The Space of Agency

Jeff Malpas

One of Davidson's very earliest and best-known publications – 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' (published in 1962)[1] focuses on the question of the relation between reasons and actions. There Davidson famously argues that reasons can only count as reasons for action, and thereby have explanatory significance, if they also cause the actions for which they are reasons. Since Davidson understands reasons as encompassing both a belief and desire component (a belief and a 'pro-attitude'), so 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' already takes a step along the path towards the development of the holistic account of the relation between the propositional attitudes and behaviour that emerges as a central element in Davidson's latter work on the nature of meaning, knowledge and interpretation. Moreover, Davidson's insistence on reasons as having a causal as well as rational connection to action also emerges as a central element in the later account. The causal efficacy of the rational is crucial in the conception of rationality, and with it the whole of mental life, as necessarily and inevitably embedded in the world. Rationality is not apart from the world but part of it. Yet there is a common view of the relation between agency and causality that takes the latter to be conceptually dependent on the former. Such a view seems to me to threaten the very embeddedness of rationality in the world to which I referred above, as well as undermining the interconnected character of the concepts at issue. The relation between agency and causality is not an issue that Davidson anywhere directly addresses, but exploring that relation, especially one influential way of understanding it, provides a way into a more developed account of the holistic conception of agency, attitudes and the world, that already seems, if not explicitly present in Davidson, then certainly that towards which his account seems inevitably to point.[2]

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The connection between agency and causality is certainly close. The very grasp of agency already presupposes a grasp of oneself as an agent and, therefore, as causally embedded in the world. Agency depends on the agent's being able to bring about, or prevent from being brought about, changes in the agent's environment, and this is only possible if the agent can make appropriate interventions in that environment in ways that the agent can, to some extent, reliably predict and control. Such intervention, and the prediction and control on which it depends, would be impossible without the agent having some understanding (although not necessarily an understanding of which the agent is explicitly aware) of the causal interconnectedness obtaining within the world and between the agent and that world.

On some accounts, however, the concept of causality is itself secondary to the concept of agency. This is precisely the point of agent-centred theories of action and of causation according to which the idea of causation is dependent upon, or derived from a particular conception of agency as an event of 'bringing about'. As Timothy O'Connor puts it 'the core element of the concept [of causality] is a primitive notion of the production or 'bringing about' of an effect"[3] and this notion is one arrived at through experience of such 'bringing about' in the form of one's own productive agency. Moreover, as agency provides experience of the power to bring about, it also provides experience of the baulking of such 'bringing about' by factors that would appear to be beyond our control. The experience of agency thus seems to provide the basis for a grasp of both causal power as it is given in and through our own bodies and of resistance to such power as it is experienced in the resistance of the world to our bodily exertions.

Such a view of the relation between agency and causation – one that gives priority to agency over causation – has been advanced by a number of philosophers. It can be found in Schopenhauer, in the work of R. G. Collingwood and Douglas Gasking, and is also discussed by G. H. von Wright. More recently, Thomas Baldwin has argued explicitly for the view that 'it is through the experience of agency that we get a grasp of bodily power, and thus of causation'.[4] While I am sympathetic with

certain of the motivations that lie behind agent-centered accounts of causation – Baldwin's account, in particular, strikes me as especially interesting – the central claim of agent-centered theories, namely that the grasp of causality is grounded in, or arrived at through, the grasp of agency, seems to me to be mistaken. One of the aims of my discussion here is to explore some of the reasons why it is mistaken, but the critique of agent-centered theories of causation will not be the only, nor even the primary, aim of the discussion that follows. Instead, the exploration of the connection between causality and agency will provide a means to approach a broader set of questions concerning the connection between these concepts and the notions of spatiality and objectivity. Agency and causality are indeed closely related concepts, although any dependence between them is mutual; neither causality nor agency, however, can stand independently of either objectivity or spatiality. In fact, all of these concepts form a single interconnected system.

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Action, according to Thomas Baldwin, is not to be understood as involving merely some act of will that stands apart from bodily movement, but as actually encompassing such movement. Thus Baldwin writes that: 'The experience of agency is ... not one of acts of will just regularly, but mysteriously, conjoined with bodily movements; it is one of acts of will that extend themselves to those parts of the body that are under direct control of the agent' and the experience of agency is, he says, the 'irreducible experience of bodily power.'[5] Baldwin claims that the experience of bodily power is an experience of possibility – it is, after all, a direct experience of the bringing about of some effect – while the experience of resistance to bodily exertion is an experience of impossibility. Since such impossibility is seen to be grounded in what lies outside us – in external forces that act upon us – so it brings with it the idea of an objective realm that is causally effective in blocking the successful exercise of our bodily powers. It is just this idea that Baldwin views as essential to a grasp of the concept of causality.

