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# Attempts

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**Abstract** It's generally assumed that, if an agent *x* acts by ϕ-ing, then there occurs an event which is *x*'s ϕ-ing. But what about when an agent *tries* to do something? Are there such things as *attempts*? The standard answer is 'Yes'. But in a series of articles, and now a book, David-Hillel Ruben has argued that the answer is 'No': what happens when *x* tries to ϕ isn't that an attempt occurs; rather, what happens is simply that a certain subjunctive conditional fact obtains; *x* tries to ϕ just in case, had all the necessary conditions for success obtained, *x* would have intentionally ϕ-ed. I defend the existence of attempts. Following Ruben, I frame the issue in terms of the logical form of trying sentences (i.e. sentences which report that an agent tried to do such-and-such). Against Ruben's view that such sentences express subjunctive conditionals, I argue that they express existential quantifications over attempts *qua* events. Thus, trying sentences are true only if attempts *qua* events exist.

**Keywords** Trying · Action sentences · Perceptual reports · Adverbs · David-Hillel Ruben

## 1 Introduction

It's generally assumed that, if an agent *x* acts by ϕ-ing, then there occurs a 'token action', an event which is *x*'s ϕ-ing. E.g., if I raise my arm in order to hail a cab, there occurs an event which is *my raising of my arm*. One of the ways we can act is by *trying* to do things; indeed, some philosophers claim that acting *always* involves

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trying.[1] But are there events in which agents try to do things? Are there such things as *attempts*?

The standard answer is 'Yes'.[2] But David-Hillel Ruben (2013, 2015, 2016, 2018) has recently argued that the answer is 'No'. On his view, no *attempt* occurs when $x$ tries to $\phi$. Rather, what happens is that a certain subjunctive conditional fact obtains: roughly, $x$ tries to $\phi$ just in case, had all the necessary conditions for success obtained, $x$ would have intentionally $\phi$-ed.[3]

While this is primarily a metaphysical view, Ruben approaches it through the philosophy of language. The assumption that there are token actions at all is based in the Neo-Davidsonian approach to the analysis of action sentences, according to which the logical form of '$x$ $\phi$-ed' is *There occurred an event which was x's $\phi$-ing*.[4] Simplifying slightly, (1) is analysed as ($1_{ND}$):

(1) Alice kissed Beth.

($1_{ND}$) $\exists e(Agent(\text{Alice})(e) \ \& \ Patient(\text{Beth})(e) \ \& \ Kiss(e))$.[5]

(In English: there occurred an event which was a kissing of Beth by Alice.) If that's right, then action sentences can only be true if token actions exist.[6] Ruben allows that the Neo-Davidsonian approach is correct for ordinary action sentences, but denies that it's correct for trying sentences, i.e. sentences with the surface form '$x$ tried to $\phi$'. Such sentences express, not existential quantifications over attempts, but subjunctive conditionals.

In this article, I defend the existence of attempts by defending a Neo-Davidsonian approach to trying sentences against Ruben's alternative. In Sects. 2 and 3 I present our competing views in more detail. In Sects. 4 and 5 I argue that the linguistic evidence favours my Neo-Davidsonian approach. Trying sentences report the occurrence of attempts, and so those sentences can only be true if attempts exist.

[1] See, e.g., Armstrong (1973), Hornsby (1980, ch.3), and O'Shaughnessy (1973).

[2] See, e.g., Adams (1995), Buckareff (2005), Cleveland (1997), Hornsby (1980, chs.3–4), McCann (1975), O'Shaughnessy (1973) and Pietroski (2000, ch.1).

[3] Ruben (2016, 273, 2018, 122). My presentation of Ruben's view is slightly simplified. The consequent of this conditional is officially a disjunction: *either* $x$ would have intentionally $\phi$-ed *or* $x$ would have been intentionally $\phi$-ing ('$x$ is $\phi$-ing' doesn't always imply '$x$ $\phi$-ed'; consider '$x$ is walking to the store'). Since nothing I say hinges on this complication, I ignore it in what follows.

[4] Davidson (1967). For detailed development, see Landman (2000) and Parsons (1990).

