct types, or classes. But then, any argument against this possibility which relies on (TI) is question-begging. (TS) and (TI) were supposed to provide us with an argument for the claim that no trope can fall under two distinct types, but now it seems that that claim has simply been assumed as an un-argued premise!

Unfortunately, this response to (TI) is too quick, since it can be motivated even by a picture on which general properties are classes rather than universals. If the general property *red* is not a universal, then we cannot say that any instance of it must ‘be of the same nature’, in this sense. But if *red* is a class of tropes, then presumably it classifies together all and only those tropes that are of the same nature as each other. That is, while no *red* trope is of the same nature as the general property, all *red* tropes are of the same nature as each other. But then, it seems that no trope can be an instance of two distinct general properties. For, suppose *F* ≠ *G*. By hypothesis, types classify together all and only those tropes that are of the same nature, so if *F* ≠ *G* then *fs* are of a different nature than *gs*. But then, since nothing can be of a different nature than itself, nothing can be both an *f* and a *g*.

It is not clear, then, that (TI) can plausibly be rejected.17 But even if it can, it is important to note that not just any claim to the effect that a single trope is an instance of two distinct general properties will be intuitively acceptable. It is typically thought to be a necessary condition on the identity of *f* and *g* that they are possessed by the same object, or that they occupy the exact same spatiotemporal region, or both. But these conditions are not sufficient. Consider a *red* trope and a *square* trope that

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17For further defence of (TI), see (Wilson, 2011, 145, 152n.27).
are possessed by the same object and occupy the same region. These tropes are intuitively distinct. For a trope is a property, a way that some object is, and so these tropes are identical only if they make the exact same contribution to the object that possesses them. But the red trope and the square trope seem to make distinct contributions, and so they are themselves distinct.18

Keeping our attention restricted to those tropes that are possessed by the same object and occupy the same spatiotemporal region, under what conditions do two such tropes make the same contribution to that object? Obviously, if \( F = G \), then \( f \) can make no contribution over and above that made by \( g \), but if that is the only such condition, then \( (TI) \) is reinstated. In order to reject \( (TI) \), we must allow that an instance of \( F \) can make the same contribution as an instance of \( G \), where \( F \neq G \). The most plausible case is a case where \( F \) and \( G \) are related as determinate to determinable. In our example, the object possesses a red trope, and is therefore red. If the object is red, then it simply follows that it is coloured, as well. Must we then posit a distinct coloured trope? Arguably not, for it seems that such a trope could make no contribution to the way the object is over and above the contribution that the red trope already makes. Since to be red is just to be coloured in a certain way, and since no object can simply be coloured, but must be coloured in some particular way, there is no need to posit two distinct tropes in order to explain why the object is both red and coloured.19

Thus, the most obvious replacement for \( (TI) \) is:

**Trope Identity (TI*)** An instance of \( F = \) an instance of \( G \) only if either (i) \( F = G \), or (ii) \( F \) and \( G \) are related as determinate to determinable.

Notice that \( (TI*) \) seems to allow us to distinguish the red trope from the square trope. Since neither red nor square is a determinate of the other — neither of these properties is such that having it is just having the other in a particular way — we must posit two distinct tropes, each of which makes a distinct contribution to the object.

While \( (TI*) \) may be a defensible identity-condition on tropes, it will not allow us to identify negative actions with positive events, since the positive things we do are typically not determinates of the negative things we do. Thus, \( (TI*) \) will not save my token-identity view.

I conclude that we cannot reconcile my token-identity view with either a property-exemplification view of events (whether these properties are universals or particulars) or with a trope view, by rejecting the principles \( (PEI) \) and \( (TI) \). These principles are difficult to reject, and the most promising strategies for rejecting them seem to require that \( \phi_V \) be a determinate of \( \psi_V \), or vice-versa, in order for an exemplification or instance of one to be an exemplification or instance of the other. Hope is not lost, however. The arguments which seem to show that my token-identity view cannot be reconciled with these theories of events do not rely solely on \( (PEI) \) and \( (TI) \). In addition, they rely on \( (PES) \) and \( (TS) \), the principles which assert that a \( \phi_N \) is an exemplification, or a particular instance, of the property \( \phi_V \). As I will now argue, those principles can, and should, be rejected.

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18 We could make the argument more powerful by adding more tropes to the example. For instance, Casey O’Callaghan (2010) argues that sounds are events, and that they are located at or near the objects that create them. Suppose this view is right, and that events are tropes. Then we may suppose that our object possesses a particular sound trope, and that this trope occupies the exact same region as the red and square tropes. Surely, though, this sound trope is not identical to either of them.

19 For detailed argument along these lines, see (Funkhouser, 2006, 557–58; 2015, 48–52).
4.4 An Alternative Picture

4.4.1 Against (PES) and (TS)

Each of (PES) and (TS) can seem irresistible. For suppose we take on board an event-based theory of agency, according to which, whenever an agent acts in a certain way, there occurs an event that is her action, her particular doing of the thing she does. And suppose further that we think of events as exemplifications of properties by objects at times. We already have it that, when an agent acts in a certain way, she exemplifies that property that is the thing she does. So, the thought goes, her action must be an exemplification of this property. Similar reasoning applies if we think of events as particular properties. Since, when an agent acts in a certain way, she possesses that property that is the thing she does, it seems that her action must be this property.

But both of these lines of reasoning can be resisted. For, at any given time, an agent exemplifies, or possesses, many properties. Even if events are exemplifications, or instances, of properties, it is a substantive question just which property any given event is an exemplification or instance of. It is a substantive question whether a $\phi_N$ is an exemplification or instance of $\phi_V$, rather than some other property.

Not only is the reasoning behind (PES) and (TS) resistible, but it ought to be resisted. For, according to an event-based theory of agency, the property $\phi_V$ is a higher-level property: just as a functionalist theory of the mind says that a mental property $M$ is the property of being in a state of a certain kind, an event-based theory of agency says that an action property $\phi_V$ is the property of undergoing, or being involved in, an event of a certain kind, a $\phi_N$. But now, if we say that a $\phi_N$ is an exemplification or instance of this higher-level property, a regress looms. Putting the point in terms of property-exemplifications, suppose there occurs some $e$ which is a $\phi_N$. By (PES), $e$ is an exemplification, by some object $x$ at some time $t$, of the property undergoing an event, $e'$, which is a $\phi_N$. By (PES) again, $e'$ is an exemplification, by $x$ at $t$, of the property undergoing an event, $e''$, which is a $\phi_N$. And so on, ad infinitum.

It is important to be clear about the nature of this regress, and why it should be avoided. The regress is not an ontological one, which requires us to posit an infinite number of distinct $\phi_N$s. For each of the $\phi_N$s is an exemplification of the same property — the property of undergoing a $\phi_N$ — and each of them has the same constitutive object and time, $x$ and $t$, and so by (PEI) they are all identical. The problem, rather, is that if (PES) is true, and every action property $\phi_V$ is the property of undergoing a $\phi_N$ event, then the property-exemplification theory sheds no light on the nature of actions. Recall that, on a Davidsonian view, events must be admitted into our ontology as an irreducible category, not to be understood in terms of objects and their properties. A property-exemplification view appears to have an advantage in this respect: rather than admitting an extra primitive into our ontology, we can simply analyse events in terms of the exemplification of properties, by objects, at times. But in order for this analysis to be worthwhile, the relevant objects, properties and times should be better understood than those events they are used to analyse. If (PES) is true, and every action property $\phi_V$ is the property of undergoing a $\phi_N$ event, then this condition is not met. When asked to say what the nature of $\phi_N$ is, and so to explain just what it is we are admitting into our ontology, we must apparently invoke the property of undergoing a $\phi_N$ event. But the nature of that property can obviously be no better understood than the nature of a $\phi_N$ event itself! If we do not yet know what such an event is, we do not know what this property is, and so nothing has been gained by analysing the former in terms of the latter.
A parallel argument can be run for trope theories. A trope theory apparently has the advantage of analysing events in terms of properties, but if we accept (TS) and that \( \phi_V \) is the property of undergoing a \( \phi_N \) event, this analysis sheds no new light on the nature of actions, because the analysans will be cast in terms of the analysandum.

Thus, if we accept an event-based theory of agency, and we do not want to be tied to a Davidsonian view which treats events as unanalyseable primitives, then we have good reason to reject (PES) and (TS), independent of any desire we might have to identify token actions that fall under distinct action types. We must develop a very different account of those properties of which our doings are exemplifications, or instances.

In Section 4.4.2, I develop such an account. This account allows us to reject (PES) and (TS), thereby giving a different account of how particular doings relate to things done, and blocking the arguments of Section 4.3. For the sake of simplicity, the discussion will mostly proceed in terms of the property-exemplification view, although at the end I will show that a similar account can be given on the trope view.

### 4.4.2 Token Doings and Distributional Properties

For any given property-exemplification, how do we determine just which property it is an exemplification of? Kim’s original proposal was that we could read the structure of an event off of the structure of a sentence that reports its occurrence:

Events... have something like a propositional structure; the event that consists in the exemplification of a property \( F \) by an object \( x \) at time \( t \) bears a structural similarity to the sentence ‘\( x \) has \( F \) at \( t \)’. This structural isomorphism is related to the fact that we often taken singular sentences of the form ‘\( x \) has \( F \) at \( t \)’ as referring to, describing, representing, or specifying an event... (Kim, 1973, 8, slightly modified.)

So, Kim takes the logical structure of an action sentence to be mirrored in the structure of an event: the sentence as a whole denotes the event, while ‘\( x \)’, ‘\( F \)’ and ‘\( t \)’ denote its constitutive object, property, and time. This proposal is what motivates (PES): a sentence that reports that an agent \( \phi \)-ed attributes the property \( \phi_V \) to that object, and so the \( \phi_N \) event is taken be an exemplification of \( \phi_V \). We can avoid (PES) by denying that the internal structure of an event can simply be read off the structure of a sentence that reports, and taking a more directly metaphysical approach to the nature of property-exemplifications.

Like most other philosophers interested in events, Kim thinks of them primarily as being changes: “The term ‘event’ ordinarily implies change, and most changes are changes in a substance... A change in a substance occurs when that substance acquires a property it did not previously have, or loses a property it previously had.” (1976, 33). In such cases, for \( x \) to \( \phi \) at \( t \) is for there to be some property \( F \), and two distinct times \( t_1 \) and \( t_2 \) in \( t \), such that \( x \) either has \( F \) at \( t_1 \) and lacks \( F \) at \( t_2 \) or lacks \( F \) at \( t_1 \) and has \( F \) at \( t_2 \). However, as you will recall from Chapter1, Kim does not restrict events to changes,

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20Note that, in adopting this view Kim is not committed to thinking that distinct predicates pick out distinct properties. ‘Blue’ and ‘the colour of the sky’ are distinct predicates, since they are intensionally inequivalent, but they can be used to pick out the same property. Thus, he can allow that my painting the wall blue and my painting the wall the colour of the sky are one and the same event (Kim, 1976, 43).

21Kim seems to have adhered to this approach at least until his 1991 exchange with Jonathan Bennett (Kim, 1991; Bennett, 1991).
and I do not, either. Sometimes, an event is not a change in an object, but rather an unchange.\textsuperscript{22} In these cases, for $x$ to $\phi$ at $t$ is for there to be some property $F$ and two distinct times, $t_1$ and $t_2$, in $t$, such that $x$ has $F$ at $t_1$ and also at $t_2$. What changes and unchanges have in common is that they are exemplifications of properties which determine how an object is over a certain span of time. Following Parsons (2004), call a property which determines how an object is, not just at a particular point in space or time, but across a region of space or time, a ‘distributional’ property. E.g. Being polka-dotted is a distributional property that determines how a thing is across a spatial region, and being hot and then cold is a distributional property that determines how a thing is across a temporal region.

Here we have the beginnings of an account of the constitutive properties of events: the constitutive property of a $\phi_N$ event is that distributional property which the constitutive object exhibits, and in virtue of which it is correct to say that that object $\phi$s. When the event is a change, the property exemplified is a property of the form being $F$ at $t_1$ and not-$F$ at $t_2$\ldots. When the event is an unchange, the property exemplified is a property of the form being $F$ at $t_1$ and $F$ at $t_2$\ldots. This view promises to give a non-circular, metaphysically illuminating account of the constitutive properties of actions. Rather than trying to understand what a $\phi_N$ is in terms of the property of undergoing a $\phi_N$, we can understand it in terms of the way in which an object that $\phi$s changes, or does not change.\textsuperscript{23}

In developing such an account, we should distinguish between those distributional properties that are maximally specific, and those which are not. Consider, for example, a case in which I raise my arm. In principle, we can describe the change that I undergo, when raising my arm, in maximally specific terms, such that no detail is left out — e.g. my arm is in precisely this position at $t_1$, precisely that position at $t_2$, etc. It seems that this description corresponds to a maximally specific distributional property, one which I only exemplify if I raise my arm in precisely this way. But we may also describe the change that I undergo in less specific terms — e.g. my arm goes from being at my side at $t_1$ to being over my head at $t_2$. And it might seem that this description corresponds to a less specific distributional property, one which I exemplify as long as I raise my arm over my head, and therefore one which I would still have exemplified even if I had not raised my arm in precisely this way. (Indeed, Parsons’ own examples of distributional properties, being polka-dotted and being hot and then cold, are properties of this less-specific kind.)

This distinction raises an interesting question about ordinary event-types, which we can pick out using ordinary English phrases, like ‘explosion’, ‘eruption’, or ‘raising of one’s arm.’ Assuming that there is no such thing as worldly indeterminacy, it cannot be the case that every event whatsoever is an exemplification of a less specific distributional property. For whenever an object exemplifies one of these properties, it must also exemplify a maximally specific one, and the exemplification of that property is itself an event. But in practice, we cannot actually describe maximally specific properties, but can only describe the behaviour of objects in terms of the less specific distributional properties that they exemplify. Rather than describe the exact way in which I raised my arm, I usually only say that I raised

\textsuperscript{22}See Section 1.2.3.

\textsuperscript{23}In what follows, I will assume that, to understand an event in terms of the way the object changes, or does not change, is to understand it as an exemplification of that property which is the way in which the object changes, or does not change. Thus, if the event is one in which an agent moves her body, then the event is the resulting movement\textsubscript{T} (see Section 2.3.2 on the distinction between movement\textsubscript{T1} and movement\textsubscript{T2}). However, since I do not wish to commit myself, in this dissertation, on the question of whether a movement\textsubscript{T} is identical to a movement\textsubscript{T1}, this assumption is mainly for the sake of simplicity. If you think that actions are movement\textsubscript{T}, then that no movement\textsubscript{T} is identical to a movement\textsubscript{T1}, everything I say should be capable of the required modifications to fit your view. E.g. if you are an agent-causalist who thinks that a movement\textsubscript{T} is an event in which an agent causes a movement\textsubscript{T1}, then you may see this action, not as a change, but as an event that has that change as a component.
my arm, and while I might be able to get a bit more specific, I could not be maximally specific. Does this mean that, when we talk about events, we typically quantify over, or refer to, only those events that are exemplifications of less specific distributional properties? That is, when we talk about my raising of my arm, are we describing, not an exemplification of a maximally specific property, but an exemplification of a less specific one?

This question is important because, if we answer ‘Yes,’ we would seem to have reinstated (PES). For if there is some distributional property of which every \( \phi_N \) is an exemplification, then it surely deserves the label ‘\( \phi_V \),’ since it is that property that anything exemplifies when it \( \phi_s \). Thus, we can say that every \( \phi_N \) is an exemplification of \( \phi_V \). Moreover, this way of reinstating (PES) avoids the circularity objection, since \( \phi_V \) is no longer conceived purely as the higher-level property of undergoing a \( \phi_N \).

However, I think the answer is ‘No.’ We should not think that ordinary events are exemplifications of less-than-maximally-specific distributional properties. Rather, we ought to avoid positing such properties in the first place, resting content with maximally-specific distributional properties, and conceive of each \( \phi_N \) as an exemplification of one of these properties.

First, we should note the obvious point that there are not just two ways to describe what happens when I raise my arm above my head, the maximally-specific description that lists the precise sequence of positions through which I move my arm, and the less specific one that simply describes my arm as starting at my side and ending up above my head. Rather, there is a whole spectrum of descriptions we could give, which range from the more specific to the less specific. If we assume that the two descriptions we started with each pick out a distinct distributional property, then it seems we should also assume that each of the many possible descriptions we could give picks out a distinct distributional property. But then, since we have left (PEI) in place, the exemplifications of these distinct properties are all distinct events. There is no obvious reason to select any of these events to be the referent of ‘my raising of my arm’ over the others, and so its referent appears to be indeterminate. If there are no less-than-maximally-specific distributional properties, then this problem does not arise. Although we may describe my raising of my arm in more or less specific terms, there is only one event to which ‘my raising of my arm’ refers.

Second, the idea that, when I raise my arm, there occur two or more events that differ in the specificity of their constitutive properties, conflicts with the natural thought (implicit in the final sentence of the previous paragraph) that, although we may use more or less specific terms in describing my raising of my arm, these are more or less specific descriptions of the same event. It seems that we can describe ordinary material objects in more or less specific terms, and we are not tempted to posit distinct things as the objects of these descriptions. I can be described as six feet and four inches tall, or between six and six-and-a-half feet tall, or simply as tall, and no one is tempted to think that these descriptions are of three distinct objects.\(^{24}\) Likewise, it seems we can describe events — such as explosions, eruptions, and bodily movements — in more or less specific terms. If we are not tempted to posit distinct material objects for distinct descriptions, why be tempted to posit distinct events?