The grasp of causation, then, at least on Baldwin's account, is dependent on our experience of power and resistance, and so of possibility and impossibility, in the exercise of agency.[6] Baldwin focuses on touch as the primary modality in which the resistance of the world and the objects within it is evident – 'e.g., my experience now as I press against the table.'[7] He later extends this experience of resistance analogously to other sensory modalities, notably sight – 'By finding that some aspects of the content of visual experience, unlike its direction, are not subject to the will, a subject encounters a kind of impossibility within visual experience (a visual analogue of tactile resistance)'.[8]

Of course, even though sensory receptivity is to a greater or lesser extent dependent on some capacity for agency (even if it be only a capacity to orient one's sense organs to sources of perceptual stimulation), mere sensory receptivity does not, as such, count as the active exercise of any bodily power. And just as the mere receipt of sensory stimuli does not count as agency, neither does any single sense – not even touch – deliver any 'experience' of' power' or 'resistance' nor of possibility of impossibility. When I press my hand against the table and experience the resistance of the surface to my touch, I grasp this as resistance through a combination of sensory information in conjunction with my own grasp of the causal powers of my body and of objects in the world. In order to grasp the pressing of my hand against the table as both an exercise (or attempted exercise) of a bodily power, and as an instance of resistance to such power, I already need to grasp a network of concepts including the concept of causality.

The very concept of 'resistance', and so the identification of some experience as an experience of resistance, is itself a concept that carries causal connotations. Resistance, at least in relation to action, takes its place within a network of concepts including that of causality. More generally, the idea of agency as itself a 'bringing about' might similarly be understood as already implicating causal notions rather than providing the basis on which such notions can be grasped. This perhaps reflects something about concepts as such: concepts are systematic – having one concept requires having a whole system, and certain concepts automatically seem to imply others. Moreover, as I noted at the very start of this discussion, not just the concept,

but the very capacity for agency itself depends on a grasp of causal structure and, as a consequence, agency cannot be taken as conceptually more fundamental than causality.

If the only alternatives here were to take either causality or agency as the more basic concept, then perhaps one might be inclined to give a certain sort of priority to agency – even in the face of the difficulties that such a view brings with it. But these are not the only alternatives here. Recognizing the way in which both agency and causality seem, in different ways, to imply one another, we can view both as correlative concepts that are together embedded within a larger conceptual framework. Thus, while a grasp of causality may be possible only for a creature that is capable of agency, still the possibility of agency may in turn depend on a grasp of causality.

It is perhaps significant that Baldwin's own agent-centered account of causation figures as merely an element in a larger argument for the claim that the concept of agency is interdependent with that of objectivity. More specifically, Baldwin argues that to conceive of a creature as capable of experiencing an objective world is also to conceive of that creature as an agent. Although not made entirely explicit, the reasoning that underlies Baldwin's claim seems to consist of two parts: first, that a creature incapable of action would be a creature to whom beliefs would not be attributable on the grounds that beliefs are essentially states defined by their role in the explanation of action; [9] second, that a creature lacking beliefs would also be a creature that could not be understood as capable of perceptions.

The latter claim at issue here is itself underpinned by a further set of considerations. Baldwin argues that the assigning of objective content to perception depends on thinking of perception as representing to the subject some feature or features of the subject's environment and doing this depends on thinking of perception in terms of its role in the subject's 'cognitive economy' and so as it is related to other cognitive states. Baldwin argues that 'Once one abstracts from this role, one is left with the conception of perceptions as just sensory states with qualities that are correlated with features of the environment that give rise to them... But from this kind of causal correlation alone one cannot get a conception of these

sensory states as representations of these features for a subject. Without an acknowledgment of their potential cognitive role, they are as nonintentional, as contentless, as the rings on a tree whose width covaries with the type of weather endured by the tree'.[10]

Baldwin thus claims that for a creature to be capable of perceptions, understood as states with some objective, representational content, it must also be the case that those perceptions be seen as part of a larger system of intentional states – including, notably, beliefs – and that the possession of such an intentional system is dependent upon the capacity for action (since it is precisely in relation to action that such states are defined). In summary then, Baldwin's argument is as follows: to have perceptions is also to have beliefs, and to have beliefs is also to be capable of action. The particular argument that Baldwin advances here can be seen as reflecting a more general connection that obtains between intentional content and agency.[11] And this connection is itself indicative of the way in which intentional content is dependent on the location of the agent within an objective framework that encompasses both the agent and the objects with respect to which the agent acts.