[5] Here, '*Agent*' and '*Patient*' denote *thematic roles*, i.e. ways of being involved in an event. As I'll understand these roles, the agent of an event is simply the doer of whatever that event is a doing of (e.g. the agent of a kiss is the kisser) while the patient of an event is simply whatever has that thing done to it (e.g. the patient of a kiss is the kissee). Thus, they're what Dowty (1989, 109–114, 1991, 571–575) calls 'proto-roles'.

Note that ($1_{ND}$) is simplified in two respects. First, tense is ignored. Second, while ($1_{ND}$) contains a single event-variable, some Neo-Davidsonians argue that action sentences like (1) should be analysed using *two* event-variables: one for a basic action and one for a result which that action produces (Davidson, 1985a; Ludwig, 2010; Pietroski, 2000, ch.1). Since nothing I say hinges on these complications, I ignore them.

[6] I assume a Quinean conception of ontological commitment (Quine, 1948). For further discussion and defense, see Payton (2021, 23–30).

## 2 The event theory

### 2.1 Metaphysics

I begin with a sketch of my commitments regarding the nature of trying and the metaphysics of attempts.

According to what I'll call 'volitionism', attempts are a *sui generis* kind of mental event. (Hornsby, 1980; O'Shaughnessy, 1973; Pietroski, 2000). This view is, in principle, compatible with a Neo-Davidsonian approach to trying sentences. But I reject it because it renders all attempts invisible. If all attempts were wholly inner, mental events, we could never see people try to do things. But we sometimes *can* see people try to do things. So, volitionism is false.[7]

According to what I'll call 'teleologism', $x$ tries to $\phi$ just in case there's something that $x$ does, $\psi$, such that $x$ $\psi$-s *in order to* $\phi$ (Cleveland, 1997; Wilson, 1989). This 'something' may simply be to $\phi$: if $\phi$-ing is a basic action, like raising one's arm, then $x$ needn't do anything *else* in order to $\phi$; her means of raising her arm can simply be *to raise her arm*. But it can't simply be *to try to* $\phi$. An agent's means of $\phi$-ing can't simply be to *try*; there must be some other way of acting such that she can attempt to $\phi$ by doing *that*.

So stated, teleologism says nothing about the metaphysics of attempts. Indeed, someone who denied the existence of attempts—or the existence of token actions generally—could accept this account of what it is to try. However, teleologists typically identify an attempt with what Ruben (2015, 2018, ch.1) calls its 'by-act': $x$'s attempt to $\phi$ is identical to $x$'s token $\psi$-ing, where $\psi$ is what the agent does with the aim of $\phi$-ing. This allows the teleologist to distinguish herself from the volitionist, by allowing that an attempt can be something other than an inner, mental event. If I successfully attempt to raise my arm, my attempt just *is* my raising of my arm, and this event (the teleologist supposes) is not a wholly inner, mental event.[8]

Ruben (2015, 9–14, 2018, 30–47) forcefully argues that teleologism is incompatible with cases of 'naked trying', i.e., cases where an agent tries to $\phi$, and not only fails to $\phi$, but fails to do anything *else* in order to $\phi$. In cases investigated by Landry (1855), a patient suffers from paralysis in one of their limbs, say, an arm; they receive no proprioceptive information about the location and position of their arm, but must rely on vision for that information. The patient is then blindfolded and asked to raise their arm while, unbeknownst to them, their arm is being held in place. The patient *tries* to raise their arm and is surprised to learn that they've failed. In the original cases, some muscular contractions in the arm may have occurred, but no overt movement does. In more recent studies, there aren't even any muscular contractions; some activity occurs in the patient's brain, but it results in neither muscular contraction nor overt movement.[9] In such cases, there

[7] See Sect. 4. For a different argument against volitionism, see Ruben (2018, 104–121).

[8] Ruben calls this 'the physical action theory' of trying, since, as it's typically developed, it allows an attempt to be identical to some token physical action. This label isn't ideal, however, since we can (and I do) allow for such identities while rejecting this conception of what trying consists in.

