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Karsten R. Stueber

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1. Introduction: Naturalism and Psychological Explanations

To a large extent, contemporary philosophical debate takes place within a framework of naturalistic assumptions. From the perspective of the history of philosophy, naturalism is the legacy of positivism without its empiricist epistemology and empiricist conception of meaning and cognitive significance. Systematically, it is best to characterize naturalism as the philosophical articulation of the underlying presuppositions of a reductive scientific research program that was rather successful in the last few centuries and, equally important, promises to be so in the future particularly in the biological sciences and the neurosciences. It seems as if the secrets of human life and behavior and the mysteries of the mind will be cracked on the molecular level of the genes or the brain, or at least so we are told. Viewed in this manner it is understandable why philosophical naturalism tends to be committed to monism, both as a metaphysical or ontological claim and as a methodological position in the philosophy of social science. Naturalists are inclined to adopt a physicalist ontology that rejects free floating Cartesian substances and they view higher order macroscopic facts and properties as being dependent or supervenient on basic micro-physical facts. Naturalists, furthermore, expect that any scientific explanation of higher order properties has to provide an account of why and how these lower order facts give rise to higher order ones. These ontological and epistemic commitments also underpin a position of methodological monism in regard to the social sciences and the explanation of human agency. If the above ontological picture is correct then there is no reason to expect that the structure of the sciences dealing with higher order properties on the social level should fundamentally differ in their methodology from the natural sciences. In both domains of investigation, scientists will develop and make explanatory use of comprehensive and empirically well supported theories with adequate predictive powers that describe underlying law-like regularities between causally efficacious properties.

Nevertheless, philosophers worry immensely about how naturalism as a general framework can be more precisely explicated in order to be fully compatible with central aspects of our scientific practice. While scientists do indeed successfully employ reductive strategies, they are not really close to the reductionist dream associated with a physicalist monism. Rather various special sciences like psychology, biology, geology, and economics maintain considerable explanatory autonomy vis a vis physics as the basic science by appealing to the causal powers of higher order properties. Yet, if the postulate

of ontological monism is assumed, one might wonder how this autonomy can be theoretically accounted for since the causal powers of higher order properties that the special sciences appeal to seem to reside in the causal powers of the physical properties of the lowest level. Or to say it differently, philosophers have a hard time accounting for the explanatory autonomy of the special sciences because their ontological commitments seem to dissolve all the causal powers of higher order properties into the lowest level.¹

In a closely related issue, philosophers debate whether the laws of the special sciences do have genuine nomic status that can support causal explanations. One agrees generally that the laws of the special sciences are non-strict and riddled with *ceteris paribus* clauses, because special sciences describe regularities on an ontological higher order and assume that certain parameters from an ontological lower level remain invariant. Causal processes described in the vocabulary of a special science are thus always susceptible to interferences from factors outside of its domain. Psychological processes described in mental terms, for example, assume the normal functioning of the brain and the invariance of other physical factors. Any amount of deviation in this respect might affect the conditions under which the *ceteris paribus* law applies. In this context, it is particularly troublesome that we seem to be practically unable to specify the almost infinite number of these potentially interfering factors. Without such knowledge we do not know whether *ceteris* is indeed *paribus*. *Ceteris paribus* laws seem to be objectionably vague since we have practically no way of empirically confirming or disconfirming them. We cannot know whether a particular instance is genuinely disconfirming the asserted regularity or is due to the fact that other things are not equal.²

These considerations are certainly important for discussing the questions of whether or not psychological explanations of human behavior are autonomous and describe genuine causal aspects of the world. Yet they are not issues that raise special problems for psychological explanations. They are in this respect on par with explanations in the other highly respected and well entrenched sciences like biology for example. For the purposes of the paper, I therefore assume that these "problems" do have a solution. It certainly would seem preposterous to assume that merely philosophical reasons can be sufficient to unhinge rather successful scientific practices. I am enough of a pragmatist to realize that our philosophical conception of what constitutes a scientific explanation in the end has to be based on an analysis of actual scientific practice rather than the other way around.

1 J. Kim's work, especially his explanatory exclusion argument against mental causation, has brought this issue to the attention of philosophers. For an overview see my 1997.

2 For an overview about the debate about *ceteris paribus* laws see Henderson 1993. See also Rosenberg 1995b.

Yet in the philosophy of social science there has been another and more fundamental challenge to the naturalist framework that focuses on a unique property of psychological and intentional explanations of human behavior. According to this line of reasoning, psychological explanations of human agency are different because psychological generalizations using the intentional idiom – whether strict or non-strict – are not like empirical law-like generalizations in the other sciences. They have more of a conceptual or analytic character because they are closely tied to our normative conception of rational agency.³ For that very reason, psychological generalizations cannot be understood as supporting causal explanations in the ordinary sense. If such explanations are causal at all, they are so only in a special sense.

Such a revisionary conception of psychological explanation has been closely associated with the rejection of methodological monism and the claim that empathy or what Collingwood calls reenactment is of central epistemological importance for understanding and explaining human agency. Explaining human agency is different from explanations in the other sciences because action explanations cannot proceed merely from the detached third person perspective but requires essential reference to our own first person perspective on the world.

In the following, I will discuss this central challenge to naturalism. In the next section, I will critically discuss William Dray's argument for a reenactive and normative conception of action explanation and outline Alexander Rosenberg's powerful argument for the conceptual character of psychological generalizations. In order to make some headway in these contracted issues I will, in the third section, address Kim's intervention on behalf of a position favored by Dray. As I will argue, Dray, Collingwood, and others are quite right in rejecting methodological monism and in emphasizing the epistemic central role of our reenactive and empathetic capacities for understanding agency. Yet contrary to Kim and Dray this does not imply that psychological generalizations have primarily normative status or that one has to distinguish between two kinds of causal relations or necessities that support different types of causal explanations. Furthermore it is also not the case, as I show in the last section, that psychological generalizations even in the intentional idiom have merely a conceptual or analytic status. Alexander Rosenberg's arguments for such a claim presupposes what contemporary philosophers call a theory theory conception of psychological explanations according to which every explanation appeals at least implicitly to some generalizations. If action explanations essentially involve our reenactive or empathetic capacities, as contemporary simulation theorists plausibly

³ In Davidson's work the issue of the analytic or conceptual status of psychological generalizations is not always sufficiently distinguished from the topic of the non-strict and heteronomous character of psychological generalizations.

argue, then his argument against the non-empirical status of psychological generalizations in the intentional idiom does not go through. Even though I will deny that psychological generalizations are analytically true, such generalizations have a special epistemic status due to the essential involvement of our simulative and reenactive capacities for understanding other agents. I will suggest that we are a priori entitled to assume that certain psychological generalizations are true of other agents as a default assumption of psychological interpretation. However, this entitlement is compatible with the fact that psychological generalizations are also empirical statements, which describe the empirical working of the minds of organisms like me.