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Baldwin's use of the language of intentional states – and, more particularly, of what seems to amount of a 'belief-desire' model of action – could itself be seen as problematic.[12] This is an issue to which I will shortly return, but for the moment I am simply going to follow Baldwin's usage in this respect, and will retain the language of intentional states – as, indeed, I have done elsewhere in my own work. As it turns out, close attention to the character of intentional states, and their interconnection with action, is actually crucial in understanding the inter-relation between the concepts at issue here, including those of agency and causality.

Intentional states such as belief and desire exhibit an important interconnection with one another – possession of one such state implies the possession of many other such states (as the belief that Tasmania is the most southerly state of Australia implies a number of other beliefs about, for instance,

Australia, about Australian states, and about 'southerliness') – but they are also connected, in no less important a fashion, with actions. The very concepts of belief or desire (and this applies to the concept of intentional states in general) seem, in fact, to be necessarily tied to the role those states play in giving sense, not only to other such states, but also to behaviour understood as action; behaviour, in turn, is constituted as action only inasmuch as it stands in an appropriate relation to beliefs and desires (and so to a network of intentional states). One familiar way of capturing the latter point, the way Davidson develops in 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', is to say that behaviour is intentional, and so counts as action, only under a description, where the description enables the behaviour to be grasped in a form that connects it with some complex of states that 'makes sense' of the behaviour or provides a framework within which it can be grasped as rational. This way of putting things does not, however, merely reflect the character of action as dependent on integration within an intentional, 'rational', framework, so much as direct attention to the character of intentionality itself as a matter of the integration of states and behaviour within a single, interconnected frame.

The necessary inter-relation of intentional states and actions brings with it a certain ordering of states in relation, not only to actions, but also to the circumstances in which action takes place. Action is the attempt to bring something about (cases of forbearance can be viewed as instances where what is to be brought about is the non-occurrence of some event or one's non-involvement in that occurrence) and thus requires a certain quite specific orientation on the part of the agent in respect of the objects, locations and events with which the agent is involved. It is not merely that the agent must stand in relation to things in the right way if she is to be successful in bringing something about, but even to be able to act at all, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, the agent must be able to grasp herself as standing in a position with respect to things that fits with the intentions with which she acts. This partly reflects the need for action to cohere with the rest of the agent's attitudes, but it also reflects the way in which action is itself a form of directed, organized behaviour (and, in this respect, reflects the way in which action presupposes a

certain organization of states, particularly of beliefs and desires, on the part of the agent).

Any system of intentional states is always organized in relation to actions -not merely to the array of possible actions that might lie before an agent, but to the actions in which the agent is currently engaged and in relation to the ongoing activities of the agent to which those actions contribute. As action is itself defined in relation to certain objects and the bringing about of certain events, so mental states are to a large extent also defined and individuated in relation to the objects and events to which they are directed. In this respect, the 'holism' that obtains between intentional states, and between intentional states and actions, brings a certain form of 'externalism' in its wake: understanding an agent as engaged in some activity is a matter both of grasping the agent as having certain relevant attitudes- notably certain relevant beliefs and desires – about the objects in her environment, and of understanding the agent as standing in certain causal and spatial relations to those objects appropriate to the activity in question.[13] We can say, with Davidson, that the objects of intentional states are the worldly causes of those states,[14] but we cannot identify those causes correctly without some preliminary grasp of the character of the agent's own mode of engagement in the world. It is in action, and only in action, that the intentional states of agents, and the objects that are the causes of those states, are brought together.

One can already see the way in which, given considerations such as these, some concept of objectivity will necessarily enter into any analysis of either intentionality or agency that tries to take account of the close relation between them. Understanding behaviour as action, or grasping states as having some particular intentional content, is a matter of understanding the behaviour or the states in question in relation to the 'cognitive economy' of the agent, but this also means understanding the way in which the agent is oriented and located in relation to her environment and the objects in that environment. Inasmuch, then, as we distinguish between subjective and objective – between what pertains to the agent and what pertains to that which is acted upon – we can also hold that the objective situation of

the agent is the key to being able to identify the subjective content of the agent's thought and experience.

