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Reply to Christos Douskos

Christos's extremely thought-provoking paper suggests that my account of agency – and more specifically, my attempt to characterise the distinction between bodily movements and changes which are agential and those which are non-agential – suffers from two main shortcomings. In what follows, I shall try to suggest that the second issue he highlights is not a genuine problem for my account, since it seems to be based on the attribution to me of a thesis I do not hold. I want to concede, though, that the first issue Christos raises is indeed a problem. The considerations put forward by Christos do succeed in showing, I think, that the account of the agential/non-agential distinction offered in *A Metaphysics* is inadequate to do the work required of it. I shall try therefore to make some suggestions as to how the inadequacy might be made good – but these suggestions are only really a starting point for what will need eventually to be a more developed response.

Let me begin with the second issue. The problem is said to arise from what Christos labels the 'Guidance Control Condition', to which he thinks I am committed. According to the Guidance Control Condition, if the execution of some movement is to count as agential, the agent must be *able* to produce movements that satisfy *d* as opposed to *d'* by the operation of intentional states/processes, where *d* and *d'* are I think intended to be physical descriptions of movements which are only slightly different from one another. Christos objects that as these descriptions, *d* and *d'*, grow more and more specific, it becomes implausible to suppose that we have the requisite abilities to produce motions that satisfy one such description rather than the other, since no agent has the power to ensure that her bodily movements are in conformity with utterly specific descriptions. I agree. But the words of the Guidance Control Condition are Christos's and not mine. The initial attribution to me of something like this condition seems to be based on what I say about the example of dancing – Christos says that I claim that "although someone might not 'specifically intend to make' movements of certain kinds while dancing she must be able to produce movements *of just these kinds* by the operation of intentional processes" (p.?, my italics). But this is not what I said and it is not what I meant. What I say is that although someone might not specifically

intend to make certain movements that she in fact makes when dancing, she can bring these movements 'under control' at a moment's notice. But this does not mean that she must be able to produce movements "of just these kinds by the operation of intentional processes". What I meant by speaking of the agent's bringing them under control was that she will be able, for example, to stop flexing her foot, or perform the arabesque more quickly, or with a straighter back, or whatever. I meant that by focusing on those movements, she will be able to bring them within the ambit of attentional processes, at least to some degree. I did *not* mean that for any description whatever of the produced motion, however specific, the agent must be able to produce a movement that conforms to that description.

It is true that I stipulated in *A Metaphysics* that agential processes must be processes which *can* be brought under control at a moment's notice (so Christos is right that there is a modal element to the account) and right too that in responding to certain sorts of cases which might be thought to be counterexamples to the view of agency as settling, I point out that for any given ø-ing, it may be that there are cases in which the agent is unable not to ø - but that provided there is *some* description of the ø-ing, say as a *d*-ing, such that the agent is able not to *d*, that the ø-ing may still satisfy the condition for being a settling (since it will be a settling at least of whether or not a *d*-ing occurs). But none of this implies that an agent must be able, for any particular *d*, to act in a way which conforms to that description (as opposed to some other). All that is implied is that in each case which is a genuine case of agency, there must be *some* description of the action as a *d*-ing such that the agent is able not to *d*. Any action must be a non-compulsory exercise of the agent's powers of self-movement and self-change – that is the thought. And if it is a non-compulsory exercise of those powers, there must be some description under which the non-compulsoriness shows itself. But that is a far cry from being able to produce *d* as opposed to *d'* for maximally specific *d* and *d'*. My condition on agency is specified as what I called a *refrainment* power - what is crucial is that the agent needs the ability *not to d* for some *d*, if an individual *d*-ing is to be an action. Christos's Guidance Control Condition, on the other hand, places a very strong *positive* condition on the abilities whose exercise constitutes agency. Being able *not* to produce *d,* though, does not imply being able to produce *d'*.

So much for the second issue. Let me turn now to the first. Christos objects that the extension of the agency concept to which I'm committed is problematic. In order to bring subintentional actions into the realm of the agential, I suggested in *A Metaphysics* that we might rely on what Christos rightly calls a *modal* criterion – these phenomena count as agential, I suggested, in virtue of their *accessibility* to direct and intentional agential control. But this, Christos rightly points out, allows far too much in. Breathing, for example, is certainly not normally an agential process; it is an automatic one, which goes on without our needing to guide it, control it or take any agential part in it. Nevertheless, it is possible for me to exert a certain amount of intentional control over my breathing, should I decide I want to do so. I can, for example, hold my breath, at least for a short time, and breathe more deeply, or more quickly or slowly, usually by simply trying to do so. The criterion I suggested, therefore, will not do. Something other than a merely modal criterion is going to be needed in order to exclude breathing from counting as agential even when it is not the focus of any agential attention.

Consider the difference between a Parkinsonian hand tremor, say, and an agent's rhythmic but absent minded tapping along to a piece of music. The former is clearly non-agentive; the latter is the sort of thing I am anxious to include in the category of the active, along with such things as hand gestures and 'nervous' activities, such as rubbing one's chin, readjusting one's glasses, scratching one's head, fiddling with one's jewellery. What is the difference? Not merely, as the line taken in *A Metaphysics* suggested, that I am able to stop the tapping but not the tremor, or change the rhythm of the former but not of the latter. It is not merely that the latter sorts of process could be controlled that makes them different from the former, but that they are clearly *being controlled already.* What I think Christos has shown is that a satisfactory account of the agential character of these subintentional actions and activities will have to try to say something about this processual, ongoing control. A purely modal strategy will not work, for the reasons Christos gives.

It is clear that the control which is apparent in these subintentional cases is not fully intentional control. Intention is usually presumed to go along with knowledge, and as is often pointed out, one may be engaging in these activities without necessarily knowing that one is doing so – one may respond to being told to stop by saying: "Oh, sorry! – I didn't realise I

was doing it!" But perhaps there is room for manoeuvre in the recognition that there can be agential awareness which falls short of the sort of knowledge that goes along with intention, and that such lesser grades of knowledge might go along, in these subintentional cases, with what might be called a lesser grade of *meantness* than is found in full-blown intentionality. One may not *intend* to be fiddling with one's jewellery. But nevertheless, there is a sense in which the movements, one might think, are *meant*. I do not grasp randomly – but *at my jewellery* - and the movements I make display a variety of rather fine control. Moreover, it is not as though – even if I did not realise I was doing it at the time – I do not *now* realise that I *was* doing it – and this realisation need not be based only on the fact that I have been told so. I may now be dimly aware that I have indeed been fiddling with my jewellery and as I cast my mind back I may even be able to recall certain periods of the fiddling. What I am inclined to try to explore, then, in searching for a better answer to the question how to distinguish the agential from the non-agential than the one I provided in *A Metaphysics* is the thought that there is a kind of meantness which falls short of intendedness which will serve to bring subintentional actions of these sorts into the fold of the agentive – while excluding automatic processes such as breathing and blinking. I do not yet have this account to hand – but I look forward to trying to develop it, and I thank Christos for making it so plain that some such account needs to be provided if I am to make good on my claim that agency can and ought to be characterised without excessive reliance on the idea of mental causation.