2. The Status of Intentional Generalizations: Normative, Conceptual or Empirical?

Ever since Davidson's seminal paper "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" philosophers have on the whole accepted that the Wittgensteinian rejection of a causal understanding of mental terminology rests on a logical confusion. Furthermore, our ordinary interpretive practice is committed to a causal understanding of mentality. An interpretation of another person is regarded as correct only if it attributes mental states to him that caused him to act in a certain way. It is this commitment to causality that allows us to distinguish between a mere *ex post* rationalization of an action and a true interpretation.

Despite these causal intuitions, philosophers still have not completely resolved the question of whether such causal understanding of mentality allows us to conceive of intentional explanation to be fully on par with ordinary causal explanations in the other sciences. This particular debate about the structure and nature of action explanation has its roots in the debate about whether the positivist conception of science and scientific explanation can account for the structure of historical explanations that are centrally concerned with the explication of human agency.⁴ According to the positivist model, as it has been paradigmatically explicated by Hempel, we explain an event or action by subsuming it under an empirically well confirmed law-like generality. In this manner we show it as an event that we should expect to occur given the initial conditions and the relevant laws. Hempel certainly acknowledges the peculiarities of historical explanations, yet for him these are not so great that one can speak of a qualitative or logical difference in the structure of explanations between history and the other sciences. Historians, for example, do not normally appeal explicitly to well articulated laws. They provide thus only explanation sketches instead of fully worked out explanations. Hempel also allows

⁴ For a detailed survey of this traditional debate between explanation versus understanding (*Erklären* versus *Verstehen*) consult the introduction to Kögler/Stueber 2000.

for the fact that no specific historical laws might exist and that historians have to appeal in their explanations only to psychological laws, economic laws etc. Moreover, Hempel admits that empathy can play a role as a heuristic method in the context of discovery. Putting myself in the shoes of another person might indeed allow me to develop some hypotheses about which behavioral generalities are correct. Yet empathy by itself cannot confirm such regularities. For that very reason, empathy does not play any genuinely explanatory role since it cannot be used to justify the explanatory claim that actions of a particular type were to be expected in these circumstances.

Hempel's epistemic conception of explanation has fallen on hard times in recent years. As has been conclusively shown, his deductive nomological and inductive statistical models do neither provide necessary nor sufficient conditions for what we intuitively accept as an explanation within ordinary and scientific contexts. Specifically, explaining an event does not require information that would allow us to justifiably predict its occurrence. Even if, as the well known paresis example illustrates, it is not highly likely that somebody with a syphilis infection will develop paresis (its tertiary state), we still explain its occurrence by citing the syphilis infection. In response to these conundrums of the orthodox theory, philosophers have developed a variety of alternative conceptions of explanations such as Salmon's ontic conception, Van Fraassen's pragmatic understanding, and Kitcher's unification model of explanation. Here is not the place to discuss these alternatives extensively.⁵ I would only like to emphasize that I am not committed to any of these models to the exclusion of the other. Indeed I regard all of them as capturing some basic intuitions of our explanatory practices. Most plausibly, and here I agree with David Henderson,⁶ an explanation of event *e* should be conceived of as an answer to a why question that mentions a prior event *c* and those of its properties that are causally relevant for bringing about event *e*. However, I regard properties to be causally relevant only if they are referred to in relevant laws. I am committed to the last requirement for epistemic reasons.⁷ Without the existence of such laws any claim about the causal relevance of properties is not justified within our scientific practices. These laws however do not have to be strict or deterministic. They can be probabilistic and contain *ceteris paribus* clauses.

Acknowledging the deficiency of the orthodox model of explanation does not have any repercussions for the purposes of this paper. Even if naturalists reject Hempel's model of explanation, they would still maintain that explanations in the natural and social sciences are structurally indistinguishable. Explanations of events succeed if and only if

⁵ For an overview see Salmon 1989.

⁶ See Henderson 1995, 78ff.

⁷ See Kitcher 1989, 459ff and Davidson 1995.

they cite causally relevant properties that are supported by empirical laws. Such a conception of explanation would thus also be affected by William Dray's critique of Hempel in the philosophy of history, since Dray categorically denies that empirical laws support action explanation whether they are deterministic, probabilistic, strict or non-strict.

Influenced by Collingwood, William Dray has objected to Hempel's rejection of empathy and reenactment by maintaining that Hempel misunderstands the logical point of the "identification" metaphor.⁸ In explaining human agency we are not interested in merely finding causes for another person's actions. Rather, we are interested in finding causes insofar as they are also his reasons. Because human agents have normally reasons for their actions, their behavior can be normatively evaluated as being rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate. Furthermore their reasons can be judged to be good or bad, sufficient or insufficient.⁹ Collingwood's suggestion that we have to reenact the thought of another person in our own mind in order to explain another person's action is thus not a mere methodological and optional device for finding the causes of behavior, something that is in principle also accessible without involving our empathetic or reenactive faculty. It is essential for understanding or conceiving an action as something that an agent was rationally compelled to do. Dray hence accuses Hempel of fundamentally obliterating "a distinction between explanation types: a distinction between representing something as the thing generally done, and representing it as the appropriate thing to have done."¹⁰ Accordingly, Dray maintains that our notion of causation is fundamentally ambiguous. He distinguishes a concept of what one could call "natural necessity" to which we appeal in our explanations of natural events from a notion of "rational necessity" that underlies our causal account of agency.¹¹ Dray admits that reasons for actions have some kind of universality that can be explicated in terms of general principles such as when in "situation of type $C_1 \dots C_n$ the thing to do is x ." Yet these general principles should not be confused with empirical and descriptive statements about how people in general will act in certain situations. Rather they have to be seen as normative "principles of actions" that are not falsifiable by negative instances.¹²

⁸ Dray 1957, 127ff.