So far as the grasp of the content of one's own thoughts and experiences are concerned, the very capacity for action and the possession of contentful states will be dependent on the capacity to grasp objective connections within one's environment and between oneself and that environment – and this is, of course, already suggested by the claim that agency requires a grasp of one's own causal connectedness with the world as well as a grasp of the causal structure of the world itself (at least as that structure is evident in relation to ordinary, medium-sized objects). Moreover, such a grasp of objectivity will also presuppose a grasp of subjectivity – that is, being able to grasp a certain ordering as indeed objective, already presupposes a capacity to distinguish between a particular representation or view of the world and the way that the world might be independently of that representation or view. Agency, and the possibility of intentional content, thus depends, from a first-person perspective, on being able to distinguish oneself from the world and to distinguish the effects of one's own directed activity from what merely 'happens' to one or occurs independently of that activity. From a third person perspective, it depends on being able to distinguish between the content of an agent's intentional states and the actual circumstances in which the agent acts. Moreover, these distinctions remain important irrespective of whether or not they are explicitly recognized or deployed.

At this point, however, it is perhaps appropriate that I return to the question -left in abeyance in the discussion above – concerning the central role that intentional states play in this account. It should be evident that one of the reasons intentional states figure so large here is because of the way in which agency and intentionality seem to depend upon the possibility of being able to distinguish between the agent, and the agent's attitudes, and the world in which the agent acts, and to which the agent's attitudes relate. Yet in arguing against the belief-desire model of action-explanation, Fred Stoutland writes that what seems to underlie that model is the 'attractiveness of a certain picture of what it is to be an agent in the world, a picture whose grip on us helps account for the persistent tendency to psychologize reasons for action', and he goes on:

> On this picture, there exists a sharp distinction between agents and the world in which they act. Agents and the world are related only externally, by world to mind relations of causality on the one hand, and mind to world beliefs and desires on the other. Apart from the attitudes of individual agents, the world is merely physical without normative or motivational significance, nothing being a reason for anything. Agents have various attitudes, which can themselves be reasons for action or perhaps constitute states of affairs as reasons, but apart from those attitudes there are no reasons for action ... if we can shake the grip of this picture, then states of affairs ... will not be understood merely as physical things which affect us in physically different ways. They will be seen to embed socio-cultural meaning and hence to be reasons to act in their own right.[15]

Here it seems as if Stoutland is taking issue with the very distinction that I have emphasized as central to agency and intentionality. Moreover, Stoutland also advances a particular view of the way in which states of affairs can be reasons for action that does not involve any reference to beliefs or desires at all, but rather depends on taking a certain type of action, what he calls 'responsive action', as actually the most basic form of action.

The issue of 'responsive action' is something to which I will shortly return, but first of all I want to explore the way in which Stoutland's apparent rejection of the distinction between agent and world actually depends upon a very particular, albeit widespread, construal of that distinction. The picture that Stoutland wishes us to abandon is one in which there is a sharp contrast between what we might call the 'internal' realm of meaning and normativity – the 'mind' – and the 'external' realm of pure physicality – the 'world'. Yet although my own account retains the centrality of intentional states, it rejects the picture of those states that treats them as part of such an 'internal', 'private' realm. On the holistic and externalist approach I have adopted here, attitudes are identified and individuated by their contents, but those contents are determined, not through an obscure relation between attitudes and some internalized, mental 'object', ('representation', 'thought' or whatever), but rather by the causal relations between those attitudes and real-world events and things.

The causal relation at issue here is not one of mere passive causal affectedness – since there are any number of causes that impinge on us as physical

bodies, so mere causal relatedness alone is not sufficient to determine the presence of an intentional relation – of an attitude being 'about' some thing in particular. Instead, intentionality arises where agency and causality intersect. The way this is worked out in Davidson is particularly instructive. As we noted above, Davidson argues that the causes of belief are the objects of belief. But at what point, in the long chain of causes that connect up with a particular belief – the chain that runs from our sensory surfaces to the thing itself – do we take the proper object of belief to be located? Davidson argues that the way this problem is resolved is by looking to the 'triangulation' that is possible once we have, not one person, but interaction between two persons that is also focused around the 'same' object.[16] Here language plays an important role, since it is through language that the appropriate interaction between agents takes place, and by means of which each is able to triangulate on the object, or on the particular point in the chain of causes, with which the other is also engaged. In fact it is precisely through their capacity as agents – through their capacity to act, in part linguistically, in relation to each other, and through their capacity to act, and react, to the object – that the process of determination of the object, as both that which both causes and is intended by each agent's attitudes, takes place.

