Omissions and Causal Explanations

Achille C. Varzi

Department of Philosophy, Columbia University (New York)

1

Little Johnny: "Can we be punished for something we have not done?" Mother: "Of course not!" Johnny: "Good—because I didn't turn off the gas…" At this point Johnny smiles and thinks he got away with it. Unfortunately, his mother is smarter than he expected. "I said we cannot be punished for something we have not done", she says, "but certainly we can be punished for not having done something".

The sort of ambiguity on which the joke trades is indicative of an ambiguity whose philosophical ramifications are far reaching. Since the works of Bentham and Mill, much talk about punishment, or blame, or responsibility broadly construed, in ethics and in the law, requires that we be deemed accountable for our actions as well as for our omissions.[1] Yet this requires in turn that we take omissions seriously, which is no straightforward business. Johnny didn't turn off the gas and, as a result, there was an explosion. Had Johnny turned off the gas, as he was supposed to, things would have gone otherwise. It is therefore natural to say (at least from the mother's perspective) that because of his omission Johnny deserves to be punished. On the other hand, this is not to say that there is something Johnny didn't do and for which he deserves to be punished. Indeed, such a something would have to be a non-doing—a "negative act", so to speak—and how could that be? Just as it is a contradiction in terms to say that there are things that are not (as Quine famously argued[2]), it seems a contradiction in terms to "count among the things an agent does things he does not do" (as Davidson once put it[3]).

In a companion paper, I do in fact argue that it makes no sense to posit such things.[4] One cannot deny that we often speak of omissions, failures, and the like, and that such talk should be taken seriously. Yet often this is best construed, not as talk about negative events of some sort, but as negative talk about ordinary, positive events. Events are spatio-temporal particulars, so we can de-

scribe them in many ways, just as we can describe an object in many ways,[5] and depending on the context we may sometime be inclined to rely on negative rather than positive descriptions; yet a negative description need not correspond to a negative entity. Thus, for example, we can say that Sally saw Johnny hide into the kitchen, or we can say that she saw Johnny not leave. In the first case, we are describing what Sally saw—i.e., what Johnny did—explicitly: he hid into the kitchen. In the latter case we are not giving any explicit characterization of the event in question; we are not saying what it was or how it was, we are just saying that it was *not* a leaving. But this is merely a difference reflecting our attitudes towards what happened. If we are interested in what Johnny actually did, the former report is more informative; but if, as we may suppose, everybody expected Johnny to leave, the latter report might be just as effective, if not better. Nothing follows from this concerning the ontological status of what Johnny did. (Compare: if we say that Sally saw a non-smoker, surely that doesn't mean she saw a negative individual. If we knew more we could be more explicit: Sally saw a tall guy with brown eyes, a mustache, and a nice smile. But if, as we may suppose, Sally was at the smoker's club, then the negative attribute 'non-smoker', though less informative, picks out the person Sally saw in a more salient way.)

Now, to some extent this is the sort of account that I would also like to offer in those cases where omissions, failures, and the like feature in our discourse about causes and responsibilities. Suppose Johnny's mother rebuked him because he didn't clean up his room: he went to the library instead. Then we can report what happened by saying:

(1)   Johnny's failure to clean up his room caused his mother's rebuke.

But we could also say, for instance:

(1')   Johnny's visit to the library caused his mother's rebuke.

Precisely because we can describe what happened in many ways, the use of a negative description does not have any ontological pregnancy: we could replace the description 'Johnny's failure to clean up his room' with the description 'Johnny's visit to the library' and the outcome would be materially equivalent. Since causal reports are semantically transparent, that is all that matters *vis-à-vis* the truth of our statement. The reason why we may be inclined to assert (1) rather than (1'), in spite of the greater accuracy of the latter's description, is that when reporting causal transactions we are generally interested in *explaining* why something happened, and the adequacy of a causal explanation does not

only depend on the truth of what is said. When it comes to an explanation, we must also make sure we describe the cause in a way that proves informative given the relevant background of shared knowledge and presuppositions, as with every act of communication; otherwise we would violate a major Gricean maxim.[6] As Bennett put it, "in general, truths about causes will be assertible only if they report causes that are salient—that is, stand out as notably significant, surprising, or the like".[7] And what is salient, here—what matters when it comes to explaining *why* Johnny's mother rebuked him—is that whatever he did, it was not cleaning his room. (Compare: if the only non-smoker at the club was a tall guy with a mustache, then it is true that seeing a non-smoker surprised Sally if and only if it is true that seeing a guy with a mustache surprised her. But if we want to explain *why* Sally was surprised, given that she was at a smokers club, then we should say 'non-smoker', not 'tall guy with a mustache'.)