⁹ For a systematic argument how such a normative conception of rationality commits us to understanding reenactment as epistemically essential for understanding other agents see also the first part of my forthcoming article "Agency and the Objectivity of Historical Narratives."

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 128.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 154.

¹² *ibid.*, 132. In his more recent and highly recommendable book on Collingwood (Dray 1995), Dray speaks of "reenactive explanations" or "quasi-normative explanations." I am not sure whether he still believes that such explanations appeal implicitly to general principles of actions as he has suggested in his 1957. See Dray 1995, chap. 3.

Dray's position however raises immediately two issues that he does not sufficiently address. First, even if one admits that reason explanations and "principles of action" contain a normative component, this does not automatically address the question of why rational explanations essentially involve our reenactive or empathetic capacities. Even if one follows Dray and accepts his distinction between two types of necessities, it still seems as if in both of these explanations we appeal to a set of initial conditions and some general principles. The only difference between these explanations consists in the epistemic status of the general principles, that is, an empirical law-like regularity versus the normative universality of practical reason. Yet why does this logical or epistemic distinction imply that reason explanations essentially involve the first person perspective or involve my reenacting another person's thoughts in my own mind? Both types of explanation subsume one event under a general principle. In both cases we thus appeal to some kind of theoretical knowledge about the world, either to knowledge of what normally happens or to knowledge of how humans are supposed to act in a certain situation. In order to show that empathy is essential for understanding human agency it is also not sufficient merely to point out that empathy can at times play a role in understanding the reasons for somebody's actions. Hempel already allowed for such heuristic use of empathy. He merely insisted that the explanatory role of empathy depends on the empirical adequacy of the general principles of action that one appeals to implicitly in Dray's account.

Second, and in this context even more pressing is the question why one should accept Dray's logical distinction between two types of explanations and two types of causal necessities. If we conceive of a causal explanation broadly as an answer to a question of why an event has happened, then it seems that "action explanations" as Dray conceives of them are not at all causally explanatory, because they do not provide an account of why the agent did what he did. As Hempel pointed out quite correctly, Dray explains "why it would have been rational for A to do x," but not "why A did in fact do x."¹³ As an illustration one just has to think of the case of the chess novice who knows all of the constitutive rules of chess. Even if he would for a while move his pieces according to what experts regard as the best strategy, he probably did not do this because these are the strategically and rationally most appropriate moves. In this case a reason explanation would constitute nothing more than an *ex post* rationalization from an external perspective. It would not describe any causally relevant factors at work in the chess novice in producing his moves. Although one should acknowledge that reasons involve a normative dimension one has to admit that reasons explain actions only if they are also causes in the ordinary sense. Appeal to rational principles of actions are causally explanatory

¹³ Hempel 1965, 471.

only if we make the further assumption that agents are as a matter of fact rational and that such principles are also describing the causal dispositions of these agents.¹⁴ For Hempel, explanations of rational agency have thus the following form:

- 1) A was in a situation of type C
 - 2) A was a rational agent
 - 3) (Schema R) In a situation of type C, any rational agent will do x
-

Therefore, A did x.¹⁵

Given the above considerations, Schema R has to be understood as an empirical generalization and rationality has to be conceived of as "a broadly dispositional trait."¹⁶ Attribution of such a trait is furthermore assumed to be based on objective and empirical criteria.

Hempel is quite aware of the fact that schema R has to be made more precise in order to serve as the basis of a scientific explanation. Specifying the type of situation will have to include information describing the psychological states of the agents, such as his beliefs and desires. Schema R will thus to have rely on psychological generalizations of the form that if a person believes that x is a means to y; he or she wants y and he or she is rational then *ceteris paribus* he or she will do x. Following Kim we will refer to this generalization as the Desire-Belief-Action-Principle (DBA).¹⁷

For Hempel's account to be acceptable it is therefore crucial that DBA is an empirically testable generalization that we can in principle either confirm, falsify or modify/refine in light of empirical evidence. Yet it is exactly this aspect of Hempel's account that has proven to be most controversial. As Davidson and following him particularly Rosenberg have suggested,¹⁸ in order for DBA to be testable we have to be able to attribute beliefs and desires and the trait of rationality independent of DBA itself. In order to test a law we have to be able to determine whether or not the initial conditions described in the antecedent of the law exist independently of the conditions described in the consequent of the law. Yet it seems as if DBA itself is constitutive for our ascription of beliefs and desires to a rational person or is constitutive for a person counting as rational.

¹⁴ See also Henderson 1993, 177. Dray acknowledges this line of thought indirectly by admitting that rational action explanations requires the "standing presumption" that "people act for sufficient reason." Dray 1957, 137.

¹⁵ Hempel 1965, 471.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 472.

¹⁷ Kim 1984, 311 and Kim 1998, 73.

¹⁸ For the following see Davidson "Hempel on Explaining Action" in his 1980 and Rosenberg 1985 and 1995a, 28-43. For a modified and generalized argument concerning all of the special sciences see Rosenberg 1995b.

Everybody in this debate agrees that principles like DBA are *ceteris paribus* principles. It is certainly imaginable that somebody has a belief and a certain desire and does not act as DBA predicts if he has also other overriding and stronger desires that take precedent. It seems however to be almost conceptually impossible to maintain that somebody has certain beliefs and desires without any other interfering psychological conditions if he does not behave as we would expect according to DBA. In such a case his subsequent behavior does not count as evidence against DBA, but would rather be taken as evidence against the attribution of these beliefs in the first place. For example, it is hard to imagine attributing to another person a strong desire not to get wet and the beliefs that it is raining outside and that going out in the rain without adequate protection will make you wet, if he subsequently goes out without adequate protection and gets wet. Our conundrum is not solved by observing that the agent insists that he does not have the desire to get wet and that he also believes that going out in the rain without adequate protection will make you wet. As Rosenberg has suggested, speech itself is action and has to be interpreted according to DBA. Taking his utterances as expressions of his mental states presupposes that we ascribe other beliefs and desires to him, such as the desire to be sincere and tell us what he believes and the belief that certain sentences in English have a certain meaning. If we follow Rosenberg in his reasoning then it seems as if any potential evidence against DBA can be accumulated only by taking DBA to be valid. For that very reason, the anomalous behavior will hardly count as evidence against DBA. Rather it will remain perplexing to the interpreter and he indeed will start wondering whether the agent has the particular beliefs in question or whether the agent can be regarded as a rational one. Since DBA functions more like an analytically true statement, it is best understood as a constitutive principle for our concepts of belief and desire or for our concept of rationality.

