Acting against one's best judgement
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CHAPTER VI
THE DAVIDSONIAN DIVISION

0. Introduction

As we have seen in Chapter IV, Davidson holds that a reason \( R \) can explain an action \( A \) only if \( R \) and \( A \) are simultaneously connected in two very different ways (see the Introduction, Section 3.4.3, and Section 3.5). First, \( R \) and \( A \) must be deductively related, second, \( R \) must be the cause of \( A \). The first relation has been worded in condition \( C1 \) and in claim \( 2^{\text{dav}} \). It reflects the Logical Connection Argument (LCA), and it is backed by claim \( 1^{\text{dav}} \), which says that action explanations do not rely on a natural regularity. The second relation finds its expression in condition \( C2 \) and in claim \( 4^{\text{dav}} \). It mirrors classical causalism, and it is supported by \( 3^{\text{dav}} \), which claims that reasons and actions do rely on a causal law. Thus Davidson has managed to secure an intermediate position, drawing both from classical causalists and from LCA champions.

However, this very position particularly exposes Davidson’s action theory to the problem of akrasia. For now the akrasia problem seems to threaten his theory on two flanks. On the one hand, as has been discussed at length in Chapter III, danger looms via the LCA. If reasons and actions are conceptually connected, then akrasia constitutes a crack in the conceptual chain. Actions would be either explainable and rational, or irrational and unexplainable - the entire idea of a clear-eyed akratic action would become a conceptual monstrosity. On the other hand, akrasia challenges Davidson’s theory through classical causalism. This danger was intimated at the end of Chapter IV. If reasons cause actions in conformity with obdurate causal laws, how could a person ever act against his reasons? How could anyone behave akratically if this would entail a breakdown of the laws of nature?

In due course, as it seems, Davidson became more and more aware of this two-headed peril. However, he resists taking either the Socratic or the Aristotelian way out: he neither reduces akrasia to mere ignorance nor transforms it into a kind of forgetting (Davidson 1982, 294-295). Notably the later Davidson takes akratic actions very seriously, and is convinced that
people who are fully *compos mentis* can act against their best judgments. Accordingly he renounces theories like those of the ancient Greeks that "frustrate[s] a coherent account of moral conflict, weakness of the will, or other forms of intentional, but irrational, action" (Davidson 1980, xii).

A large part of Davidson’s more or less recent work consists in attempts to reconcile his theory of action with the existence of akratic behaviour (Davidson 1970a; Davidson 1978; Davidson 1982; Davidson 1985a; Davidson 1985b). These attempts led to his adjusting and readjusting the theory, without, however, abandoning the idea that it occupies an intermediate position between the LCA and the classical causalists. I shall describe the results of his repair work in the present chapter. Section 1 contains Davidson’s formulation of the *akrasia* problem. In Section 2 I reconstruct his solution, which he achieved after a protracted process of conjectures and refutations. Section 3 contains an evaluation and a conclusion.

1. An apparent paradox: Davidson’s version of the *akrasia* problem

According to Davidson an action $A_1$ of an agent $P$ is akratic if and only if the following three conditions are fulfilled (Davidson 1970a, 22):

(i) $P$ does $A_1$ intentionally
(ii) $P$ believes there is an alternative action $A_2$ open to him
(iii) $P$ judges that, all things considered, it would be better to do $A_2$ than to do $A_1$.

The question then of course is: are there any actions that satisfy (i), (ii) and (iii)? Davidson’s simple answer, a heartfelt ‘yes’, is worded in principle (P$_1$):

(P$_1$): There are akratic actions

(Davidson 1970a, 23). In maintaining (P$_1$), Davidson dissents from an influential position in ethics, developed by Richard M. Hare (Hare 1952; Hare 1963).

As far as weakness of will is concerned, Davidson and Hare have two important points in common. To begin with, they both gave the old problem of *akrasia* a place in contemporary philosophy. Granted, they place
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it differently, for Davidson works within the philosophy of mind (and thus talks about weakness of will in a very broad sense, referring to any action against any best judgement), while Hare is an ethicist *pur sang* (and hence is merely concerned with actions going against *moral* judgements). But as I stated in Chapter I, that is only a minor difference, since moral *akrasia* is a special case of *akrasia* in general. Furthermore, Davidson’s ideas as well as Hare’s are challenged by the existence of akratic actions: incontinent behaviour threatens not only Davidson’s theory of action explanation, but also Hare’s prescriptivistic meta-ethic. According to Hare’s prescriptivism, moral judgments are "universalisable" and "prescriptive". The former means that the same judgements must be made when the same properties are present, the latter means that moral judgments are intended as guides to conduct. From universalisability and prescriptivity Hare then infers that one cannot sincerely embrace a moral judgment without acting upon it. Hence Hare, like Davidson, finds himself confronted by the apparent existence of *akrasia*. Hence Hare, like Davidson, senses the need to arm his theory against the peril.

Apart from those two points, however, there is scarcely any resemblance between Davidson’s approach and that of Hare. No doubt the most striking difference lies in their ultimate attitudes towards *akrasia*. Davidson makes every effort to account for its existence, and consequently is prepared to change his theory drastically. Hare, on the other hand, sternly sticks to his prescriptivism and therefore must deny that incontinent actions can occur. As Steven Lukes has rightly observed, Hare uses as many as four strategies to explain akratic actions away. If a man assents to a moral principle and fails to act accordingly, then he is either (i) hypocritical or (ii) not sure that the principle is worth assenting to or (iii) physically unable or (iv) psychologically impotent:

"[I]f the moral words are being used in a fully evaluative, i.e. universally prescriptive way, the explanation of moral weakness boils down to either insincerity, lack of conviction, physical impossibility or psychological impossibility." (Lukes 1965, 150).

The sting of Lukes’ observation is of course in its tail: declaring that an agent is psychologically disabled to act upon his moral principle means little more than to affirm that he has fallen prey to incontinence; it does not
explain how this can happen. The same point has been made by Neil Cooper (Cooper 1968), and more recently by Thomas Spitzley:

"One can nevertheless still ask the question as to where the psychological inability resides, what it amounts to ... Hare’s only attempt at a more precise characterisation of this inability is the following: when a person is psychologically incapacitated, he cannot bring himself to do that which he believes he should do. ... If we now ask ourselves what this psychological incapacity means, it seems that we have little more than a circular explanation: psychological inability means whatever makes a person, in a case of acting against one’s better knowledge, not to do what he believes should be done; it consists in the fact that he is psychologically unable to do so." (Spitzley 1992, 131-132).54

Another problem with Hare’s notion of psychological inability is how to distinguish it from physical disability. Clearly, we are physically unable to fly or to stop an earthquake, but what about our addiction to alcohol, tobacco or some other drug? Is it physical? Psychological? Perhaps both? But what precisely could be meant by ‘both’? That the one causes or reinforces the other, that they are reducible to each other, that they work independently? Interesting as these questions may be, I do not wish to dwell upon them. For my major concern is not Hare’s denial of moral weakness, but Davidson’s attempt to save akrasia in the general sense of the word. (But see Taylor 1980 for another way of comparing Davidson and Hare on akrasia.)

54 My translation, greatly improved by David Atkinson and Detlev Pätzold, of:
"Immer noch kann man aber fragen, worin denn die psychische Unfähigkeit bestehe, was sie ausmache ... Das einzige, was Hare zur genauerem Charakterisierung von Unfähigkeit sagt, ist folgendes: Liegt sie vor, kann sich der Mensch nicht dazu bringen, das zu tun, wovon er glaubt, dass er es tun soll. ... Fragen wir nun, was psychische Unfähigkeit hier bedeutet, so scheint es, als hätten wir kaum mehr als eine zirkuläre Erklärung: Psychische Unfähigkeit ist das, was einen Menschen in einem Fall von Handeln wider besseres Wissen nicht so handeln lässt, wie er glaubt, dass er handeln sollte, liegt darin, dass er dazu psychisch unfähig ist."
Davidson does not make the rescue operation easy for himself. In addition to the principle that akratic actions exist, (P₁), Davidson holds to two other principles (Davidson 1970a, 23):

(P₂): If an agent judges that it would be better to do \( A₁ \) than to do \( A₂ \), then he wants to do \( A₁ \) more than he wants to do \( A₂ \).

(P₃): If an agent wants to do \( A₁ \) more than he wants to do \( A₂ \) and he believes himself free to do either \( A₁ \) or \( A₂ \), then he will intentionally do \( A₁ \) if he does \( A₁ \) or \( A₂ \) intentionally.

Separately, each of the three principles sounds sensible enough. The problem is of course that, when taken together, they constitute a paradox. Hence, as in reconciling the seemingly inconsistent claims 1\text{dav} - 4\text{dav}, and as in reconciling the seemingly inconsistent principles P₁ - P₃ (see Chapter IV, Section 3.4.1), Davidson again sets out to reconcile the seemingly inconsistent principles (P₁) - (P₃). And once more, Davidson’s task is twofold. He starts by attempting to show that (P₁) - (P₃) are not inconsistent; then he tries to explain why we think that they are inconsistent. In other words, Davidson wants to demonstrate why irrational acting is possible, and why we deem it impossible.

In Section 2 I show how Davidson accomplishes this compound task by reestablishing some old Freudian ideas. More particularly, Davidson reinstalls three Freudian theses, that circulate three Freudian concepts: the concept of mental partitioning, the concept of mental conflict, and the concept of mental causality.