Third, if we posit events that are exemplifications of less-than-maximally-specific distributional properties, we must give an account of how these properties are to be understood, and of how they relate to the maximally-specific ones. The two obvious accounts are that the former are disjunctive properties of which the latter are the disjuncts, and that the former are determinable properties of which the latter are determinates. Neither account is attractive.

\(^{24}\)Well, almost no one. See (Matthews, 1982; 1990).
Consider first the disjunctive view. This view allows that there is a multitude of discrete distributional properties — \( D_1, \ldots, D_n \) — which I might exemplify when I raise my arm, but insists that whenever I exemplify one of these properties, I also exemplify the disjunctive property \( D_1 \lor \ldots \lor D_n \). The problem with this view is that we have reason to doubt whether there are such things as disjunctive properties. Amongst realists about properties, it is typically thought that a genuine property must be one which makes for genuine similarity among the things that exemplify it, and which makes a distinctive contribution to the causal powers of a thing that possesses it.\(^{25}\) Disjunctive properties seem to fail both of these tests.

In some cases, it might seem that the maximally-specific distributional properties \( D_1, \ldots, D_n \) that one may exemplify are themselves sufficiently similar to one another that any two objects that exemplify \( D_1 \lor \ldots \lor D_n \) will also be similar to one another. For instance, the various ways in which one might raise one’s arm are seemingly not so disparate that two people who raise their arms in different ways are not thereby similar with respect to how they move their bodies — if the property raising one’s arm is a disjunctive property, it is quite unlike the property red or square, which can be shared by a red circle and a blue square, neither of which is similar to the other in colour or shape.

But not all act-properties, or things that we do, are like this. For example, when an orchestra plays together, there is one thing that they all do, namely, they all play the same song. But in order to play that song, the various musicians have to move their bodies in very different ways, both because they are playing different instruments — the pianist moves the fingers of her right hand as well as her right foot, while a cellist moves neither; the musicians in the brass and woodwind sections move their mouths in very different ways, while those in the string and percussion sections do not use their mouths at all — and because of the different roles those instruments play in the composition — one musician may be playing on the beat while another plays in a syncopated fashion; and one musician may play for a long stretch while another rests. The different maximally-specific distributional properties that are exemplified by the musicians in the orchestra do not seem to be very similar to one another at all.

Moreover, even when \( D_1, \ldots, D_n \) are sufficiently similar to one another that any two objects that exemplified \( D_1 \lor \ldots \lor D_n \) would also be similar to one another, this does not (contrary to what is sometimes assumed) show that \( D_1 \lor \ldots \lor D_n \) itself makes for similarity among the objects that possess it. For the similarity between those objects is already accounted for by their possession of, say, \( D_1 \) and \( D_2 \). We would be justified in positing the disjunctive property if, by doing so, we could give a metaphysical explanation of the similarity between the objects that possess it. But since that similarity is sufficiently explained by their possession of the disjunct properties, we are not justified in positing the disjunctive one.

As for whether disjunctive properties make a distinctive contribution to the causal powers of the objects that possess them, I have nothing to offer by way of positive argument against this possibility. I will rest content with rebutting a recent argument to the effect that they can make such a contribution.

Say that a property is ‘associated’ with a causal power if it has the potential to bestow that power on an object that possesses it. Jessica Wilson argues that a disjunctive property \( F \lor G \) is associated, in this sense, with at least one more power than \( F \):

Consider the powers of \( F \lor G \) to produce effects when in circumstances \( C \) (restrict attention to these, for simplicity). Since there are two ways for \( F \lor G \) to be instanced, there will in general be two powers associated with \( C \): (1) If in \( C \land F \land \neg G \), then \( E_1 \); and (2) If in

\(^{25}\)See (Armstrong, 1989, 82–88), (Lewis, 1983), and (Schaffer, 2004).
Chapter 4. Negatives as Positives: A Functionalist Account of Negative Actions

$C \land G \land \neg F$, then $E_2$. (There may be others, but that won’t matter for making the point.) What powers will $F$ have, in $C$? It will have at least one of the powers of $F \lor G$, in $C$: 1. If in $C \land F \land \neg G$, then $E_1$. (Here the conjunct $F$ is redundant, but no matter.) However, $F$ will not have the following causal power of $F \lor G$, in $C$: 2. If in $C \land G \land \neg F$, then $E_2$. $F$ would have such a power only if it could be both instanced and not instanced in $C$, which it can’t. (Wilson, 2009, 165n.24, slightly modified)

Obviously, similar reasoning will show that $F \lor G$ is associated with at least one more power than $G$. Does this show that disjunctive properties can make a distinct contribution to the powers of their possessors?

No. To see why not, note that a property need not actually bestow a power with which it is associated, since that power may be ‘cancelled out’ by some other property which the relevant object has. Shoemaker (1980) gives the following example: the property being knife-shaped has the potential to bestow upon an object the power to cut through cheese if the right amount of force is applied; however, if the object also has the property being made of butter, then it will not actually gain this power. The powers with which a property is associated are thus distinct from the powers it actually bestows. Now, it is clear that although $F \lor G$ might be associated with more powers than either $F$ or $G$ individually, it cannot actually bestow any powers not already bestowed by $F$ or $G$. For suppose that an object $x$ has $F$, and so it has the power (1): if in $C \land F \land \neg G$, then $E_1$. If $x$ has $F$, then it obviously has $F \lor G$, as well. Does that mean that $x$ can now have the power (2), if in $C \land G \land \neg F$, then $E_2$, bestowed upon it by $F \lor G$? No, because, as Wilson notes, (1) and (2) are incompatible powers. So, although $F \lor G$ is associated with at least one more power than $F$ is, it cannot ever bestow that power on anything that already has $F$. The actual contribution of $F \lor G$ to an object that has $F$ is indiscernible from the contribution already made by $F$. (Similar reasoning shows that its contribution to an object that has $G$ is indiscernible from the contribution made by $G$.)

Thus, we ought not to think of the things we do as disjunctive properties, of which maximally-specific distributional properties are the disjuncts. Might we instead think of the former as determinables of which the latter are determinates?

It might seem natural to take this view, since it is often said that to possess a determinate property is to possess a determinable property ‘in a certain way’, and it is quite intuitive that for one to possess a maximally-specific distributional property of the sort we have been discussing is for one to do a certain thing in a certain way. Isn’t it tautologous that raising my arm in the specific way that I do is a way of raising my arm?

Despite the naturalness of this talk of ‘ways of doing something,’ it is not clear that the relationship between maximally-specific distributional properties and the things we do is, in general, the relationship between determinates and determinables. First, we have seen that, whenever $F_1$ and $F_2$ are distinct determinates of the same determinable, $G$, an object that has $F_1$ and an object that has $F_2$ will differ with respect to their $G$-ness, and that this is generally taken to be a consequence of the fact that $F_1$ and $F_2$ are simply distinct specifications of $G$. But suppose that you and I each raise an arm, although we do so in different ways. It does not seem right to say that you and I differ with respect to our raising one’s arm-ness. While you and I raise our arms in different ways, these ways do not amount to specifications of a property we both share.

Second, distinct determinates of a determinable are incompatible with one another. For instance, an object can be red by being crimson, or by being scarlet, but not both. Crimson and scarlet are distinct
specifications of red, and are thus incompatible with one another. But it is not generally true that distinct, maximally-specific ways of doing something are incompatible. Suppose that I raise my right arm, while you raise your left. In doing so, you and I exemplify distinct, maximally-specific distributional properties, each of which is a way of raising one’s arm. But these properties are not incompatible, since one could exemplify them both at once.

Thus, we should not think that ordinary events are exemplifications of less-than-maximally-specific distributional properties. To do so is to multiply events to the point that terms like ‘my raising of my arm’ become referentially indeterminate, and to run counter to the intuitive idea that, when we describe an agent’s behaviour in more or less specific terms, these are descriptions of one and the same event. Furthermore, we cannot understand these less-than-maximally-specific distributional properties as either disjunctive properties (because we ought not to posit such things) or as determinables of which maximally-specific distributional properties are determinates (since the latter are not determinates of the things we do).

We can avoid all of these problems by thinking of events as exemplifications of maximally-specific distributional properties. My raising of my arm, for instance, is an exemplification of the maximally-specific distributional property that tracks the precise movement and position of my arm — my arm is in precisely this position at $t_1$, precisely that position at $t_2$, etc.

This account of what events are allows us to reject (PES), as I argued we should, if we accept an event-based theory of agency. In its place, we have:

(PES*) For every event-type $\Phi_N$, every token $\phi_N$ event is an exemplification of a maximally-specific distributional property, $F$, such that, by virtue of exemplifying $F$, the constitutive object of $\phi_N$.

(PES*) allows us to block the argument that, given a property-exemplification view of events, no negative action can be identical to a positive event. The argument was that Randy’s omission, for instance, cannot be identical to his act of driving past the store, since the former has omit to pick up milk as its constitutive property, while the latter has drive past the store as its constitutive property. But according to (PES*), that is not true. The constitutive property of a doing is not the thing done, but some maximally-specific distributional property, by virtue of exemplifying which the agent does what she does. Thus, we cannot immediately rule out the possibility that Randy’s omission and his drive past the store are identical, since these may both be exemplifications of the same distributional property.

Indeed, the functionalist account of negative actions that I developed in Chapter 3, and in Section 4.2, shows how these two events might be exemplifications of the same property. To omit to pick up milk is to do something else, one’s doing of which plays the role of ensuring that one does not pick up milk. Now, when Randy drives past the store, he exemplifies a maximally-specific distributional property which tracks the precise movement and position of the relevant parts of his body at that time. His exemplification of this property ensures that he does not pick up milk, in the relevant sense: given the circumstances, if he had successfully picked up milk then he would have moved or positioned his body in a different way than he actually did, and thus exemplified a distinct maximally-specific distributional property. Thus, by virtue of exemplifying the distributional property he actually does, Randy both drives past the store and omits to pick up milk. By (PES*), these events are exemplifications of the same property, and so by (PEI) they are identical. Thus, a plausible view of events as exemplifications of maximally-specific distributional properties fits with my functionalist account of negative actions, and allows us to say that a single event can be both a positive event and a negative action.
Of course, while the discussion in this section has been conducted in terms of the property-exemplification view, we can develop a parallel version of the trope view. On this view, events are not exemplifications of maximally-specific distributional properties. Rather, they are such properties, understood as particulars rather than universals. Thus, instead of \((TS)\), we have:

\((TS^*)\) For every event-type \(\Phi_N\), every token \(\phi_N\) event is a particular instance of a maximally-specific distributional property, \(F\), such that, by virtue of possessing \(F\), the constitutive object of \(\phi_N\) \(\phi_N\)s.

By analogous reasoning, \((TS^*)\) allows us to block the argument that, given a trope view of events, no negative action can be identical to a positive event.

### 4.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by sketching the concern that, even if negative actions are events, a property-exemplification or trope view of events renders them into problematically negative entities, no less than the view that they are absences. In Section 4.2 I developed a realizer-functional account which identifies each negative action with a positive event, and thereby avoids this result. Section 4.3 showed that, if we accept a certain picture of how our particular doings are related to the things we do — namely, that a doing is an exemplification or instance of the property that is the thing done — and we accept seemingly plausible accounts of the identity-conditions of property-exemplifications and tropes, then this token-identity view cannot be right. I have allowed those identity-conditions to remain in place, and showed how we can instead adopt a different conception of how particular doings relate to things done. On this conception, particular doings are not exemplifications or instances of things done, but are rather exemplifications or instances of properties of another kind. This conception allows a single doing to fall under distinct types, and in particular, it shows how every negative action can be token-identical to a positive event.

This chapter has largely dealt with a very broad objection to the identity of negative actions with positive events, namely that such identities are incompatible with plausible theories of what events are. In the next and final chapter, I turn to more piecemeal objections. These objections are meant to show that any negative action and positive event that I claim are identical are in fact distinct, because they have different properties.
Chapter 5

Objections

5.1 A Plethora of Objections

In the previous two chapters, I argued that negative actions are best thought of, not as mere absences of events, but as events in their own right. In particular, I argued that negative actions are best thought of as events that play a certain role: an omission to φ, or refrainment from φ-ing, is an event whose occurrence at a time ensures that the agent does not φ at that time. Since ordinary, positively-describable bodily events are capable of playing this role, my functionalist view allows us to identify negative actions with positive events. In the language of (Fine, 2003), I am a monist about negative actions and positive events.

We may apply the label ‘pluralists’ to those who think that no negative action is identical to a positive event, although we should note that the label might be misleading. Recall the case where Mary refrains from taking a chocolate, by keeping her arms at her sides. The label ‘pluralist’ suggests that someone who refuses to identify Mary’s refrainment with her positive action thinks that we have two events in this case, not one. But one way to deny the identity claim is to deny that there is any such thing as Mary’s refrainment to be identified with her positive action, and someone who takes this view of things will agree with the monist that we have only one event in this case, not two.1 Thus, we should not take the label ‘pluralist’ to imply the belief that there really are two things here, a refrainment and a negative action; a pluralist is someone who thinks that if there are such things as negative actions, then they are distinct from positive events.

In Chapter 4 I dealt with a very general objection to monism, namely that it is inconsistent with both property-exemplification and trope theories of events. The literature is rife with more piecemeal objections, however. By ‘piecemeal’ I mean an objection that looks to a small set of cases, perhaps only one, and attempts to show that a particular negative action is distinct from a particular positive event, with the suggestion that similar reasoning will apply to any negative-action/positive-event pair. It is the task of this chapter to survey such arguments, and show that they fail.

This chapter is quite long, and deals with many different issues, but I beg my readers’ patience. For although the objections I will consider concern a wide range of issues, my responses will, for the most part, make use of just two considerations: first, my functionalist view of negative actions as events that

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1 Indeed, this may be Clarke’s take on the case: unless Mary intentionally keeps her arms at her sides in order to refrain from taking a chocolate, Clarke will insist that ‘Mary’s refrainment’ could only be the absence of taking-chocolate events and that, since there are no such things as absences, there is no such thing as Mary’s refrainment.
play a certain role; and second, the distinction between our particular doings of things and the things that we do. This is particularly true of Sections 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4, which deal, respectively, with concerns about the spatiotemporal locations, modal profiles, and causal roles of negative actions. In those three sections, I aim to show that if we accept my realizer functionalist account, and we keep clearly in mind the distinction between doings and things done, then we can answer some of the most popular objections to monism. My strategy only changes in Section 5.5, where I consider objections that do not appeal to explicitly spatiotemporal, modal, or causal properties — e.g. the argument that an omission to go for a walk is not identical to a jog, since the latter can be fast while the former is not. I argue that predicates like ‘fast’ do not denote a single property, and that the property we attribute to a jog in calling it fast is not the same as the property we withhold from the omission in saying that it is not fast.

5.2 Spatiotemporal Location

On my view, negative actions, no less than positive ones, are events. But, at least according to the metaphysical theories of events I have considered here, events are particulars which are located in space and time. Thus, my view not only requires that negative actions have spatiotemporal locations, but also requires that each negative action shares its spatiotemporal location with that positive event with which it is identical. But several philosophers have argued that the view that negative actions are events runs into trouble on just these points.

5.2.1 Puzzles About Spatial Location

It is often assumed that, if an omission to φ or refrainment from φ-ing has a location in space, it is located at the relevant place where there is no event of the agent φ-ing. In the vast majority of cases, the relevant place will be not be terribly specific. For instance, if Randy is supposed to pick up milk at the grocery store, then the relevant location is the grocery store. If we adopt monism about negative actions and positive events, and we assume that Randy’s omission is located at the grocery store, several problems result.

First, we face a choice of which of the many events going on at the grocery store to identify with Randy’s omission. If Randy is actually at the store at the time, then we might reasonably choose an event in which he is involved. But Randy need not be located at the grocery store in order to omit to pick up milk there — he might be taking the scenic route home from work, nowhere near the store. In that case, it will be much more difficult to make a principled choice.

We might try to identify Randy’s omission with the conjunction of every event going on at the grocery store at the time, or with their disjunction (Bernstein, 2014, 4–5). The latter option is unattractive, since it is not clear what sort of entity the disjunction of several events is supposed to be. The former option is better in this regard, since the concept of a conjunction of events seems to be the concept of a certain kind of mereological sum, and mereological sums are fairly widely accepted as metaphysically legitimate. However, this option has troubles of its own. First, the resulting view is seriously implausible. The mereological sum of all the events going on at the store presumably involves all of the people in the store at the time and the movements of their bodies, not to mention any movements being undergone by food items. Why on earth should we think that these people and objects are involved in Randy’s omission? Second, the resulting view identifies omissions that should be kept distinct. Suppose that, at the same time that Randy omits to pick up milk at the store, Rodney does as well. If both of these omissions are
identical to this mereological sum, then they are identical to each other. But these are obviously distinct
omissions (Clarke, 2012, 363; 2014, 38). Thus, neither strategy for avoiding the selection problem is very
promising.