For Rosenberg, Wittgensteinians are right after all, even though the arguments for their claims were riddled with logical confusions.¹⁹ But their heart seems to have been in the right place. "Explanations" in the intentional idiom cannot be treated to be on par with causal explanations, since principles like DBA do not seem to have empirical law-like status. Hence the logical peculiarity of the intentional idiom allows us only to interpret but not to explain the behavior of another person. It allows us to attribute a certain significance to the behavior of the other person without situating it in the causal structure of the world, at least not in the causal structure of the world that is described by the other sciences.

¹⁹ See especially Rosenberg 1985, 407. For an analysis of the distinction between Davidson's argument and the Wittgensteinian logical connection argument see Rosenberg 1995a, 43- 48, and Kögler/Stueber

3. Reason Explanation and the First Person Perspective

The above conclusion is deeply unsatisfying, since it is not clear what purpose such interpretive redescription of behavior serves. It would make it rather difficult to explain why we are ordinarily so committed to viewing agents in terms of having certain reasons for their actions based on their beliefs and desires. It seems to be better to look for alternatives to our ordinary folk-psychological framework, since folk-psychological notions on this account cannot serve as a basis for a scientific explanation of human behavior. Naturalists would have no other option but to bet on a different kind of horse. They might concede that giving up the folk-psychological framework will meet with resistance since it is central for viewing ourselves as responsible agents who act because we conceive of the world in a certain manner and try to satisfy some of our desires. But if the above considerations are correct then our self-conception essentially involves a causal conception of mentality that cannot stand up to philosophical scrutiny and has to be discarded. Such drastic conclusion can in my opinion be avoided, if one recognizes the irreducible involvement of our empathetic and reenactive capacities for the explanation of human agency in the folk-psychological context. In the end the conclusion of the last section follows only under a theory theory conception of psychological explanation and a rather outdated behaviorist understanding of the attribution of mental states to other people.

In this context, it is useful to look more closely at some of Kim's observations about reason explanations. In contemporary philosophy of mind Kim is best known for his intervention in the debate over mental causation by articulating the powerful causal explanatory exclusion argument.²⁰ According to this line of reasoning, it is so difficult to account for mental causation within a physicalist framework because we can already fully explain the physical behavior of agents from the perspective of the physical sciences. Consequently and given further assumptions about physical closure and the rejection of causal overdetermination, it seems as if the possibility of a sufficient and complete physical explanation of a physical event preempts the objectivity of mental explanations. Our mental terminology thus does not seem to delineate any properties possessing autonomous causal powers. In two of his lesser known articles Kim however suggests that reasons do not primarily play a role within the "causal-predictive" framework of accounting for agent's behavior and his "overt physical and bodily movements" from the third person perspectives.²¹ Rather, rationalizing action explanations are primarily concerned with accounting for a different explanandum. We appeal to reasons in explaining the agent's

2000, 16/17.

²⁰ See especially his 1998b and the relevant articles in his 1993. I have explicated the problems facing a philosophical account of psychological explanations in my 1997.

²¹ Kim 1984, 316 and 319; and 1998a, 85.

intentions and decisions. Such explanations involve essentially the first person perspective, since reasons form also the basis for the agent's self-understanding of his actions. Without having access to the reasons for our actions from a first person perspective we could not maintain a coherent conception of ourselves as agents interacting with the world. Without having any reasons for my actions, I would not only not be able to explain why I did what I did, I also would be inherently alienated from my actions since I could not understand them as my actions. At a maximum my actions would be similar to my bodily reflexes, the blinking of my eye or my sneezing. Such behavior is behavior I can recognize as my own in an immediate sense only insofar as I recognize it as involving my body. That my sneezing causes other people to say "God bless you" or that the blinking of my eye might attract the attention of another person however is something that I will find out merely inductively. Such consequences of my actions might surprise me the first time. Just imagine writing a signature on a sheet of paper without recognizing the reasons for doing so, such as wanting to buy a house and recognizing that this signature will enable you to acquire the necessary mortgage for doing so. Without being able to recognize your reasons for your actions you would also have no knowledge about what you are doing in this particular circumstance. You would still recognize that your body is doing something, writing something on a paper, yet you would not be able to take immediate ownership of this behavior insofar as its wider environment is concerned, that is, you could not understand it as a signing of a contract. Your action in this particular environment would be a complete mystery to yourself.

Kim suggests quite correctly that beliefs and desires cannot merely be conceived of as internal events whose occurrences allow me to predict with a certain probability what I will do next in the manner that being aware of a scratching in my throat allows me to realize that I will cough soon. From the first person perspective beliefs and desires rather function as reasons "on the basis of which I chose, or decided, to do this action."²² Beliefs and desires insofar as they are reasons for my decisions allow me to take ownership of my actions. In this manner "name writing behavior" is immediately transparent to myself as the signing of a contract. Kim therefore rejects Hempel's conception of DBA as a nomological principle because such understanding fails to recognize it as a "principle that underlies the self-understanding of actions."²³ Conceiving of DBA nomologically treats beliefs and desires as internal events that lead only with a certain probability to a decision and action. In treating DBA as primarily belonging to the "third person causal predictive stance" it fails to account for the role of beliefs and desires as reasons for decisions within the first person deliberative stance. Within the first person deliberative

²² Kim 1998, 77.