[9] See Ruben (2015, 12n.8, 2018, 48n.10) for sources.

seems to be nothing the patient does *in order to* try to raise their arm; they simply try to raise it. Thus, teleologism is false.[10]

I prefer a view like that developed by Adams and Mele (1992). On this view, an attempt is a process which is initiated and sustained by a relevant intention, or at least by the agent's having a relevant aim or goal. This process begins in the mind/brain, but can extend beyond it. In the Landry case, the patient's attempt to raise her arm doesn't extend far beyond the brain, if at all. However, when I successfully raise my arm, my attempt begins in my brain, but also encompasses the contraction of my muscles and the overt movement of my arm. Indeed, it seems plausible to say, when I successfully attempt to raise my arm, my attempt *is* my raising of my arm.[11]

This view—which I'll call 'the process view'—is compatible with naked trying. The view requires that some process is initiated in the patient's brain, a process which—if all went well—could eventually encompass muscle contractions and overt arm-movements. It does *not* require that there be some course of action, some means of raising one's arm, which the patient undertakes with the aim of raising her arm.

### 2.2 Semantics

Turning from metaphysics to semantics, I claim that the Neo-Davidsonian approach to ordinary action sentences applies to trying sentences as well. In making this claim, my focus is on *analysis* (i.e., the claim that action sentences express propositions which existentially quantify over events) rather than *compositional semantics* (i.e., how the meaning of an action sentence is built up from the meanings of its parts). Regarding the latter, we needn't make any substantive assumptions beyond the following two. First, the semantic contribution of a verb includes an event-type. 'ϕ' may simply denote the event-type *ϕ-ing* which, following standard practice, I represent using the function $\lambda e.\phi(e)$, which is true of some token event $e$ just in case $e$ is a ϕ-ing. Or it may denote something more complex, e.g. a relational property represented by the function $\lambda x.\lambda e.(Agent(x)(e)\ \&\ \phi(e))$, which is

[10] It's sometimes claimed that cases of naked trying are cases of 'total action failure': when Landry's patient tries to perform the basic action of raising her arm, and fails to do so, she doesn't *act* or *exercise her agency* at all—see Ruben (2018, 32), Adams and Mele (1992, 328), Enç (2003, 19), and Hornsby (1980, 42). I find this view implausible. Moreover, we can reject teleologism, on the ground that it rules out naked trying, while allowing that naked attempts are actions. You might think that naked attempts are *basic* actions—Landry's patient doesn't try to raise her arm *by* doing anything else—and that the problem for teleologism is that it effectively requires all attempts non-basic. (Recall, one's means of ϕ-ing can't simply be *to try to ϕ*; otherwise, no reductive identification of $x$'s attempt to ϕ with $x$'s ψ-ing is achieved.).

[11] See also Buckareff (2005). Note: to adopt this view, you needn't think that an attempt to ϕ must be initiated by an intention with ϕ-ing as its content. You may think it's possible for $x$ to set ϕ-ing as her goal, and try to ϕ, even in cases where she doesn't *intend* to ϕ. For relevant discussion, see Bratman (1987, ch.9), Hornsby (1995), Mele (2003) and Ruben (2018, 134–137, 145–155). Note also that the process view is compatible with the claim that naked attempts are *actions*: you might think that the patient's attempt to raise her arm is an action, because it's caused and sustained by the right sorts of mental states and events.

true of some $x$ and $e$ just in case $e$ is a ϕ-ing of which $x$ is the agent.[12] Second, adverbs denote properties of events: 'F-ly' denotes the function $\lambda e.F(e)$, which is true of an event if and only if that event is $F$. E.g. the denotation of 'quickly' is the property *quick*, or $\lambda e.Quick(e)$.[13]

Before presenting my analysis of trying sentences, I should note a complication about adverbs.

The phrase 'try to ϕ' is composed of two verbs: 'try' and 'ϕ'. Thus, a sentence with the surface form '$x$ tried to ϕ F-ly' is potentially ambiguous between two readings. On the first reading, 'F-ly' modifies the embedded verb 'ϕ'; the sentence reports that what $x$ tried to do was *ϕ F-ly*. On the second reading, 'F-ly' modifies the whole phrase 'try to ϕ'; 'F' somehow describes, not what $x$ tried to do, but her behaviour of trying to do that thing.[14] Call the former reading the 'wide-scope' reading (since 'try' takes scope over both 'ϕ' and 'F') and the latter the 'narrow-scope' reading (since 'try' takes scope over 'ϕ' but not 'F').