One last problem for the view that an omission to φ is located at the relevant place at which there is
no φ-ing is that, in some cases, there is no single location which stands out as the relevant place where
the agent does not φ. For Randy can only omit to pick up milk at this particular store — where this
means that what he omits to do is pick up milk at this particular store — if there is some norm or
expectation to the effect that he pick up milk there. But in the normal case there is no such expectation;
all that is expected is that Randy pick up milk, and it doesn’t matter which store he goes to. We now
face similar problems as before. We could insist on identifying Randy’s omission with an event going
on at a particular store, but our choice of identification would seem to be unprincipled. If there is no
expectation that Randy go to this store rather than that one, why should his omission be located at one
rather than the other? On the other hand, we could identify his omission with the mereological sum
of every event that is going on at any one of the grocery stores in Randy’s immediate area at which
he might be expected to pick up milk. But if it is implausible that Randy’s omission could intimately
involve all of the people at a single store, it is surely even less plausible that it involves all of the people
at several stores.

My view avoids all of these worries, because it avoids the assumption that generates them. The
assumption that an omission to φ or refrainment from φ-ing must be located at the relevant place where
there is no event of the agent φ-ing looks plausible if omissions and refrainments are absences, since the
absence of Fs, if it has a spatial location at all, would seem to be located at that place wherefrom Fs
are absent — e.g. the absence of beer from my fridge, if it has a location, is located in my fridge. But as
we saw in Chapter 3, the idea that an omission to φ is an absence of φ-ing is motivated by Deflationism,
which I reject. When I say that negative actions are events, I am not identifying absences with events,
since I do not think negative actions are absences to begin with. Thus, I need not think that a negative
action is located where the corresponding absence is (if there even is such a thing).

On the contrary, my account of negative actions locates them (roughly) where their agents are.
Randy’s omission to pick up milk, for instance, is an event whose occurrence ensures that he does not
pick up milk. Plausibly, the parts of Randy’s body that are involved in this event are his arms, since
only an event involving them is suited to play the ensuring-role — that, recall, is why I must see Randy’s
arms in order to see him omit to pick up milk. Thus, his omission is located where his arms are, and
not necessarily at the grocery store.

This approach to the spatial locations of negative actions might seem to face problems of its own,
however. I say that negative actions, no less than positive ones, are typically bodily events, and that they
are located where the relevant body parts are located throughout the relevant time.2 But, according to
some, it is often a vexed question just which body parts are involved in a negative action. “Suppose that
I omit to snap my fingers at a certain moment, and I also omit to wiggle my toes then. Presumably,
any actual movement of my toes at that time will be said to be at least part of what constitutes the
latter omission; is the actual movement of my fingers also implicated?” (Clarke, 2014, 17) If questions
like these do not have tolerably clear answers, then neither will questions about the spatial locations of
negative actions.

My account of negative actions as ensuring-events helps us to answer the question of which body

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2 As usual, I leave aside the question of whether there are purely mental, non-bodily actions.
parts are involved in a given negative action. To omit to φ, or refrain from φ-ing, is to be the agent of an event whose occurrence ensures that one does not φ. Recall that ‘ensure’ does not mean ‘necessitate.’

If a vote is being called, and votes are cast by a show of hands, an event of me keepings my arms at my sides does not necessitate that I do not vote, since there are possible worlds in which votes are cast by keeping one’s arms at my sides, and if my actual act of keeping my arms at my sides occurs in one of those worlds, then I cast a vote there. And yet, in the relevant sense of ‘ensure’, my actual act does ensure that I do not vote. Thus, the relevant sense of ‘ensure’ is not ‘necessitate.’ Rather, an event ensures that I do not vote iff, for all nearby worlds, if that event occurs I do not vote — where a nearby world is one in which those facts about the actual world which are relevant to whether or not an event of a given kind counts as a vote are held fixed. My act of keeping my arms at my sides fits the bill. For if we hold fixed the voting procedures — which are those facts which determine whether an event of a given kind counts as a vote — then, if my act of keeping my arms at my sides occurs, then I do not vote.

This view of negative actions suggests the following account of bodily involvement. The body parts that are involved in an omission or refrainment are all and only those parts that might have been involved in a φ-ing event, had one occurred, where ‘might’ is an existential quantifier over worlds that is restricted to those that are nearby. In the case where I refrain from voting, there are two distinct ways in which I might have voted: I might have raised my left arm; and I might have raised my right arm. While there are possible worlds where I use other parts of my body to vote — worlds where one stands up in one’s chair in order vote, worlds where one violently shakes one’s head, and maybe even far-off worlds where one spreads one’s wings or vibrates one’s tentacles — none of those worlds count as nearby. Thus, the parts of my body that might have been involved in a voting event, had one occurred, are my left and right arms. Those are the parts of my body that are involved in my refrainment, since it is the actual movement or placement of my arms that ensures that I do not vote. Had I voted, at least one of my arms would have had to move or be placed differently than it actually was, in which case the event of their actual movement or placement would not have occurred.

Thus, the body parts that are involved in an omission or refrainment are all and only those parts that might have been involved in a φ-ing event, had one occurred. The answer to Clarke’s question — ‘Are the actual movements of my fingers, as I omit to snap my fingers, also implicated in my omission to wiggle my toes?’ — is clearly ‘No.’ In all nearby worlds, the only body parts involved in an act of wigging my toes are my toes; my fingers would certainly not be involved in such an event, had one occurred. Therefore, it is only the actual movement or placement of my toes that ensures that I do not wiggle them, and so only my toes are involved in my omission.

Of course, not all cases will be so clear-cut, since it will not always be clear-cut which of our body parts are involved in a given positive event. E.g. if I stroll down the hallway, it seems that my legs and feet should be involved in the event that is my stroll. But what about my arms, or my head? If I had moved my arms or my head differently, would I have been the agent of the same stroll-event, or a different one? If the answer to these questions is unclear, then it will also be unclear just which body parts would be involved in an omission to stroll. However, this worry does not constitute an objection to my view that negative actions are events. For the worry begins from the recognition that it is sometimes unclear just which body parts are involved in a positive action like a stroll, and that would usually not be taken as an objection to the idea that a stroll is a bodily event with a spatiotemporal location. On the contrary, most philosophers of action would accept that sometimes the spatial locations of positive actions are unclear. Why, then, should we expect things to be more clear in the case of negative actions?
Even if it is allowed that the spatial locations of negative actions are tolerably clear in most cases, it might nonetheless seem implausible that certain negative actions are located where my view says they are. Suppose that I have promised to go for a walk with Tom this afternoon, but that I go for a jog with Sue instead. My jog is a natural candidate for the event whose occurrence ensures that I do not go for a walk, so my monist view suggests that my jog is my omission. But while it might be plausible to say that the jog carves a zig-zag shape through space, it seems implausible to say that my omission does, as well (Clarke, 2014, 37–38).

Here, I am willing to bite the bullet, and insist that the omission does take a zig-zag pattern. This claim is not as strange as it might at first appear. Suppose that Sue and I carry on a conversation the whole time we are jogging. There is an event here, a conversation, which consists of the movements of our mouths and vocal chords, and possibly of other parts of our bodies. Where is this conversation-event located? Well, since the jog goes in a zig-zag, our conversation does as well. After all, as we jog through the forest, we cannot help but bring our mouths and vocal chords with us, so the objects involved that conversation event move in a zig-zag pattern. Of course, it seems strange at first to suppose that a conversation can take a zig-zag pattern through space — especially if we ineptly express this idea with the sentence ‘We conversed in a zig-zag direction’ — but on reflection, that is exactly what we ought to say. Likewise, although it seems strange at first, it makes perfectly good sense to suppose that my omission to go for a walk with Tom takes a zig-zag pattern through space. For as I jog through the forest I bring with me those parts of my body that are involved in my omission.

5.2.2 Puzzles About Temporal Location

So far I have concerned myself with the spatial locations of negative actions, but puzzles also arise concerning their temporal locations.

It is often assumed that, if an omission to φ or refrainment from φ-ing has a location in time, it is located at the relevant time at which there is no event of the agent φ-ing. This assumption can seem problematic where omissions are concerned. For in such cases, the relevant time at which there is no φ-ing is the time at which the agent is supposed, or expected, to φ — one can only omit to φ at t if one is supposed, or expected, to φ at t. But in some cases it seems that there is no such thing as the time at which the agent is expected to φ, and hence no such thing as the time at which the omission to φ can be located. Bernstein imagines a case where an airport technician — call him ‘Bob’ — is supposed to perform a safety check on one of the planes, but omits to do so. “Suppose that the safety check takes a half hour, and the time in which the technician could have performed it was between 1 and 3 pm. To which half-hour period does the omission reduce? 1 – 1:30 pm? 1:47 – 2:17 pm? Each half-hour period between 1 and 3 pm was a time at which the safety check could have occurred,” (Bernstein, 2014, 4). If we cannot make a principled choice between these different half-hour periods, then we cannot make a principled claim about the temporal location of the omission.

This puzzle parallels one raised earlier about spatial locations. My solution to that puzzle was to reject the assumption that if an omission to φ has a spatial location at all, it is located at the relevant place where there is no φ-ing event. You might expect that I could make a similar move in the temporal case, and reject the assumption that if an omission to φ has a temporal location, it is located at the relevant time when there is no φ-ing event. But on my view, that assumption is true. Look again at my analysis of a negative action sentence that contains no explicit temporal adverbs:
Jones omitted to butter toast.

\[ \forall t : t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land At(e, t) \land Ensure(e, \neg(\exists e') \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land Patient(toast, e') \land Buttering(e') \land At(e', t)) \]

Although the sentence contains no temporal adverbs, it is nonetheless tensed, and so on a neo-Davidsonian semantics requires a quantifier over times, as well as an explicit predication, ‘At(e, t)’, which locates the event described at the relevant time. The sentence also requires an explicit predication, ‘At(e’, t)’, which locates the absent event at that time. This is because, on a plausible rendering of the relevant notion of ensuring, to omit to φ or refrain from φ-ing is to do something one’s doing of which ensures that one does not φ then. Given these two features of my semantics, temporal adverbs cannot be applied to the two event-variables independently. Indeed, at the level of logical form these adverbs are not applied directly to event-variables at all. The sentence ‘Jones omitted to butter toast at midnight,’ for instance, is analysed as:

Jones omitted to butter toast at midnight.

\[ \exists t : t < t^* \exists e \text{Agent}(Jones, e) \land At(e, t) \land Ensure(e, \neg(\exists e') \text{Agent}(Jones, e') \land Patient(toast, e') \land Buttering(e') \land At(e', t) \land t = \text{midnight} \]

The adverb ‘at midnight’ contributes the identity claim ‘t = midnight,’ where this ‘t’, like those in ‘At(e, t)’ and ‘At(e’, t)’, is bound by the quantifier over times; that is, it contributes a predication, not of an event-variable, but of the time-variable. Since the sentence locates both the omission and the absent buttering at t, the contribution of ‘at midnight’ affects them both equally. Thus, on my semantics, an omission to φ is located at the relevant time when there is no φ-ing event, and so any unclarity about the latter will generate unclarity about the former.

There is a further assumption behind Bernstein’s argument, however. Recall, it is part of the imagined scenario that Bob is supposed to perform the safety check at some half-hour period between 1:00 and 3:00, but that there is no particular period during which he is supposed to perform the safety check. Intuitively, the relevant time at which there is no safety check is not a particular half-hour period, but rather the whole two-hour interval between 1:00 and 3:00. After all, the relevant time is the time at which the safety check is supposed to be performed, and there is simply no more specific time at which this is supposed to happen than the time between 1:00 and 3:00. Intuitively, then, if the omission has a temporal location at all, it extended through this whole two-hour interval. Bernstein assumes otherwise, however, demanding that we locate the omission at some more specific half-hour interval. What could motivate that assumption?

I suspect that Bernstein’s assumption is motivated by three elements of her own view of omissions: first, on her view, an omission to φ is an absence of a φ-ing event; second, the claim that an omission to φ is an absence of a φ-ing event is to be understood in its de re sense — x’s omission to φ is an absence of a particular event that is a φ-ing by x, rather than the absence of any such event — and third, the absence of a thing is identical to the thing that is absent. Taking these three elements together, Bernstein identifies an omission to φ with a particular φ-ing event that is absent from the world, a mere possibilium. So, when she considers the question of whether Bobs omission to perform the safety check is an actual event, she reinterprets this as the question of whether some merely possible performance of the safety check is identical to some event in the actual world. Since this merely possible performance of the safety check occupies a half-hour period, it would apparently have to be identical to some actual-world
event that also occupies a half-hour period, not to one that occupies the whole interval between 1:00 and 3:00.

Fortunately for me, none of these claims are elements of my own view. I obviously do not accept the first claim, that omissions are absences of events. Nor do I accept the second claim, that if an omission to $\phi$ is an absence, it is the absence of a particular $\phi$-ing event. Recall that, according to neo-Davidsonian semantics, ordinary action sentences existentially quantify over events, rather than containing singular terms that refer to particular events. To say that Bob performed the safety check, then, is to say that some event of Bob performing the check occurred, although it is not to say, of any particular such event, that it occurred. But now suppose that we say Bob did not perform the safety check. We would seem to be reporting, not the absence of some particular event of Bob performing the safety check, but the absence of any such event.

Nor do I accept the third claim, that the absence of something is identical to the thing that is absent. Consider a case where Ann fails to show up at a party, and suppose that we take ourselves to be committed to the existence of some entity which is the absence of Ann from the party. Should we identify this thing with Ann herself? Prima facie, no. For the absence is located where the party is, since that is the place from where she is absent (compare, the absence of beer in my fridge, if it has a location, is located in my fridge). But Ann is not located there, which is precisely why she is absent. Similarly, suppose Ann ceases to exist, so she is absent from the world altogether. If there is such a thing as Ann’s absence, it is prima facie located in the actual world, since that is the place from where she is absent. But Ann is not located there, for if she were, then she would exist there. More generally, Ann and her absence cannot be co-located, since if she is located at $l$ then she is not absent from $l$, and if she is not absent from $l$ then there would seem to be no absence of her there. The same point applies to events and omissions, although with an extra wrinkle thrown in. If Bob’s omission to perform the safety check is an absence, it is the absence of any event of Bob performing the safety check. If we identify absences of things with the things that are absent, it seems that the absence of a safety check is located in all of those worlds in which Bob does perform the safety check, and yet it is not located in worlds like the actual one, in which Bob does not perform the safety check. Again, this is a very strange result. Surely the absence of a safety check can only be located in worlds where there is no safety check, rather than being located only in worlds where there is a safety check.

Thus, I have no reason to assume to Bob’s omission must occupy a particular half-hour period. I can say the more natural thing, that since Bob omitted to perform the safety check between 1:00 and 3:00, his omission occupies that whole interval. Thus, on my view, there is no unclarity about when Bob’s omission occurred.

Of course, not every case will be so clear-cut, since it will not always be clear just when the relevant interval of time begins and ends. Suppose my spouse asks me to vacuum the house at some point on Monday. Just when does the relevant interval begin? Technically, the day starts just after midnight, but surely my spouse does not intend 12:01am to be a suitable time to do the vacuuming. Perhaps the interval starts whenever I usually get out of bed, but this is a fairly vague starting-point, since it is difficult to say with much precision when I usually get up. And when does the relevant interval end? Technically, the day ends at midnight, but surely my spouse does not intend 11:59pm to be a suitable time to do the vacuuming. Perhaps the interval ends whenever I usually get ready for bed, but this is a fairly vague ending-point, since it is difficult to say with much precision when I usually get ready for bed. It seems that, while there are plenty of times which obviously must fall within the relevant interval,
the boundaries of the interval are vague. Thus, on my view, if I omit to do the vacuuming on Monday then the temporal location of this omission is itself vague.

As with the parallel puzzle about spatial locations, I do not take this to be an objection to my view. Philosophers of action are well aware that it can be difficult to say just when a positive event occurs. For instance, if I shoot the Queen on Monday, I die on Tuesday, and the Queen dies from the gunshot on Wednesday, when does my act of killing her occur? Does it occur on Monday, when I shoot her, on Wednesday when she dies, or perhaps throughout the whole interval? There is no settled answer to this question. And yet, this would not usually be taken as an objection to the idea that my killing of the Queen is an event with a temporal location. On the contrary, most philosophers of action would accept that sometimes the temporal locations of positive actions are unclear. Why, then, should we expect things to be more clear in the case of negative actions?³

Having surveyed some of the most popular arguments to the contrary, I conclude that a monist view like mine faces no problems in attributing spatiotemporal locations to negative actions.

5.3 Modal Profiles

From issues about the location of negative actions in physical space, I turn to issues about their location in modal space. On my monist view, each negative action is identical to a positive event. Thus, it entails that each negative action shares its modal profile — i.e. the set of worlds in which it exists — with some positive event, since if \( a = b \), then it is impossible for \( a \) to exist and \( b \) not to exist. But it can seem implausible that any negative action shares its modal profile with a positive event. For instance, Carolina Sartorio imagines the following case:

**Drown** A child is drowning in the pond in front of me. I could easily jump in and save the child, but I omit to do so. Instead, I simply stand on the shore and eat some ice cream. As a result of my omission, the child drowns.