²³ *ibid.*, 74.

stance reasons cannot be understood as mere causes that “naturally necessitate” my action independent of my recognizing them as my reasons. DBA is better understood as “a normative constraint on decision making and intention formation ... broadly speaking DBA states a constraint on the concept of rational action.”²⁴ Accordingly, Kim suggests that rationally explaining the actions of another person requires us to treat them as agents that deliberate about their actions and decide to act based on their reasons. Treating other agents in this manner implies conceiving of them as possessing a first person perspective. It is thus necessary “to project to them the way we understand our own actions.”²⁵

Kim’s conception of reason explanation is best viewed as an explication of a position that Dray hints at. Contrary to Dray he accounts for the epistemically different character of action explanation because he situates reasons primarily in the dimension of the agent’s self-understanding, whereas Dray concentrated on our understanding of other people. Like Dray, Kim seems to regard our notion of explanation and causation to be fundamentally ambiguous. Rationalizing explanations do not appeal to nomological causation or “natural necessity”, rather they constitute a form of justificatory explanation and appeal, as Dray suggests, to a type of rational necessity. Compared to Dray, Kim’s position has obvious advantages. First Kim admits, like Dray, that rational explanations include a normative element. Yet he avoids Hempel’s objection that explaining why an action should be done does not explain why it was done by freely admitting that belief/desire explanations do not explain action in the sense of an agent interfering with the world. They only explain why somebody arrived at a certain decision from his own first person point of view. Second, and equally important, by emphasizing the first person deliberative aspect of our notion of reasons, Kim is able to address the question of what purpose folk psychological interpretations serve and why reason explanations involve our empathetic or reenactive capacities. Empathy is required because we are only in this manner able to see others as agents that struggle to gain a consistent view of themselves.

Nevertheless, these advantages require us to pay a rather steep price. We seem to be forever banned to conceive of reason explanations as explaining the behavior that agents show because of their decision, since reason explanations stop at the point of arriving at an intention or a decision. Ultimately, we are unable to attribute the actions of an agent to his reasons. This theoretical consequence seriously undermines our conception of ourselves as agents that can be held responsible for our actions. Kim is quite right to point out that the problem of how decisions are related to our bodily movements in the physical world requires us to solve the mind body problem and the problem of mental

²⁴ Kim 1984, 318. See also 1998a, 77.

²⁵ Kim 1998a, 84 and 1984, 319.

causation. I do not intend to provide such a solution in this article. Yet it is preferable to adopt an account of reason explanations that would allow such a solution in the future and does not preclude it from the outset. If Kim is right we never will be able to articulate a philosophically unifying account of mental causation or to provide the mind with autonomous causal powers, since he distinguishes between two fundamental types of causation: nomological or natural causation and rational causation, that is, causation by reason. Reasons cause decisions radically different from the way that physical events cause each other. In order for decisions to be conceived of as mental events that cause further bodily movements, they would however have to be conceived of as causing actions in an ordinary sense, in the manner physical events cause other physical events. Decisions thus would have to be conceived of being causes in a very different sense than reasons for such decisions. Such bifurcation of mental causation is deeply counterintuitive and not supported by our ordinary explanatory practices. At a minimum such position constitutes a radical revision of our ordinary explanatory practices where we normally refer to beliefs, desires, emotions, and other mental states not just in order to explain decisions but also the ensuing actions. According to our ordinary understanding, mental states such as pain and more complex emotions can cause our behavior directly while circumventing our deliberative and reflective capacities. If such mental states can cause events in the ordinary sense why should this not be possible for beliefs and desires?

Moreover, Kim does not merely bifurcate our notion of causation he also bifurcates our ordinary understanding of our concepts of belief and desire. Whereas he situates our understanding of beliefs and desires in his 1984 article exclusively within the first person perspective, he allows in his later article for the possibility that DBA in addition serves as an empirical and descriptive principle for the prediction of action from the detached third person perspective.²⁶ These two explanatory stances however have to be strictly distinguished since from the third person perspective beliefs and desires cannot be understood as reasons for a decision and as the basis for the agent's self-understanding. They are merely conceived of as internal causes having certain external and bodily effects. In treating beliefs and desires in this manner we treat them as theoretical entities of a comprehensive theory for a particular domain and not as reasons directly accessible to the agent.

Kim acknowledges that ordinarily our understanding of mental notions such as beliefs and desires is committed to the projective first person perspective. He explicitly expresses sympathies for an account of our folk-psychological capacities as championed by proponents of simulation theory. According to simulation theorists, we do not under-

²⁶ Kim 1998a, 82 and 79.

stand other agents by implicitly appealing to a psychological theory and psychological generalizations such as DBA, but by putting ourselves in the situation of the other agent and by deliberating about this situation after taking into account the relevant differences between ourselves and the other person. Theory theorists on the other hand conceive of the mechanism underlying our normal folk-psychological capacities as akin to the detached perspective of a scientist trying to explain an observed event. For theory theorists, we do not use our own deliberative capacities in trying to understand other agents but engage our theoretical knowledge about the world and human beings in order to account for their behavior. For Kim, such explanatory strategy tends to be atypical and is appealed to only if ordinary empathetic capacities are lacking as is suggested by the Oliver Sacks' account of the highly functioning autistic Temple Grandin.²⁷ But if Kim is right, then simulation theorists and theory theorists are not talking about the same issue. Rather simulation theorists would talk about beliefs/desires as reasons that are referred to in DBA understood as normative principle, whereas theory theorists would talk about beliefs and desires as internal causes that function in empirical generalizations.

Here Kim holds a number of issues insufficiently apart. What Kim fails to realize is that our understanding of beliefs and desires even if we conceive of DBA as an empirical generalization implicitly requires us to understand them as reasons for actions. Even though DBA can function as a normative constraint, this does not imply that it does not at the same time describe the structure of our deliberative processes. An analogy might be helpful. Think of the following statement: "In America people drive on the right side of the road." This statement can certainly be understood as a descriptive statement about how Americans tend to drive. At the same time, it can also function as the articulation of a rule that Americans follow. Each driver in America can accept such a statement on reflection as expressing an obligation for him – at least in the sense of a hypothetical imperative – and as a standard according to which his driving behavior should be evaluated. One only has to imagine the case of a particularly clumsy novice, who has a hard time staying on the right side of the road. For him the continuous mumbling of "In America one drives on the right side of the road" is a desperate reminder of a normative rule that he has to follow if he wants to pass the driver's test. Yet at the same time it also describes how people drive in America because people have been trained to follow such rules. The distinction between understanding a general statement as the articulation of a normative standard or as the description of a regularity in behavior points to different functions of the same statement in different contexts. In one context the statement serves as a justification for distinguishing between right and wrong behavior, in the other it serves as a statement that justifies certain predictions of how people will behave and this general

²⁷ See the essay with the same title as the anthology in Sacks 1995.

statement is justified by empirical observation. One could even argue that the descriptive statement is true because Americans generally accept it also as a rule that should guide their behavior. No ambiguity of the concept of driving however is implied.