Unfortunately, this sort of account does not carry over to every case in which talk of omissions must be taken seriously, and Johnny's boutade about punishment illustrates the difficulty. Johnny was supposed to turn off the gas but he didn't and, as a result, there was an explosion. We may report what happened by saying:

(2)   Johnny's failure to turn off the gas caused an explosion.

and we could insist that the phrase 'Johnny's failure to turn off the gas' is not to be construed as a description of a negative action whose agent was Johnny; it should be construed as a negative, indirect, contextually salient description of what Johnny actually did (he ate a sandwich and read a book, for instance). Perhaps we don't know, or we might not want to be explicit. We are only describing what Johnny did in negative terms by saying that *it* was not a turning-off of the gas (if you prefer: we are collectively describing the things he did by saying that none of them was a turning-off of the gas)—a description that by itself carries very little information and yet is informative enough in the relevant scenario. There is, however, a complication. For if indeed Johnny ate a sandwich and read a book, *whence the explosion?* There is nothing dangerous in Johnny's actions. So on what grounds can Johnny be blamed for the accident? On what grounds can we maintain that

(2')   Johnny's eating a sandwich and reading a book caused an explosion.

would be an equally correct, though less salient, way of reporting what happened? And if this example is not problematic enough, consider:

(3)   Peter's omitting the cutlery from the wedding list made Sally angry.
(4)   The flood was caused by the Administration's negligence.
(5)   The main cause of the epidemic was lack of rain.

What is the positive cause negatively described in (3)? What did Peter do that may account for Sally's anger? Surely he left the cutlery out of the list, but that sounds more like a positive description of Peter's omission than a negative description of something he actually *did*. And what are we talking about in (4) when we speak of the Administration's negligence? What is the actual cause of the epidemic allegedly described in (5) as 'lack of rain'? On the face of it, in cases such as these it doesn't help to say that we have a negative description of a positive event, for we have no clue as to what that relevant event could be. Indeed, as Higginbotham noted,[8] in cases such as these there doesn't seem to be *any* particular event that we are describing negatively.

It is here that the issue gives rise to serious philosophical worries. Some take cases such as these to provide conclusive evidence against the general eliminativist stance that I put forward at the beginning: whether we like it or not, omissions and, more generally, negative events of various sorts must be admitted as *bona fide* citizens of the world.[9] Others take such cases to provide evidence against the view that I have implicitly taken for granted, namely that omissions and the like would have to be construed as negative *events*.[10] It is a fact that Johnny did not turn off the gas, and we could say that it is because of that negative *fact* that there was an explosion. It is a fact that Peter did not include the cutlery in the wedding list, and that is why Sally got angry. It is a fact that it didn't rain, and that's why there was an epidemic. Surely, if we think that facts may enter into causal relations, then the difficulty dissolves. But facts are elusive entities. Although great efforts have gone into the task of articulating satisfactory theories of such entities since Russell's and Wittgenstein's early attempts,[11] many a philosopher today share Strawson's, Quine's, and especially Davidson's misgivings to the effect that our fact talk is by itself utterly misleading.[12] There are no individual facts, on pain of contradiction; there is at most a factual entirety, a single undifferentiated "great fact", and that is not enough to underpin any serious philosophical work. So suppose we reject this way out. Suppose we insist on the view that the only admissible causal relata are events, construed as spatio-temporal particulars (a view that has many advantages over its competitors).[13] And suppose we wish to uphold to the thesis that there are no negative causes—that every causal situation "develops as it does as a result of the presence of positive factors alone", as David Armstrong put it.[14] Then the truth of statements such as (2)–(5) raises a genuine conundrum. We can't eat

the cake and keep it, too. We can't just appeal to the pragmatics of speech acts, for the problem is not that we tend to construe such causal reports as causal explanations; the problem appears to arise with their being causal reports in the first place.