Agency is thus pivotal to the possibility that there be intentional content at all, since it is pivotal in determining the objects that directly or indirectly determine the contents of intentional states (or, to put matters slightly differently, in determining the descriptions under which those objects determine the contents). What is equally important here, however, is the way in which intentional content is seen as bound up with the real world in which agents act and are located, rather than belonging within some internal, purely 'mental' realm. On this account, the explanation of intentional behaviour – of action – exhibits much the same structure as does the identification of intentional content. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that the intention in acting is itself determined by that which causes the action, by the situation that elicits the action. To use a favourite example Stoutland often employs: when I come to a halt at a stop sign, we may say that my stopping is intentional because of the way in which it is indeed caused by the stop sign such that my intention can be 'read off' the situation that causes my stopping. The problem of

identifying the exact cause of my attitude (or of identifying the description under which it is a cause), such that the content of the attitude is itself correctly identified, also arises in relation to action: it is the problem of how the cause of the action should be described such that the intention or 6reason' is correctly identified and the action thereby explained. The solution is also the same in each case: what causes the action and so determines the intention is the situation as it is also picked out by other agents in their own interactions, and in their interactions (or potential interactions) with one another and with the original agent whose action is in question. Thus the understanding of the intentional, including both attitudes and action, always involves a grasp of one's own situation, a grasp of the situation of others (including, therefore, the broader socio-cultural context), and the real-world environment in which all are embedded. Moreover, while one can certainly distinguish between these elements in various ways, and the capacity to make that distinction is both necessary and fundamental, these elements are not independent of one another and neither can any absolute distinction be drawn between them in any particular case.

On this basis, there need be no incompatibility between the position I have outlined here and Stoutland's rejection of the picture that underlines the traditional belief-desire model of action explanation. Moreover, I would go further and argue that, in fact, there is an essential continuity between the account I have advanced and that which is to be found in Stoutland's work. While my approach could be characterized as dependent upon a certain 'externalist' approach to the character and content of intentional states that significantly shifts the way in which those states must be understood, what Stoutland and others of like-mind have done in the philosophy of action is to advance a similarly 'externalist' approach to the key concepts at issue there in a way that also significantly shifts the way those concepts should be understood. In both cases, the crucial move is away from private, 'internal' representations or 'thoughts' either as that to which intentional states are directed or as that which detemiines and explains intentional action, Instead, the proper objects of intentionality – both in the sense of that which intentional states are about, and that towards which action is directed and on the basis of which it is to be rationally explained and understood – are the real world things and events to which

we are practically and causally related in our thinking and acting. In neither case do we need to abandon the distinction between agent and world, so long as that distinction is properly understood. Moreover, the considerations I have adduced here are not merely convergent with aspects of the position for which Stoutland argues, but they can also be seen as providing additional support for that position. Not only does the standard belief-desire model of action explanation fall short in terms of its adequacy to the actual practice of action explanation, but it also proves to be inconsistent with the character of intentionality, and of intentional states, as such.

But what of the issue of 'responsive action' that I noted above and to which I said I would return? The issue is clearly a significant one, since, on Stoutland's account, not only is 'responsive action' the most basic and common type of action, but it is also action in which beliefs and desires play no part. Consequently, if Stoutland is right about the nature of responsive action, then the claims I have advanced about the indispensability of intentional states in the very possibility of agency, and so of action, would seem to be put in question. Stoutland has made just this point in responding directly to my position:

> The reason why I stop at a comer may simply be that there is a stop sign there, an object which surely affects me in some way but about which I may have no beliefs or desires. if I stop even though the stop sign has been moved, I may explain my behavior by saying there had been a stop sign there and I thought it was still there, but it doesn't follow that such a thought is a belief or that it explained my previous stops for the sign... Stop signs must stand in an appropriate relation to beliefs and desires to be stop signs, but it doesn't follow that every act must stand in such a relation.[17]

Yet what this comment seems, in fact, to show is not that there is a real disagreement here about the role of intentional states in relation to action, but instead that there remains a certain lack of clarity about the nature of the intentional states at issue. Assuming that we reject the conception of intentional states or their contents that would treat them as the private, internal states of agents, then what conception of intentional states are we to put in its place? While it is true that intentional states belong to the agents whose states they are, those states cannot be severed either from

the wider socio-cultural or environmental content in which the agent is located or from the capacities and dispositions of the agent to action. In this respect, intentional states are not discrete elements in the internal mental lives of agents, but are perhaps best understood as habits, dispositions and modes of orientation to the world, and so as standing in a necessary relation to action and to the capacity for action. When we make use of the language of intentional states, and, in particular, when we explain action by reference to the beliefs and desires of the agent who acts, we thus do no more than direct attention to aspects of the agent's overall behavioural disposition and orientation.