Similar considerations apply in my opinion to the case at hand. DBA can function as a normative principle that rational agents on reflection accept as a normative standard that should guide their deliberation and that can be used as a standard to evaluate the correctness of their deliberation. At the same time DBA could be a statement that describes how people as a matter of fact tend to act or tend to deliberate. Kim is driven to distinguish so sharply between DBA as a normative and as an empirical principle because he thinks that the causally predictive and the deliberative stance are “mutually exclusionary” insofar as the “the agent cannot be doing both at the same time.”²⁸ Kim certainly allows that we can take the causally predictive stance towards our own action retrospectively but he seems to insist that such a stance is necessarily from the detached third person perspective.

Whereas one has to agree that in deliberating about a particular course of action I am not concerned with predicting my own behavior, it does not follow that I cannot use my deliberative capacity as a tool that allows me to predict how I or somebody else (who is psychologically structured in a similar fashion) act in particular circumstances given certain beliefs and desires. To use a rather common example in this context, I could for instance predict that I would run a little bit faster if I am in a dark alley in a dangerous part of town and I hear footsteps behind me. I predict such behavior by putting myself imaginatively in this situation and I use my knowledge of the result of my deliberation about this imagined situation to make a prediction about my and other people's behavior. If simulation theory is indeed right this is how we predict and explain the behavior of other people most of the time. The difference between the deliberative stance and the predictive stance is thus not necessarily a difference between first person and third person perspective but a difference of the function of this stance. In cognitive science terminology this difference is expressed in terms of whether or not I deliberate on-line or off-line. In both cases however I have to understand beliefs and desires as reasons for my actions. In the first sense, I primarily understand them as providing me with information about the world that is relevant to consider in a particular situation, whereas in the second case I am more concerned with finding out which reasons should be seen as causes for behavior. The use of the first person perspective via simulation provides me thus with epistemic access to causally and explanatory relevant information.²⁹

²⁸ Kim 1998a, 79.

²⁹ In this context see also Henderson 1995, particularly 83. Henderson conceives of theory theorists and simulation theorists as merely describing different yet compatible epistemic venues to causally relevant information that can be used to answer why questions. In intentional psychology such divers

More importantly, our understanding of DBA as an empirical generalization is not solely tied to the third person perspective. Contrary to Kim, DBA understood as an empirical generalization cannot be conceived of without the first person perspective and our simulative capacities. It is important to remember that DBA is a generalization that contains *ceteris paribus* clauses. A person will act on specific beliefs and desires only if all things are equal, that is, if no "interfering conditions" exist. Particularly, one has to distinguish between two types of interfering factors. Factors of type I include conditions such as mental illness, tiredness, drunkenness or absentmindedness. The existence of such interfering factors can be objectively established solely from the third person perspective. In core cases of explaining why DBA failed, we however refer to factors of type II. We particularly mention that the agent had overriding reasons, that is, beliefs and desires that are in some sense stronger and incompatible with the ones cited in order to explain his behavior. We explain, for example, why somebody did not eat the bread in front of him, even though he is very hungry and he thinks that bread would nourish him and satisfy his hunger by pointing out that he also thinks that this particular bread is poisoned or infected by a fungus that would make him very sick. For such an explication of the failure of DBA to work however we appeal to the first person perspective, at least if we follow Kim's considerations that the third person perspective does not allow us to recognize a reason as a reason, compatible or incompatible. As I have also argued more extensively elsewhere, recognizing reasons as being incompatible with each other or understanding two beliefs as contradicting each other requires using my own cognitive and deliberative capacities.³⁰ In order to recognize two beliefs as being incompatible with each other I have to understand them as thoughts that would create an epistemic tension if I were to try to integrate them in my own belief system. It thus requires minimally that I can recognize them as thoughts that I could have.

We thus should reject Kim's suggestion that understanding DBA as an empirical generalization does not involve understanding reasons from the first person perspective. Even if we understand DBA in this manner we presuppose the normal working of our deliberative capacities and our normal capacity to adjudicate between sometimes conflicting desires and beliefs. Our understanding of the normal working of the deliberative processes is, as Kim himself acknowledges, closely tied to the first person perspective. DBA even as an empirical generalization presupposes thus implicitly that the mental capacities of the other agent are sufficiently similar to my own. Only in this case can I indeed have a justification to regard certain conditions as conditions that will lead to the failure of DBA.

epistemic venues are however not merely optional, since both procedures have their respective "blind spots." For further elaboration of this theme see Henderson/Horgan 2000.

³⁰ See especially my 2002a and my forthcoming essay. For an evaluation of the simulation proposal see also my 2000.

4. The A Priori Status of the Desire-Belief-Action Principle Or Why Sometimes We Can Have Our Cake and Eat It Too

If the above considerations are correct, then the third person predictive stance and the first person deliberative stance are not mutually exclusive. Even the first person perspective can be used for predictive purposes. Furthermore, a mere detached understanding of DBA from a Martian point of view that does not share our belief/desire psychology, for example, would not be possible, since such a person would not even have a rudimentary understanding of when other things are equal. Without resource to a cognitive capacity similar to our own, he would not know when a reason might interfere with beliefs and desires that normally lead us to expect an agent to act in a certain way. Equally important, the foregoing considerations provide a means for rejecting Rosenberg's argument that DBA has merely conceptual non-empirical status and the claim that reason explanations conceive of reasons as causes in a very special sense. If I am right that reason explanations essentially involve our simulative and reenactive capacities then DBA can be seen as a principle that we are on reflection entitled to as a default assumption of explaining the actions of other agents within the folk-psychological framework. Here I am using the concept of entitlement in Burge's sense of an "epistemic right or warrant" "that need not to be understood by or even accessible to the subject."³¹ Our epistemic right to DBA as default assumption is derived from the recognition that reason explanations of other agents involve essentially the first person perspective and from my knowledge based on imaginative simulation that I normally would act according to the prediction of DBA. Yet being entitled to DBA as a default assumption does not exclude that it is also an empirical generalization that describes *ceteris paribus* the minds of certain biological organisms. We hence cannot exclude that reasons are causes in an ordinary sense to which we have primarily access through the first person perspective and our simulative capacities.