To take an example I'll discuss in more detail later, consider (2):

(2) Alice tried to open the door noisily.

On the wide-scope reading of (2), 'noisily' modifies what Alice tried to do: it says that what Alice tried to do was *open the door noisily*. Thus, it implies that, if Alice opened the door quietly, she failed to do something she was trying to do. By contrast, on the narrow-scope reading, 'noisily' somehow modifies, not what Alice tried to do, but her behaviour of trying to do it: it says that what Alice tried to do was *open the door*, and that she did so noisily. (E.g. suppose that she needs to turn a handle to open the door, and that the handle makes a loud squeaking noise.) There's no implication that, if Alice opened the door quietly, she thereby failed to do something she was trying to do. Indeed, she might have been trying to *open the door quietly*, and made noise accidentally (in which case, she wouldn't have done what she was trying to do, namely, to *open the door quietly*).[15]

There's a natural explanation of this ambiguity within a Neo-Davidsonian framework. The phrase 'try to ϕ' is composed of two verbs. Since, on the Neo-

[12] Bayer (1997, 4–5) distinguishes *lexical Neo-Davidsonian semantics*, on which at least some thematic roles are built into the denotations of verbs—see, e.g., (Landman 2000, ch.2)—and *compositional Neo-Davidsonian semantics*, on which the denotation of a verb is simply an event-type, and thematic roles are contributed by other (perhaps unpronounced) lexical items, special compositional rules, or other means—see, e.g., Parsons (1990, ch.5) and Dowty (1989, 88–96). I remain officially neutral between these two approaches.

[13] The treatment of 'quickly' actually needs to be more complex. No event is quick or slow *simpliciter*, but only relative to standard of evaluation. Similar remarks apply to adverbs like 'noisily' and 'quietly', which I also discuss below. For my preferred account of how standards of evaluation are fixed, and how they figure in the analysis of action sentences, see Payton (2021, 211–217). Nothing hinges on these complications for present purposes, so I ignore them.

[14] I say 'somehow' because, as we'll see, Ruben and I disagree on how adverbs function outside the scope of 'try'.

[15] The narrow-scope reading is more easily triggered if we shift the location of the adverb: 'Alice noisily tried to open the door'. For some adverbs, the wide-scope reading isn't clearly available at all—consider 'Alice tried *hard* to close the gap' or 'Alice tried *repeatedly* to remember Beth's name'. Thanks to an anonymous referee for discussion.

Davidsonian approach, verbs contribute event-types, which are represented using predicates applied to event variables, the natural assumption is that the phrase 'try to ϕ' contributes *two* event variables, not just one: the proposition expressed by '*x* tries to ϕ' contains a variable for ϕ-ings and a variable for attempts *qua* events.

I propose that the semantic contribution of 'try' includes a two-place predicate, '*Try*', the first argument of which is an event, and the second argument of which is an event-type, contributed by an auxiliary verb phrase. '$Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\phi(e_2))$' relates the event-token $e_1$ to the event-type *being a ϕ-ing*, and says that $e_1$ was an attempt to ϕ. '$Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\phi(e_2)\ \&\ F(e_2))$' relates the event-token $e_1$ to the event-type *being a ϕ-ing which is F*, and says that $e_1$ was an attempt to ϕ F-ly (in the wide-scope sense).