2. Freudian thoughts

In his effort to account for irrational behaviour, Davidson sees himself as being sustained by Freud: "Psychoanalytic theory as developed by Freud claims to provide a conceptual framework within which to describe and understand irrationality" (Davidson 1982, 290). Small wonder, then, that the much-discussed philosopher has displayed great interest in the even more discussed psychologist. Although he believes that Freud’s ideas suffer from "fundamental errors or confusions", Davidson thinks that these blemishes can be removed by phrasing those ideas "in a sufficiently broad way" (ibid.). He
thereby appoints himself as a prudent champion of Freud whose defense
pertains to only some of Freud’s ideas, "and these are ideas at the
conceptual, in contrast to the empirical, end of that vague spectrum" (ibid.).

According to Davidson, studying Freud is indispensable in attempts
to solve the *akrasia* problem. Any genuine solution will always be redolent
of Freudian thoughts: "After analysing the ... problem of irrationality, I
conclude that any satisfactory view must embrace some of Freud’s most
important theses" (Davidson 1982, 290). Which theses is Davidson aiming
at? And why are they so important for the solution of the *akrasia* problem?
The present Section 2 contains answers to both questions.

### 2.1 Three Freudian theses

When talking about "Freud’s most important theses", Davidson has
especially the following three theses in mind (Davidson 1982, 303-304):

**THESIS 1: the partitioning of the mind**
the mind contains two or more semi-independent parts,
these parts being characterised by mental features like
beliefs and desires

**THESIS 2: the existence of a structure in each part**
each part has a structure, similar to the structure needed to
explain ordinary actions

**THESIS 3: the existence of causal relations between parts**
the mental attribute by which one of the parts is
characterised might causally affect the mental attribute that
identifies another part.

According to Davidson these theses are not only central to the Freudian
paradigm, but also essential for a conceptual solution of the *akrasia* problem
(Davidson 1982, 291). I shall discuss THESIS 1 and THESIS 2 in 2.2 - 2.4.
The third thesis will not be discussed until 2.5.
2.2 Partitioning and structuring the mind

THESIS 1 says that the mind consists of parts, each of which is an as yet unordered set of beliefs, desires and perhaps other mental features. It thus suggests the existence of boundaries which keep the mental segments apart. These boundaries must not be construed as discoveries of introspection. They are merely, as Davidson says, "conceptual aids to the coherent description of genuine irrationalities" (Davidson 1985a, 147).

As an aside, I point out that the term ‘genuine irrationalities’ in Davidson’s work covers various phenomena. *Akrasia* is a genuine irrationality, but so are *self-deception* (believing \( p \) while knowing that not-\( p \)), *weakness of the warrant* (believing \( p \) in the face of evidence for not-\( p \)) and *wishful thinking* (believing \( p \) because \( p \) is desired). As opposed to *akrasia* (which refers to irrational actions), self-deception, weakness of the warrant and wishful thinking all refer to irrational beliefs. Apart from irrational actions and irrational beliefs, Davidson also bandies about irrational *intentions*, irrational *emotions* and even irrational *inferences* (Davidson 1982, 289; Davidson 1985b, 345). Among these ‘genuine irrationalities’ interesting differences and similarities exist (Davidson 1985a). I shall not ponder upon them. Suffice it to say that, in Davidson’s view, the description and the explanation of each single irrationality takes in the three theses mentioned above.\(^{55}\)

While THESIS 1 introduces the idea of as yet unordered parts, THESIS 2 imposes order upon each part; it says that the beliefs and desires in each segment have a structure. What structure? THESIS 2 speaks of "a structure needed to explain ordinary actions". In the preceding chapters we have seen what this means. The Davidsonian structure for action explanation is certainly not of a Hempelian nature. For Davidson considered the rationality assumption in Hempel’s model as a tautology, thereby opposing the Hempelian schema for action explanation (\( \text{AE}^\text{H} \)). Rather, Davidson’s structure is a blend of the schemata proposed by the LCA adherents on the one hand and the classical causalists on the other. The LCA schema for action explanation is, see Chapter III, (\( \text{AE}^\text{LCA} \)). By demanding that the reason mentioned in (\( \text{AE}^\text{LCA} \)) *causes* the action, Davidson inserts classical causality

\(^{55}\) But see 2.5 for a brief remark on the similarity between *akrasia* and wishful thinking.
into the LCA. However, as I have pointed out, its compound character renders the Davidsonian model for action explanation particularly vulnerable. For now the akrasia problem can attack it from two sides: through the LCA and through classical causalism.

In sum, then, THESIS 1 and THESIS 2 confirm what we already observed in the introduction to this chapter: Davidson is in an awkward position. Davidson’s escape from this predicament lies in an appeal to conflicting practical syllogisms (2.3). This way of circumventing the difficulty generates however new problems, which are described and partially solved in 2.4. The final solution, achieved by means of THESIS 3, is explained in 2.5.

2.3 Inner conflicts and conflicting practical syllogisms

For Davidson, as for Freud, akratic behaviour arises from an inner conflict, which in its turn presupposes a divided mind. Davidson has embodied the notion of a divided mind in THESIS 1. The notion of an inner conflict he tries to make precise by combining THESIS 1 and THESIS 2 in the following way.

THESIS 2 entails that the beliefs and desires in a certain part of the mind have a structure, that somehow mirrors or represents an explanation of the form (AE\textsuperscript{csa}). As I have shown in Chapter III, (AE\textsuperscript{csa}) is identical to Von Wright’s practical inference, which in its turn is equivalent to an Aristotelian practical syllogism. Hence it is, I think, no exaggeration to maintain that THESIS 2 boils down to the claim that the beliefs and desires in a certain part of the psyche are arranged in a practical syllogism à la Aristotle. Combined with THESIS 1, this means that we can entertain two (or more) syllogisms at the same time. When these syllogisms also oppose one another, they represent a mental conflict, thus preparing the ground on which akratic actions can bloom.

We saw in Chapter I that the idea of two conflicting practical syllogisms as a basis for akratic actions had already been welcomed by Aristotle and by the early Stoics. However, of the Stoic writings we know too little to pass judgment, and Aristotle somehow failed to press the point home. Davidson makes considerably more of the idea. According to Davidson, entertaining two rivalling syllogisms is precisely what it means to be in an inner mental conflict. When two rivalling syllogisms are
simultaneously present, they constitute "straightforward cases of conflict, cases in which an agent has good reasons both for doing, and for refraining from, a course of action; or, what comes to the same thing, good reasons for doing each of two mutually exclusive things" (Davidson 1982, 295).

Not every instance of rivalling syllogisms gives rise to akratic behaviour. Situations of conflict frequently occur and can often be handled easily:

"Such situations are too familiar to require special explanation: we are not normally paralysed when competing claims are laid on us, nor do we usually suppress part of the relevant information, or drive one of our desires underground. Usually we can face situations where a decision must be made, and we decide best when we manage to keep all the considerations, the pros and cons, before us" (Davidson 1982, 295).

However, sometimes the considerations, the pros and cons, escape our control. In those cases, akratic actions occur. Below, in 2.4, I examine a proverbial example of such a case.

2.4 Handling the conflict

The famous philosopher Solomon has taught us invaluable lessons, of which I think that the following two are useful here:

"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him" (Proverbs, 26:4);

"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit" (Proverbs, 26:5).

Taking ‘d’ for ‘answering a fool according to his folly’, Solomon’s teaching can be cast in two rivalling practical syllogisms, (PS¹) and (PS²), one representing verse 26:4, the other reflecting 26:5:
(PS1)

major (M1): Avoid acts that make you a fool
minor (m1): d makes you a fool

concl. (c1): Avoid doing d

(PS2)

major (M2): Perform acts that prevent a fool from considering himself wise
minor (m2): d prevents a fool from considering himself wise

concl. (c2): Perform d

(PS1) and (PS2) herd miscellaneous scholars together: while embodying Solomonic lessons, they also represent Davidson’s way of saying in Aristotelian terms what Freud meant by an inner conflict.

Strictly speaking, the conflict between (PS1) and (PS2) does not lie in their premises: both the majors and the minors do not yet form an inconsistent set. The real clash is between the conclusions, or the ‘Solomonic judgements’, as we, inspired by Elster 1989, might call them. This becomes even more clear when we rewrite them such that (c1) becomes (c1*) and (c2) becomes (c2*):

(c1*): not-d is better than d
(c2*): d is better than not-d.

Statements (c1*) and (c2*) are in flat contradiction with one another. But, as Davidson asks himself, "how can premises, all of which are true (or acceptable), entail a contradiction?" (Davidson 1970a, 34). And how to solve the contradiction? In 2.4.1 I mention two solutions. Davidson rejects both. He has conceived his own solution, which I discuss in 2.4.2 and 2.4.3. Davidson’s solution leads to a comparison of practical reasoning with theoretical reasoning (2.4.4-2.4.6). Sections 2.4.7 and 2.4.8 explain how the solution renders akratic actions logically possible. In Section 2.5, by invoking THESIS 3, I explain how they are also factually possible.
What to do when we labour under a mental conflict? How to soothe the clash between syllogisms like (PS\textsuperscript{1}) and (PS\textsuperscript{2})? Two solutions deserve to be mentioned here. Each of them reflects a familiar part of Judaeo-Christian and Greek mores.