Stoutland seemed to consider such a possibility in his original response, but also appeared to reject it on the grounds that 'while it is not sharp, we need some contrast between actions that result from beliefs and desires and those that don't'.[18] It is not obvious to me that either such a distinction is needed or that it can be made without being led back into exactly the problematic conception of intentional states that we have already abandoned (indeed, for this reason, I suspect that Stoutland's comments here may carry with them unrecognized commitment to the view of intentional states that I suspect both us wish to reject). We may well want to distinguish between those actions that seem to be immediate and spontaneous responses to a situation and those actions that seem to be the outcome of a process of reflection and deliberation. But this distinction (which, together with a suspicion of the deliberative, the reflective, and certain associated concepts, lies at the base of a great many accounts that are dismissive of the language of intentional states), need not be articulated, nor is it well-articulated, in terms of a distinction between action that involves beliefs and desires and actions that do not. The real difference at issue here is actually between those 'action-situations' to which our prior dispositions and orientations are already adequate (and so in which the intentional context is unproblematic) and those 'action-situations' to which our prior dispositions are not adequate and in which some degree of reorientation is required – in which we have to 're-think' the beliefs and desires that are constitutive of our dispositions and orientation. And, of course, it is precisely when we do need to re-think in this way

that we are led to formulate our dispositions and orientations in terms of explicit beliefs and desires.

In the one case, we are located within, as we might put it, a particular space of agency such that we already know our way around, and so can immediately act, while, in the other, we find ourselves in a space to which we are not oriented, and in which we must find our way. In both cases, however, the space can be described in intentional terms, that is, in terms of the intentional attitudes – beliefs, desires and the rest – that enable us to identify, in a consistent and coherent fashion, the structure of the space in which we act and so of our own orientation within that space. We may thus reject the standard view of 'belief-desire psychology', and yet still hold that the capacity for agency is interdependent with the possession of intentional states such as belief and desire, and that both agency and intentionality depend on the agent's location within an objective order, that is, as the agent stands in relation to real world events and things. This latter point has important implications for the way in which agency is itself dependent, not merely on causality, but also on spatiality, and it is to this that I wish now to turn.

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Baldwin's emphasis on the way in which the possibility of having a grasp of the objective order of the world might be dependent on a grasp of resistance, and of possibility and impossibility, whether or not it is correct as an account of the conceptual basis of causality, nevertheless brings to the fore the way in which the grasp of objectivity is a matter of grasping a causal ordering of things that exists, to a greater or lesser extent, independently of the activities of the agent. The causal ordering of the world is an ordering, therefore, that is to be found in the world itself, rather than being merely derivative of the agent's own ordering of things. This is not to say that the agent's activities have no role to play in the way in which the world is objectively ordered, but that the agent's activities are not the only determining factor here.

The objective ordering of the world is, as Baldwin, I think, correctly argues (though, as will become evident shortly, I think this implies a more central role for spatiality than Baldwin seems to suggest), essentially a causal ordering. And although I do not wish, in this discussion to become embroiled in an argument about the proper analysis of the idea of causality, I do want to claim that the causal ordering of the world has to be viewed as an ordering in which objects play an indispensible role. Agency and intentionality depend on the location of agents in relation to their environment, but if such an environment is to provide any sort of framework within which location is possible, then it must be ordered in terms of certain fairly stable features or concatenations of features that are causally connected to one another. The idea of an object is just the idea of such a concatenation of features that are causally related in a way that enables them to be treated as possessing a certain distinctive unity and so to provide a focus for the actions and attitudes of agents. For an agent to have a grasp of the world is precisely for her to have a grasp of the causal ordering of the world as organized around such objects.

The causal integration of features that is fundamental to the concept of the object is not merely a matter of the causal integration of features understood as existing at different times – such that two temporally distinct features are part of a single object only if there is some appropriate causal connection between them -but also in relation to features as they are spatially distinct. Indeed, it seems that the sort of causal connection that is most important for agency is precisely the connectedness that can be seen to obtain both between parts of the same object at a time and between parts of different objects at a time. And only if we have a grasp of objects as spatially extended can we have a grasp of the way in which modification of one thing can result in a modification of something else. And this is, of course, exactly what we must be able to do in acting, for in acting we effect a change in something that exists contemporaneously with us through affecting a change in our bodies. The idea of an objective causal ordering of the world is thus also the idea of a world of objects that are extended in both space and time.