This approach yields the following schemata which cover both bare and adverbially modified trying sentences:

**Neo-Davidsonian Schemata**

$$[\![x \text{ try to } \phi]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi \text{ F-ly})]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)\&F(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi)\text{F-ly}]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&F(e_1)\&Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)))$$

The braces in the second and third sentence forms indicate the scope of 'try': '*x* try to (ϕ F-ly)' is the wide-scope reading while '*x* try to (ϕ) F-ly' is the narrow-scope one. These schemata capture the difference between wide- and narrow-scope readings in the natural way: the adverb 'F-ly' denotes a property of events, represented by the predicate '*F*', and the difference in scope is a difference in which event variable takes this predicate, the variable for ϕ-ings (wide-scope) or the variable for attempts (narrow-scope). E.g. the wide- and narrow-scope readings of (2) are analysed as ($2_{\text{ND-W}}$) and ($2_{\text{ND-N}}$), respectively:

$$(2_{\text{ND}-\text{W}})\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)\&Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.Patient(\text{door})(e_2)\&Open(e_2)\&Noisy(e_2)))$$

$$(2_{\text{ND}-\text{N}})\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)\&Noisy(e_1)\&Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.Patient(\text{door})(e_2)\&Open(e_2)))$$

($2_{\text{ND-W}}$) reports an attempt by Alice to *open the door noisily*, while ($2_{\text{ND-N}}$) reports an attempt by Alice to *open the door*, and reports that this attempt was noisy.

You might worry that this approach doesn't yet account for the intensionality of trying. There seems to be a reading of (3) on which the inference from (3) and (4) to (5) is invalid:

(3) Alice tried to kiss Beth.
(4) Beth is the tallest person in the room.
(5) ∴ Alice tried to kiss the tallest person in the room.

For, Alice might not be aware that Beth is the tallest person in the room, in which case it seems wrong to describe her as trying to kiss *the tallest person in the room*. How should we account for this?

My preferred approach is modelled on 'Neo-Russellian' approaches to attitude reports.[16] On this approach, *Try* is a two-place relation between an event and a coarse-grained act-type (just as, according to Neo-Russellians, attitudes like belief and knowledge are two-place relations between agents and coarse-grained propositions). Given that Beth is the tallest person in the room, the act of kissing Beth just *is* the act of kissing the tallest person in the room, and so the inference from (3) and (4) to (5) is, despite the appearances, valid. The appearance of invalidity is explained pragmatically. To describe Alice as *trying* to do something is to report the occurrence of an event with that act-type as its aim or goal. But then, to describe this act-type as 'kissing the tallest person in the room' is to *implicate* that this is how Alice herself conceives of it.

Other approaches are possible. We may take a Fregean approach, and say that *Try* is actually a two-place relation, not between an event and a coarse-grained act-type, but between an event and a fine-grained *mode of presentation* of an act-type. Or we might model the apparent intensionality of trying on 'hidden indexical' approaches to attitude reports.[17] On this approach, the two-place relation *Try* should be replaced by a three-place relation which holds between an event, a coarse-grained act-type, and a mode of presentation.

Nothing in what follows hinges on which approach we take. The linguistic data which favours a Neo-Davidsonian approach to trying sentences over Ruben's conditional view can equally be accommodated by Neo-Russellians, Fregeans, and hidden-indexical theorists. Thus, I'll proceed with my simple schemata.[18]

## 3 The conditional theory

Recall that, according to Ruben, what happens when $x$ tries to $\phi$ is simply that a conditional fact obtains: roughly, had the conditions for success obtained, $x$ would have intentionally $\phi$-ed, where these conditions include that "the agent has…the opportunity to act, the know-how, there can be no preventers or blockers to his acting…there can be no finks or reverse-cycle finks at work, and so on" (2018, 116). Ruben elaborates on these conditions in detail and defends the account against a range of objections (2016, 273–286, 2018, 123–158). In what follows, I'll ignore these details and simply refer to these conditions collectively as 'condition $C$': $x$ tries to $\phi$ just in case, had $x$ been in condition $C$, $x$ would have intentionally $\phi$-ed.[19]

Ruben needn't deny that ordinary action sentences existentially quantify over events, or that the denotation of an ordinary verbs includes an event-type. Thus, we can give the following 'Rubenesque' schemata for trying sentences:

[16] See, e.g., Salmon (1986) and Soames (2002, ch.8).

[17] See, e.g., Richard (1990, ch.3).

[18] For further discussion of the intensionality of trying, see Ruben (2018, 69–73).

[19] My presentation is simplified in another way; see note 3.