Solution (1) - According to this solution, two rivalling practical syllogisms actually represent a battle between Passion and Reason. Each of the syllogisms is, as it were, fighting on the side of either Passion or Reason. The conflict is solved when Reason has defeated Passion or when Passion has triumphed over Reason. The first defeat is of course ‘good’, the latter is ‘bad’. A variation on this solution is to depict both syllogisms as representing a battle between three parties: Reason, Passion, and a party called Volition or Will. This variant can, as we have seen in Chapter I, be found in the \textit{Phaedrus}, the \textit{Timaeus} and most suggestively in the \textit{The Republic}, Book II (Part II) and Book IV (Part V). There Plato argues that the individual soul consists of three faculties: Reason, Passion, and a faculty called \textit{Thumos}, whose task it is to serve Reason in the often tough battle against Passion (cf. Chapter I, Section 2). In terms of rivalling syllogisms this may be taken to mean that \textit{Thumos} must make us focus on the ‘reasonable’ syllogism and make us conquer the ‘passionate’ one.

What is solution (1) worth? It certainly has some plausibility in specific cases, such as the one we encountered in Chapter I. There we considered Aristotle’s description of two conflicting syllogisms. We concluded that it allows two different readings (I recall that ‘S(x)’ means ‘x is sweet’, ‘T(x)’ means ‘x is to be tasted’, ‘L(x)’ means ‘produces lactic acid’):

\begin{align*}
\text{First Reading} \\
(E_3 \text{PS, pred}) & \quad (E_3 \text{PS, pred}) \\
(I.15): \forall x \ (S(x) \rightarrow T(x)) & \quad (I.18): \forall x \ (S(x) \rightarrow \neg T(x)) \\
(I.16): S(a) & \quad (I.16): S(a) \\
(I.17): T(a) & \quad (I.19): \neg T(a)
\end{align*}
Each reading fits solution (1), since each is compatible with the interpretation of conflicting syllogisms as a conflict between Reason and Passion. In both readings (E₄PS₅) is fighting on the side of Reason whereas (E₅PS₅) or (E₆PS₅) are both Passion’s minions. However, in many other cases of conflict the split between Reason and Passion cannot so easily be made. Consider, for instance, our Solomonic syllogisms (PS₁) and (PS₂). How to distinguish between them on the basis of Reason versus Passion? What is reasonable (or passionate): to answer a fool in an asinine manner or to reciprocate as sensibly as you can? In these cases, solution (1) is of little help, for we do not know what is good or bad. There is, moreover, another difficulty attached to solution (1). By suggesting that everything is settled if only we let Reason come out on top, solution (1) entirely bypasses the problem of akrasia. For that problem is not how Reason can lose the battle against Passion, but how we can act either in accordance with Passion when Reason has vanquished, or in accordance with Reason when Passion emerged victorious.

Solution (2) - The second way to handle the conflict between (PS₁) and (PS₂) is to fuse both into one practical syllogism of a higher order. The core of this fusion is the reduction of the majors, (M₁) and (M₂), to one single major, M. If it turns out that M, too, occurs in a pair of conflicting syllogisms, then we should reduce M together with its counterpart to still another single major. This reductionist operation continues until we arrive at a major, M⁺, which occurs in a practical syllogism without any rival. M⁺ then represents a principle that is absolute, unconditional, and valid without any counterexample.

The models that Steedman and Krause made of a Faustian decision-taker, cf. Chapter V, may serve as examples of solution (2). For their attempts to construct an overall comparison C on the basis of several conflicting preference orderings are very much like attempts to merge lower
order practical syllogisms into one syllogism of a higher order. A completely
different defender of solution (2) seems to be R.M. Hare. As we saw, Hare’s
prescriptivism requires that genuine moral judgements are “universalisable”,
i.e. have unrestricted generality and hence hold without exception.
Ultimately this entails the existence of one single absolute moral principle.
This principle is either a higher-order principle, covering all the lower ones,
or a conjunction of the lower principles.

Davidson briefly mentions the two above mentioned solutions, only
to reject each of them. He calls solution (1) "absurd" and deems it of no
relevance to the akrasia problem (Davidson 1970a, 35). He spurns solution
(2) for its presupposition that there exists one single major which can unite
all other majors, no matter how glaringly different the latter may be.
Solution (2) thus assumes that all actions are ultimately based on one
principle, an assumption that Davidson rejected from the very beginning: "... I
do not believe any version of the ‘single principle’ solution, once its
implications are understood, can be accepted: principles, or reasons for
acting, are irreducibly multiple." (Davidson 1970a, 34). Hence Davidson
proposes a third way of handling conflicting syllogisms. It rests on two
pillars: the idea of a higher-order syllogism and the idea of the distinction
between prima facie judgements and judgements sans phrase. The first idea
is discussed in 2.4.2, the second in 2.4.3.

2.4.2 A higher-order syllogism

Although Davidson disapproves of the two solutions mentioned above, he
grants them heuristic utility. Notably the second solution he deems useful,
for it justly suggests that conflicting syllogisms might be brought into
agreement by incorporating them into a syllogism of a higher order. In the
case of (PS₁) and (PS₂), let us assume that this higher-order argument is
(PS¹₂):

(PS¹₂)

major (M¹₂): (M¹) and (M²)
minor (m¹₂): (m¹) and (m²)
concl. (c¹): avoid doing d.
(PS1,2) eases the conflict between (PS1) and (PS2). But it does more: it also ameliorates our understanding of what akrasia is. For (PS1,2) indicates that an action is akratic if it goes against the conclusion of (PS1,2), not if it violates only the conclusion of (PS1) or that of (PS2). (PS1,2) thus accounts for the fact that actions are irrational because they deviate from what you think is best all things considered, not because they defy Reason’s orders, or ignore Passion’s cries. As Davidson phrases it: “The incontinent man goes against his better judgement, and this is surely [the conclusion of (PS1,2)], and not [that of (PS1)] which fails to bring in the reasons on the other side.” (Davidson 1970a, 36). But while it is clear enough that (PS1,2) improves our grasp of akrasia, it is quite as obvious that it cannot serve as a solution of our problem. For it is of course indecisive: (c1) follows from (M1,2) and (m1,2), but so does (c2). Hence, according to the official Aristotelian Syllogistics, (PS1,2) is not a syllogism at all.

Thus on the face of it, Davidson’s plea for a higher-order syllogism seems to have brought us back where we started. We still have two conflicting conclusions and hence two conflicting syllogisms. However, Davidson has still a shaft left in his quiver, viz. the distinction between prima facie evaluative judgements and evaluative judgements sans phrase.

2.4.3 Prima facie and sans phrase

The difference between prima facie and sans phrase is an old one, but it has been given new flesh and blood by W.D. Ross (Ross 1930). Ross applies both notions to duties in the following way. If in a certain situation, SIT, you have a certain duty, DUT, then DUT is called your prima facie duty in SIT. It might however happen that in SIT still another prima facie duty, DUT*, is incumbent on you, and that DUT and DUT* cannot simultaneously be fulfilled. If after conscientious inspection of SIT you form the considered opinion that DUT is more incumbent upon you than DUT*, then DUT is your duty sans phrase in SIT.

Davidson uses Ross’s distinction between duties to distinguish between two kinds of evaluative judgements: evaluative judgements sans phrase and prima facie evaluative judgements. The former are unconditional or all-out judgments; they claim that something is good or desirable without referring to any other claim. The latter are conditional judgements; they claim that something is good or desirable relative to other claims.
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It is easy to see how the distinction between conditional and unconditional judgements cancels out of the conflict between (PS\(^1\)) and (PS\(^2\)). I have already noted at the beginning of 2.4 that the core of this conflict is to be found in the conclusions. In their rewritten form, those conclusions are:

\[(c^{1\#}): \text{not-}d \text{ is better than } d\]
\[(c^{2\#}): d \text{ is better than not-}d\]

Although \((c^{1\#})\) and \((c^{2\#})\) look like judgements \textit{sans phrase}, they are in fact \textit{prima facie} statements. Their real logical form is given by:

\[(c^{1\#}_{pf}): pf(\text{not-}d \text{ is better than } d, (M^{1})&(m^{1}))\]
\[(c^{2\#}_{pf}): pf(d \text{ is better than not-}d, (M^{2})&(m^{2}))\],

where \(pf\) is a sentential connective, meaning "'if so and so were the case, the best thing to do is such and such'".\(^56\) (The analogy with certain sorts of probability reasoning is discussed below.) Thus \((c^{1\#}_{pf})\) says: if \((M^{1})\) and \((m^{1})\) were the case, then it is better not to do \(d\) than to do \(d\). Similarly for \((c^{2\#}_{pf})\). Contrary to \((c^{1\#})\) and \((c^{2\#})\), \((c^{1\#}_{pf})\) and \((c^{2\#}_{pf})\) do not conflict. They form a perfectly consistent set, i.e. they can be true at the same time.

At this point, Davidson argues, we are touching the sore spot in many theories of practical reasoning.\(^57\) Most of those theories assume that the conclusions in practical syllogisms can be detached from the premises. This assumption, Davidson says, is wrong: "... if we are to have a coherent theory of practical reason, we must give up the idea that we can \textit{detach}..."

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\(^56\) (Davidson 1985c, 202-203). One might object that my account of \(pf\) is somewhat sloppy. For \((c^{1\#}_{pf})\) and \((c^{2\#}_{pf})\) suggest that \(pf\) means 'if so and so were the case, doing this \textit{is better than} doing that' rather than 'if so and so were the case, \textit{the best thing} to do is such and such'. However, I deliberately omit from my story the distinction between 'best' and 'better'. For Davidson declared it to be irrelevant for his argument on incontinent actions (Davidson 1970a, 22-23). See Slote 1986, 475, for further reflection on the matter.