<center>2</center>

The way out, I think, is to reject this very last claim. I want to deny that statements such as (2)–(5) are genuine causal reports. The right thing to say, I think, is that such statements are *just* causal explanations. And if that is what they are, then the problem does not arise at all.

The idea comes from recent work by Helen Beebee.[16] Consider: What reasons are there to regard such statements as genuine causal reports? One reason, of course, is that they explicitly involve the word 'caused', or 'cause', but this doesn't take us very far. What reasons are there to suppose that such words are always to be taken strictly and literally? The main reason, Beebee says, is that we are generally inclined to think that whenever we engage in causal talk, we do so by speaking of causes and effects. I have said that we should pay attention to the distinction between mere causal reports, which are semantically transparent, and causal explanations, whose adequacy does not depend merely on the truth of what is said. It is an important distinction and Davidson himself has emphasized it in this connection.[17] But I have also implied that there is a close connection between the two: typically, a causal explanation is a certain way of reporting the existence of a causal nexus, a way of reporting a causal interaction in which the cause and the effect are described in a suitable fashion given the relevant background of shared knowledge and presuppositions. This, however, calls for refinements, for its suggests that there must always exist a correspondence between cause and explanans, on the one hand, and effect and explanandum, on the other—which is not the case. Indeed, there is no reason to think that a causal explanation should *always* mention the cause explicitly. If we know the cause of a certain event, and we know it under a description that fits the bill, then we can rely on this knowledge to produce a successful explanation. This is why (1) translates naturally into the familiar jargon of causal explanations:

> (6)   Johnny's mother rebuked him because he failed to clean up his room.

The converse, however, need not hold. If I say

> (7)   Sally complained because nobody went swimming with her.

<center>5</center>

then I am offering a perfectly reasonable explanation of Sally's complaint. And it is a *causal* explanation: it answers a why-question, as opposed to a how- or a what-question. Yet (7) is silent about the actual cause of Sally's complaint: there is no mention, direct or indirect, of the specific event that brought it about (which for all we know might have been Peter's refusal to join her, after a frustrating sequence of similar refusals by her friends).

David Lewis has a nice way of making this point succinctly.[18] A causal explanation, he says, aims to provide some information about the "causal history" of a certain event *e*, and there are many ways of providing such information: we can do so by citing a cause of *e* (in which case the goodness of our explanation depends primarily on the words we use to pick out that cause), but we may also provide information that relates only indirectly to *e*'s cause. What matters is that the information provided fills in a significant gap in what we know about the causal history of *e*. We may, for example, say that *e* occurred because a certain *type* of event occurred, without specifying any particular instance. Or we may say that the causal history of *e* includes several events of such-and-such types, related to one another in such-and such ways. The information we provide about a causal history may range from very specific to very abstract. And in some cases it may be so abstract as to concern, not what the causal history includes, but what it does not include. There is no event of someone's swimming with Sally in the causal history of her recent complaint—*that* is why she complained. (Compare also what Peter might say in response to Sally's request for an explanation of his encounter with Sue: "Why was she at the park when I went there? Just a coincidence, Sally, believe it or not".[19]) Of course, this is not to say that all explanatory information is of equal value: the more directly and completely we can describe the causal history of an event, the more likely we are to succeed in our explanatory efforts. But never mind that. The point to be stressed is simply that we need not and often do not aim at such completeness.

So, now, to go back to our main example, consider the following four statements:

> (8)   There was an explosion because Sally turned on the light.
> (9)   There was an explosion because somebody turned on the light.
> (10) There was an explosion because nobody turned off the gas.
> (11) There was an explosion because Johnny didn't turn off the gas.

Following Beebee (and Lewis), I want to say that only (8) may be regarded as a causal explanation in which the cause of the explosion is mentioned explicitly.

Only (8) says something directly informative about the causal history of the event in question, or so we may suppose. The other statements are less and less informative: (9) makes a general existential statement about what the causal history includes, whereas (10) and (11) only say something about what the causal history does *not* include: it includes no event of somebody's turning off the gas, and more specifically no event of Johnny's turning off the gas. It follows that only (8) can properly be matched by a corresponding causal statement:

(12)   Sally's turning on the light caused an explosion.