**Rubenesque Schemata**

$$[\![x \text{ try to } \phi]\!] = C(x)\Box\!\!\rightarrow\!\exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&\varphi(e_1)\&Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi \text{ F-ly})]\!] = C(x)\Box\!\!\rightarrow\!\exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&\varphi(e_1)\&Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)\&F(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi) \text{ F-ly}]\!] = C(x)\ \Box\!\!\rightarrow ???$$

Here, '*Int*' denotes a two-place relation between an event and an event-type contributed by an auxiliary verb phrase, and which obtains just in case the event is intentional relative to that event-type. Thus, in the schema for '$x$ tried to $\phi$', '$Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\phi(e_2))$' says that $e_1$—the $\phi$-ing event which would have occurred, had condition $C$ obtained—is an intentional $\phi$-ing, and in the schema for '$x$ tried to ($\phi$ F-ly)', $Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\phi(e_2)\ \&\ F(e_2))$' says that $e_1$ is an intentional $F$ $\phi$-*ing*.[20] These schemata, like my Neo-Davidsonian ones, make use of two event-variables. And as on my Neo-Davidsonian schemata, one of these variables takes $\phi$-ing events as values. So, Ruben can accommodate the wide-scope reading of '$x$ tried to $\phi$ F-ly' easily enough: on that reading, 'F-ly' modifies *what x tried to do*. We'll see in Sect. 5 that Ruben has a harder time account for narrow-scope adverbially modified trying sentences. But first, I'll raise a problem for the conditional theory which is independent of concerns about adverbs.

## 4 Perceptual locutions

The Neo-Davidsonian approach to ordinary action sentences explains important data about sentences like (6), in which an action phrase is combined with the perceptual locution 'saw':

(6) Charlie saw Alice kiss Beth.

Seeing someone do something isn't the same as seeing *that* they do that thing. (6) isn't equivalent to (7):

(7) Charlie saw that Alice was kissing Beth.

(6) reports that Charlie stood in a perceptual relation to an aspect of the external world; it reports that Alice kissed Beth and that Charlie saw this happen. By contrast, (7) reports that Charlie possessed a certain kind of knowledge of the proposition *Alice kissed Beth* (or *Alice was kissing Beth*); roughly, it reports that he knew this proposition as a relatively direct result of visual perception. To see that these aren't equivalent, notice that (6) doesn't imply (7): Charlie might not have known it was Alice and Beth he was seeing, in which case (*modulo* considerations of intensionality) he would have lacked perceptual knowledge of the proposition

[20] Following Davidson (1971, 45–47), I allow that $x$'s $\phi$-ing can be token-identical to $x$'s $\psi$-ing, even if $x$ $\phi$-s intentionally but $\psi$-s *un*intentionally. An event's status as intentional is relative to an event-type; or, as Davidson puts it, an event is only intentional 'under a description'. Davidson (1967, 121–122; 1985b, 218–219) denies that an event's being intentional under a certain description should be represented by a predicate denoting a property of events, but see Payton (2021, 154–157) for criticism.

*Alice kissed Beth*. Moreover, (6) exhibits no intensionality: if Alice is Beth's wife, (6) implies that Charlie saw Beth's wife kiss her. But (7) *does* exhibit intensionality: even if Alice is Beth's wife, (7) isn't equivalent to the claim that Charlie saw *that* Beth's wife was kissing her, since he might not have known they were married.

The Neo-Davidsonian explains these facts by taking (6) to report perception of an *event*: (6) reports that an event of a certain kind occurred and that Charlie saw it.

($6_{ND}$) $\exists e_1 \exists e_2 (Agent(\text{Charlie})(e_1)\ \&\ Patient(e_2)(e_1)\ \&\ See(e_1)\ \&\ Agent(\text{Alice})(e_2)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Beth})(e_2)\ \&\ Kiss(e_2))$

In English: there occurred two events, $e_1$ and $e_2$, such that $e_2$ was a kissing of Beth by Alice and $e_1$ was a seeing of $e_2$ by Charlie.[21] This explains the transparency of 'saw': substituting a co-referring term for 'Alice' merely results in a new description of the event Charlie saw, and so it preserves truth. (In general, if the $F$ = the $G$, then '$x$ saw the $F$' implies '$x$ saw the $G$'.) It also explains why (6) doesn't imply (7). (6) merely reports that Charlie saw an event of a certain kind; it doesn't imply that he knew that it *was* an event of that kind.[22]

What goes for ordinary action sentences goes for trying sentences, too. (8) is a perfectly acceptable English sentence:

(8) Charlie saw Alice try to kiss Beth.

