Timothy O'Connor and **Constantine Sandis**, eds.
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In one of his final published papers, Donald Davidson remarks: 'Since it is clear that the concept of action is central to many of the perennial concerns of philosophy, what is surprising is not Aristotle's interest, or ours, but rather the relative neglect of the subject during the intervening millennia… But whatever the reason, the consequence is that the subject has progressed, or changed, relatively little since Aristotle… Our topic has flourished, then, mainly in two periods: Aristotle's and our own' ("Aristotle's Action," *Truth, Language and History* [Clarendon Press, 2005], 277–8). The first three parts of *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*—Part I, "Acts and Actions"; Part II, "Agency and Causation," and Part III, "Action in Special Contexts"—testify to the efflorescence of work in the philosophy of action since the second half of the twentieth century. Part IV, "Prominent Figures," which, apart from an opening chapter on classical Indian philosophy, focuses on Western philosophers from Plato to Paul Ricœur (no living philosophers are treated), might seem to challenge Davidson's historical claim. After limning the main topics treated in the first three parts of the volume, I treat Part IV, which constitutes nearly a third of the volume, at greatest length, and assess whether the historical chapters included there challenge Davidson's claim about the history of the philosophy of action.

Part I focuses on the nature of actions. This Part begins from the standard assumption that the philosophy of action is concerned with bodily action caused by individual agents: successive chapters put pressure on this assumption. One encounters types of action that are not bodily (negative actions, such as refraining, and speech acts), not undertaken by individuals (collective actions, undertaken by more than one person, and habitual actions, not explicitly undertaken by individuals), questions are raised about the causation of actions (including questions about the nature of agents themselves), and, in the final chapter, a doubt is even raised as to whether there is a unitary conception of action.

One of the central and most hotly contested questions in the philosophy of action concerns the explanation of action: this topic is the focus of Part II. This Part includes discussions of the causal antecedents of action—volition, desire, emotion, consciousness—the nature of mental causation, motivation, and 'breakdowns' of agency, such as addiction, compulsion, and *akrasia*. The heart of this Part consists of essays examining competing accounts of the explanation of action. The central issue here is the relation between reasons and causes: given that when agents act, they act for reasons, the question is whether reasons cause actions, or whether there is a non-causal, perhaps teleological, relation between reasons and actions. These topics are engaged most directly in the contributions of Scott Sehon. "Teleological Explanation," which argues that reasons cannot be reduced to causes, and of Timothy O'Connor, "Reasons and Causes," which judiciously examines the problems facing the attempt to treat the explanation of action as exclusively causalist. One important threat to a causalist explanation of action is the problem of deviant causal chains, which arises when an

agent's mental states cause her action, but do not rationalize it: as in the case—introduced by Davidson—of an agent who loses her grip on a rope because she is afraid of falling. Rowland Stout engages these issues at greatest length in the article, "Deviant Causal Chains," suggesting that the resolution of the problem of deviant causal chains may lie in deeper attention to the nature of causation. In "Triggering and Structuring Causes," Fred Dretske articulates one version of this sort of approach—to which O'Connor appeals—that might serve to help resolve the problem of deviant causal chains by distinguishing structuring causes, such as the reason that one moves one's arm, and triggering causes, like the electrical impulses that cause one's arm to move.

Parts I and II focus on fundamental issues in the philosophy of action: Part III, "Action in Special Contexts," broadens the scope of the volume by considering more generally concepts that figure in the philosophy of action and contexts outside of the philosophy of action *per s*e in which issues that figure centrally in the philosophy of action also arise. Conceptually oriented chapters treat rationality, internalism and externalism about motivation, the doctrine of double effect, the nature of free will, and the relation between responsibility and autonomy. The treatment of action in ethics and the law is given consideration, as is the role of intentions in the law. Finally, this Part surveys the understanding of action in a variety of explanatory contexts, such as folk psychology, ethology, and the social sciences. These chapters return to the issues about the explanation of action examined in Part II, reopening those questions from alternative perspectives that merit broader attention from those working on the philosophy of action.