Sartorio insists that my omission in **Drown** is not identical to the event of my eating ice cream, on the grounds that “I could have failed to jump in by doing something other than eating ice cream on the shore, for example, by reading a book” (2009, 120). Since I could have omitted to jump into the pond without eating ice cream, it seems that my omission could have occurred in the absence of my eating ice cream. Therefore, these two events must be distinct, since nothing can exist in the absence of itself.

One might object on my behalf that my view does not force us to identify the omission and the eating of ice cream, on the grounds that these events do not involve all and only the same body parts — my eating ice cream intuitively involves my mouth and throat, but it is not clear that my omission does. For as I argued in my discussion of spatiotemporal location, an omission to \( \phi \)-ing involves those body parts that might have been involved if the agent had \( \phi \)-ed, and it is not clear that my mouth and throat

³It might be thought that my ‘natural’ claim that a negative action occupies the whole of the relevant time at which there is no \( \phi \)-ing has some quite unnatural consequences. Randolph Clarke imagines a case where I am expected to pull the weeds in my garden at some point in June, but there is no more specific time such that I am expected to do it then. If I omit to pull the weeds, are we to conclude that I was omitting to pull them throughout the whole month of June? That seems like the wrong result (Clarke, 2014, 27).

Fortunately, as I argued in Section 3.3.2, my view does not have this consequence. Since one can only omit to do something at a time when one is supposed to do it, the reason I am not omitting to pull the weeds at any particular point in June is that none of those points is such that I am supposed to pull the weeds then. Nonetheless, my omission occupies the whole month.
would have been involved in an event of jumping into the pond, had such an event occurred. However, this objection only delays the problem without solving it. For consider all and only those parts of my body that might have been involved, had I jumped into the pond. We may introduce a verb, $\psi_V$, and stipulate that it stands for whatever it is that I was doing with all and only those parts of my body, at the time that I omitted to jump into the pond. It seems that my view forces us to identify my omission with the event of my $\psi_V$-ing, since that event is uniquely suited to play the role of ensuring that I do not jump into the pond. But now we may simply re-run Sartorio’s argument: my omission and my $\psi_V$-ing cannot be identical, since I could have omitted to jump into the pond without $\psi_V$-ing. If I had been reading a book, for instance, then I would not have been $\psi_V$-ing, either. So it seems that my omission could have occurred in the absence of my $\psi_V$-ing, and that these two events must therefore be distinct. Thus, the force of the argument does not depend on which particular positive event in Drown we say is identical to my omission, since it can be re-run for any identity-claim we might care to make.

Moreover, although Sartorio presents her argument in the context of Drown, it does not depend on the particulars of the case. For it seems that, in general, an agent could have omitted to $\phi$ without doing whatever it is she actually did in place of $\phi$-ing. For example, recall the case where Randy omits to pick up milk from the store, and suppose that what he does instead is to pick up cream by mistake. It seems that, on my view, we should identify Randy’s omission with the event of his picking up cream. But while Randy may have actually picked up cream instead of picking up milk, he could have omitted to pick up milk without doing that — he may have picked up buttermilk instead of cream, or he may have driven right past the grocery store and omitted to go in altogether. But now the reasoning we applied in Drown can simply be applied here: since Randy could have omitted to pick up milk without picking up cream, his omission could have occurred in the absence of his picking up cream, and these two events must therefore be distinct. Sartorio’s reasoning is thus perfectly general, and any satisfactory reply must itself be suitably general, not relying on the particulars of any given case.

How, then, is the argument to be resisted? Its general form is:

\[
\begin{align*}
(\alpha) & \quad \text{It is possible for } x \text{ to } \phi \text{ without } \psi\text{-ing.} \quad \text{[Premise]} \\
(\beta) & \quad \therefore \text{It is possible for } x\text{'s } \phi\text{-ing to exist, and yet } x\text{'s } \psi\text{-ing not to exist.} \quad \text{[From } (\alpha)\text{]} \\
(\gamma) & \quad \text{For all events, } e, \text{ it is not possible for } e \text{ to both exist and not exist.} \quad \text{[Premise]} \\
(\delta) & \quad \therefore x\text{'s } \phi\text{-ing is not identical to } x\text{'s } \psi\text{-ing.} \quad \text{[From } (\beta) \text{ and } (\gamma)\text{]} 
\end{align*}
\]

Notice that, as I have formalized it, this argument-form does not merely concern the identity and distinctness of negative actions and positive events, but can be applied to any pair of events whatsoever. This is to the pluralist’s advantage since, ceteris paribus, an argument that appeals to a principle about the modal profiles of events more generally is preferable to one that requires a more specific principle about the modal profiles of negative actions. I have already suggested that, in many cases, the relevant instance of $(\alpha)$ will be true, so a suitably general defence of my monist position cannot hope to succeed by undermining that premise. $(\gamma)$ is unassailable, or so I will assume, and $(\delta)$ follows from it by a simple application of Leibniz’s Law. This leaves the inference from $(\alpha)$ to $(\beta)$ as the only promising target.

While this is the most promising strategy, it may not seem promising at all, on first glance. For it is quite common for philosophers to make the move from a claim of the $(\alpha)$ form to a claim of the $(\beta)$ form.

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4 Or, if not this event, the event of his $\psi_V$-ing, where $\psi_V$ is stipulated to be the thing Randy does with all and only the relevant parts of his body. If need be, the argument can simply be re-run to apply to Randy’s omission and his $\psi_V$-ing, as we did above with my omission in Drown.
form, both within the literature on negative action and without. To make the move, one simply reasons as follows: \((\alpha)\) is true because there is a possible world, \(w\), such that \(x\ \phi s\) in \(w\) — and therefore, \(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing occurs in \(w\) — but \(x\) does not \(\psi\) in \(w\) — and therefore, \(x\)'s \(\psi\)-ing does not occur in \(w\); therefore, there is a world, namely \(w\), such that \(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing exists in \(w\) while \(x\)'s \(\psi\)-ing does not.

The problem with this reasoning lies in the side remarks, in which ‘\(x\ \phi s\)’ is taken to entail ‘\(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing occurs’ and ‘\(x\ \psi s\)’ is taken to entail ‘\(x\)'s \(\psi\)-ing does not occur.’ These side remarks run roughshod over a distinction to which I have drawn our attention in previous chapters, namely the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them. As I have said, the things we do are \textit{prima facie} universals, in the sense that they are repeatable, shareable entities, while our doings of the things we do are \textit{prima facie} particulars.\(^5\)

The reason this distinction is important for present purposes is that, if we discriminate between the things we do and our doings of them, then we must also discriminate the thought that \(x\ \phi s\) from the thought that a specific \(\phi\)-ing event occurs. It may be that, whenever an agent does something, there occurs an event that is a doing of that thing. But it need not follow that the same event occurs whenever she does that thing. By making the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them, we clear conceptual space for the idea that, while \(x\ \phi s\) at \(t_1\), and then again at \(t_2\) — that is, she \textit{does the same thing} at both times — it is not the case that one and the same event occurs at both \(t_1\) and \(t_2\), but rather that to each of these times there corresponds a distinct \(\phi\)-ing event. For example, I made a pot of coffee at 6am, and then again at noon, but it is perfectly coherent (even commonsensical, to some) to suppose that two coffee-making events occurred, not just one. What goes for times goes for worlds, as well: there are plenty of possible worlds in which I make a pot of coffee at 6am today, and so it is true that I do the same thing in all of these worlds, but it is perfectly coherent to deny that the same coffee-making event occurs in all these worlds. Thus, ‘\(x\ \phi s\)’ should not be taken to entail ‘\(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing occurs.’

We can make this lack of entailment, and its importance for arguments of the \((\alpha)\)–\((\delta)\) form, more clear by presenting the argument in neo-Davidsonian form. Recall that, on a semantics of this sort, action sentences contain no singular terms which refer to particular doings. Rather, a sentence of the form ‘\(x\ \phi s\)’ existentially quantifies over particular doings: it says that there exists some event which is a \(\phi\)-ing by \(x\) (Davidson, 1967). This is how we must analyse the antecedent and consequent of \((\alpha)\): \((\alpha)\) says that there is some world in which \(x\ \phi s\) and yet \(x\) does not \(\psi\), which in neo-Davidsonian terms is to say that there is some world in which there exists some event which is a \(\phi\)-ing by \(x\) but in which there exists no event which is a \(\psi\)-ing by \(x\):

\[(\alpha)\quad \text{It is possible for } x \text{ to } \phi \text{ without } \psi\text{-ing.}
\]

\[\Diamond((\exists e)\text{Agent}(x,e) \land \phi(e) \land \neg(\exists e')\text{Agent}(x,e') \land \psi(e'))\]

By contrast, \((\beta)\) actually uses the singular terms ‘\(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing’ and ‘\(x\)'s \(\psi\)-ing’ to refer to particular events. Using ‘\(a\)’ and ‘\(b\)’ as singular terms for \(x\)'s \(\phi\)-ing and \(x\)'s \(\psi\)-ing, respectively, we analyse \((\beta)\) as:

\[(\beta)\quad \text{It is possible for } x\text{'s } \phi\text{-ing to exist, and yet } x\text{'s } \psi\text{-ing not to exist.}
\]

\[\Diamond(Ea \land \neg Eb)\]

\(^5\)See Section 1.2.2.
where ‘E’ is a predicate meaning ‘...exists’. We can now see right away why (β) does not follow from (α). We may suppose, for the sake of argument, that if there is no event which is a ψ-ing by x in w, then x’s actual ψ-ing does not exist in w, and so ¬(∃e′)Agent(x, e′)∧ψ(e′) entails ¬Eb, although this may be disputed. We might hold a view of the nature of events which allows one and the same event to be a ψ-ing in one world and yet fail to be a ψ-ing in some other world, in which case the mere fact that nothing is a ψ-ing in w does not entail that x’s actual ψ-ing does not exist in w — compare the inference from ‘There is a possible world in which no-one is President’ to ‘In that world, person who is actually President does not exist.’ But even if we allow that that inference is a good one, perhaps on the grounds that any ψ-ing is essentially a ψ-ing, we should reject the inference from (∃e)Agent(x, e)∧φ(e) to Ea. For while it may be true that some φ-ing by x occurs in w, this simply does not entail that the actual φ-ing by x occurs in w — compare the inference from ‘There is a possible world in which someone is President’ to ‘In that world, Barack Obama exists.’

Thus, returning to the case of Drown, while it is true that I could have omitted to jump into the pond without eating ice cream — I may have read a book instead — it does not follow that my actual omission could have occurred in the absence of my actual eating of ice cream. For the former claim amounts to the claim that some omission to jump into the pond could have occurred in the absence of any eating of ice cream. This may be true even if my actual omission and my actual eating of ice cream are identical, since if I had not eaten ice cream — and hence my actual eating of ice cream had not occurred — some other omission to jump into the pond could have occurred. Similar reasoning applies to any other case that a pluralist might imagine, since it relies only on a general distinction between saying that some thing of such-and-such a kind exists and saying that this thing exists.

In making this reply to Sartorio’s argument, I have not relied on any substantive view about the nature of negative actions, or about the nature of events. I have relied only on the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them, and the logical distinction between sentences which refer to particular objects and sentences which merely quantify over them. Given that philosophers of action are generally familiar with this distinction, and the obvious parallel between the (α)–(δ) argument and the patently invalid argument from ‘In w, someone is President’ to ‘In w, Barack Obama exists’, why would one be inclined to think that Sartorio’s argument is valid?

The obvious answer is that, although the argument is not logically valid, it would go through if we added certain substantive claims about the nature of negative actions, or about the nature of events. Consider, first, the claim that negative actions are not events, but absences of events. If that claim is assumed, then it is far more natural to suppose that, whether I had eaten ice cream or read a book, the exact same omission would have occurred. For an absence of events in which I jump into the pond seems to be a state of affairs which consists solely in their being no events of that kind,7 and that exact same state of affairs seems to obtain in both the actual and counterfactual scenarios. Of course, at this point in the dialectic, it can hardly be assumed that negative actions are absences.

Now consider a response that accepts that negative actions are events, but invokes a claim about the nature of events to license the move from (α) to (β). This is the claim, familiar from Chapter 4, that

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6 On some views, ontological commitment is carried by the existential quantifier: to say that a exists is just to say that there is such a thing as a. On those views, we can treat Ea as a shorthand for (∃x)x = a. However, some philosophers deny that the existential quantifier carries ontological commitment, and so they allow themselves to quantify over things that, by their lights, do not exist. On those views, Ea cannot be a shorthand for (∃x)x = a, for then the sentence ‘There is something that does not exist’, which is true by these philosophers’ lights, is analysed as the contradictory (∃x)(∃y)x = y. I take no stand on this dispute.

7 On negative states of affairs, see (Kukso, 2006), (Martin, 1996), and (Thomson, 2003).
events are exemplifications of properties, and in particular that our particular doings are exemplifications of the things we do:

**Property-Exemplification Schema (PES)** For every $\phi_V$ and corresponding $\Phi_N$, every $\phi_N$ is an exemplification of the property $\phi_V$.

A property-exemplification view of this sort is typically paired with the following existence-condition:

**Property-Exemplification Existence-Condition (PEEC)** $x$'s exemplification of $F$ at $t$ exists iff $x$ has $F$ at $t$ (Kim, 1976, 35).

Suppose that (PEEC) applies across possible worlds: for all $w$, $x$’s exemplification of $F$ at $t$ exists iff $x$ has $F$ at $t$ in $w$. Then, by (PES), my omission to jump into the pond occurs in $w$ iff I omit to jump into the pond, at the relevant time, in $w$. Thus, whereas I have insisted on distinguishing between the claim that I omit to jump into the pond in the counterfactual scenario, and the claim that my actual omission to jump into the pond occurs there, (PES) and (PEEC) together imply that these claims are equivalent. The distinction between the things we do and our doings of them no longer bears the weight I have placed on it.

But we saw in Chapter 4 that a proponent of an event-based theory of agency ought to reject (PES). Rather than thinking of a doing as an exemplification of the thing the agent does, we ought to think of it as an exemplification of a maximally-specific distributional property, by virtue of exemplifying which the agent does what she does. This variant on the property-exemplification view restores the importance of the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them, for we can no longer motivate the idea that there is a single event which occurs whenever $x$ $\phi$s at $t$. If $x$ $\phi$s at $t$ in the exact same way in both $w_1$ and $w_2$, then we are entitled to say that the exact same event occurs, since $x$ exemplifies the exact same maximally-specific distributional property at the exact same time, and so (PEEC) is satisfied. But if $x$ $\phi$s at $t$ in different ways in $w_1$ and $w_2$, meaning that $x$ exemplifies different maximally-specific distributional properties, then, since property-exemplifications are individuated by their constituents, we must say that two different $\phi$-ing events occur. And indeed, it seems that in *Drown* I omit in very different ways in the actual and counterfactual worlds. In the actual world, I stand on the shore eating ice cream, thereby moving and positioning my body in particular ways. In the counterfactual world I read a book, thereby moving and positioning my body in quite different ways. Thus, we ought to say that a different omission occurs in each of these worlds.\(^8\)

One might think that Sartorio’s argument can be salvaged in a different way. Rather than trying to show that ($\beta$) really does follow from ($\alpha$), a pluralist might simply excise ($\alpha$) from the argument altogether. That is, rather than taking the fact that I could have omitted to jump into the pond without eating ice cream to show that my actual omission could have occurred in the absence of my actual eating

\[^8\]A similar response to my objection might have been mounted using a trope theory of events which combined the familiar schema from Chapter 4

**Trope Schema (TS)** For any general property $\phi_V$ and corresponding event-type $\Phi_N$, every token $\phi_N$ event is an instance of $\phi_V$.

With the following existence-condition on tropes:

**Trope Existence-Condition (TEC)** $x$’s particular instance of $F$ exists iff $x$ has $F$.

However, not only have I argued against (TS), but I doubt that (TEC) should be very appealing to believers in tropes. If the properties I have are particulars, why could I not have had numerically distinct properties of the exact same kinds? Even if we were to accept that tropes are individuated by their bearers *within* a possible world — *contra* (Ehring, 2011) and (Schaffer, 2001) — it would be unappealing to have to individuate them by their bearers *across* worlds.
of ice cream, the pluralist might take the latter claim as a stand-alone premise, justified by its intuitive truth rather than by derivation from something else. For is not simply obvious that my omission could have occurred in the absence of my eating of ice cream?

I do not think this is obvious at all, at least where ‘my omission’ is meant to refer to my doing of something, rather than the thing that I do. It is perfectly obvious that I do the same thing in both worlds in the Drown case — in both worlds, I omit to jump into the pond. But it is not at all obvious that the very same doing of that thing, the very same particular omission, occurs in both worlds. At least from a pre-theoretical perspective, the question ‘Of course, I omit to do the very same thing in both scenarios, but does the very same omission occur?’ is perplexing. We simply do not have strong pre-theoretical judgements about the transworld identity of particular doings, as we do about the transworld identity of people, statues, and other typical subjects of the monism/pluralism dispute. If this revised version of the argument is going to get off the ground, it must not rely on pre-philosophical, intuitive judgements to motivate (β). (β) must instead be motivated by theoretical claims. Unfortunately for the pluralist, the only such claims that could obviously do the job are the claims (i) that negative actions are absences, or negative states of affairs, and (ii) that a doing of something is an exemplification of the thing done, both of which I have already rejected.