E.g. suppose that Alice leans in to kiss Beth, but that Beth doesn't see this, and walks away at the last second. If Charlie observes this course of events—that is, he sees Alice lean forward, pucker her lips, etc.—then he sees Alice try to kiss Beth. Moreover, (8) isn't equivalent to (9), for the same reasons that (6) isn't equivalent to (7):

(9) Charlie saw that Alice was trying to kiss Beth.

Given my Neo-Davidsonian schemata for trying sentences, we can explain these facts by taking (8) to report perception of an *attempt*:

($8_{ND}$) $\exists e_1 \exists e_2 (Agent(\text{Charlie})(e_1)\ \&\ Patient(e_2)(e_1)\ \&\ See(e_1)\ \&\ Agent(\text{Alice})(e_2)\ \&\ Try(e_2)(\lambda e_3.Patient(\text{Beth})(e_3)\ \&\ Kiss\ (e_3)))$

In English: there occurred two events, $e_1$ and $e_2$, such that $e_1$ was an attempt to kiss Beth by Alice and $e_1$ was a seeing of $e_2$ by Charlie. Since (8) reports that Charlie saw an event, and 'Alice' figures in a description of that event, substitution of co-referring terms preserves truth: if Alice is Beth's wife, (8) implies that Charlie saw Beth's wife try to kiss her. And because (8) merely reports that Charlie saw an event of a certain kind, and not that he knew it *was* an event of that kind, (8) doesn't imply (9).

(Notice that perceptual locutions provide evidence, not just for a Neo-Davidsonian analysis of trying sentences, but for the process view of attempts. The reason Charlie can be said to have seen Alice try to kiss Beth is that he saw

[21] You might worry that Charlie can't be the *agent* of a seeing, in the way that Alice can be the agent of a kiss, since perception isn't an action. But see note 5 and sources cited therein.

[22] See Parsons (1990, 15–17) and Payton (2021, 138–144) for further development of this argument.

some ordinary course of events: as I imagined the case, he saw Alice lean towards Beth. If Alice's attempt were, e.g., a volition located entirely inside her body, it would be mysterious how seeing Alice lean towards Beth could amount to seeing her attempt. If Alice's attempt just *is* her act of leaning towards Beth, the mystery vanishes.[23])

How can Ruben account for the truth of (8), and its distinctness from (9)? Perhaps the obvious thing for him to say is that (8) reports, not that Charlie saw an *event*, but that he saw a *person*—namely, he saw *Alice* as she tried to kiss Beth. That is, (8) reports that Charlie saw Alice and that, had Alice been in condition *C*, she would have intentionally kissed Beth.

$(8_{R1})$ i. $\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Charlie})(e_1)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Alice})(e_1)\ \&\ See(e_1))\ \&$

ii. $(C(\text{Alice})\ \Box\!\!\rightarrow\ \exists e_2(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_2)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Beth})(e_2)\ \&\ Kiss(e_2)\ \&\ Int(e_2)(\lambda e_3.Patient(\text{Beth})(e_3)\ \&\ Kiss(e_3))))$

$(8_{R1})$ explains the data as well as $(8_{ND})$ does: since 'Alice' simply names the person Charlie saw, substitution of co-referring terms preserves truth; and since $(8_R)$ merely reports that Charlie saw Alice at the time that a certain conditional fact obtained, and not that he knew that that fact obtained, (8) doesn't imply (9).

There are two problems with this approach. First, consider (10):

(10) Charlie saw Alice try to kiss Beth, and David saw it, too.