\(^57\) I am referring here to theories of (practical) \textit{reasoning}, not to theories of genuine \textit{acting}. Whereas the latter are about real actions, the former deal with conclusions of practical syllogisms. Admittedly, the early Davidson does not distinguish between the two, but the later one does. I come back to this point in 2.4.5.
conclusions about what is desirable (or better) or obligatory from the principles that lend those conclusions colour." (Davidson 1970a, 37). In this respect, practical reasoning is like a certain branch of theoretical reasoning, viz. reasoning from probabilistic evidence (Davidson 1970a, 37ff). In probabilistic reasoning, too, the conclusion may not be separated from the premises. Ignoring this precept leads to the famous ambiguities of inductive-statistical explanation, discovered and described with great clarity by Hempel (Hempel 1965, 381-405, in particular 394-395). The similarities between practical and probabilistic reasoning are described in Section 2.4.4; an important difference is pointed out in 2.4.5.

2.4.4 Practical reasoning and probabilistic reasoning: similarities

Consider the following piece of theoretical reasoning, \((T^3)\):

\[
(M^3): \text{More than 98\% of the pilgrims to Lourdes are Roman Catholics}
\]

\[
(m^3): \text{Petersen made a pilgrimage to Lourdes}
\]

\[
(c^3): \text{Petersen is almost certainly a Roman Catholic}
\]

(Hempel 1965, 55; Toulmin 1958, 109); in order to avoid confusion with the majors of \((PS^1)\) and \((PS^2)\), I call this theoretical argument ‘\((T^3)\)’ rather than ‘\((T')\)’ or ‘\((T^3)\)’). \((T^3)\) is not only a theoretical argument, but also a probabilistic one: it contains the expressions ‘more than 98\%’ and ‘almost certainly’ (I ignore the fact that the first expression is quantitative whereas the latter is qualitative in character). More particularly, \((T^3)\) is a piece of inductive-statistical (I-S) reasoning. It is inductive, as opposed to deductive, because it implies that Petersen is a Roman Catholic only with near-certainty. It is statistical, as opposed to strictly nomological, because it makes essential use of a law or theoretical principle of statistical form, namely \((M^3)\).

The next argument, \((T^4)\), is an I-S argument that rivals with \((T^3)\):
Together, \((T^3)\) and \((T^4)\) illustrate the ambiguity of I-S explanation. This is the peculiar logical phenomenon that a consistent set of true premises logically entails what seems to be a contradiction: the set \({(M^3), (m^3), (M^4), (m^4)}\) is consistent and yet entails \((c^3)\) and \((c^4)\), which seem contradictory. How can this be?

Hempel observed that \((T^3)\) and \((T^4)\) permit two different readings, a correct and an incorrect one. In the incorrect reading ‘almost certainly’ is an operator that affects the conclusions. In this reading \((c^3)\) and \((c^4)\) actually have the form:

\[
(c^3\ast): \text{Almost certain: Petersen is a Roman Catholic} \\
(c^4\ast): \text{Almost certain: Petersen is not a Roman Catholic.}
\]

In the correct reading, however, ‘almost certainly’ does not modify the conclusions. Instead, it modifies the connection between premises and conclusion. In this reading \((T^3)\) and \((T^4)\) become \((T^3\ast\ast)\) and \((T^4\ast\ast)\):

\[
(T^3\ast\ast)
\]

\[
(M^3): \text{More than 98\% of the pilgrims to Lourdes are Roman Catholics} \\
(m^3): \text{Petersen made a pilgrimage to Lourdes} \\
(c^3\ast\ast): \text{Petersen is a Roman Catholic} \\
\]

\[
(T^4\ast\ast)
\]

\[
(M^4): \text{More than 98\% of Swedes are not Roman Catholics} \\
(m^4): \text{Petersen is a Swede} \\
(c^4\ast\ast): \text{Petersen is not a Roman Catholic,}
\]
where (c^3) and (c^4) changed into (c^{3**}) and (c^{4**}) respectively. Clearly, (c^3)
and (c^4) seem contradictory only in the incorrect reading: (c^{3*}) and (c^{4*}) are
in epistemic contradiction (in the sense that no reasonable epistemic state
would contain both of them), but (c^{3**}) and (c^{4**}) are perfectly consistent.
For (c^{3**}) and (c^{4**}) cannot be detached from the premises, and hence
should actually be written as:

(c^{3 prob}): prob(Petersen is a Roman Catholic, (M^3)&(m^3))
(c^{4 prob}): prob(Petersen is not a Roman Catholic, (M^4)&(m^4)),

where prob is a qualitative, rather than a quantitative operator, meaning
‘makes it almost certain that’ or ‘makes it very probable that’. Under that
interpretation, the parallel of (c^{3 prob}) and (c^{4 prob}) with:

(c^{1 pf}): pf(not-d is better than d, (M^1)&(m^1))
(c^{2 pf}): pf(d is better than not-d, (M^2)&(m^2))

is evident. Thus the moral of Davidson’s story will be clear: practical
reasoning, governed by the operator pf, proceeds in much the same way as
I-S reasoning, governed by the operator prob. No more than I-S reasoning
does practical reasoning permit the detachment of conclusions from
premises.58

The ban on this detachment, in I-S reasoning as well as in practical
reasoning, springs from a common source. In both cases it ultimately stems
from the nature of the major-premises. Since the theoretical major (M^3) is
a statistical principle, its logical form is not a universally quantified sentence
of the form:

(M^{3*}): \forall x \{L(x) \rightarrow RC(x)\},

where ‘x’ ranges over persons, ‘L(x)’ means ‘x made a pilgrimage to

---

58 Of course, (c^{3 prob}) and (c^{4 prob}) are in fact rewritings of (T^{3*+}) and (T^{4*+}) rather
than of (c^{3**}) and (c^{4**}). The same goes, mutatis mutandis, for (c^{1 pf}) and (c^{2 pf}): they
actually represent entire syllogisms, not just conclusions. However, Davidson regards
them as rewritings for conclusions rather than for syllogisms, and I wish to stay close to
his text (cf. Davidson 1970a). Besides, the idea will be clear enough. It is that Modus
Ponens may not be applied in I-S reasoning or in practical reasoning.
Lourdes’, and ‘RC(x)’ means ‘x is a Roman Catholic’. Rather, the logical form of (M³) is (M³**):

(M³**): \text{prob}(RC(x), L(x)),

in words: ‘That x went to Lourdes makes it very probable that x is a Roman Catholic’. Similarly, the logical form of (M⁴) is (M⁴**):

(M⁴**): \text{prob}(\text{not-RC}(x), S(x)),

in words, ‘That x is a Swede makes it very probable that x is not a Roman Catholic’.

What holds for the majors in I-S arguments, also goes for the majors in practical syllogisms. No more than the former, should the latter be construed as universally quantified sentences. In contrast with Hare, see 2.4.1, Davidson argues that major-premises in practical syllogisms are essentially relative:

"... moral principles, or the judgements that correspond to desires, cannot be expressed by sentences like ‘It is wrong to lie’ or ‘It is good to give pleasure’. ... For one and the same act may be a lie and an act that gives pleasure, and so both be wrong and good. On many moral theories, this is a contradiction. ... The solution to this puzzle ... is to recognize that evaluative principles are not correctly stated in the form ‘It is wrong to lie’. For not all lies are wrong; there are cases where one ought to lie for the sake of some more important consideration.” (Davidson 1982, 296).

Hence the logical form of (M¹) is not (M¹*):

(M¹*): \forall x \ (F(x) \rightarrow \text{not-P}(x)),

that is, ‘All acts x that make you a fool (F), should not be performed (P)’. Its logical form is rather given in (M¹**):

(M¹**): pf(not-P(x), F(x)),

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meaning something like ‘To the extent that $x$ makes you a fool, $x$ should not be performed’. Analogously, the logical form of (M2) is (M2**):

$$(M2**) : pf(P(x), W(x)),$$

i.e. ‘To the extent that $x$ prevents a fool from considering himself wise ($W$), $x$ should be performed’. Clearly, the practical majors ($M1**$) and ($M2**$) are very similar to the theoretical majors ($M3**$) and ($M4**$).

The analogy between practical reasoning and probabilistic reasoning stretches even further. In probabilistic reasoning we are especially interested in the values of the following major-premises:

$$(M3te) : prob(RC(x), e)$$

and

$$(M4te) : prob(not-RC(x), e),$$

where $e$ is the total evidence (hence: $te$) available. As is well known, ($M3te$) and ($M4te$) cannot be derived from ($M3**$) and ($M4**$). This would be the case even if $L(x) \land S(x)$ were equal to $e$, and even if prob were a quantitative instead of a qualitative operator. Similarly, in practical reasoning we want to know the values of:

$$(M3tr) : pf(P(x), r)$$

and

$$(M4tr) : pf(not-P(x), r),$$

where $r$ is the totality of reasons (hence: $tr$) available. But ($M3tr$) and ($M4tr$) cannot be derived from ($M3**$) and ($M4**$), not even if $F(x) \land W(x)$ were equal to $r$, and if $pf$ were a numerical operator.