I conclude that the argument from modal profiles is a failure, since the crucial claim that particular negative action could have occurred in the absence of that positive event with which my view says it is identical, lacks any clear and non-question-begging motivation, philosophical or otherwise.

5.4 Causal Roles

Some of the most popular arguments against my monist view, on which each negative action is identical to a positive event, appeal to apparent differences in the causal roles of these events. These arguments purport to show that a given negative action and positive event have different causes and effects, and come in four forms:

(A) This negative action causes something that this positive event does not cause; therefore, the two are distinct.

(B) This positive event causes something that this negative action does not cause; therefore, the two are distinct.

(Γ) This negative action is caused by something that does not cause this positive event; therefore, the two are distinct.

(∆) This positive event is caused by something that does not cause this negative action; therefore, the two are distinct.

In what follows, I will focus mainly on arguments that take the (A)-form for the sake of simplicity, since my response to such arguments can be applied, mutatis mutandis, to arguments of the other forms. However, before doing that, I should note one peculiarity shared by the (B) and (∆) forms that is not shared by the (A) and (Γ) forms, and which requires a unique response.

The (A) and (Γ) forms attempt to show that a certain negative action has a cause or effect that is not had by a certain positive event. Such arguments therefore assume that negative actions actually have

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9Sara Bernstein (2014, 4) appears to give this version of the argument, taking it to be intuitively obvious that my omission to φ is itself multiply realizable, so that that very omission could have been realized by a different positive event.
causes and effects. By contrast, the \((B)\) and \((\Delta)\) forms attempt to show that a certain positive event has a cause or effect that is not had by a certain negative action. Such arguments can get by perfectly well without the assumption that negative actions have causes and effects. In fact, arguments that take these forms may be motivated by the thought that negative actions do not have causes and effects.

Why should we think that negative actions have no causes or effects? The typical explanation is that a negative action, like an omission, is not an event in its own right, but merely the absence of an event, and because of this it — if ‘it’ really exists at all — cannot stand in causal relations to anything. This explanation comes in two forms. According to the first, there is something peculiar about the causal relation which ensures that absences cannot be its relata. For example, on some views causation is a physical process that consists in the transfer of conserved quantities of energy or of some other scientifically respectable thing. When I throw a rock at a window, thereby causing it to shatter, the fact that my throw causes the shattering is to be understood in terms of the transfer of momentum from my arm to the rock and from the rock to the window. Negative actions, conceived as absences, do not seem capable of being involved in such processes. Recall Sartorio’s Drown case, in which I omit to jump into the pond, choosing to eat ice cream instead. It seems that my act of eating ice cream might cause a stomachache (Sartorio, 2009, 120), but can we also say that my omission to jump into the pond causes my stomachache? It seems not. My omission is merely an absence of events in which I jump into the pond — it does not transfer any conserved quantities to anything else, exert any forces on anything else, etc. Therefore, it cannot be a cause of anything, let alone a cause of my stomachache (Dowe, 2000, ch.6).

According to the second form, what prevents negative actions from standing in causal relations is not anything peculiar about the causal relation, but merely the fact that it is a relation. Relations need relata, and since it is plausible that absences are not genuine entities, ‘they’ cannot be the relata of any relation whatsoever. So, once again, my omission to jump into the pond cannot be a cause of anything, let alone a cause of my stomachache.

Such arguments may be compelling in some contexts, but in the present context they are question-begging, since they simply assume that negative actions mere absences rather than events in their own right. Thus, I will not deal with them in detail here.

5.4.1 Causation, Causal Explanation, and Counterfactuals

That point having been made, I now turn to the task of developing a response that can be applied to arguments taking any of the \((A)–(\Delta)\) forms. As I said, I will focus on arguments taking the \((\Delta)\) form. Such arguments are common in the literature on negative actions. Recall Sartorio’s Drown case:

**Drown** A child is drowning in the pond in front of me. I could easily jump in and save the child, but I omit to do so. Instead, I simply stand on the shore and eat some ice cream. As a result of my omission, the child drowns.

As we have seen, my monist view suggests that my omission and my eating of ice cream are identical. But, Sartorio says, they cannot be identical, since the former causes the child’s death while the latter does not. “For, intuitively, the child died because of what I didn’t do, not because of what I did in its place. It seems, in fact, irrelevant that I was eating ice cream on the shore (as opposed to, say, reading a book, or doing anything else but jumping in): all that matters is that I failed to save him” (2009, 121).

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10See (Alvarez, 2001) and (Lewis, 2004). Note that, while Alvarez and Lewis each gives a good expression of this source of scepticism, neither of them endorses it. That is, they each deny that causation is always a relation between relata.
Sara Bernstein presents a similar case:

**Crash** A plane is being examined prior to take-off. Bob is supposed to perform an important safety check, but he omits to do so. Instead, he sits in the breakroom having a snack. Shortly after take-off, the plane crashes due to a malfunction which would have been caught, had Bob performed the safety check.

It seems that my view identifies Bob’s omission to perform the safety check with his sitting in the breakroom having a snack. But, Bernstein says, this identity claim is false, because only the former causes the crash “For it is not necessarily true that if [Bob] had not snacked, the plane would not have crashed. It is not the case that the snacking causes the plane crash. It is the omission, rather than the positive event, which correctly figures into the causal claim” (2014, 5).

Finally, and less morbidly, consider a case due to Randolph Clarke:

**Fly** You and I have made plans to meet at a certain location. Knowing I will get there first, I promise to raise my arm in greeting upon seeing you, so that you will know where I am. By the time you arrive, however, I have forgotten my promise to raise my arm, and so I omit to do so. Instead, I wave my arm about at my side in an attempt to shoo a pesky fly.

It seems that my view identifies my omission with my waving of my arm. But, Clarke says, “if my omission to raise my arm has effects, one of them might be your disappointment. But this can be so even if, because you can’t see that I’m waving my arm about at my side, the movement of my arm is no cause of your response” (2014, 19).

Each of these cases seems like a plausible example of a negative action causing something that is not caused by a certain positive event. How is a monist to respond?\(^{11}\)

Generally, singular causal claims (and their negations) tend to go hand-in-hand with causal explanations (and their negations), i.e. with claims to the effect that \(q \text{ because } p\) (or that not-(\(q \text{ because } p\))). This is certainly true of the causal claims that Sartorio and Bernstein make: they each justify the claim that the relevant negative action causes such-and-such while the relevant positive one does not by appealing to a causal explanation. More specifically, these causal explanations seem to take the form of counterfactual conditionals. Bernstein is the most explicit about this. She insists that Bob’s snacking does not cause the crash, on the grounds that the latter does not counterfactually depend on the former: “it is not necessarily true,” she says, “that if [Bob] had not snacked, the plane would not have crashed.” (2014, 5) And while she does not say so explicitly, she would likely insist that Bob omission does cause the crash on the grounds that the latter depends on the former: if Bob had not omitted to perform the safety check — that is, if he had performed the safety check — then the plane would not have crashed.\(^{12}\)

\(^{11}\)Note that it will not do to deny that my monism commits me to the particular identity claims that Sartorio, Bernstein and Clarke argue against. In *Drown*, for instance, we might try to deny that my omission is identical to my eating ice cream, on the grounds that the latter involves my mouth and throat while my omission does not. But we can introduce the label ‘my \(\psi V\)-ing’ to pick out that positive event in *Drown* that involves all and only those parts of my body that are also involved in my omission — and hence to pick out that positive event with which my omission is supposedly identical — and it is no more plausible that my \(\psi V\)-ing causes the child’s death than that my eating ice cream does. Thus, the force of these (\(A\))-form arguments does not depend on which particular positive event we say is identical to the relevant omission, since they can be re-run for any identity-claim we might care to make.

\(^{12}\)Likewise, when Sartorio says that it is “irrelevant that I was eating ice cream on the shore (as opposed to, say, reading a book, or doing anything else but jumping in)” (2009, 121), she seems to be engaged in counterfactual reasoning: it is not true that my consumption of ice cream causes the child’s death, because the child might still have died had I not been eating ice cream, but reading a book, or doing anything other than jumping into the pond. Similar reasoning would justify the claim that my omission to jump in does cause the child’s death: it is highly relevant that I omitted to jump into the pond.
The \((A)\)-form arguments, then, seem to rely on counterfactual conditionals in order to motivate the relevant singular causal claims. While this is a typical way to motivate such claims, we will now see that it is the arguments’ downfall.

It is standard practice, in discussions of causation, to treat the relevant counterfactuals as relating sentences or propositions about the occurrence of particular events. That is, the antecedents and consequents of the relevant counterfactuals are typically analysed as either \(\mathcal{O}(e)\) or \(\neg \mathcal{O}(e)\), where \(\mathcal{O}\) is a predicate of events meaning ‘. . . occurs’, and \(e\) is a proper name for a particular event. Denials of counterfactual dependence are treated the same way. Thus, an assertion of counterfactual dependence takes the form \(\neg \mathcal{O}(c) \Rightarrow \neg \mathcal{O}(e)\) — ‘if \(c\) had not occurred, \(e\) would not have occurred’ — while a denial takes the form \(\neg \mathcal{O}(c) \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{O}(e)\) — ‘if \(c\) had not occurred, \(e\) might still have occurred.’

Given the prevalence of this treatment of counterfactuals in the literature on causation, it is most natural to read Sartorio, Bernstein and Clarke as intending their arguments to utilize conditionals of this form. For instance, Sartorio’s argument can be represented as follows, where ‘omission’, ‘eating’ and ‘drowning’ are proper names for my omission, my eating of ice cream, and child’s drowning, respectively:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(1)} & \quad \text{If I had not omitted to jump into the pond, the child would not have drowned.} \\
& \quad \neg \mathcal{O}(\text{omission}) \Rightarrow \neg \mathcal{O}(\text{drowning}) \quad \text{[Premise]} \\
\text{(2)} & \quad \therefore \text{Causes(omission, drowning)} \quad \text{[From (1)]} \\
\text{(3)} & \quad \text{If I had not stood on the shore eating ice cream, the child might still have drowned.} \\
& \quad \neg \mathcal{O}(\text{eating}) \Leftrightarrow \mathcal{O}(\text{drowning}) \quad \text{[Premise]} \\
\text{(4)} & \quad \therefore \neg \text{Causes(eating, drowning)} \quad \text{[From (3)]} \\
\text{(5)} & \quad \therefore \text{my omission to jump into the pond is not identical to my eating of ice cream.} \\
& \quad \therefore \text{omission} \neq \text{eating} \quad \text{[From (1) and (4)]}
\end{align*}
\]

The problem with this formalization is that the supposed logical forms of these sentences do not match their surface forms.

To see this, consider the sentence ‘I omitted to jump into the pond.’ This sentence says that I did something, namely omit to jump into the pond, but it contains no singular term referring to a particular doing of that thing. It does not say, of some particular omission, that it occurred, but only that some omission occurred. Thus, it cannot be analysed as \(\mathcal{O}(\text{omission})\), so the antecedent of (1) cannot be analysed as \(\neg \mathcal{O}(\text{omission})\).’ Similar remarks apply to the antecedents and consequents of the other conditionals in the argument, with the result that this formalization runs roughshod over the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them.

To reinstate the distinction, we analyse both the antecedent and consequent of (1) as an existential quantifications over events, and likewise for (3):

\[\therefore \quad \text{pond, since had I not done so — that is, had I jumped in — the child would not have died.}\]

Clarke does not explicitly appeal to counterfactuals when he argues that, in \textit{Fly}, it is only my omission to greet you that causes your disappointment. However, he does so when mounting other causal arguments against monism. For instance, he makes the \((\Delta)\)-form argument that the appearance of the fly causes me to wave my arm about, but does not cause me to omit to greet you, on the following grounds: “Had the fly not appeared, still I wouldn’t have raised my arm, for I’d already forgotten my promise, and the arrival of the fly is no explanation of my failure” (2014, 19).

\[13\text{This practice is, no doubt, due to the influence of David Lewis; see (Lewis, 1973a) and (Lewis, 1973b).}\]

\[14\text{Note that the inferences from (1) to (2) and from (3) to (4) need not be assumed to be deductively valid — all we need assume is that counterfactuals are good evidence for singular causal claims, not that the former entail the latter.}\]
If I had not omitted to jump into the pond, the child would not have drowned.
\[-(\exists e)Omission(e) \rightarrow -(\exists e')Drowning(e')\]

If I had not stood on the shore eating ice cream, the child might still have drowned.
\[-(\exists e)Eating(e) \leftrightarrow (\exists e')Drowning(e')\]

(1*) and (3*) say, respectively, that no drowning would have occurred if no omission to jump into the pond had occurred, and that a drowning might still have occurred if no eating of ice cream had occurred. Thus, these conditionals better reflect the meanings of their English counterparts than (1) and (3) do. How does this affect the argument?

The inference from the counterfactual (1*) to the singular causal claim (2) is a compelling one. We do not infer that my omission causes the child’s drowning on the grounds that the latter would not have occurred if the former had not occurred. Rather, we infer this on the grounds that the instantiation of the kind *drowning of the child* depends on the instantiation of the kind *omission to jump into the pond*: if there had been no event of the latter kind, there would have been no event of the former kind. The reason my omission counts as a cause of the drowning is that these two events are witnesses to a counterfactual conditional that encodes dependence between the relevant kinds.

But if that is how the inference from (1*) to (2) works, then the inference from (3*) to (4) looks far less compelling. We do not infer that my eating ice cream does not cause the child’s drowning on the grounds that the latter might still have occurred if the former had not. Rather, we infer this on the grounds that the instantiation of the kind *drowning of the child* does not depend on the instantiation of the kind *eating of ice cream*: if there had been no event of the latter kind, there might still have been an event of the former kind. But this inference leaves open the possibility that my eating ice cream falls under another kind, \(K\), and that the instantiation of the kind *drowning of the child* depends on the instantiation of \(K\). If that possibility obtains, then my eating of ice cream and the child’s drowning are witnesses to a counterfactual conditional that encodes dependence between relevant kinds. The pluralist cannot deny that that would provide good evidence that the one event was a cause of the other, without giving up the inference from (1*) to (2).

This would not be a problem, if we take it for granted that there is no such \(K\) under which my act of eating ice cream falls. But we cannot take this for granted in the present context, since if my monist view is correct, then *omission to jump into the pond* is such a \(K\). The (A)-form argument is supposed to show that my omission and my eating of ice cream are identical, and so it cannot assume that my eating of ice cream does not fall under the kind *omission to jump into the pond* without begging the question. Thus, my response to this version of the argument stands.

This problem for Sartorio’s argument arose because, upon noticing the discrepancy between the surface forms of the counterfactual conditionals and the typical logical forms assigned to them, we opted to modify the logical forms to match the surface forms. But a pluralist might go the other way, and change the surface forms of her counterfactuals to match the typical logical forms. This would mean replacing (1) and (3) with (1**) and (3**):

If my omission to jump into the pond had not occurred, the child’s drowning would not have occurred.
\[-O( omission) \rightarrow -O( drowning)\]

As we saw in Chapter 3, the correct semantics for a negative action sentence like ‘I omitted to jump into the pond’ is more complex than (1*) suggests, but the complications are irrelevant for our purposes.
(3**) If my act of standing on the shore eating ice cream had not occurred, the child’s drowning might still have occurred.

\[-O(\text{eating}) \iff O(\text{drowning})\]

Unlike with (1*) and (3*), the surface forms of these conditionals make clear that they are claims about dependence between particular events, not about dependence between kinds of events; they are claims about doings, not about things done. Moreover, the inferences from (1**) to (2) and from (3**) to (4) look quite strong, since counterfactual dependence between particular events provides good grounds for believing in causal dependence between them.

However, while this formalisation apparently saves the inferences from the counterfactuals to the corresponding singular causal claims, it weakens the intuitive support for the counterfactuals themselves. In particular, there is little intuitive support for (1**).

To see why not, first consider (3**), the claim that the child’s drowning might still have occurred, even if my act of eating ice cream had not. On a Lewisian semantics, this claim is true iff at least one of the closest worlds in which my act of eating ice cream does not occur is a world in which the child’s drowning does occur. And this condition seems to be satisfied. For we are only concerned with worlds in which my actual eating of ice cream does not occur, and it seems that a world in which that event does not occur, but some distinct eating of ice cream does, is closer to actuality than a world in which I do not eat ice cream at all. Now suppose that in the actual world, @, I hold my ice cream in my left hand, and consider what happens in a nearby world, w, which differs from @ only in that I eat my ice cream with my right hand. It seems clear that the child still drowns in w, since I remain standing on the shore eating ice cream. But it furthermore seems quite plausible that the exact same drowning event occurs in both @ and w. For the only differences between these two drowning events would seem to be extrinsic differences — which hand I use to eat my ice cream does not affect the intrinsic nature of the child’s drowning, but only its extrinsic nature, i.e. whether it co-occurs with a left-hand-eating or right-hand-eating. And although, as I argued in Section 5.2, we generally lack strong pre-theoretical intuitions about the identity-conditions on events, such extrinsic properties as these seem like poor candidates to be essential properties. Thus, it seems plausible that the same drowning occurs in both worlds, and hence that (3**) is true.