As with (1) and (6), here it doesn't really matter whether we use the 'caused' language or the 'because' language: in both cases we are giving a description of what led to the explosion, and a description that is explanatorily adequate. Perhaps we can say the same about (9), which may be rephrased as

(13)   Somebody's turning on the light caused an explosion,

though here I wouldn't be so sure. With (10) and (11), however, the situation is clearly different: as with (7), here we are offering perfectly reasonable explanations of why a certain event occurred—causal explanations. Yet, because these explanations are silent about the actual causes of that occurrence, we cannot rephrase our statements as causal reports *stricto sensu*. We are not saying what events feature in the relevant causal history; rather, we are just saying what (sort of) events are *missing* from that history. If you wish, we can add that the explanatory value of such statements lies in the truth of the corresponding counterfactuals:

(10')   Had somebody turned off the gas, there would have been no explosion.
(11')   Had Johnny turned off the gas, there would have been no explosion.

But this is not to say that we can now apply a counterfactual analysis of causation backwards, so to say, and generate in each case a matching causal statement.[20] Causal statements concern events that feature in the history of this world; counterfactuals concern what goes on in other worlds. And although we can counterfactualize about this world by considering how things might have gone had certain events not taken place, we cannot work our way backwards and infer how things actually went from the way they might have gone. We cannot infer that the actual world contains a non-occurrence *e* from the fact that *e* occurs in some counterfactual world, just as we cannot infer that the actual world contains a non-existing Pegasus from the fact that Pegasus exists in some non-actual world. To put it differently, the counterfactual analysis of causation

7

requires conditionals whose antecedent is a negative statement: had a certain event *not* occurred, some other event would not have occurred either. The antecedents in (10') and (11'), by contrast, are in the affirmative, so their logical form does not match the analysis—period.

Incidentally, I am focusing on cases putatively involving negative causes because these are the most interesting and widely discussed cases, but let me stress that a perfectly parallel story could be told with regard to putative cases of negative *effects*. Only, in those cases we would hardly speak of explanations in the strict sense. We should not speak of the "causal history" of an event but, rather, of its "causal destiny". Just to give the gist of it, suppose I say:

(14)   Johnny didn't turn off the gas because he got absorbed in his book.

Then what I am offering is not a causal report of what happened. In fact, what I am saying is silent about what happened: I am not saying what events followed Johnny's getting absorbed in his book—that Sally turned on the light, for example, or that there was an explosion. Rather, I am providing some generic information about the causal consequences of Johnny's doing. I am saying that a certain type of event, which was supposed to take place in the ordinary course of things, did not in fact happen. And this is all that is required in order to apply the analysis offered above, *mutatis mutandis* (What about statements in which we putatively appeal to negative causes *and* negative effects? Consider:

(15)   Johnny didn't turn off the gas because he forgot.

Here it would seem that we can speak neither of causal histories nor of causal futures, since no events are mentioned; yet (15) has the same causal flavor as (11) and (14). My answer is that we are in fact referring to a certain course of events, though very generally: we are referring to what happened at Johnny's house during the period of time specified the context of our narrative, and we are saying that this course of events doesn't include any episode of a certain type A—any event of Johnny's turning off the gas—because it doesn't include any episode of a certain type B—any event of Johnny's remembering that he had to do so.)

At this point it should be clear how the picture can be completed. We started by saying that the truth of a causal statement such as (2) appears to commit us to the existence of a truly negative event—a genuine failure of Johnny's. As it turns out, this has it the wrong way around. For we are only committed to what follows from our true statements, and strictly speaking we should deny the truth of (2). It's not just that, on closer inspection, the "real"

cause of the explosion was some other event than Johnny's failure to turn off the gas, e.g., Sally's turning on the light. That would just be a terminological point: we can certainly distinguish between mediate and immediate causes, triggering and structural causes, and so on.[22] More simply, (2) is not true because its subject term, 'Johnny's failure to turn off the gas', has no referent. What is true, strictly speaking, is the corresponding explanatory statement, (11), and if we wish also the corresponding counterfactual in (11'). But the truth of these statements is independent of (2) and does not entail a commitment to Johnny's failure as such. Similarly for (3), (4), (5), and the like. Strictly speaking, such statements are false, for the putative causal terms have no referent; what is true are the corresponding explanations:

(3')   Sally got angry because Peter's omitted the cutlery from the wedding list.
(4')   There has been a flood because the Administration has been negligent.
(5')   There was an epidemic because it hadn't rained enough.