Given the similarities mentioned above, it should not surprise us that the definitive versions of our rivalling practical syllogisms are very much like the definitive versions of our rivalling probabilistic arguments. The final versions of the latter, ($T3$) and ($T4$), appear to be ($T3fin$) and ($T4fin$):
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\[(T^3_{\text{fin}})\]

\[(M^3_{\text{fin}}): \text{prob}(RC(x), L(x))\]
\[(m^3_{\text{fin}}): L(a)\]
\[\text{[almost certain]}\]
\[(c^3_{\text{fin}}): RC(a)\]

\[(T^4_{\text{fin}})\]

\[(M^4_{\text{fin}}): \text{prob}(not-RC(x), S(x))\]
\[(m^4_{\text{fin}}): S(a)\]
\[\text{[almost certain]}\]
\[(c^4_{\text{fin}}): not-RC(a)\]

where \(RC(x) = x\) is a Roman Catholic, \(L(x) = x\) makes a pilgrimage to Lourdes, \(S(x) = x\) is a Swede, \(a = Petersen\). The major-premises, \((M^3_{\text{fin}})\) and \((M^4_{\text{fin}})\), are the same as \((M^{3**})\) and \((M^{4**})\). The minors, \((m^3_{\text{fin}})\) and \((m^4_{\text{fin}})\), are predicate logical forms of \((m^3)\) and \((m^4)\). It is important to note that the conclusions, \((c^3_{\text{fin}})\) and \((c^4_{\text{fin}})\), are conditional judgements and should be read as

\[(c^3_{\text{fin}}): \text{prob}(RC(a),(M^3_{\text{fin}}) \& (m^3_{\text{fin}}))\]
\[(c^4_{\text{fin}}): \text{prob}(not-RC(a),(M^4_{\text{fin}}) \& (m^4_{\text{fin}})).\]

Similarly, the final versions of our rivalling Solomonic syllogisms, \((PS^1)\) and \((PS^2)\), appear to be \((PS^1_{\text{fin}})\) and \((PS^2_{\text{fin}})\):

\[(PS^1_{\text{fin}})\]

\[(M^1_{\text{fin}}): pf(not-P(x), F(x))\]
\[(m^1_{\text{fin}}): F(d)\]
\[\text{[prima facie]}\]
\[(c^1_{\text{fin}}): not-P(d)\]
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\[(\text{PS}_2^{\text{fin}})\]

\[(M_2^{\text{fin}}) : pf(P(x), W(x))\]
\[(m_2^{\text{fin}}) : W(d)\]
\[(c_2^{\text{fin}}) : P(d)\]  

where \(P(x) = \text{it is better to perform } x \text{ than } not-x\), \(F(x) = x \text{ makes you a fool}\), \(W(x) = x \text{ prevents a fool from considering himself wise}\). The major-premises, \((M_1^{\text{fin}})\) and \((M_2^{\text{fin}})\), are the same as \((M_1^{**})\) and \((M_2^{**})\). The minors, \((m_1^{\text{fin}})\) and \((m_2^{\text{fin}})\), are predicate logical forms of \((m_1)\) and \((m_2)\). Again, it is important to note that the conclusions, \((c_1^{\text{fin}})\) and \((c_2^{\text{fin}})\), are conditional judgements which should be read as

\[(c_1^{\text{fin}}) : pf(not-P(d), (M_1^{\text{fin}}) \&(m_1^{\text{fin}}))\]
\[(c_2^{\text{fin}}) : pf(P(d), (M_2^{\text{fin}}) \&(m_2^{\text{fin}}))\].

They are formulated in such a way that any conflict between \((\text{PS}_1^{\text{fin}})\) and \((\text{PS}_2^{\text{fin}})\) is removed: together, all the premises and the conclusions make up a consistent set.

Despite all this, we are far from where we wish to be. The conflict between the practical syllogisms is removed, it is true, but \((\text{PS}_1^{\text{fin}})\) and \((\text{PS}_2^{\text{fin}})\) do not suffice when we pass on to real acting. This will be explained in 2.4.5, where I shall argue that there still exists an important difference between practical reasoning and reasoning from probabilistic evidence. The difference breeds a problem for practical reasoning, which I term the transition problem. In Section 2.4.6 we will see how Davidson tries to solve it. In 2.4.7 it is explained how Davidson’s solution of the transition problem deepens our understanding of akrasia.

2.4.5 Practical reasoning and probabilistic reasoning: a difference

When Davidson wrote his ‘Actions, Reasons, Causes’ (1963), he endorsed a rather straightforward theory. He distinguished neither between conditional and unconditional judgements nor between constructing practical syllogisms and performing actions. According to Davidson in 1963, a theory of practical reasoning and a theory of action were practically the same. He thus takes
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what he believes is Aristotle’s view, namely that performing an action is drawing the conclusion of a practical syllogism. However, looking back on his 1963 paper, Davidson declares in 1985 in a reply to Michael Bratman:

"In ‘Actions, Reasons and Causes’ ... I accepted the view that the propositional contents of the explanatory want and belief should provide premisses from which the desirability of the action could be deduced. Not that I thought of the agent as first deducing the consequence and then acting. Instead, I embraced Aristotle’s idea that drawing the conclusion could be identified with the action. This had the advantage (I thought) of eliminating the need for an intermediary between reasons and action that might be called an act of the will, or an independent state to correspond to a phrase like ‘the intention of seeing what is on the next page’." (Davidson 1985c, 195).

In other words, the early Davidson acknowledges only reasons (i.e. belief/desire pairs) and actions (i.e. conclusions of practical syllogisms). He rejects the existence of something in between, notably of intentions. Expressions which refer to intentions, he argues, in fact refer to either reasons or actions: "The expression ‘the intention with which James went to church’ has the outward form of a description, but in fact is a syncategorematic and cannot be taken to refer to an entity, state, disposition, or event. Its function in context is to generate new descriptions of actions in terms of their reasons; thus ‘James went to church with the intention of pleasing his mother’ yields a new, and fuller, description of the action described in ‘James went to church’." (Davidson 1963, 8). From the

59 Davidson here conceives intentions as being reducible either to reasons or to actions. At the time he wrote the quoted lines, Davidson interpreted ‘having an intention’ as ‘acting with an intention’ (Davidson 1980, xiii). The expression ‘acting with an intention’, however, seems to allow two readings. On the one hand, it suggests that someone’s beliefs and desires (and hence his reasons) can only be known by observing his actions. On the other, it suggests that beliefs and desires finally take the form of, and hence become actions. In the first interpretation, intentions are reasons; in the second, they boil down to actions. In his later work, Davidson espouses also other interpretations of ‘intention’; I come back to those interpretations in Section 2.4.8.
preceding pages we know that serious shortcomings are attached to this early picture. It is only after a repeated reading of Anscombe 1957 that Davidson became aware of them. One of the failings he encountered is the following.

When I desire so-and-so, and believe that by doing such-and-such this desire is fulfilled, I will of course do such-and-such. We have already seen that such-and-such can be described in numerous ways (cf. DISTINCTION 1 in Chapter IV). However, one might in addition argue that it can also be performed in many ways: I can switch on the light with my right third finger or with my left fourth finger, while wearing a blue sarong or a green kilt, standing on tiptoe or standing on my head - there are countless ways in which I can perform what may be described as ‘switching on the light’. Each of those performances is desirable only in so far as it satisfies my desire, for actions are never wholly desirable or undesirable, but only partially so: "Every action we perform, or consider performing, has something to be said for it and something against" (Davidson 1982, 296). Yet, neither the multitude of possible performances nor their partial desirability can be represented in Davidson’s early picture, which is completely deductive and lacks the potentials of a relational approach.

Its deductive character saddles the early picture with still another shortcoming: it cannot represent the idea of a divided mind. Having a divided mind, see 2.3 and the beginning of 2.4, means that two or more syllogisms can be entertained at the same time. These syllogisms might oppose each other, and then we are faced with two conflicting conclusions: one encouraging us to perform an action that the other one advising us not to do so. However, if actions coincide with conclusions of practical syllogisms (as in the deductive picture they do), this would entail that we perform two mutually exclusive actions at the same time.

Because of these difficulties, Davidson gave up the deductive picture of 1963. In ‘How is Weakness of the Will Possible?’ (1970) he denies that performing an action is the same as drawing the conclusion of a practical syllogism. The conclusion of a practical syllogism, Davidson now argues, is a conditional statement saying that an action is desirable in so far as it fulfils the desire expressed by the major-premise. Since the acceptance of such a conditional statement is "compatible with the agent knowing that the action (because of other characteristics) is highly undesirable" (Davidson 1985c, 196), it cannot coincide with a real action. Real acting, Davidson argues in 1970, requires that we do detach the conclusion from the premises. When we wish to know what to do, do or not-d, we must leave considerations
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for and against $d$ and not-$d$ behind. We must go beyond conditional judgements like $(c_{1\text{fin}})$ and $(c_{2\text{fin}})$ for:

"Reasoning that stops at conditional judgements is practical only in its subject, not in its issue." (Davidson 1970a, 39).

According to Davidson in 1970, a real action coincides with an unconditional statement, which says that the action is desirable tout court. Whenever we act we commit ourselves to a judgement saying that what we do is unconditionally desirable, and not only desirable to this or that extent. Actual acting, as Davidson expresses it, "is geared to unconditional judgements" (Davidson 1985c, 201). What we need, then, when we pass on to the actual deed, is an unconditional judgement that tells us which action to take. We need an all-out statement of the form that we encountered in 2.4.3:

$$(c_{1*}): \text{not-}d \text{ is better than } d$$

or

$$(c_{2*}): d \text{ is better than not-}d.$$  

However, this outlook generates a problem. For the statements that we need, $(c_{1*})$ or $(c_{2*})$, cannot be inferred from the statements that we have, $(c_{1\text{fin}})$ and $(c_{2\text{fin}})$. One cannot derive what is best sans phrase from what is conditionally best: "[unconditional judgements] do not follow by ordinary logic from the premisses provided by our desires and beliefs" (Davidson 1985c, 196).

