

Agency, Control and Knowledge

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Structure of the talk

The Causal Theory of Action (CTA)

A Problem for the CTA

Practical Knowledge as an Alternative to the CTA

1. The Causal Theory of Action (CTA)

- 1.1 Control: the kind of control that is, at least, necessary for free will consists in the performance of an intentional action. Thus, if the CTA is the right account of intentional action, then it is the right account of the relevant kind of control.
- 1.2 Davidson's insight ("reasons are causes"): an intentional action constitutes a certain kind of unity of thought and movement, one in which the agent's thought is the cause of the movement it represents.
- 1.3 The CTA: a subject's thought and her movement constitute an intentional action iff (1) the thought is a *representation* of the movement and (2) the thought is the *cause* of the movement.
- 1.4 The CTA is a reductive analysis, which implies that conditions (1) and (2) – the representational and the causal condition – are *independent* of one another.
- 1.5 Assumption of the CTA: the relevant agent's practical thought is composed of two *independent* elements: a content and a causal force. Underlying this conception of practical thought is a *uniform* understanding of content and causality:
 - Uniform content: it is possible to understand what it is for the agent's practical thought to be a *representation* of her movement without thereby implying an understanding of the thought as being the cause of her movement.
 - Uniform causality: it is possible to understand what it is for the agent's thought to be the *cause* of her movement without thereby implying an understanding of the thought as being a representation of the movement.
- 1.6 Distinction between Davidson's insight and CTA: the CTA is neither identical with nor entailed by Davidson's insight. We get from Davidson's insight to the CTA by adding a uniform understanding of content and causality.

2. A Problem for the CTA

- 2.1 Accidentality-Problem: given the CTA's uniform understanding of content and causality, a practical thought's causal efficacy and its representational content must be independent of one another. But if this is so, how can we exclude the possibility that the practical thought causes what it represents by mere *accident*? However, given Davidson's insight, this sort of accident has to be excluded by an adequate account of intentional action. (Problem is illustrated by examples of deviant causation.)
- 2.2 Lesson from the problem: in order to account for Davidson's insight (and, thus, for intentional action), we have to understand the essential unity of the representational and the causal condition, i.e. the causality of a practical thought must be constituted by its being a representation of its effect.
- 2.3 Objection: we can save the CTA by supplementing it with an additional condition, one that secures a reliable connection between what the thought causes and what it represents. This is the aim of the sensitivity condition:
- Sensitivity condition: the agent's behavior is responsive (sensitive) to the content of her intention in that, if the content had been different, the resulting behavior would have differed accordingly.
- 2.4 Reply: either the truth of counterfactual does not show that the agent is acting intentionally or, if it does, this is so because it is a mere reflection of the agent's responsiveness to the content of her intention, wherefore it is not itself the ground of such responsiveness.

3. An Alternative to the CTA: Practical Knowledge

- 3.1 My claim: understanding the essential unity of the representational and the causal condition is tantamount to understanding the idea of practical knowledge.
- 3.2 Practical Knowledge: for a thought to be practical knowledge it must be knowledge of what it causes and knowledge on account of being a cause. (Thus, for an intention to be practical knowledge its causality must be such as to provide knowledge of its effect.)
- 3.3 Connection with lesson from Accidentality-Problem: according to this lesson, the causality of a practical thought must be constituted by its being a representation of its effect. If this is so, then it is constitutive of this thought's causality that the thought is a true representation of its effect and, thus, amounts to knowledge of its effect.
- 3.4 Objection: an intention, even though it is causally efficacious, may fail to be productive of its object and, thus, may fail to be knowledge of its effect. Therefore, an intention is a thought that causes whatever it causes, which may or may not realize its content, and which is productive of its object and, possibly, knowledge if it satisfies certain *additional* conditions.
- 3.5 Reply: from the fact that an intention might fail to be productive of its object it does not follow that an intention that is productive of its object is *more* than just a causally efficacious thought. Instead, an intention that fails to be productive of its object may be, for that very reason, *less* than an intention proper (i.e. a *defective* instance of an intention).