And the truth of these causal explanations does not entail any commitment to such ontologically dubious entities as cutlery omissions, administrative negligences, or lacks of rain.

3

As I have said, in offering this account I am basically following Helen Beebee, though I am trying to remain neutral on the ontology underlying our explanatory talk. Perhaps here is where facts enter the picture, as Beebee suggests. But I prefer to bypass the issue and rest content with Davidson's claim that 'because', unlike 'cause', is truly a sentential connective relating pairs of statements. Otherwise it's hard to see why we shouldn't take all of this as evidence for the view that 'cause' *is* like 'because' and that the causal relata are facts rather than events. Let me now conclude with two remarks concerning the overall plausibility of the account.[24]

First, why are we inclined to assert (2), if (2) is not true? Why do we speak as in (2), if the proper way to phrase things is (11)? Sarah McGrath pointed out that we cannot just appeal to conversational maxims here, and she is right: the maxim of relevance may explain why we do not utter certain truths, not why we do utter certain falsehoods.[25] So how can we explain our inclinations concerning such falsehoods as (2)?

The answer, I think, does lie in a fact about our conversational practices, though a general fact that goes beyond the scope of a Gricean theory. The fact

is, we often speak loosely. Indeed, we tend to speak loosely especially when it comes to keeping track of our ontological commitments. When speaking with the vulgar, we may say that there is a difference in age between Johnny and his sister Sally without thereby implying that there are such things as age differences. If necessary, we can rephrase our statement more carefully by saying, for instance:

(16) Either Johnny is older than Sally or Sally is older than Johnny.[26]

We may say that a slice of cheese contains many holes without thereby implying that there are such things as holes. If pressed, we could rephrase our statement more neutrally by saying, for instance:

(17) That slice of cheese is multiply-perforated.[27]

Likewise with (2), I submit. We like the language of causation and we tend to use it freely when it comes to the task of offering explanations. Sometimes this is perfectly all right, as we have seen: it is all right when we actually know the cause of the event whose occurrence we are trying to explain and we know it under a suitable description. Sometimes, however, this is just speaking with the vulgar. If we don't know the relevant cause, for example, then obviously we are not in a position to produce a genuine causal report. We can only produce a causal explanation; we can provide *some* information about the causal history of the event, including negative information to the effect that certain events did not take place. If pressed, that is how we should speak. If pressed, we should rephrase a statement such as (2) by uttering (11) instead. It's just that usually we are not pressed. Normally we don't pay attention to such nuances because normally we don't care about the metaphysical underpinnings of what we say. We tend to speak loosely, and that is a fact about which not even philosophers can complain. What really matters is that we know how to regiment our talk if the need arises.

The second remark concerns a dual worry. Not only are we inclined to assert (2) even though, strictly speaking, (2) is false. We are also inclined to deny:

(18) There was an explosion because I didn't turn off the gas.

even though, strictly speaking, (18) is true. After all, not only does the causal history that led to the explosion include no event of Johnny's turning off the gas; it includes no event of my turning off the gas, either. Still, had I turned off the gas, there would have been no explosion. So why are we willing to offer (11) an explanation, or even (10), but not (18)?

The answer, I think, is once again part and parcel of the general theory of explanation I have been assuming throughout. I have said that the goodness of an explanation is to be weighed against the relevant background of shared knowledge and presuppositions, as with every act of communication. Accordingly, relevance constraints and standards of normality apply, not only when we construe a causal statement as a causal explanation, as with (1) versus (1'), but also when we put forward a causal explanation explicitly, as with (11) versus (18). Here again I agree with Beebee: the *truth* of a causal explanation does not depend on the moral question of who is to be blamed for what happened; but its *adequacy* does so depend.[28] Thus, it is true that there was an explosion because I didn't turn off the gas, for it is true that had I turned off the gas, the explosion would not have occurred. It's just very hard to imagine that someone would be *satisfied* with that explanation: everybody expected Johnny to turn off the gas, which is to say that everybody expected an event of that sort to take place. That no such event took place, as per (11), is therefore significant to an assessment of the causal history of the explosion. It is also significant that nobody turned off the gas, as in (10), although that leaves us with nobody to blame. That no event of *my* turning off the gas took place, however, is completely irrelevant. I was not supposed to do that. I don't even know Johnny and I don't know where he lives, so why blame me? Surely I could have done something to prevent the explosion, and you could have too. We didn't do anything although we could have. Yet that would be a very poor explanation of *why* there was an explosion—and Johnny's mother knows that.