So in 1970 Davidson is confronted by a problem that did not trouble him in 1963. This problem might be called the transition problem. It is the question of how to proceed from conditional judgements to unconditional ones. By definition, the transition problem cannot be solved

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60 Job van Eck discusses a similar problem and calls it "the dilemma of commitment and detachment" (Van Eck 1981, 23). The subject of Van Eck's study has much in common with mine. Both are about conflicts, be it that Van Eck focuses on conflicts between duties (and thus between things that people ought to do), and I discuss conflicts between reasons (and thus between things that people want or intend to do). Another difference is that Van Eck works within the framework of deontic logic, whereas I am interested in the explanation of actions by means of dispositions couched in reduction
through a process of practical reasoning, since such a process yields only conditional judgements.

The transition problem does not affect probabilistic arguments. Probabilistic arguments are theoretical arguments and for that reason are essentially conditional. When we reason theoretically, our aim is neither to arrive at indisputable statements nor to detach conclusions from premises. Instead, we endeavour to spell out the premises that make the conclusion true, or make it probable to a certain (quantitative or qualitative) degree. What is distinctive of theoretical reasoning is the logical relation between statements, not the achievement of unconditional or all-out judgements. I think that the point is scarcely ever acknowledged, but I nonetheless refrain from going further into the matter here (I mentioned the subject briefly in Peijnenburg 1995). I shall confine myself to practical reasoning, where the transition problem does pose itself.

Although the transition problem does not afflict theoretical arguments, an examination of the principles that guide probabilistic reasoning may help us to solve it. Such an examination is undertaken in the next section. In Section 2.4.7 I show how the solution of the transition problem contributes to an understanding of *akrasia*.61

2.4.6 The principle of continence

Imagine that some probabilistic reasoning has provided us with the following three conclusions, all of which are conditional statements:

61 Davidson, in Davidson 1970a, weakly indicates that intentions have an existence of their own. For it is vaguely suggested that intentions are conditional statements, i.e. the conclusions of practical syllogisms. Hence they are neither reasons nor actions. Davidson thus seems to distance himself even further from the view that he embraced in 1963. However, the Davidson of 1970 also demurs at the prospect of breaking too drastically with his early ideas. We shall see that the Davidson of 1978 no longer harbours these scruples: he fully acknowledges that intentions exist autonomously. As will be explained in Section 2.4.8, the Davidson of 1978 differs in three respects from the Davidson of 1970. First, he fully grants the autonomous existence of intentions. Second, he identifies intentions with *un*conditional statements. Third, he breaks the bond between actions and unconditional statements.
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(c\text{3 fin}): \text{prob}(RC(a), (M_{3 fin})&(m_{3 fin}))
(c\text{4 fin}): \text{prob}(notRC(a), (M_{4 fin})&(m_{4 fin}))
(c\text{3 te}): \text{prob}(RC(a), e),

where \(e\) is the set of all the evidence available. We assume that this set is:

\{(M_{3 fin}), (m_{3 fin}), (M_{4 fin}), (m_{4 fin})\}.

Since it contains the evidence of both the other conclusions, (c\text{3 te}) might be considered as the conclusion of a higher-order argument. (c\text{3 te}) cannot be logically inferred from the other two statements, but here we assume that we derived it in some other way. Confronted with the three probability statements above, what should we do? Carnap has recommended us to base further reasoning especially on the latter statement, (c\text{3 te}), since that involves the largest amount of evidence. This recommendation is Carnap’s principle of total evidence (Carnap 1950b). It is, as Carnap has frequently stressed, not a rule of formal logic, but merely a methodological advice. In order to solve the transition problem, Davidson uses Carnap’s principle in the following way.

Now imagine that some practical reasoning provided us with three conclusions, each of which is a conditional judgment:

(c\text{1 fin}): pf(not-d is better than d, (M_{1 fin})&(m_{1 fin}))
(c\text{2 fin}): pf(d is better than not-d, (M_{2 fin})&(m_{2 fin}))
(c\text{1 tr}): pf(not-d is better than d, r),

where \(r\) is the total set of reasons available. We assume that \(r\) consists of:

\{(M_{1 fin}), (m_{1 fin}), (M_{2 fin}), (m_{2 fin})\}.

In perfect analogy to the previous case, (c\text{1 tr}) might be considered to be the conclusion of a higher-order practical syllogism, because it contains the reasons of both the other conclusions. And as in the previous case, (c\text{1 tr}) cannot be logically inferred from the other two statements, but we assume that we derived it in some other way.

Confronted with the three prima facie statements above, which action should we perform? Inspired by Carnap, Davidson recommends us to base our action on the conditional statement with the largest set of reasons.
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In other words, we should tailor our actions not to \((c_1 \text{fin})\) or to \((c_2 \text{fin})\), but to \((c_1 \text{tr})\), since that is our "all things considered judgement". Consequently, we should abstain from doing \(d\), which amounts to saying that we should accept the all-out statement that not-\(d\) is better than \(d\). Davidson terms his advice the principle of continence. Like Carnap’s principle of total evidence, it is not a formal rule but only an advice. If one follows the advice, one acts in accordance with one’s all-things-considered judgement; the result then is a rational action. If one disregards it, one goes against one’s own best judgement; here, one acts incontinently and hence behaves as an akratès.

2.4.7 The logical possibility of akraia

We are finally prepared to answer three important questions:

(1) In what do akratic actions consist precisely?
(2) How are they logically possible?
(3) Why do people think that they are logically impossible?

ad (1) - The preceding section indicated that akratic actions occur whenever two steps are taken. The first step consists in setting up several practical syllogisms and in drawing the corresponding conclusions. These conclusions have three properties:

(i) they are all conditional or \( \text{prima facie} \) judgements;
(ii) some of them are also higher-order conclusions, in the sense that the set of premises from which they follow contains the premises of other practical syllogisms as subsets;
(iii) the conclusion that follows from the largest set of premises is the all-things-considered judgement.

When we apply these properties to our example, we get:

(i) \((c_1 \text{fin})\) and \((c_2 \text{fin})\) and \((c_1 \text{tr})\) all are conditional statements;
(ii) \((c_1 \text{tr})\) is a higher-order conclusion since its premises contain the premises of the syllogisms corresponding to \((c_1 \text{fin})\) and \((c_2 \text{fin})\);
(iii) \((c_1 \text{tr})\) is the all-things-considered judgement, since there is no
conclusion that follows from a larger set of premises.\textsuperscript{62}

As a second step, the *akratès* opts for an unconditional or all-out judgement that is not tailored to his all-things-considered judgement. As a result, he acts counter to his best judgement. Applied to our example: the *akratès* answers a fool according to his folly instead of being wiser in avoiding such a riposte.

ad (2) - At this juncture, the logical possibility of akratic actions discloses itself. An akratic action is logically possible because a conditional judgement cannot logically contradict an unconditional one. In our example: the statement that, all things considered, it is best *not* to answer a fool according to his folly, can never contradict the judgement that, apart from any consideration, it *is*. In Davidson’s words: "there is no (logical) difficulty in the fact of incontinence, for the *akratès* is characterized as holding that, all things considered, it would be better to do *b* than to do *a*, even though he does *a* rather than *b* and with a reason. The logical difficulty has vanished because a judgement that *a* is better than *b*, all things considered, is a relational, or *pf*, judgement, and so cannot conflict logically with any unconditional judgement." (Davidson 1970a, 39). Thus the logical possibility of akratic actions hinges on the distinction between conditional and unconditional statements: since it is logically possible to judge (conditionally) that not-*d* is better than *d*, and to judge (unconditionally) that *d* is better than not-*d*, one can perform *d* although one knows that not-*d* is better.

ad (3) - The above indicates that there are three ways in which we might start to believe that akratic actions are logically impossible. First, we might leave the idea of a divided mind completely out of account. We wrongly assume that practical reasoning consists in the production of one single syllogism, instead of two or more. Second, we might ignore that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is a *prima facie* statement, thus

\textsuperscript{62} It is important to note that for Davidson (c\textsuperscript{1}u) is a conditional statement. For it is exactly this conditionality which constitutes the difference between Davidson and the supporters of solution (2), such as Hare. As we have seen in 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, Davidson and Hare both use a higher-order syllogism as a means to solve the problem of conflicting syllogisms. However, Davidson believes that the conclusion of a higher-order syllogism is a *conditional* statement, whereas Hare seems to regard it as an *unconditional* statement.
overlooking its intimate contact with the premises. Third, we might not distinguish actions from conclusions of practical syllogisms. Like Aristotle (at least according to some of his interpreters), we wrongly believe that the one is identical to the other, whereby we do not appreciate that, whereas the former is a conditional statement, the latter amounts to the acceptance of an unconditional one.

However, one can still be puzzled as to how akratic actions can in fact occur. It may be logically possible to deviate from your best judgement, but is it also a real possibility? Davidson appears to be well aware of this problem:

"... how is it possible for a man to judge that \( a \) is better than \( b \), on the grounds that \( r \), and yet not judge that \( a \) is better than \( b \), when \( r \) is the sum of all that seems relevant to him? When we say that \( r \) contains all that seems relevant to the agent, don't we just mean that nothing has been omitted that influences his judgement that \( a \) is better than \( b \)?" (Davidson 1970a, 40).

In Davidson’s later work this problem occurs for a second time. It then takes a different shape, since after the revision of 1970 Davidson modified his theory again in 1978. This modification, together with its effects on the question just raised, will be described in 2.4.8. In 2.5 I shall explain how Davidson answers the question by using the third Freudian thesis.