But now consider (1**), the claim that the child’s drowning would not have occurred if my omission to jump into the pond had not occurred. On a classic Lewisian semantics, this claim is true if and only if all of the closest worlds in which my omission does not occur are worlds in which the drowning does not occur, either. But it is not at all clear that this condition is satisfied. For when we suppose that my omission does not occur, we are not necessarily supposing that I do not omit to jump into the pond — to conflate those suppositions is once again to conflate a claim about what I do with a claim about my doing of it. It is true that if I had not done a certain thing, namely, omit to jump into the pond, the child’s drowning would not have occurred, since he would not have drowned. But is it also true that if my doing of that thing had not occurred, the child’s drowning would not have? It is not clear, since the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them opens up space for the possibility that although my doing of that thing does not occur in the counterfactual world, I nonetheless do the same thing, because some other doing of that thing, some other omission to jump into the pond, takes the place of the actual one. (1**) is not intuitively compelling, in the way that (3**) is.

Of course, the pluralist might appeal to substantive claims about the nature of events or about the nature of negative actions in order to justify (1**). A conception of negative actions as absences, or a
property-exemplification view of events, could be invoked to justify the claim that my actual omission to jump into the pond occurs in every possible world in which I omit to jump into the pond (at the relevant time). If that claim is right, then to suppose that my actual omission does not occur just is to suppose that I do not omit jump into the pond, and so (1**) intuitively comes out true: if I had not omitted to jump into the pond, then the child would not have drowned at all, and so it seems his actual drowning would not have occurred. But since I have already argued against such conceptions of events and of negative actions, this defence of (1**) is unavailable.

I conclude that Sartorio’s argument, and others like it, is a failure. If we try to show that my omission and my eating of ice cream have different effects by appealing to counterfactuals which quantify over events rather than naming them, we cannot justify the claim that my act of standing on the shore eating ice cream does not cause the child’s drowning. On the other hand, if we try to show that my omission and my eating of ice cream have different effects by appealing to counterfactuals which actually name events rather than merely quantifying over them, then one of those conditional claims — namely that the child’s drowning would not have occurred if my omission had not — loses all intuitive support. The same point applies to any argument of the (A)–(∆) form which appeals to counterfactual conditionals to justify singular causal claims.

5.4.2 Extending the Reply

It should be noted that, although I have focused on arguments which rely on causal explanations that take the form of counterfactual conditionals, the over-arching point is that we must distinguish carefully between the things we do and our doings of them, and hence that we must distinguish between an explanation of the fact that \( x \phi \)-ed (a fact about what someone did) an explanation of the fact that a particular \( \phi \)-ing occurred (a fact about a doing). Even if we do not represent causal explanations as counterfactual conditionals, attention to this distinction can still block causal arguments for pluralism.

Consider a (B)-form argument based on Drown that I hinted at earlier: even if we allow that omissions can be causes, we are tempted to say that my eating of ice cream causes my stomachache but that my omission to jump into the pond does not. Why? Because I got a stomachache because of what I did, not because of what I did not do. But it is precisely because the explanans and explanandum here are facts about what I did or did not do, rather than facts about the occurrence or absence of particular doings, that this reasoning cannot be relied on in the present context. We infer that my eating of ice cream causes my stomachache on the grounds that there is some explanatory connection between the instantiation of the kind eating of ice cream and the instantiation of the kind stomachache. But if that is how we justify the claim that my eating of ice cream causes my stomachache, then the corresponding justification for the claim that my omission does not cause my stomachache looks far less compelling. We infer that my omission does not cause my stomachache on the grounds that there is no explanatory connection between the instantiation of the kind omission to jump into the pond and the instantiation of the kind stomachache. But that inference leaves wide open the possibility that my omission falls under some other kind, \( K \), and that there is an explanatory connection between the instantiation of \( K \) and the instantiation of stomachache. This would not be a problem if we could assume that there is no such \( K \). But we cannot do so in the present context, since if my monist view is correct, then eating of ice cream is such a \( K \), and so that assumption would be question-begging.

A pluralist could try to avoid this problem by trading such explanations for singular explanations of the occurrence of particular events. There are two problems with this reply. First, ordinary people
— and even philosophers — do not easily distinguish these singular explanations from existentially quantified ones.\footnote{See, e.g., (Paul & Hall, 2013), where the authors frequently shift from saying ‘$y$’s $\psi$-ing occurred because $x$’s $\phi$-ing occurred’ (a singular claim) and saying ‘$y$ $\psi$-ed because $x$ $\phi$-ed’ (a non-singular claim).} That is not to say that they cannot tell the difference between their surface forms. But these two sorts of claim are often treated as if they were equivalent, or as if any inequivalence could not matter to the assessment of causal explanatory claims. This suggests that, even if we shift from non-singular to singular explanations at the level of surface form, the intuitive force of the latter may be illicitly based on the intuitive force of the former.

Indeed, this suggestion is borne out by the fact that we are naturally hesitant to assert a singular causal explanation when we would also be hesitant to assert the non-singular form: these two kinds of explanation stand or fall together in ordinary thinking about causation. Why does it seem wrong to say that my stomachache occurred because my omission to jump into the pond occurred? The natural response to someone who would say this is ‘But look, the fact that the I got a stomachache had nothing to do with the fact that I omitted to jump into the pond. It doesn’t matter what I omitted to do; all that matters is that I ate ice cream!’ But to make this response is to confuse singular with non-singular explanations.

The second problem with the reply is that, even if we are careful to distinguish singular from non-singular explanations, and we make sure that what we are thinking is that the occurrence of this act of eating ice cream explains my stomachache while the occurrence of this omission to jump into the pond does not, it is questionable whether this explanatory difference really holds. For we are no longer claiming that the fact that I omitted to jump into the pond is irrelevant to the fact that I got a stomachache, which suggests a contrast with cases where I do jump into the pond. That is, we are not claiming that, when trying to find out why I got a stomachache, the answer to the following question is irrelevant: ‘Did I jump into the pond or not?’ Rather, we are saying that the fact that this particular omission occurred is irrelevant, which suggests a contrast with cases where some other omission to jump into the pond occurs. That is, we are claiming that, when trying to find out why my stomachache occurred, the answer to the following question is irrelevant: ‘Did this omission to jump into the pond occur, or did that one occur?’ But absent some philosophical account of the nature of events in general or of negative actions in particular, it is simply not clear whether the fact that this omission to jump into the pond is causally relevant, since it is not clear what would be required for some other omission to jump into the pond to occur, rather than the actual one.

I conclude that arguments of the (A)–(\Delta) forms fail, even if causal explanations are not treated as counterfactual conditionals. Where causal explanations concern the things we do rather than our particular doings of them, a difference in explanatory quality should not be taken as good evidence for a difference in the causal roles of particular events. Where causal explanations do concern our doings of things rather than the things we do, a difference in explanatory quality may be good evidence for a difference in the causal roles of particular events, but it is far more difficult to establish. In the absence of any concrete arguments that avoid these difficulties, my monist view is safe from concerns about the causal roles of negative actions and positive events.

### 5.4.3 Excursus: Deflationism and Counterfactuals

Before leaving the topic of causation, I should consider a problem for my view that may have occurred to my readers. I have argued that a negative action sentence like ‘I omitted to jump into the pond’ does
not name any particular omission, and that it ought to be interpreted as existentially quantifying over omissions. This claim, if true, applies even when that sentence figures as the antecedent or consequent of a counterfactual conditional, and I used this idea in Section 5.4.2 to block certain \((A)\)-form arguments against my view. But we can construct an argument to show that my semantics for negative action sentences is in tension with the natural methods for assessing causal counterfactuals involving omissions. This argument not only calls much of the discussion in Sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 into question, but also constitutes a new argument for Deflationism, the view that negative action sentences are negative-existentials.

To see what the problem is, look again at (1), as I originally presented it:

\[
\text{(1) If I had not omitted to jump into the pond, the child would not have drowned.}
\]

In order to assess this counterfactual, we must look to a world where I do not omit to jump into the pond, and it seems obvious to both laypeople and philosophers that looking to a world where I do not omit to \(\phi\) is just looking to a world in which I \(\phi\).\(^{17}\) That is, we tend to treat (1) as equivalent to (6):

\[
\text{(6) If I had jumped into the pond the child would not have drowned.}
\]

\[
(\exists e) \text{Jump}(e) \rightarrow \neg (\exists e') \text{Drown}(e')
\]

If we accept Deflationism, this equivalence is easy to explain. For according to Deflationism, ‘I jumped into the pond’ is simply the negation of ‘I omitted to jump into the pond’: the latter says that there was no event of me jumping into the pond, while the former says that there was such an event. Thus, ‘I did not omit to jump into the pond’ is equivalent to ‘I jumped into the pond.’ And if \(\neg p\) is logically equivalent to \(q\), then \(\neg p \rightarrow r\) is equivalent to \(q \rightarrow r\).

I cannot give this explanation of the intuitive equivalence of (1) and (6), since on my view ‘I omitted to jump into the pond’ and ‘I jumped into the pond’ are not simply the negations of one another. ‘I omitted to jump into the pond’ does not merely say that there was no event of me jumping into the pond; it reports the occurrence of an omission-event, which according to me is an event in which I ensured that there was no event of me jumping into the pond. This is a much stronger claim than the claim that I did not jump into the pond. For every time before I came into existence, and for every time after I go out of existence, it is true that I did not jump into the pond; I am not involved in any events at any of those times, still less an event of jumping into the pond. But for that same reason, it is not true at any of those times that I ensure that I do not jump into the pond.

There is a solution to this problem. It simply requires that we give up on treating (1) and (6) as logically equivalent. Instead, we must say that they are ‘practically’ equivalent, in the sense that their truth-conditions are the same in many cases. That will suffice to answer the objection, since we need not think that (1) and (6) are logically equivalent in order to explain why they are treated interchangeably in causal reasoning.

Assume a Lewisian semantics for counterfactuals. Then, for \(\neg p \rightarrow r\) and \(q \rightarrow r\) to be equivalent in a given context — i.e. for their truth-conditions to be the same in that context, though not necessarily in all contexts — it is not required that \(\neg p\) and \(q\) are themselves equivalent. That is, it is not required that all \(\neg p\) worlds be \(q\) worlds and vice-versa. All that is required is that the closest \(\neg p\) worlds be the closest \(q\) worlds, and vice-versa. As long as this condition holds, then supposing \(p\) to be false will come

\(^{17}\)See the counterfactual reasoning at play in, e.g., (Beebee, 2004), (Lewis, 1986, 189–193), (Lewis, 2004), (McGrath, 2005) and (Paul & Hall, 2013, ch.4).
to the same as supposing that \( q \) is true, for our sight will be drawn to the same set of worlds. It does not matter if the \( \neg p \) worlds and the \( q \) worlds diverge as we get farther from actuality (Lewis, 1973b, 33).

Thus, for (1) and (6) to be equivalent in a context, it must be that, in that context, the closest worlds in which I do not omit to jump into the pond are worlds in which I jump into the pond, and vice-versa. That is, (7) and (8) must be true.

\[
\begin{align*}
(7) & \text{ If I had not omitted to jump into the pond, I would have jumped into the pond.} \\
(8) & \text{ If I had jumped into the pond, I would not have omitted to jump into the pond.}
\end{align*}
\]

And it seems that, unless we imagine a scenario that is much stranger than *Drowning* suggests, (7) and (8) are both true. That (8) is true is obvious, since \( \phi \)-ing is generally incompatible with omitting to \( \phi \). My semantic and metaphysical views pose no problem here, since if I had jumped into the pond, then I obviously could not have ensured that I did not jump into the pond.

That (7) is true on my view might seem less obvious, since according to me not omitting to jump into the pond is compatible with not jumping into the pond. But the cases which demonstrate this compatibility are cases where I am not involved in any events at all — since they are cases in which I have died or have yet to be born — and I have no reason to say that, when we evaluate (7), we should look to worlds where I am not involved in any events at all. When we suppose that I did not omit to jump into the pond, we do not imagine a world in which I cease to exist at the time of my decision. Rather, we hold fixed that I exist, and that I do *something*, and we ask what that something might have been if not omitting to jump into the pond.

On my view, there is only one clear candidate answer: I would have jumped into the pond. For the only way for me not to do something the doing of which is incompatible with jumping into the pond, is for me to *jump into the pond*. If I do anything else, then the event that is my doing of that thing will be incompatible with jumping into the pond, and will thereby count as an omission to jump into the pond. Thus, (7) is true: had I not omitted to jump into the pond, I would have jumped into the pond.

Since (7) and (8) are both true in the context where we evaluate (1) and (6), (1) and (6) are equivalent in that context. Thus, my view of negative action sentences as existential quantifications over events can accommodate what seems to be a good practice in evaluating causal counterfactuals involving omissions.

5.5 Other Objections

5.5.1 Standard-Relative Predicates and Predicative Shift

Among other things, the previous sections considered various appeals to Leibniz’s Law which purport to show that a negative action is not identical to a positive event. These arguments appealed to an apparent difference in spatiotemporal location, in modal profile, or in causal role. I have shown that by taking on board my account of negative actions as ensurings, and carefully distinguishing the things we do from the events that are our doings of them, we can resist these arguments.

\[\text{[18]This point is not only intuitive, it is supported by the claim — which both the deflationist and I can accept — that ‘I omitted to } \phi \text{’, unlike ‘I did not } \phi \text{’, carries the presupposition that I was, in some sense, supposed to } \phi \text{ at that time. The norms and expectations grounding this presupposition can be cancelled by an inability to } \phi \text{, and seem pretty clearly to be cancelled if I cease to exist at the relevant time. I can hardly be expected to } \phi \text{ when I’m } \text{dead}. Since the presuppositions of } p \text{ are generally thought to project to } \neg p \text{, even when the latter is the antecedent of a conditional, to suppose that I did not omit to jump into the pond is to look to a world in which I am still, in some sense, supposed to jump into the pond. Worlds where I have ceased to exist are thus irrelevant.}\]
Not all arguments against my monist view appeal to these sorts of differences, however. For instance, Randolph Clarke presents the following case:

**Jogging** Al has previously made arrangements to go for a walk with Tom during a certain interval $T$. However, he has forgotten this engagement, and Sue asks him to go for a jog with her during $T$. Unaware that he would be failing to keep his word, Al accepts. During $T$, Al is both going for a jog with Sue and omitting to go for a walk with Tom.

It seems plausible that, if Al’s omission to go for a walk is identical to any positive event, it is identical to his going for a jog with Sue. For a walk and a jog would seem to involve all of the same body parts, so Al’s jog is a good candidate to be an event whose occurrence ensures that he does not go for a walk. But, Clarke says, these two events cannot be identical, for while Al’s jog might be fast or slow, his omission is neither fast nor slow — indeed, it doesn’t even seem to make sense to describe his omission as being fast or slow. So, the jog has a feature that the omission lacks, and they are therefore distinct (Clarke, 2012, 363).

Properties like *fast* and *slow* are not the only ones that it appears an omission cannot have. Suppose we modify Clarke’s example so that Al is doing something other than jogging.

**Dancing** Al has previously made arrangements to go for a walk with Tom during a certain interval $T$. However, he has forgotten this engagement, and Sue asks him to go to her dance class with her during $T$. Unaware that he would be failing to keep his word, Al accepts. During $T$, Al is both dancing with Sue and omitting to go for a walk with Tom.

If the dance involves all of the same body parts that would be involved in a walk, then it is plausible that, if Al’s omission to go for a walk is identical to any positive event, it is identical to his dancing with Sue. But it seems that these two events cannot be identical, for while Al’s dance might be elegant or inelegant, his omission is neither elegant nor inelegant — indeed, it doesn’t even seem to make sense to describe his omission as being elegant or inelegant. So, the dance has a feature that the omission lacks, and they are therefore distinct.

Properties like *fast*, *slow*, *elegant* and *inelegant* are not obviously amenable to the treatment I have given to other properties. For instance, *fast* and *slow* seem to be intimately bound up with spatiotemporal location — whether a jog is fast or slow, for instance, surely depends on how the jogger’s body moves through space during the relevant time — and so one might think that I could adopt the same strategy for *fast* and *slow* that I did for predicates that attribute spatiotemporal location: bite the bullet and accept that Al’s omission in *Jogging* really is fast or slow, and argue that appearances to the contrary are generated from the implicit assumption that omissions are absences and not, as I have argued, ensuring-events. But while I am sympathetic to that response, some work remains to be done to make it plausible. For even if it is allowed that Al’s jog and his omission have the same spatiotemporal location, there remains a lingering feeling that his omission is neither fast nor slow, and indeed a feeling that it doesn’t even make *sense* to describe it in those ways. Unless I can explain that feeling, or explain it away, the flat-footed response that Al’s omission really *is* fast or slow will be unsatisfying.

My explanation of why it is apparently nonsensical to attribute speeds and aesthetic properties to omission is this. Adjective like ‘fast’, ‘slow’, ‘elegant’ and ‘inelegant’ are standard-relative. For an object or event to be fast, for example, is for it to be fast by a certain standard. Since there are many standards with respect to which something can be fast — Bobby might be fast by the standards appropriate for third-graders, but not by the standards appropriate for professional runners — the adjective ‘fast’ does
not pick out a single monadic predicate, or a single property; rather, it picks out different predicates, or different properties, depending on the standard that is invoked. That is why utterances of ‘Bobby is fast’ and ‘Bobby is not fast’ are not necessarily contradictory: if the former says that Bobby is fast by one standard, while the latter says that he is not fast by a different standard, then the latter utterance does not withhold from Bobby the property attributed to him by the former.