Notes

[1] See Bentham (1789), chs. 1 & 17 (at 19) and Mill (1869), ch. 1. For a review of the large contemporary literature on this topic, see e.g. Smith (200+).

[2] Quine (1948).

[3] Davidson (1985), p. 217.

[4] See Varzi (2006). On this I align myself with a tradition that goes back at least to Ryle (1973) (see also Thomson 1977, ch. xv) against authors such as Brand (1971), Goldman (1979), Vermazen (1985), and others.

[5] So I side with Davidson (1967a, 1970) against Chisholm (1970). Also, I favor a "coarse-grained" view on event individuation, siding e.g. with Davidson (1969a) against Goldman (1971). See Varzi (2002) for elaborations.

[6] Grice (1975), p. 45: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged".

[7] Bennett (1995), p. 133.

[8] Higginbotham (2000), p. 74.

[9] See for instance de Swart (1996) and Przepiórkowski (1999).

[10] See for instance Bennett (1988) and Mellor (1995).

[11] I am thinking of Russell (1918/1919) and Wittgenstein (1921). In recent years, the most thorough attempt to take facts at face value is articulated in Neale (2001).

[12] See Strawson (1950), Quine (1960), pp. 246ff, and Davidson (1967c, 1969b).

[13] Of course some may disagree, but this is not the place to elaborate. The *locus classicus* is Davidson (1967b).

[14] Armstrong (1999), p. 177. As Moore (2005), fn 104, points out, such is also Julie Andrews's wisdom in *The Sound of Music*: "Nothing comes from nothing, and nothing ever can".

[16] See Beebee (2003).

[17] See Davidson (1967b), pp. 161f. Compare also Strawson (1985).

[18] See Lewis (1986), section III.

[19] The example is adapted from Lewis (1986), p. 220.

[20] The counterfactual analysis of causation comes from Lewis (1973). The analysis itself has been subjected to various criticisms (see Collins *et al.* 2003), but never mind that: the main criticisms concern cases of preemption or overdetermination, so here they could be ignored.

[22] See e.g. Dretske (1988), chs. 1 and 2.

[24] I take it that a fact-free account of alleged cases of causation by omission is the main challenge that an austere event ontology must meet. It is not, of course, the only one. For instance, a good account of intentionality must also come to terms with omissions: I tried not to fall, even though I actually did. I did not vote, not because I forgot, but because I intended to do so. On such complications, see e.g. Mele (2003), sec. 6.4. (My own take is outlined in the last section of Varzi 2006.)

[25] McGrath (2005), p. 129.

[26] The example is from White (1956), pp. 68–69.

[27] This example is from Lewis and Lewis (1970), p. 207.

[28] Beebee (2003), p. 307.

References

Armstrong, D. M., 1999, 'The Open Door', in H. Sankey (ed.), *Causation and Laws of Nature*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 175-185.

Beebee, H., 2003, 'Causing and Nothingness', in Collins *et al.* (2003), pp. 291-308.

Bennett, J., 1988, *Events and Their Names*, Oxford: Carendon Press.

Bennett, J., 1995, *The Act Itself*, Oxford: Carendon Press.

Bentham, J., 1789, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, London: Payne.

Brand, M., 1971, 'The Language of Not Doing', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8: 45-53.

Chisholm, R. M., 1970, 'Events and Propositions', *Noûs* 4, 15-24.

Collins, J., Hall, H., and Paul, L. A. (eds.), 2003, *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.

Davidson, D. 1967a, 'The Logical Form of Action Sentences', in N. Rescher (ed.), *The Logic of Decision and Action*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 81-95; reprinted in Davidson (1980), pp. 105-122.