**2.4.8 The second revision**

We saw that the Davidson of ‘How is Weakness of the Will Possible?’ (1970) differs in important respects from the Davidson of ‘Actions, Reasons, Causes’ (1963). In the latter essay Davidson embraces the deductive view on practical reasoning. He distinguishes neither between actions and conclusions of practical syllogisms, nor between conditional and unconditional judgements. He acknowledges only reasons and actions; intentions as such made no appearance. In 1970 Davidson abandons the deductive picture. He now distinguishes conditional from unconditional statements; conclusions of syllogisms belong to the former, actions belong
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to the latter category. Moreover, there are vague indications that Davidson now grants the autonomous existence of intentions, identifying them with conditional statements.

However, in 1978 Davidson changes his view on practical reasoning once more. Like the first change, the second one too was brought about by a repeated reading of Anscombe 1957. As is well known, Anscombe distinguishes three major uses of the concept ‘intention’ (Anscombe 1957, 1, 24-25):

(a) - expressions of intentions for the future, as in ‘I intend to go to France tomorrow’;
(b) - intentional actions;
(c) - intentions in actions.

The intentions mentioned in (a) are pure intendings, i.e. intentions which are not necessarily followed by actions; pure intendings presumably are what Bratman, in several publications, called "future intentions" or "future-directed intentions" (Bratman 1985; Bratman 1987). The intentions in (b) and (c) are somehow derivable from (a). (b) refers to intentions behind (or perhaps one might say prior to) the actions. Anscombe describes intentional actions as 'actions to which a certain sense of the question ‘Why' is given application" (Anscombe 1957, 24). Thus the intentions denoted in (b) are the reasons for an action (cf. Chapter III, Section 1). On the other hand, (c) denotes intentions which are present in the action, i.e. the intentions with which the action is performed. Hence (c) refers to descriptions of actions, and in that sense to actions themselves (cf. Chapter IV, Section 3.2.1, where it is said that an action is an entity plus a description). 63

Davidson’s second revision touches the pure intentions mentioned in (a). In 1963 Davidson does not want to have anything to do with pure intentions. Seven years later he seems to be somewhat more tolerant, but it is not until 1978 that Davidson, impressed by Anscombe and perhaps also challenged by Bratman-like philosophers, takes the existence of pure

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63 The difference between (b) and (c) resembles a distinction made by Theo A.F. Kuipers, according to whom actions have external and internal goals. The external goal is the desire which, together with a belief, constitutes the reason for the action in question. The internal goal refers to the way the action is described, namely as a deliberate event. Kuipers’ distinction is, albeit only implicitly, present in Kuipers 1985.
Freudian thoughts

intentions seriously. He now realises that many phenomena cannot be understood without assuming that intentions somehow exist autonomously. For example, any action that takes some time, such as the trapping of a tiger, requires the existence of a pure intending, such as the intention of trapping a tiger. This intention must be something, be it an entity or a state: "... it is not likely that if a man has the intention of trapping a tiger, his intention is not a state, disposition or attitude of some sort." (Davidson 1978, 88). In what does this entity, state, disposition or attitude consist exactly? It cannot be an action or a reason, since that would reduce the intention to (b) or (c). Nor can it be a conditional judgement like the conclusion of a practical syllogism, for a conditional judgement is noncommittal: no strings are attached to it. Within Davidson’s theory only one possibility remains, namely that a pure intention equals an unconditional or all-out judgement. Precisely that is Davidson’s new claim:

"... intentions are distinguished by their all-out or unconditional form" (Davidson 1978, 102);

"... intentions are ‘all-out’ positive evaluations of a way of acting " (Davidson 1985c, 214);

"An all-out judgement that some action is more desirable than any available alternative, is not distinct from the intention: it is identical with it." (Davidson 1985c, 197).

However, if all-out judgements are actions, as Davidson had been arguing in 1970, his new claim would reduce intentions to ordinary actions. Thus the Davidson of 1978 decides to break the tie between actions and all-out judgements. From now on, an agent can act either in conformity with his all-out judgement or against it. In the first case, we may conveniently forget about the difference between action and judgement. In the second, action and judgement should be sharply separated; here the judgement constitutes a pure intending.64

64 Bratman, however, is far from satisfied with Davidson’s account of pure intendings or future-directed intentions. It is a favourite theme of Bratman’s that "our commonsense conception of intention is inextricably tied to the phenomena of plans and planning", and thus that the notion of future-directed intention is central for any adequate
What I have been saying about the Davidsonian revisions can be summarised as follows. In 1963 Davidson distinguishes neither between conditional and unconditional judgements nor between actions and conclusions of practical syllogisms. Next, in 1970, he makes both distinctions: actions are unconditional judgements whereas conclusions are conditional judgements. Finally, in 1978, he rejects the simple equivalence of actions and unconditional judgements. He now distinguishes between all-out judgements followed by the proper actions and all-out judgements which remain pure intentions. When we read 'x' for the conclusion of a practical syllogism, 'y' for an action, and 'z' for an unconditional judgement, the three Davidsons can be represented as follows:

theory of intention (Bratman 1987, 3-5). Bratman chided many contemporary philosophers (Robert Audi, Monroe Beardsley, Paul Churchland, Wayne Davis, and last but not least the young Davidson) for reducing future-directed intentions to belief/desire pairs (Bratman 1987, 7). The elder Davidson is reprimanded by Bratman for cherishing a theory which is "constrained by an overly weak conception of the role of future intentions in further practical thinking" (Bratman 1985, 24). According to Bratman this weak conception has some "unwelcome results", which he described and explained in Bratman 1985. Davidson, for his part, agreed that the results mentioned were "unwelcome", but denied that they follow from his theory (Davidson 1985c, 198-200). Bratman, in an appendix to the reprint of Bratman 1985 (see the bibliography), argued once more that they do so follow.

This part of the discussion between Davidson and Bratman concentrates on what the latter calls the Buridan-cases, i.e. situations where a decision has to be made in the absence of a decisive reason. Davidson comments: "if there is reason to reach some decision, and there are no obvious or intrinsic grounds for decision, we find extrinsic grounds. Perhaps I flip a coin to decide" (Davidson 1985c, 200). Bratman replies: "Why does heads 'indicate' Kepler’s rather than Printer’s Inc.? Presumably because I have made this arbitrary assignment .... Must I judge all-out that this assignment is strictly better than its alternative? The problem seems only to have been pushed back" (Bratman 1985, appendix, 28).

I must confess that I find Bratman’s riposte somewhat confusing. Since the assignment is indeed arbitrary, it is by definition not strictly better that its (equally arbitrary) alternative. Also, it is not the case that heads does indicate Kepler’s; heads indicates for instance Kepler’s.
Davidson’s outlook in 1978 affects his analysis of akrasia, a fact that, as far as I know, Davidson does not mention anywhere. As we have seen, Davidson characterises an akratic action as an unconditional judgement going against an all-things-considered conditional judgement; thus it is the very distinction between conditional and unconditional judgements that makes akratic actions logically possible. Davidson’s view of 1978, however, suggests that an action is akratic if it goes against an unconditional judgement; it thus situates the logical possibility of akrasia in the distinction between actions and all-out judgements.

Hence the problem with which I finished 2.4.7 recurs in a different dress. Instead of asking ‘It may be logically possible to deviate from your best conditional judgement, but is it also a real possibility?’ we can now ask ‘It may be logically possible to deviate from your best unconditional judgement, but is it also a real possibility?’ To be sure, its new dress renders the puzzle even more pressing. However, Davidson notices the question only in its old clothes. His answer to it is described in 2.5.

2.5 The factual possibility of akrasia and the existence of causal relations between mental parts

Until now I have paid little notice to the causal aspect of Davidson’s theory. I mainly focussed on THESIS 1 and THESIS 2, which introduced the ideas of mental parts, of structures within the parts, and of conflicts between the parts, but in which the causal force of reasons is not mentioned at all. However, if we wish to understand how akratic actions are really instead of merely logically possible, then we need to concentrate on the existence of causal relations between the parts, and thus on the function of THESIS 3. Consider the following incident:

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\[ \begin{array}{ccc}
1963 & 1970 & 1978 \\
\text{\(x = y\)} & \text{\(x \neq y\)} & \text{\(x \neq y\)} \\
\text{\(x = z\)} & \text{\(x \neq z\)} & \text{\(x \neq z\)} \\
\text{\(y = z\)} & \text{\(y = z\)} & \text{\(y \neq z\)} \\
\end{array} \]

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\[65\] But see Grice and Baker 1985, and Davidson’s reply in Davidson 1985c.
"A man walking in a park stumbles on a branch in the path. Thinking the branch may endanger others, he picks it up and throws it in a hedge beside the path. On his way home it occurs to him that the branch may be projecting from the hedge and so can still be a threat to unwary walkers. He gets off the tram he is on, returns to the park, and restores the branch to its original position." (Davidson 1982, 292).

The story is told by Freud in a footnote of a study on obsessional neurosis, and Freudians refer to it as the tale of the Rat Man (Freud 1909). Davidson uses it to describe a typical case of *akrasia*. The agent in the story does two things: he removes the stick from the path and he returns to the park (of course he also stumbles upon the branch but that is not an action). Since both the removing and the returning are actions, they are done for a reason. As it should be in Davidson's philosophy, those reasons not only *cause* the corresponding actions but also make them *reasonable*:

"Given that the man believed the stick was a danger if left on the path, and a desire to eliminate the danger, it was reasonable to remove the stick. Given that, on second thought, he believed the stick was a danger in the hedge, it was reasonable to dismount from the tram and return to the park." (Davidson 1982, 292).