In this respect, spatiality also turns out to play an important role in the possibility of agency since it is precisely the spatial differentiation of our bodies that

enables us to grasp the possibility of a differentiation inaction that can in turn be related to differential effects in the world. Only inasmuch as I can grasp differences in myself, that is to say in my own body, however these differences are perceived, can I bring about different changes in myself. And it is my grasp of these bodily differences that is tied to my ability to grasp the various causal connections that obtain between my world and myself. Something of this same point is evident in Kant's emphasis on the way in a grasp of spatiality is tied to our grasp of bodily differentiation and orientation. As he writes 'our geographical knowledge, and even our commonest knowledge of the position of places, would be of no aid to us if we could not, by reference to the sides of our bodies, assign to regions the things so ordered and the whole system of mutually relative positions'.[19] Much the same idea appears in Gareth Evans' work and his emphasis on the way in which a grasp of an objective order is dependent on the subject's capacity to locate herself within that order.[20]

One of the most useful sources for any exploration of the relation between spatiality, objectivity and agency that comes into view here is P. F.Strawson's discussion in Chapter Two of Individuals. There Strawson attempts to construct a world as it might be experienced by a creature in purely auditory term and he does this as a means to explore the question as to whether there can be a grasp of objectivity- understood in terms of the idea of particulars that continue to exist independently of their being perceived – in the absence of any grasp of space. Strawson acknowledges, in fact, that some 'analogue' of spatiality is indispensable here and he attempts to provide one (though insisting that it is indeed an analogue of space rather than a space as such) through the introduction of the idea of a 'master-sound' – a 'sound of a certain distinctive timbre'[21] with unvarying loudness but varying pitch – that is heard continuously as the background to every other sound. On this basis different sounds can be 'located' at different points on the master-sound and, through the ordering afforded by the ordering of pitch, each sound can be located as at some definite position in relation to every other sound.[22] The introduction of the master-sound supposedly provides a unitary dimension

within which a multiplicity of other sounds can be 'laid out' and within which those sounds can be grasped as existing simultaneously, but independently of one another.

One of the questions that arises when one begins to examine the Strawsonian 'No-space world' in any detail concerns the manner in which a creature with only an auditory grasp of things can possibly grasp its orientation, even given the presence of the master-sound, within the auditory world in which it is located. Certainly the master-sound provides a means of establishing direction, given a point from which those directions are taken, and so a creature within the auditory world could presumably grasp differences in pitch between one location and another and thereby grasp the idea of a certain direction either up or down the scale – so this sound stands in a direction of lower pitch (where the idea of 'lower than' is understood purely mathematically) from that sound – but it is hard to see how this difference in perceptual discrimination could translate into a difference in capacity to control movement. Such control of movement would be impossible without some differentiation internal to the creature itself - that is, some internal differentiation that allows for external orientation. But a purely auditory world, or any world that is presented in terms of only one sensory dimension,[23] would seem incapable of providing the resources to support such differentiation and orientation. Within a purely auditory world it would seem impossible to have a grasp of one's body as both extended in space, and as possessing a certain bilateral asymmetry, and, without this, it would seem impossible to orient oneself in terms of ahead, behind, above, below, to the right and to the left, let alone to be able to grasp one's body as possessed of differentiated causal capacities. And in the absence of such a grasp of bodily capacities or bodily orientation it would be impossible to exercise one's capacities for action in the coordinated, directed fashion that such action would require.

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Agency requires, it seems, a grasp of the causal ordering of the world as it is organized in relation to spatially and temporally extended objects. But it also

requires both an ordering and differentiation internal to the agent, as well as some grasp of that ordering and differentiation on the part of the agent herself. Agency thus requires a spatio-temporally differentiated and extended world and a spatio-temporally differentiated and extended agent. Moreover, inasmuch as intentionality is itself interdependent with agency, so the conditions on which agency rests are also the conditions for the possibility of intentionality. Agent-centered theories of causation are correct in viewing the grasp of causality as grounded in the capacity for agency, but agency itself turns out to have a complex structure in which causality, objectivity and spatiality – as well as intentionality – are already implicated. These concepts turn out to be holistically interconnected in a way that, it might be said, itself mirrors the holism that is also to be found in Davidson's account of the inter-relation between the concepts of action, reason and cause.