Davidson, D. 1967b, 'Causal Relations', *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 691-703; reprinted in Davidson (1980), pp. 149-162.

Davidson, D. 1967c, 'Truth and Meaning', *Synthese* 17: 304-323; reprinted in Davidson (1984), pp. 17-36.

Davidson, D., 1969a, 'The Individuation of Events', in N. Rescher (ed.), *Essays in Honor of Carl G. Hempel*, Dordrecht/Boston: Reidel, pp. 216-34; reprinted in Davidson (1980), pp. 163-180.

Davidson, D. 1969b, 'True to the Facts', *Journal of Philosophy* 66: 748-764; reprinted in Davidson (1984), pp. 37-54.

Davidson, D., 1970, 'Events as Particulars', *Noûs* 4: 25-32; reprinted in Davidson (1980), pp. 181-187.

Davidson, D., 1980, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Davidson, D., 1984, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Davidson, D., 1985, 'Reply to Bruce Vermazen', in B. Vermazen and M. B. Hintikka (eds.), *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 172-76.

de Swart, H, 1996, 'Meaning and Use of *not ... until*', *Journal of Semantics* 13: 221-263.

Dretske, F., 1988, *Explaining Behavior. Reasons in a World of Causes*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.

Goldman, A., 1971, 'The Individuation of Actions', *Journal of Philosophy* 68, 761-774.

Goldman, A., 1979, *A Theory of Human Action*, Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice-Hall.

Grice, P. H., 1975, 'Logic and Conversation', in P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press, pp. 41-48.

Higginbotham, J., 2000, 'On Events in Linguistic Semantics', in J. Higginbotham, F. Pianesi, and A. C. Varzi (eds.), *Speaking of Events*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 49-79.

Lewis, D. K., 1973, 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy* 70: 556-567.

Lewis, D. K., 1986, 'Causal Explanation', in his *Philosophical Papers: Volume II*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 214-240.

Lewis, D. K., and Lewis, S. R., 1970, 'Holes', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48: 206-212.

McGrath, S., 2005, 'Causation by Omission: A Dilemma', *Philosophical Studies* 123: 125-148.

Mele, A. R., 2003, *Motivation and Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mellor, D. H., 1995, *The Facts of Causation*, London: Routledge.

Mill, J. S., 1859, *On Liberty*, London: Parker.

Moore, M. S., 2005, 'Causal Relata', *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 13: 589-642.

Neale, S., 2001, *Facing Facts*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Przepiórkowski, A., 1999, 'On Negative Eventualities, Negative Concord, and Negative Yes/No Questions', in T. Matthews and D. Strolovitch (eds.), *Proceeding of Semantics and Linguistic Theory 9*, Ithaca (NY): CLC Publications, pp. 237-254.

Quine, W. V. O., 1948, 'On What There Is', *Review of Metaphysics* 2: 21-38.

Quine, W. V. O., 1960, *Word and Object*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.

Russell, B., 1918/1919, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', *The Monist* 28: 495-527 and 29: 32-63, 190-222, 345-380.

Ryle, G., 1973, 'Negative "Actions"', *Hermathena* 81: 81-93.

Smith, P., 200+, *Omission, Law and Responsibility*, forthcoming.

Strawson, P. F., 1950, 'Truth', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 24: 129-156.

Strawson, P. F., 1985, 'Causation and Explanation', in B. Vermazen and M. B. Hintikka (eds.), *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 115-135.

Thomson, J. J., 1977, Acts and Other Events, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press.

Varzi, A. C., 2002, 'Events, Truth, and Indeterminacy', *The Dialogue* 2: 241–264.

Varzi, A. C., 2006, 'The Talk I Was Supposed to Give', in A. Bottani and R. Davies (eds.), *Modes of Existence. Papers in Ontology and Philosophical Logic*, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, to appear.

Vermazen, B., 1985, 'Negative Acts', in B. Vermazen and M. B. Hintikka (eds.), *Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 93-104.

White, M. G., 1956, *Toward a Reunion in Philosophy*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Wittgenstein, L., 1921, 'Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung', *Annalen der Naturphilosophie* 14: 185-262. First Eng. trans. by C. K. Ogden, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922.