The historical chapters of Part IV, according to the editors, are meant to "constitute a good starting point for those working in the history of ideas," and to "demonstrate… the role that action theory can play within a large philosophical system" (xxi-ii). While the editors are to be commended for trying to bring out the historical background to present-day discussions of the philosophy of action, this Part is much less successful in achieving its aims than the previous Parts of the volume. Many of the chapters are far too narrow in scope to "demonstrate…the role that action theory can play within a large philosophical system" or even to bring out the historical background to present-day discussions. Ursula Coope's chapter on Aristotle, whom Davidson judged to be the only historical figure who seriously considered the philosophy of action before the present day, focuses exclusively on Aristotle's treatment of the concept of voluntary action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, leaving aside his discussions of the nature of action and his treatment of animal action. The chapter therefore fails either to provide much background for contemporary treatments of action or to demonstrate the role that action theory can play in a larger philosophical system. Although Stephen Boulter acknowledges the comprehensiveness of Aquinas's theory of action (462), he offers "only the briefest of overviews" (462). This is unfortunate, for the significance of Aquinas's work on action has been acknowledged by twentieth-century philosophers such as P. T. Geach and Alan Donagan and drawn on at length in Candace Vogler's recent *Reasonably Vicious* (Harvard University Press, 2009), so more extensive consideration of Aquinas would not only have better served the editors' aims for this section, but it might also have provided grounds for challenging Davidson's claim that the philosophy of action flourished only in Aristotle's period and our own. Given that early modern philosophy is widely taken to have set the agenda for much present-day philosophy, the chapters on the early moderns—Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Reid, and Kant—are of special interest in this context. Of these chapters, only the essays by Matthew Stuart on

Locke and Eric Watkins on Kant engage with a range of issues in present-day philosophy of action. The chapters on Hobbes and Reid are more narrowly focused on issues relating to free will and determinism, perhaps because those philosophers were less interested in the nature of action itself. Paul Hoffman's chapter on Descartes examines general issues of causation, with special attention to bodily action and to mental causation, but doesn't treat the accounts of animal and human action that can be derived from Descartes's works and that would seem to be more relevant in the context of this volume. The chapters on Berkeley and Hume are rather narrowly textually focused, and manifest little engagement with the conceptual issues treated elsewhere in the volume. While it is noteworthy that this Part concludes by considering the work of Paul Ricœur, generally ignored in Anglo-American philosophy of action, I was surprised that the essay does not even mention Ricœur's early work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Northwestern University Press, 1966), which directly engages topics in the philosophy of action. There are probably a variety of reasons for the seeming disconnect between these historical chapters and the earlier Parts of the volume: contributors may not have been encouraged to emphasize the concepts treated in the earlier chapters, and the scope of may have been limited by constraints of space. I think that consideration of fewer figures might have allowed for a more in-depth treatment of their views that would have provided grounds for challenging Davdson's claim that the philosophy of action has flourished only in Aristotle's time and our own. As they stand, however, the essays in this Part of the volume do not provide the evidence necessary to challenge Davidson's historical claim.

These reservations about the final Part of this volume notwithstanding, this volume is a great success. The essays in Parts I-III deftly and judiciously survey the vast range of topics in the philosophy of action and nicely bring out the relation between concepts of the philosophy of action and other areas of philosophy, as well as other discipline; the inclusion of the historical essays in Part IV may well encourage readers to pay more attention to historical figures, consideration of whose writings may well cast new light on standard issues in the philosophy of action. The editors have done excellent work selecting topics for treatment in the volume, enlisting a constellation of eminent contributors, and providing helpful cross-references that enable the reader to follow out connections between issues broached in one chapter into others. The volume serves to introduce the neophyte to central issues in the philosophy of action, but specialists will also benefit from the perspicuous overview of central issues in the philosophy of action that bring out their interactions and their connections to other intellectual domains. I recommend this volume to all those with any interest in the concepts treated in the philosophy of action.

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