Often, the standards with respect to which standard-relative predicates are evaluated are associated with sorts or kinds — e.g. to say that Bobby is fast might be to say that he is fast for a thing of a certain kind, more specifically that he is fast for a third-grader. The relevant sort, and hence the relevant standard, may be salient in the conversational context without needing to be explicitly invoked. For instance, if we are watching a third-grade track meeting, and I say to you ‘My son Bobby sure is fast’, it should be obvious that I am invoking the standards of speed for third-graders, and not the standard of speed for professional runners. It would be not just rude, but semantically inappropriate for you to say that no, Bobby is in fact not fast, since he would never qualify for a professional race. But if the relevant standard is not already salient, I may invoke it explicitly. For instance, if we are having a conversation about professional runners, I might remark, ‘You know, my son Bobby is quite a fast third-grader. Maybe he’ll be fast enough to race professionally someday.’ If I had simply said ‘My son Bobby is quite fast,’ you might not have known that the intended comparison class was the other third-graders, rather than the professionals we had been discussing. By explicitly saying that he is a fast third-grader, I make sure that you know what I mean.

This, I claim, is what is going on with sentences like ‘Al’s jog is fast’ and ‘Al’s omission is not fast.’ The former sentence explicitly categorizes the event as a jog, and so the natural reading is that it says that Al’s jog is a fast jog, i.e. that it is fast by the standards appropriate to jogs. The latter sentence explicitly categorizes the event as an omission, and so the natural reading is that it says that Al’s omission is not a fast omission, i.e. that it is not fast by the standards appropriate to omissions. If there even are standards appropriate for judging the speed of one omission compared to other omissions (about which more below), they are presumably quite different from the standards appropriate for the judging the speed of one jog compared to other jogs — these are, after all, very different comparison classes. So ‘fast’ denotes a different predicate or property in each sentence, and the property ‘Al’s omission is not fast’ attributes to Al’s omission is not the same as the property ‘Al’s jog is fast’ attributes to Al’s jog. Thus, both sentences can be true, even if the jog and the omission are one and the same event.

In making this move, I am appealing to what Kit Fine calls ‘predicative shift’, the phenomenon where a single adjectival phrase shifts its denotation from one predicate or property to another. This strategy for rejecting arguments from Leibniz’s Law has come under fire in recent years. In particular, in the context of defending the non-identity of material things and the matter that composes them, Fine (2003) claims that these things satisfy different predicates — e.g. the statue may be well-made and Romanesque, while the alloy that composes it is neither — and considers the objection that these predicates are shifty, because they are standard- or sort-relative. He argues that this objection fails, because these predicates simply do not behave as one would expect them to, if they were shifty in this way. While Fine does not explicit address monism about negative actions and positive events, he does suggest that his arguments can be applied against any variety of monism that appeals to predicative shift (2003, 196), so I will consider how well his arguments apply to predicates like ‘fast’ and ‘elegant.’

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19 Note that I say this is often the case. See (DeRose, 2008) for arguments that the relevant standard need not be associated with a sort.

20 For early responses to Fine, see (Frances, 2006) and (King, 2006). For replies, see (Fine, 2006).
Fine presents a barrage of arguments, but for the sake of space I will consider just two: first, that these predicates cannot be sort-relative, because their sort-relativity cannot be made explicit in ordinary English; and second, that these predicates cannot be standard-relative, because their interpretation is not appropriately flexible, i.e. it is not capable of being fixed by more than one standard in a given sentence, as the interpretation of standard-relative predicates typically is. These arguments seem to be the most fundamental to his case, since they call into question the very idea that ‘fast’, ‘elegant’ and the like are sort- or standard-relative at all, whereas his other arguments pose problems about how the relevant sort or standard gets invoked. I believe these latter problems can also be solved, but those are matters of detail. Here I focus on matters of principle.

Before turning to those arguments, two points of clarification about my appeal to predicative shift are in order. First, I have been talking as if there are, or could be, standards of speed and elegance appropriate to omissions qua omissions. That is, I have been talking as if, when we refer to Al’s omission as an omission, there is a predicate or property, fast for an omission, that the word ‘fast’ comes to denote. But that idea is apparently called into question by the fact that many people, upon hearing the sentence ‘Al’s omission is fast’, judge that it is meaningless. Fortunately, we can explain this impression without abandoning the idea that ‘fast’ is a shifty predicate. The idea would simply be that, when a speaker utters ‘Al’s omission is fast’, the hearer attempts to interpret ‘fast’ as relativized to the standards appropriate to omissions. Since there is no such standard (or so one might reasonably suppose), the attempt fails, and the sentence is rendered meaningless. Nothing I say hinges on which of these two ideas is right.

Second, I said earlier that a monist about negative actions and positive events might simply bite the bullet, and insist that Al’s omission in jogging really is fast, and I claimed that the appeal to predicative shift would help make this reply plausible, by helping to explain why it can seem to make no sense to describe Al’s omission as fast. You might worry that I cannot say both of these things at once. For if ‘fast’ in ‘Al’s omission is fast’ means fast for an omission, then I cannot insist that Al’s omission really is fast on the grounds that it is a fast jog — to make that inference would be to ignore the shiftness of ‘fast’ that I am trying to appeal to.

However, all I have claimed is that the most natural reading of ‘Al’s omission is fast’ is one on which the use of ‘omission’ triggers the reading Al’s omission is fast for an omission. I need not claim that that is the only possible reading, since shifty predicates are generally capable of being interpreted with respect to standards other than those that apply to things of an explicitly invoked sort. Given that I identify Al’s omission in jogging with his jog, I am able to hear the sentence ‘Al’s omission is fast’ as claiming that his omission is fast by the standards appropriate to jogs. On that reading, which is

21One might naturally worry that, if ‘Al’s omission is fast’ is meaningless, then ‘Al’s omission is not fast’ should also be meaningless. For the latter appears to be the negation of the former, and if the former does not express a proposition, then neither should the latter. Here we may appeal to the notion of ‘meta-linguistic negation’: generally, not-S is the meta-linguistic negation of S when not-S, rather than being used to negate the propositional content of S, and hence to object to S on grounds of its falsehood, is instead used to object to the use of S on other grounds. Almotahari (2014a, 390) provides the following examples:

(IMPLICATURE DENIAL) Louis C.K isn’t funny; he’s hilarious.

(PRESUPPOSITION DENIAL) The king of France isn’t bald; he doesn’t exist!

(FORM DENIAL) Our radar didn’t detect several aircrafts; it detected several aircraft.

The idea, then, is that when we say that Al’s omission is not fast, what we are objecting to is the use of the sentence ‘Al’s omission is fast’, presumably on the grounds that the word ‘omission’ fails to invoke a standard by which ‘fast’ could be interpreted. For detailed discussion of this sort of reply to arguments from Leibniz’s Law, see (Almotahari, 2014a), (Almotahari, 2014b), and (Schnieder, 2006). For objections to the idea that sentences like ‘Al’s omission is fast’, really are meaningless, see (Magidor, 2013).
admittedly not the natural one, the sentence is unproblematically true, and so I can give the bullet-biting response. The appeal to predicative shift is what shows this reading to be available — something I defend in more detail in Section 5.5.3 — and so it is not in conflict with the bullet-biting response.

### 5.5.2 Making Sort-Relativity Explicit

Fine’s first argument begins from a plausible assumption: if an adjective is sort-relative, then it should be possible to replace it with a more complex adjective that makes the relevant sort explicit. Focusing on ‘fast’, I have argued that it means fast by such-and-such a standard, and that in certain sentences, like ‘Al’s jog is fast’ and ‘Al’s omission is not fast’, the relevant standard is set by the explicitly-invoked sortal (‘jog’ and ‘omission’, respectively). If that is right, then it should be possible to replace ‘fast’ in each case with a more complex adjective that makes the relevant sort explicit. Fine thinks this cannot be done for the phrases a monist needs, and takes this to be good evidence that those phrases are not sort-relative.

This should be a surprising claim, at least as far as ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ go. When I first presented my strategy, I tried to make the sort-relativity of ‘fast’ explicit by cashing out ‘Al’s jog is fast’ as Al’s jog is a fast jog and, what will be more important in what follows, Al’s jog is fast for a jog. The construction ‘F for a G’ is a familiar one in English, and it is typically used when the interpretation of a standard-relative term is fixed by a sort, in order to make the relevant sort explicit. King (2006, 1036) gives the examples ‘tall,’ ‘expensive,’ ‘intelligent,’ ‘smooth,’ and... ‘fast.’ We can say that Alice is tall for a third-grader but not tall for an elementary-schooler, or that a certain watch is expensive for a watch but not tall for a Rolex, thereby making explicit the relevant standards for height and expense. I have already argued that we can say that Bobby is fast for a third-grader but not fast for a runner, and something similar seems true for ‘elegant’: we can say that a particular dance is elegant for the dance of a first-year student, but that it is not elegant for a dance simpliciter. So there would seem to be no problem in making the sort-relativity of ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ explicit. What makes Fine think otherwise?

Fine allows that plenty of English phrases are sort-relative, and that we can make this relativity explicit. His favourite example is ‘qualified’: for someone to be a qualified F is for them to be qualified for the position of being an F, or for a task associated with being an F. But, he says, we cannot meaningfully say “that the alloy or piece of alloy is not well made as a statue, or that it is better made as a statue, or that the alloy or piece of alloy is not Romanesque, or more Romanesque, as a statue” (2003, 214, emphasis added). Applied to my monist view, Fine would have it that we cannot meaningfully say that Al’s omission is fast as a jog, or that it is elegant as a dance. But notice: what I have argued is that we can meaningfully say that Al’s omission is fast for a jog, or that it is elegant for a dance, making use of the standard ‘F for a G’ construction. Fine does not deny that claim. What he denies is that we can use the distinct ‘F as a G construction’ to make the relevant sort explicit. But I have no obvious reason to insist that we can use that construction for this purpose. Why does Fine think that a monist (of any stripe) is committed to thinking that the sort-relativity to which she appeals can be made explicit using the phrase ‘x is F as a G’?

King (2006, 1041) raises this question, and as I understand it, Fine’s answer is this. He agrees that certain adjectives, among them ‘fast’, ‘elegant’, ‘Romanesque’ and ‘well-made’, have readings on which they are interpreted relative to a standard, and that when the relevant standard is one associated with a sort or kind, we can make the relativity explicit by saying that x is fast/elegant/Romanesque/well-made for a thing of that kind. However, he does not agree that these are the only reading of these predicates.
He thinks that they also have readings which are not interpreted relative to a standard — for instance, he says that “there appears to be a default sense of ‘badly made’ in which one can make sense — at least if one is a pluralist — of an object being as such badly made” (2006, 1068), and he would presumably say the same about ‘Romanesque’, ‘fast’, ‘elegant’, etc. It is this reading that the arguments against monism are meant to invoke: when Clarke says that Al’s jog is fast but his omission is not, what he means is that Al’s jog is fast as such, not that it is fast relative to a standard, and that Al’s omission is not fast as such, not that it is not fast relative to a standard. The monist must argue that this apparently non-relative sense is sort-relative after all. But Fine thinks that she will not be able to claim that they are relative to a standard, since that standard-relative meaning has already been accommodated. The monist will need to invoke a sui generis kind of sort-relativity, expressible using the ‘F as a G’ construction, rather than the ‘F for a G construction’, which is reserved for standard-relativity.

Before turning to the vexed question of how Fine knows that this sui generis kind of sort-relativity, if it existed, would be best expressed in English using ‘F as a G’, I should note that it is quite implausible that words like ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ have the non-relative interpretations to which Fine would be committing himself, if he made this response to my version of monism. Suppose Andrea and Cathy are in a heated disagreement about whether or not Bobby is fast. Hoping to settle the dispute, or at least clear it up, you ask each of them ‘By what standard are you judging Bobby to be fast/not-fast?’ If they both answer that they are judging by the standards appropriate to third-graders, or by the standards appropriate to professional runners, then you have some sense of what the dispute is about — Andrea and Cathy agree on which standards are appropriate, but they disagree on whether Bobby meets the threshold for counting as fast by those standards, or perhaps, as a result of the vagueness of ‘fast’, they disagree about just where the threshold is. If one of them answers that she is judging by the standards appropriate to third-graders while other answers that she is judging by the standards appropriate to professional runners, then you will have shown the disagreement to be merely verbal, a result of miscommunication. Both of those possibilities are intelligible. What is not intelligible is that one or both of them should say ‘I’m not judging by any standards at all. I’m saying that Bobby is as such, in and of himself, fast/not-fast.’ The phrases ‘as such’ and ‘in and of himself’ are evidently meant to shed some light on what ‘fast’ means in this person’s mouth, but on the contrary they are mystifying. Just what could it mean for Bobby to be fast as such, irrespective of any standard?

Perhaps Fine would not want to press this line for ‘fast,’ but I see no difference between ‘fast’ and phrases like ‘elegant’, ‘Romanesque’, ‘well-made’, or others that he appeals to, like ‘damaged’ and ‘expensive.’ I can understand what it would be to apply these phrases with respect to a standard, but I cannot understand what it would be to say that something is elegant, Romanesque, well-made, damaged, or expensive as such.

Fine suggests that one can make sense of the non-standard-relative readings, provided that one is a pluralist, but why does adherence to pluralism make these readings available, while adherence to monism does not? The obvious answer is that, as a monist, I can make sense of the idea that a single object can fall under two or more kinds, with respect to which different standards of speed, elegance and the like are appropriate.22 Thus, I can make no sense of idea that Al’s jog is fast as such, because I think of that

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22Fine accuses the monist of treating a statue, for instance, as a ‘mere thing’, “since it is not plausibly taken to be, in itself, one of the more specific things picked out by the pluralist” (Fine, 2003, 198), i.e. a statue or a piece of alloy. I’m not sure what the force of ‘in itself’ is supposed to be — there is a sense in which an object is only a statue by virtue of standing in certain relations to humans, e.g. its causal history, and hence not a statue ‘in itself’ and independently of us, and surely the pluralist doesn’t deny that — but whatever it means, Fine apparently sees no middle ground between classifying an object as either a statue or a piece of alloy, and classifying it as neither. Thus, he misses the obviously
event as falling under many kinds, and that while it may be fast with respect to some of those kinds, it may be not-fast with respect to others. The contrast would then be that, from a pluralist perspective, every object really falls under only one kind, with respect to which it can be evaluated as fast, elegant, etc. For a thing to be fast as such, then, is for it to be fast with respect to that kind, the only kind under which it falls. That this is what Fine intends is suggested by the fact that he glosses ‘badly-made’ as meaning *badly-made for a thing of its kind* (2006, 1069), apparently intending the phrase ‘its kind’ to be a definite description.

But if that is the contrast Fine has in mind, then the supposedly non-sort-relative reading of ‘fast’, ‘well-made’ and the like is relative to a sort after all. Indeed, this supposedly distinct reading of ‘fast’ and ‘well-made’ appears to be the standard-relative reading that I have been arguing for, since Fine makes the relevant sort explicit using the ‘F for a G’ construction. The difference between the monist and the pluralist is not that the latter can make sense of non-standard-relative readings of certain predicates, while the monist cannot. The difference is simply that, from the pluralist’s perspective, an object can only satisfy a standard-relative predicate with respect to a single sort, namely the single sort that it falls under.

Thus, phrases like ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ have no clear meanings other than standard-relative ones, even if one is a pluralist about negative actions and positive events. Having made my case for this point, I now turn to the question of why Fine assumes that the monist must appeal to a kind of relativity that can only be expressed using the ‘F as a G’ construction.

As I have noted, the ‘F for a G’ construction is naturally suited to expressing standard-relativity. But, according to Fine, the kind of sort-relativity that a monist must appeal to works differently than standard relativity. In particular, the allegedly sort-relative interpretation of words like ‘Romanesque’ and ‘well-made’ — and perhaps also ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ — is rigid in a way that standard-relative interpretation is not. When a predicate $F$ is interpreted relative to a standard, it is not required that, if $x$ is picked out as being of sort $S$, then the standard with respect to which $F$ is interpreted is one naturally associated with $S$. For instance, I can use the sentence ‘That elephant is big’ to mean that it is a big *animal*, rather than that it is a big *elephant*, despite the fact that I pick it out as an elephant. By contrast, Fine thinks, where predicates such as ‘Romanesque’ and ‘well-made’ — and perhaps also ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ — are concerned, it apparently is required that if $x$ is picked out as being of sort $S$, then the standard with respect to which the predicate is interpreted is one naturally associated with $S$. The sentence ‘Al’s jog is fast’, for instance, cannot be used to mean that Al’s jog is fast *for an omission* — once we pick out an event as a jog, we thereby fix the meaning of ‘fast’ as *fast for a jog*. In Fine’s terms, we can only hear ‘Al’s jog is fast’ as meaning that the jog is fast as such, so ‘fast’ does not behave in the way that other standard-relative predicates, like ‘big’, do.