Rosenberg however might object to this line of reasoning since the above considerations do not *prima facie* address his argument for the conceptual or analytic nature of DBA. In order to counter Rosenberg's argument, David Henderson has suggested that one should regard DBA as part of a theory that can be on the whole empirically refined and improved.³² In this respect DBA would not differ much from other principles that are central for empirically testable theories. Laws as such never meet experience in an isolated fashion but are, as Quine and Duhem have taught us, always part of a larger theory. According to this model, the concepts of beliefs and desires are used for formulating a number of psychological generalizations. Although we cannot test all of them at once,

³¹ Burge 1993, 458.

³² Henderson 1993, chap. 4 and 7.

advances in cognitive psychology have shown that we can test them in a piecemeal fashion by holding onto some of them while testing others. Furthermore, our attribution of beliefs and desires proceeds first "by constructing interpretive schemes", "without employing sophisticated theoretical expectations."³³ These original interpretations are then also presupposed in our testing of more complex psychological generalizations.

The above considerations do not directly address the issue of whether DBA (without any refinement) is constitutive for our notions of belief/desires and rationality. Henderson certainly has shown that DBA can be empirically refined, nevertheless Rosenberg asserts that DBA is assumed even in the interpretation of speech behavior. In order to attribute meaning to certain utterances we have to assume that the speaker has certain beliefs (i.e. about the meaning of the sentences he utters) and certain desires (such as the desire to reveal what he believes) etc. Henderson seems to admit as much by suggesting that DBA could not be tested in the same manner in which any of its refinement could be tested. Yet this should not be seen as counting against its empirical status, because it only reveals its basic and central status within an empirical project of explaining agents psychologically. DBA itself still responds to empirical evidence, because we could be forced to develop another psychological theory in light of empirically recalcitrant experience. Such theory could be regarded as a conceptual successor theory. It could be understood as talking about some internal states that are sufficiently similar to beliefs and desires but without making the rationality assumption.³⁴

Here however Henderson comes close to admitting Rosenberg's point, since it is not clear why we should understand a theory that does not satisfy the constraint of DBA as a belief/desire theory, that is, why we should regard it as the successor theory that modifies intentional psychology rather than as a theory that eliminates it. If Stich and Churchland are right, it is much more likely that the structure of the newly developed theory will not be isomorphic to the structure of ordinary intentional psychology.³⁵ In this case it becomes difficult to say whether we have empirically disproved intentional psychology or whether we merely changed the subject matter by refusing to talk about beliefs and desires and by refusing to conceive of persons as rational agents.

More importantly, in seeing DBA in analogy to other central principles of empirical scientific theories, one, I think, fails to locate the distinctive source of the special epistemic status that we intuitively seem to grant DBA.³⁶ The debate between Henderson and

³³ Henderson 1993, 198/199.

³⁴ For these considerations see Henderson 1993, 201.

³⁵ See Stich 1983.

³⁶ To be fair, I am focusing here on Henderson 1993. In his later publications Henderson recognizes the central role of simulation for understanding agency. Nevertheless he does not apply these considerations to the question of the epistemic status of psychological generalizations.

Rosenberg in the end comes down to the question of whether one should view DBA as a central principle within a broader psychological theory that as a whole meets experience or whether DBA is a principle at the periphery of the theory that infects any attempt to collect data for the psychological theory.³⁷ In that case DBA would be unlike any other nomological principle in the sciences since it would not allow any independent instrument to collect data to confirm its validity.

Thus conceived, the debate is squarely within the framework of a theory theory conception of folk-psychology and of our ability to attribute mental states to other persons. Within this framework the attribution of beliefs and desires is an inferential process that is implicitly mediated by appeal to general principles such as DBA. For Rosenberg, we proceed according to a behaviorist model of psychological interpretation. In the final stages, evidence for the attribution of mental states – like the assertion of the existence of other theoretical entities – consists of directly perceivable bodily movements and noises that a person produces.³⁸ Given this behaviorist model one certainly would have to appeal to psychological principles that link these bodily movements to internal psychological states.

Simulation theorists however strongly object to such conception of our relation to other people. Folk-psychological interpretation does not proceed by appealing to general psychological principles, but it proceeds by presupposing as the central default assumption that the other person is psychologically same-minded. For that reason, human beings do not proceed like behaviorists but they read bodily movements directly in terms of underlying goals and intentions. This position has for a long time been suggested by the phenomenological tradition in philosophy and by the later Wittgenstein, but it has been recently also advocated by cognitive child psychologists like Andrew Meltzoff, who focuses on the innate ability of infants to imitate the bodily movements of other people. Very young infants (less than two months old), for example, are able to intentionally imitate tongue protrusion and mouth opening of other people. Similarly, 18 month old infants are able to recognize the underlying intentions of bodily movements. If infants are shown adults trying but not succeeding in reaching the goal of their actions – like pulling a toy apart – they will reenact the intended target act and not the bodily movements of the failed attempt.³⁹ Given the known and strong transcultural connection, particularly demonstrated in the work of Paul Ekman, between certain facial expression and emotional states, Meltzoff even suggests that imitation might play a role in the infant's recognition of emotional states.⁴⁰

³⁷ Rosenberg 1985, 405 and 1995, 41/42.

³⁸ Rosenberg 1995, 38.

³⁹ For a summary of these results see especially Meltzoff and Moore 2001. See also Meltzoff 1995.

⁴⁰ Meltzoff/Gopnik 1993, 356ff.