The space of agency is not a space that is centred on the agent alone – neither in the sense that the agent's grasp of that space is determined by her grasp of her own capacities alone nor in the sense that it is determined by her grasp merely of some set of 'internalized', private 'representations'. But neither is the space of agency a space that is severed from the realm of the intentional. The intentional arises only in the space that is opened up in and through agency, a space that encompasses the real-world events and things in relation to which the agent acts, as well as the inter-subjective, socio-cultural context in which those events and things are themselves meaningful and significant. If reality is 'practical', as Jonathan Dancy suggests,[24] then so too is intentionality – the intentional and the practical belong together – and so is the real itself connected with the intentional. This is, indeed, the other side to the connection between the intentional and the real – between reason and cause – that Davidson originally brought to our attention. The world can thus never be completely severed from the intentional modes under which it is available to us. One way of putting this latter point is to say that our beliefs and desires are best understood as dispositions or modes of orientation of our situatedness in the world. They are articulations of our comportment within the space of the world – which is the space, the only space, within which agency is possible.

[1] Originally in [insert reference]; reprinted in Davidson, Essays on Actions and Events (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp.3-20. It is worth noting that the Davidsonian position as set out in this paper has an essentially Wittgensteinian pedigree, while the holistic and externalist position Davidson has developed in later papers, and that is itself the basis for my own position, can also be seen strongly Wittgensteinian in terms of its core themes and commitments.

[2] Much of the discussion draws directly on material from Chapter Five of my Place and Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), although here the framework of discussion is rather more circumscribed. A version of the material presented here was also read to a seminar at Umeå University in April of 1998.

[3] Agent Causation', in Timothy O'Connor(ed.), Agents, Causes and Events (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 175.

[4] 'Objectivity, Causality and Agency', in Jorge Luis Bermudez, Anthony Marcel, and Naomi Eilan (eds.), The Body and the Self (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

[5] Ibid, p.115.

[6] For a fuller account of Baldwin's position see especially ibid., pp. 116-121.

[7] 'Ibid, p.113.

[8] Ibid., p.121.

[9] Ibid, p.107-108.

[10]Baldwin, ibid, p.108.

[11] Baldwin notes the appearance of this idea in pragmatist thought, ibid, p.108.

[12] See, for instance, Fred Stoutland, 'The Real Reasons' in J. Bransen and S. Cuypers (eds.), Human Action, Deliberation and Causation (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999). As Stoutland points out, his dissatisfaction with the belief-desire model has been longstanding – see 'On not Being a Behaviorist', in L. Herzberg and J. Pietarinen (eds.), Perspectives on Human Conduct (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Of course, while the belief-desire model has been the standard view in the philosophical literature for some time, there have also been other alternative accounts. In particular the 'praxeological' approach associated with Jakob Meløe provides a particularly interesting such alternative – one that has parallels with my own account (especially as developed in Place and Experience) as well as Stoutland's. See Jakob Meløe, 'The Agent and His World', in Gunnar Skirbekk (ed.), Praxeology: An Anthology (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1983).

[13] And even where we identify an agent as having made a mistake – that is, as acting in a way that is actually inappropriate given the agent's beliefs and desires – still we need to be able to make sense of the way in which other features of the agent's location and orientation might explain the misdirectedness at issue

[14] See Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge', p.00; for amore recent presentation of Davidsonian externalism see 'Three Varieties of Knowledge'.

[15] Fred Stoutland, 'The Belief-Desire Model of Reasons for Action', unpublished typescript,.

[16] Davidson first introduced the idea of 'triangulation' in 'Rational Animals', reprinted in Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p.105; see also: 'The Second Person', 'Epistemology Externalized', 'The Emergence of Thought', and 'Three Varieties of Knowledge', all reprinted in Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective.

[17] Comments on Jeff Malpas, 'The Space of Agency"', p.3, 'Mind and Action II':, Aix-en-Provence, April, 1999, unpublished typescript

[18] Ibid

[19] 'On the First Ground of the Distinction of Regions in Space', in Kant's Inaugural Dissertation and Early Writings on Space, trans. John Handyside (Chicago: Open Court, 1929), p.23.

[20] See The Varieties of Reference.

[21] Strawson, Individuals (London: Macmillan, 1959), pp.75-6

[22] Evans claims that the ordering of pitch that the master-sound provides plays no real part in Strawson's discussion. This seems to me mistaken – without the ordering of pitch there can be no way of providing content for the idea of distance that Strawson takes to be essential here. Evans is right, however, that one could provide such an ordering without appeal to the ordering of pitch at all, through the idea of an ordered system of locations in which each location is defined in terms of its relation to other locations -thus location p is defined as that which must be traversed in

order to move from o to q. See Evans, 'Things Without the Mind', Collected Papers (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), p.225.

[23] So a world presented only visually, or exclusively through tactile sensations, would be limited in analogous ways to the world envisaged by Strawson. The problem is not so much the restriction of Strawson's world to the auditory, but rather its restriction to a single sensory modality

[24] See the contents – as well as the title – of Practical Reality