Of course, on its own, this point would not establish that if ‘fast’ really is sort-relative, then this relativity would most naturally be made explicit using the ‘F as a G’ construction. But it is a familiar monist idea that (i) certain predicates are subject to sort-relative interpretations that are rigid, in the sense described in the previous paragraph, and that (ii) these interpretations are best made explicit using the ‘F for a G’ construction. For example, pluralists about material objects and the matter that composes them have argued that these things must be distinct, on the grounds that they have different *de re* modal properties, e.g.:

(9) The alloy is such that it could have survived being squashed.
(10) The statue is such that it could not have survived being squashed.

(11) ∴ The alloy is not the statue.

Some monists reply to this argument by claiming that de re modal phrases, like ‘could have survived being squashed’, are implicitly sort-relative. For instance, (9) says that the unsquashed alloy in the actual world, @, is identical to some squashed alloy in a possible world, w, but (according to this reply) it makes no sense to say that x and y are the same tout court, irrespective of a sort or kind under which they both fall. We can say that the unsquashed alloy is the same alloy as the squashed one, but not that they are the same simpliciter (Gibbard, 1975; Lewis, 1971). This kind of sort-relative, if it exists, is not happily expressed using the ‘F for a G’ construction: we cannot say that the alloy could have survived being squashed for an alloy, or that the statue could not have survived being squashed for a statue. Thus, proponents of this strategy tend to appeal to the ‘F as a G’ construction, or the slightly more technically-sounding, but apparently equivalent, ‘F qua G’ construction. Fine may be thinking that, because the interpretation of ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ is rigid in the same way that philosophers like Gibbard and Lewis think the interpretation of de re modal predicates is, the sort-relative that the monist finds in the former must be expressed using ‘F as a G’.

In Section 5.5.3 I will argue that the interpretation of ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ is not rigid in the way Fine would say it is. But even leaving that point aside, the argument just sketched is not compelling. The reason someone like Gibbard uses the ‘F as a G’ construction to express the alleged sort-relative of de re modal predicates has nothing to do with the fact that their interpretation is fixed by the explicitly-invoked sort or kind. Rather, the reason Gibbard uses this phrase is that the sort-relative of ‘same’ that he argues for cannot be naturally expressed in English: the phrase ‘same statue’ in ‘x and y are the same statue’ does not obviously make explicit that ‘same’ is being interpreted relative to a sort or standard, and the phrase ‘same for a statue’ in ‘x is the same as y, for a statue’ is highly unnatural and has no obvious meaning. Finding that the alleged sort-relative of ‘same’ cannot be made explicit using any natural expression of everyday English, Gibbard instead relies on the locution ‘same qua statue’, which is introduced by stipulation to do the job he requires of it. But ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ are unlike ‘same’, since their sort-relative can be made explicit in ordinary English, and indeed it can be made explicit using the ‘F for a G’ construction. Or at least, none of the arguments I have considered gives us reason to think otherwise.

5.5.3 Rigid Interpretation and Explicitly-Invoked Sorts

I previously made the point that, even if the interpretation of a predicate like ‘fast’ or ‘elegant’ is fixed by an explicitly-invoked sort or kind, this does nothing to suggest that the relativity of that predicate cannot be made explicit using the ‘F for a G’ construction. Nonetheless, if the interpretation of such predicates is fixed in this way, that would seem to count against their being sort-relative, as I have claimed they are. For one might think that if ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ are sort-relative in the same way that ‘big’ is, then their interpretation ought not to be automatically fixed by an explicitly-invoked sort. Just as we can use ‘That elephant is small’ to mean that that elephant is small for an animal, we ought to be able to use ‘AI’s omission is fast’ to mean that that omission is fast for a jog. Since Fine has argued that phrases like ‘Romanesque’ and ‘well-made’ are not flexible in this way, I will briefly consider his

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23E.g. Gibbard says, “Meaningful cross-world identities of such things as statues...must be identities qua something: qua statue or qua lump [of alloy]” (1975, 194).
arguments, as they apply to ‘fast’ and ‘elegant.’

Fine’s first argument is that, if a predicate $F$ is sort-relative, then even if we pick out an object that satisfies it as an instance of kind $K$, we should not thereby be forced to interpret $F$ as meaning ‘$F$ for a $K$’, since it should be possible for other descriptive material in the sentence to trump the explicitly-invoked kind and fix the meaning of $F$. Consider, for example, the sentence

(12) The alloy from which the statue is constituted is well-made.

Here, we pick out an object as being of the kind *alloy*, but we further describe it constituting a statue. Now, Fine thinks it is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret (12) as meaning that the alloy is well-made *for a statue*: the extra descriptive material does not serve to fix the meaning of ‘well-made.’ A similar point applies to the sentence

(13) The jog which constitutes Al’s omission is fast.

Here, pick out an event as being of the kind *jog*, but we further describe it as constituting an omission. It seems difficult, if not impossible, to interpret (13) as meaning that the jog is fast *for an omission*. Fine’s pluralist explanation of the interpretation of (12) is that the alloy and the statue are distinct objects, and so when we refer to the object as ‘the alloy’, we thereby fix that we are talking about this object, and saying that it is well-made for a thing of its kind. But, he asks, how is a monist to explain it? “[W]hy should it matter how the information that might serve to invoke a relevant respect is presented?” (2003, 213) The same question can, of course, be asked with respect to (13).

Recall from Section 5.1 that, on one way of developing the appeal to predicative shift, we can deny that there are any standards appropriate to evaluating the speed of an omission, *qua* omission. We might invoke this idea in order to explain why (13) cannot be interpreted as meaning that the jog is fast *for an omission*. The explanation would be that there is no such proposition as *The jog which constitutes Al’s omission is fast for an omission* for (13) to express, and the hearer naturally resists interpreting (13) as trying to express that proposition, if she can avoid doing so. The presence of the phrase ‘the jog’ gives her a way out by suggesting that the intended standard is the one appropriate for judging the speed of a jog, *qua* jog, and so she interprets (13) as expressing the proposition *The jog which constitutes Al’s omission is fast for a jog*.

There are two problems with this solution. First, it requires us to definitively say that there is really no such proposition as *The jog which constitutes Al’s omission is fast for an omission*, a matter over which I have tried to stay neutral. Second, and more importantly, it does not generalize to other sentences that exhibit the problematic rigidity. Consider:

(14) The omission which is constituted by Al’s jog is fast.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret (14) as meaning that Al’s omission is fast *for a jog*. But if the explanation just given for the interpretation of (13) is correct, then it should be difficult, if not impossible, to interpret it in any other way. The hearer should be casting about for an interpretation on which (14) does not attempt to express the proposition *The omission which is constituted by Al’s jog is fast for an omission*, since *ex hypothesi* there is no such proposition. The presence of the phrase ‘which is constituted by Al’s jog’ provides a way out, so presumably the hearer should take it, and interpret (14) as meaning that Al’s omission is fast *for a jog*.

Fortunately, there is a better explanation available, one which applies to all of (12)–(14). Start with (12), and suppose that, despite the difficulty in doing so, the hearer interpreted it to mean that the
alloy is well-made for a statue. On that interpretation, (12) is equivalent to the claim that the alloy is a well-made statue. But now the hearer is faced with the question, ‘Why didn’t the speaker just say “The statue is well-made”? ’\textsuperscript{24} Answers to this question are difficult to come by. For notice that the definite description ‘the statue’ is embedded in the extra descriptive material in (12), and so an utterance of that sentence seems to presuppose that there is a single statue that is salient in the conversational context, ready to be picked out using that description. Given that the statue is available to be talked about in this way, it would be strange for the speaker not to simply utter ‘The statue is well-made’, if that is what she meant by her utterance of (12). The natural thing for the hearer to conclude, then, is that this is not what the speaker meant by her utterance: what she meant was that the alloy is well-made \textit{for an alloy}, and the extra descriptive material is being used, not to fix the meaning of a sort-relative term, but merely to make it clear which alloy is being talked about.

This explanation extends easily to (13). Suppose that, despite the difficulty in doing so, the hearer interprets an utterance of (13) to mean that Al’s jog is fast for an omission. On that interpretation, (13) equivalent to the claim that the jog is a fast omission. But now the hearer is faced with the question, ‘Why didn’t the speaker just say “Al’s omission is fast”? ’ Answer to this question are difficult to come by. For the definite description ‘Al’s omission’ is embedded in the extra descriptive material in (13), and so an utterance of that sentence seems to presuppose that there is a single omission of Al’s that is salient in the conversational context, ready to be picked out using that description. Given that Al’s omission is available to be talked about in that way, it would be strange for the speaker not to simply utter ‘Al’s omission is fast’, if that is what she meant by her utterance of (13). The natural thing for the hearer to conclude, then, is that this is not what the speaker meant by her utterance: what she meant was that Al’s jog is fast \textit{for a jog}, and the extra descriptive material is being used, not to fix the meaning of a sort-relative term, but merely to make it clear which of Al’s jogs is being talked about. And the same points apply, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to (14).

Thus, even on the supposition that ‘fast’ is sort-relative, we can give a natural explanation of why the extra descriptive material in (13) and (14) does not serve to fix the meaning of that predicate. Moreover, we have a general explanation of why it matters, to the interpretation of sort-relative predicates, how descriptive material that is potentially relevant for fixing the meaning of a sort-relative term gets presented: it matters because the way in which that material is presented makes it clear whether that material is being used in order to fix the meaning of a sort-relative term, or merely to help pick out the relevant object.

Whereas Fine’s first argument concerned the role of extra descriptive material in fixing the meaning of a sort-relative term, his second argument concerns the role of conversational context. Recall that, in the right context, the sentence ‘The person who applied for the position of janitor is qualified’ can be used to express the proposition that that person is qualified for the position of professor. If you and I are looking through job applications, trying to fill the position of professor, then the conversational context allows you to interpret ‘qualified’ as \textit{qualified for the position of professor}, even though I picked the candidate out by referring to them as the person who applied for the position of janitor. Thus, in the case of ‘qualified’, conversational context can trump explicitly-invoked sortals in setting the appropriate interpretation of the predicate.

Fine claims that the same phenomenon does not occur with predicates that the monist claims are\textsuperscript{24}Mahrad Almotahari and Jeff King both anticipate me in making this point, but they each develop it in a different way than I do.
sort-relative. To see how his argument applies to ‘fast’, suppose that you and I are comparing the
speeds of various jogs, and we have been saying things like ‘Alice’s jog is pretty fast,’ ‘Bob’s jog is about
average,’ etc. If I now say, ‘Al’s omission is fast,’ it seems that the conversational context does not
trump my explicit invocation of the kind omission. Even supposing that ‘fast’ is sort-relative in the way
I have claimed it is, the most natural way of interpreting my utterance is as meaning Al’s omission is
fast for an omission, not Al’s omission is fast for a jog. A similar example could easily be constructed
using ‘elegant’. It seems, then, that these predicates do not behave as ordinary sort-relative predicates
do (Fine, 2003, 215).

Fortunately, the points I have already made about trumping by extra descriptive material can be
applied to trumping by conversational context. Consider again the sentence ‘The person who applied
for the position of janitor is qualified.’ Heard out of context, the natural way to interpret this sentence
is that that person is qualified for the position of janitor — we naturally take the explicitly-invoked
sort to set the appropriate standard. But in the case where you and I are evaluating candidates for the
position of professor, we have a pragmatic reason for not interpreting the sentence that way: if I were
to utter that sentence, intending to say that that person is qualified for the position of janitor, I would
be saying something irrelevant to the task at hand. Thus, you must find some other proposition to be
the correct interpretation for my utterance, and you must be able to explain why I used that sentence to
express that proposition. In this case, both tasks are easily carried out: what I mean is that the person
who applied for the position of janitor is qualified for the position of professor, and the reason I used
the sentence that I did, referring to this person as the person who applied to be the janitor, is simply
that I have no other obvious means of referring to that person.

Compare this case to a case where you and I are evaluating the credentials of professors who are
already employed at the university. We have been saying things like ‘Prof. A is qualified,’ ‘If anything,
Prof. B is over-qualified,’ etc. If I now say ‘The janitor is qualified,’ it seems that conversational context
does not automatically trump my explicit invocation of the kind janitor. The natural way to interpret
my utterance is as meaning, not that the janitor is a qualified professor, but that she is a qualified
janitor. This is because, although this interpretation represents me as saying something irrelevant to
the task at hand, there is no obvious explanation of why I would use the sentence that I did to express
the proposition The janitor is a qualified professor. For one thing, you would not normally assume that
anyone would hold both the position of professor and the position of janitor. For another, if the person
I am referring to is indeed a professor, then as I am currently looking through the credentials of various
professors, I presumably could have picked her out as ‘Prof. So-and-So,’ thereby making it clear to you
that I meant that she is a qualified professor. The context provides you with no explanation of why I
would use the sentence I did to say that that person is a qualified professor, rather than the simpler
sentence ‘Prof. So-and-So is qualified,’ and so you cannot interpret it that way.

Crucially, the case where we are comparing the speeds of various jogs and I utter ‘Al’s omission is
fast’ is analogous to this latter case, in which we are evaluating the qualifications of actual professors,
rather than to the case in which we are evaluating those of merely potential professors. For in the imagined
case, there is no obvious explanation of why I would use the sentence ‘Al’s omission is fast’ in order to
express the proposition that it is fast for a jog. For one thing, it is unlikely that enough information
about Al’s various omissions is sufficiently salient in context that I can count on you to know that ‘Al’s
omission’ refers to a jog. Furthermore, even there is sufficient information to make that obvious, there
is no clear explanation of why I did no just the simpler sentence ‘Al’s jog is fast,’ thereby making it
clear that I meant it is fast for a jog. Without such an explanation, it is inappropriate to interpret my utterance as meaning anything other than Al’s omission is fast for an omission.

Thus, we can explain the fact that ‘Al’s omission is fast’ can typically only be interpreted to mean Al’s omission is fast for an omission without invoking a sui generis form of sort-relativity, simply by paying attention to the pragmatic mechanisms governing interpretation. Even for predicates like ‘qualified’, conversational context cannot always be used to trump an explicitly-invoked sort in setting the correct interpretation of the predicate. When interpreting a speaker’s utterances, a hearer must be able to explain to themselves why the speaker would use the sentence they did in order to express a particular proposition. If the natural interpretation of a sentence appears to be unavailable, and aspects of the context make clear why a speaker would use that sentence to express some other proposition, then context can trump an explicitly-invoked sortal. But if no such explanation is available, the natural interpretation is the only one that can be given.

This explanation is bolstered by the fact that, if we imagine a case in which the hearer does have available to her some explanation of why the speaker would use ‘Al’s omission is fast’, rather than ‘Al’s jog is fast’, in order to convey the proposition Al’s omission is fast for a jog, then the sentence can be interpreted as expressing that proposition. We need only suppose (i) that the hearer can be counted on to know that the phrase ‘Al’s omission’ refers to a jog, and (ii) that there is some special reason why the speaker cannot simply refer to it as a jog. For instance, suppose you and I are playing the following strange game: the goal is to describe the various negative actions discussed in my dissertation in as much detail as possible, but without using any positive sortals — that is, we are only allowed to refer to them as omissions, refrainments, etc. Now suppose that I say ‘Al’s omission is fast.’ It is stipulated in my dissertation that, if ‘Al’s omission’ refers to an event at all, it refers to Al’s jog, so you can be counted on to interpret the phrase in that way. Thus, (i) is satisfied. (ii) is also satisfied, since the rules of the game prevent me from using the positive sortal ‘jog.’ If what I have been arguing is correct, then you should be able to interpret my utterance as meaning that Al’s omission is fast for a jog, and it seems to me that you are able to do so.

Of course, this is a very strange case, so people’s linguistic intuitions might differ. But notice that, on the account I have given, it should be very difficult to find cases where the sentence ‘Al’s omission is fast’ can be used to say that Al’s omission is fast for a jog. It is rarely, if ever, the case that conditions (i) and (ii) are both satisfied, and so this interpretation is typically unavailable. But I can explain why that reading is typically unavailable without positing some sui generis form of sort-relativity. Given my account of how, and when, conversational context can trump an explicitly-invoked sort in fixing the meanings of sort-relative predicates, we should not expect such trumping to be easy, where the sort omission is concerned.

Thus, Fine is wrong to think that the sort-relativity that I posit for predicates like ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ is sui generis. While it is not easy for extra descriptive material or elements of the conversational context to trump explicitly-invoked sorts — at least, not with respect to the sentences I have been concerned with — it is, nonetheless, possible for them to do so. Moreover, we can explain the difficulty simply by appeal to the pragmatics of interpretation, i.e. by appeal to facts about what it would reasonable to suppose a speaker is trying to convey with a particular sentence. Fine has provided no reason to think that the interpretation of ‘fast’ and ‘elegant’ is rigid in a way that the interpretation of ‘big’ is not.
5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered objections to both the very idea that negative actions could be events and to the idea that each negative action is identical to a positive event, and argued that they all fail. The objections I have considered are some of the most popular in the literature on negative actions: appeals to spatiotemporal location; appeals to modal profiles; appeals to causal roles; and appeals to apparently standard-relative predicates. In many cases, I have shown that attention to the distinction between the things we do and our doings of them, together with my functionalist metaphysics of negative actions, provide the necessary tools for avoiding the objections. In other cases, I have shown that attention to the ways in which sort-relative predicates are expressed and interpreted does the trick. Putting these results together with the results of the previous chapter, I conclude that my account of negative actions faces no serious metaphysical problems.
References


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References


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