Meltzoff therefore proposes that imitation should be seen as a starting mechanism to social cognition. It allows the infant to code the other agent as being another self, that is, as being “like me” and to learn about others through “investigation by re-creation.”⁴¹ According to Meltzoff the world of objects is for the infant primarily divided “into those that perform human acts (people) and those that do not (things.)” He continues that

Because human acts are seen in other and performed by the self, the infant can represent the other as “like me”: It can act like the other and reciprocally the other acts like me. Persons are special entities, the only entities with whom I can share behavioral states. *The crossmodal knowledge of what it feels like to perform observed acts provides a privileged access to people not afforded by things.* This sets the child down the pathway of ascribing psychological properties to people.⁴²

Our primary encounter with other people is thus one in which we directly recognize them as minded creatures because we recognize them as creatures that are like me. If this is indeed the case then we are, for example, justified in attributing similar perceptual experiences to another person, unless we are given a specific reason not to do so, such as the information that the other person is blind.⁴³ I would propose that we similarly recognize sincerity in another speaker based on his facial expression and general behavior using our own behavior as a model for sincere behavior in a specific situation. Certainly such attributions are fallible and revisable in light of further knowledge about cultural differences and differences between the speaker’s and interpreter’s personality. Yet recognizing the importance of our simulative and imitative capacities suggests that we can be justified in attributing beliefs and desires to the agent even though his future behavior does not correspond to DBA.⁴⁴

Rosenberg is thus wrong to suggest that we can never assign or are never justified in attributing any mental states to other people except in light of certain general principles such as DBA. For that very reason, his argument for the conceptual character of DBA also

⁴¹ Goldman 2001, 218. Goldman also suggests that we might explain the central role of imitation and simulation through underlying neurobiological mechanisms. Goldman points in this context to evidence about the central role of so called “mirror neurons.” According to discoveries in the brain of macaque monkeys, which also seems to apply to human beings, the neurons that are involved with planning certain actions (such as grasping an object) are also involved in the observation of these actions in others.

⁴² Meltzoff 2001, 174.

⁴³ Within the context of simulation theory, Robert Gordon has conceived of the interpretive process in a similar fashion. See Gordon 1995. For my view of the limits of pure simulation theory see my 2000 and 2002. It has to be noted in this context that I am here presupposing an epistemically externalist conception of justification, as is common within the context of simulation theory.

⁴⁴ Hempel is thus right in his judgment in this respect in his 1965, 477. He however did not provide extensive arguments for his claim.

fails. Yet at the same time Rosenberg is right that it is hardly imaginable that DBA on the whole is false. This fact however does not imply that DBA is merely an analytically true principle that is constitutive for our concept of belief or for our concept of rationality. It reveals only that our attribution of psychological concepts like belief and desire to other people is essentially tied to the use of our simulative capacities. As we have also seen, DBA itself implicitly relies on our simulative capacities in order to recognize core cases of interfering conditions. It is therefore hardly imaginable that people in general do not act according to DBA because it is not imaginable for me that I will have certain beliefs and desires and not act in a certain way. If I imaginatively assume that I have certain beliefs and desires then I will also simulate the appropriate decision based on these beliefs and desires. DBA thus expresses something like the default assumption of the interpretive process within the realm of folk-psychology due to the fact that we essentially rely on our empathetic abilities in this context. Furthermore since we have argued for the essential involvement of the first person perspective by non-inductive means, solely by reflecting on the nature of what it means to have a reason for one's action and decision, we have argued for being entitled to DBA by non-empirical means.⁴⁵ I am therefore inclined to talk in this context about an a priori entitlement to regard DBA as a default assumption of psychological interpretation. Notice however, that in speaking of an a priori entitlement to a default assumption I am not denying that DBA is also an empirical generalization that describes psychological processes of agents who belong to the same species as me or that describes how people like me reason and come to decisions. To a large extent, empirical research in this area will consist in empirically specifying under what exact neurobiological, cultural and social conditions I am not justified to make this assumption. The special status of DBA just derives from the fact that we ourselves have access to our cognitive states and reasoning from the first person perspective and have to use this

⁴⁵ Prima facie it seems as if my argument is very similar to Stich's understanding of folk-psychology as involving our projective capacities. However, for Stich DBA or something like Grandy's principle of humanity has conceptual status. See Stich 1990, chap. 2 (particularly 46ff) and 1983, 79-92. Stich bases his argument centrally on a projectivist understanding of our concept of a belief. For him, when we say that S believes that p, we are saying that "S is in a belief state identical in content to the one which would play the central causal role if I were now to produce an utterance 'p' with a typical causal history" (1983, 81). I object to such a projectivist account of our concept of belief because it cannot account for the fact that first person and third person ascriptions of beliefs have the same content. It thus cannot account for the univocality assumption within folk-psychology. According to the projectivist analysis, to say that K.S. believes that the table is green is equivalent to the claim that K.S. is in a state that normally causes the attributor to utter that the table is green. To maintain that I express the same thought when I say that I believe that the table is green is, however, absurd, especially in light of the assumption that my knowledge of my own mental states is supposedly not based on any inferences. For a further critique of the projectivist account of belief ascriptions see Fodor and LePore 1992, 139ff.

ability in a projective or reenactive manner in order to understand the reasons of other agents.⁴⁶

To conclude, anti-naturalists are right to reject methodological monism in the social sciences. Our understanding of other agents has to be epistemically distinguished from explanations in the natural sciences. Yet traditional anti-naturalists tended to argue from the supposed normative or conceptual character of psychological generalizations to the essential involvement of our reenactive or empathetic abilities. As I have shown, this argumentative strategy puts the cart before the horse. For that reason, antinaturalists do not succeed in establishing that intentional action explanations are not causal explanations in the ordinary sense and that one has to distinguish between realms of natural and rational necessities. Rather, psychological generalizations like DBA are empirical generalizations that describe the psychological mechanisms of agents like me. This fact is fully compatible with the assertion that DBA can also function in a certain context as the articulation of a normative principle that creatures that are psychologically like us can accept on reflection as a standard for the evaluation of their reasoning and behavior. One however should admit that we are in an a priori manner justified in assuming that DBA is true of other agents like me. The special epistemic character of DBA is not based on DBA being a conceptual or analytic truth. It is merely due to the fact that our understanding of other agents within the folk-psychological belief/desire framework essentially depends on our reenactive or simulative use of the first person perspective. Only in this manner can we indeed understand beliefs and desires as reasons for actions.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ The epistemic status of DBA is thus very similar to the assumption of my knowledge of my own mental states. My direct and non-empirical knowledge of my own mental states does not exclude that others know about the same state in an inferential and empirical manner. Furthermore there might be empirical reasons for disregarding the first person perspective as being authoritative in special cases. For the debate about the status of the assumption of self-knowledge see my 2002b.

⁴⁷ I would like to thank David Henderson and Manisha Sinha for their helpful comments.

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