Let us call the reason for returning *R-1*. Now imagine that the man also has a reason, *R-2*, for *not* returning to the park (*R-2* might be based on his initial reasons for removing the stick, or on the time and the trouble it costs to return, or on both). Imagine further that, in the man’s own judgement, *R-2* outweighs *R-1*. Then in going back to the park he acts against his best judgement and hence performs a pure-blooded irrational action. We have already seen how this is *logically* possible: the man’s conditional judgement that it is best not to return is logically compatible with his unconditional judgement that it is best to return. In order to explain how this is *in fact* possible we have to realise that *R-1* plays a double rôle. *R-1*, to use Davidson’s words, enters the decision process *twice over*:
"First it was a consideration in favour of replacing the branch, a consideration that, in the agent’s opinion, was less important than the reasons against returning to the park. The agent then held that everything considered he ought not to return to the park. Given his principle that one ought to act on such a conclusion, the rational thing for him to do was, of course, not to return to the park. Irrationality entered when his desire to return made him ignore or override his principle." (Davidson 1982, 297).

At first, $R-1$ constitutes the reason in a practical syllogism, PS-1, pleading for returning and replacing the stick on the path. As such, $R-1$ is overruled by $R-2$, featuring in a rivalling practical syllogism, PS-2, that pleads for resting comfortably in the tram and leaving the stick poking out of the hedge. After it has tasted defeat, $R-1$ appears anew. It now overrules the principle of continence, which recommends the man to do what he thinks is best all things considered, that is, to stay in the tram. It is the ignoring of the principle of continence that constitutes the irrationality:

"For though [$R-1$] was a reason for ignoring the principle, it was not a reason against the principle itself, and so when it entered in this second way, it was irrelevant as a reason, to the principle and to the action. The irrationality depends on the distinction between a reason for having, or acting on, a principle, and a reason for the principle." (Davidson 1982, 297; my emphasis).

This analysis of how akratic actions can really occur also applies to some irrationalities other than akrasia. Wishful thinking is a case in point (cf. 2.2). If Douglas believes proposition $p$ solely because he wishes $p$ to be true, his wish is (part of) a reason for believing $p$. However, it is not a reason for $p$ itself. In Davidson’s words: "the wish to have a belief is not evidence for the truth of the belief, nor does it give it rational support in any other way.

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$66$ Here one of the members of my Reading Committee commented in the margin: "Rather than throwing it behind the hedge? If I were to return it would certainly not be to put the [expletive - JP] stick back in its original position!"
VI: The Davidsonian Division

What [Douglas’] wish to have this belief makes rational is that this proposition should be true: He believes that \( p \). This does not rationalize his believing: \( p \)." (Davidson 1982, 298). Similarly, the agent in our Rat Man story has a reason for ignoring the principle of continence, but he lacks a reason against the principle itself. This can also be stated by saying that there is a causal, but not a logical relation between \( R-1 \) and ignoring the principle. As a result, \( R-1 \) causes the action of returning to the park, but fails to make it reasonable. Thus \( R-1 \) is a mental event that does not justify what it causes:

"In the cases of irrationality, the causal relation remains while the logical relation is missing or distorted. In the cases of irrationality that we have been discussing, there is a mental cause that is not a reason for what it causes." (Davidson 1982, 298).

So this is how akratic actions can in fact occur: akratic actions result from a mental cause that is not a reason for what it causes. The cause is mental in the sense which I have described in Chapter IV: it is an event described in mental terms. It is the very mental description which gives rise to the rationality question; without the mental description of the cause, the effect is neither rational nor irrational, but rather non- or arational:

"If a bird flying by causes a belief that a bird is flying by (or that an airplane is flying by) the issue of rationality does not arise; these are causes that are not reasons for what they cause, but the cause has no logical properties, and so cannot of itself explain or engender irrationality ..." (Davidson 1982, 298).

The existence of a mental cause that is not a reason - an MCNR, as Mele calls it (Mele 1987, 76) - presupposes the existence of a reason that does not cause what it renders reasonable: an RNC, as we might call it. Indeed, an MCNR and an RNC seem to be two sides of the same akratic coin. If an irrational action has been succesfully produced by an MCNR, then there must be an RNC that failed to produce a rational action. Conversely, an RNC presupposes an MCNR. For if an RNC has failed to produce the action for which it is a reason, then clearly another action is performed. Since the
latter is an action, it was caused by a reason. But since it is an irrational action, it was caused by an MCNR which thus successfully produces an action for which it is not a reason. Davidson appears to have both sides in mind when he talks about irrationality, for in one and the same breath he characterises *akrasia* by means of MCNR and by means of RNC:

"... irrationality may be characterized by the fact that there is a mental cause that is not a reason [an MCNR - JP] ... a person is irrational if he ... has a reason which does not cause what it is a sufficient reason for [an RNC - JP]"

(Davidson 1982, 298-299).

All in all, Davidson’s ideas on the factual possibility of irrational actions can be represented in the following variant of a truth-table:

### Mental Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>rational action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>irrational (RNC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>irrational (MCNR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>idle (inconsequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>considerations, dreams, et cetera)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This picture is of course confined to events under a mental description, since in the realm of physical events the question of rationality does not arise. It is shown that mental events can be causes, or reasons, or both (they can also be neither the one nor the other, as is illustrated by the fourth row, but then our tale signifies only a barren idea). If the mental event causes that for which it is a reason, then the result is a wholesome rational action: see the first row. But if the mental event is an MCNR, as is pictured by the third row, then an irrational action occurs; in this case the cause of the action is not a reason for what it causes. The situation expressed in the third row presupposes what is represented by the second row. For the existence of an MCNR requires that there exists another mental event, to wit an RNC, which by definition fails to cause what it makes reasonable.
I trust that by now the rôle of THESIS 3 is clear. THESIS 3 introduces the idea of causal relations between mental parts. It states that the mental attribute by which one of the parts is characterised might causally affect the mental attribute that identifies another part. It thus can clarify, albeit somewhat metaphorically, what happens in the Rat Man parable according to Davidson. As a mental attribute that characterises the mental part which is represented by PS-1, \( R-1 \) causally effects the mental part which is represented by a higher-order syllogism that weighs up PS-1 and PS-2. The conclusion of the latter higher-order syllogism is the \textit{prima facie} judgement that, all things considered, the agent should stay in the tram. \( R-1 \) overrides this judgement. It thus also overrides the principle of continence which recommends us to tailor our all-out judgement to our best conditional judgement.

From this the Davidson of 1970, see 2.4.8, probably would conclude that the all-out judgement ‘It is best to stay in the tram’ was never conceived. For had it been conceived, the agent would have remained in the tram; such follows from the identity of actions and all-out judgements that Davidson espoused at that time. The Davidson of 1978, however, does not advocate that identity any more. He thus can maintain that the all-out judgement was in fact created, despite the fact that the corresponding action never took place. In this case, we are confronted by a pure intention, not followed by the expected action.

3. Evaluation and conclusion

Davidson’s solution of the \textit{akrasia} problem makes use of three concepts: the concept of mental partitioning, that of mental conflict, and that of mental causality. These concepts he finds embodied in three theses of Freud, whose work he deems indispensable for the study of \textit{akrasia}.

The concept of mental partitioning is specified by the idea that a person can entertain several practical syllogisms at the same time (THEESIS 1). The notion of a mental conflict is developed by imagining that the syllogisms oppose each other (THEESIS 2). The idea of conflicting syllogisms is problematic, and Davidson tries to handle it by employing a two-fold tactic. First, he uses the idea of higher-order syllogisms, and second, he distinguishes \textit{prima facie} judgements from judgements \textit{sans phrase}. This compound manoeuvre enables him to show how akratic actions are possible
Evaluation and conclusion

from a logical point of view. The notion of mental causality (THESIS 3) comes in when Davidson tries to demonstrate that akrasia is also a real, and not only a logical, possibility. Davidson’s final solution of the akrasia problem relies on mental causes that do not justify what they cause (the MCNR’s), and on reasons that do not cause what they make reasonable (the RNC’s).

However, MCNR’s and RNC’s can only exist if reasons and actions are related in two ways: logically and causally. It thus appears that Davidson makes a virtue of need. Initially, his intermediate position brought him into an awkward predicament: by drawing lessons both from classical causalists and from LCA champions, Davidson made his action theory doubly vulnerable to the problem of akrasia. In the end, however, it is the middle position that shows him the way out. By claiming that reasons and actions are not only logically, but also causally related, Davidson can account for the existence of MCNR’s and RNC’s. Hence he can argue for the logical and the real possibility of akratic actions.

I hope that my lengthy paraphrase of Davidson’s thoughts on akratic actions has made clear how ingenious his approach is. However, I also hope that it did not smooth over the snags and irregularities. Some of them I listed in Chapter IV, Section 4.1. Here I wish to mention once more the vexed issue of mental causation, which Davidson tries to make less troublesome by introducing two other ideas: the idea that mental events differ from physical events, and the idea that causal laws differ from singular causal statements (DISTINCTION 2 and DISTINCTION 3 respectively in Chapter IV). In the ensuing chapters I shall develop a purely extensional approach from which the idea of mental causation has been banished altogether. Accordingly, I need neither the distinction between mental and physical events nor that between causal laws and causal statements. Since my approach makes use of ideas developed by Hempel and Reichenbach, I begin with explaining their ideas in the next two chapters.