(8) reports that Charlie saw something, and (10) adds that David saw it, too. But to what does 'it' refer, here? 'It' seems to function as an anaphoric pronoun, referring to some object introduced by the phrase 'Charlie saw Alice try to kiss Beth'. On the Rubenesque approach being considered, that phrase reports that Charlie saw Alice, so it's natural to treat 'it' as referring to her, and (10) as reporting that David also saw Alice:

$(10_{R1})$ i. $\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Charlie})(e_1)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Alice})(e_1)\ \&\ See(e_1))\ \&$

ii. $\exists e_2(Agent(\text{David})(e_2)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Alice})(e_2)\ \&\ See(e_2))\ \&$

iii. $(C(\text{Alice})\ \Box\!\!\rightarrow\ \exists e_3(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_3)\ \&\ Patient(\text{Beth})(e_3)\ \&\ Kiss(e_3)\ \&\ Int(e_3)(\lambda e_4.Patient(\text{Beth})(e_4)\ \&\ Kiss(e_4))))$

But if (10) reports that Charlie and David saw the same *person*, then the presence of the impersonal pronoun 'it' is odd. We should expect $(10_{R1})$ to be expressed in

[23] For further discussion of the perception of attempts, and of token actions more generally, see Hornsby (1986), Steward (2000) and Payton (2021, 138–150). Note that the point also applies in cases of naked trying: while I might be able to see *that* the patient is trying to raise her arm (e.g. if she furrows her brows in frustration upon repeated failed attempts), I can't literally see her try to raise her arm. In cases of naked trying, attempts remain wholly inner, and are no easier to see than the firings of neurons or the activities of the digestive system.

English with a personal pronoun ('he', 'she', 'they') and for the use of the impersonal 'it' to be objectionable. Yet (10) sounds fine as it is.[24]

Compare the Neo-Davidsonian approach. On that approach, 'Charlie saw Alice try to kiss Beth' reports that Charlie saw an *event*, so 'it' refers to this event, and (10) reports that David also saw it:

$(10_{ND})$ $\exists e_1 \exists e_2 \exists e_3 (Agent(\text{Charlie})(e_1)$ & $Patient(e_3)(e_1)$ & $See(e_1)$ & $Agent(\text{David})(e_2)$ & $Patient(e_3)(e_2)$ & $See(e_2)$ & $Agent(\text{Alice})(e_3)$ & $Try(e_3)(\lambda e_4 \cdot Patient(\text{Beth})(e_4)$ & $Kiss(e_4)))$

Since (10) doesn't report perception of a *person*, on this approach, there's no reason to expect the presence of the impersonal pronoun 'it' to be objectionable.

Second, $(8_{R1})$ gets the truth-conditions of (8) wrong. It's possible for Charlie to see Alice as she tries to kiss Beth, without actually seeing her try to do so. Suppose that Alice and Beth are sitting at the kitchen table, and that Charlie is a small child playing under it. He can see Alice from the waist down, but nothing above her waist is visible to him. If Alice tries to kiss Beth, then Charlie will see *her* as she does this. So, assuming that Ruben's conditional theory is at least extensionally adequate, $(8_{R1})$ will be true. But (8) will be false: Charlie won't see Alice try to kiss Beth.[25]

(The process view explains why (8) is false in this case. Alice's attempt to kiss Beth is a process which begins in Alice's brain, but which extends outward to encompass the movement and positioning of certain parts of her body. As she leans in to give Beth a kiss, she moves certain parts of her body, and these movements are parts of the overall process that is Alice's attempt. But since none of these body parts—nor any other body parts involved in the attempt—is within Charlie's view, that process is *also* located out of his view. Thus, although he can see *Alice* as she tries to kiss Beth, he can't see her *attempt*, and so he can't be said to have seen her try to kiss Beth.)

Ruben might instead claim that (8) reports that Charlie saw, neither an event nor a person, but a *fact*, or a *state of affairs* in Armstrong's (1997) sense: the fact or state of affairs of *a* being *F* isn't the proposition *Fa*, but a worldly entity (i.e. a concrete particular, located in space and time, and capable of having causes and effects) which *makes* that proposition true. On this approach, (8) reports that Charlie saw the fact of Alice trying to kiss Beth, and so it's analysed in (something like) the following way (where 'Alice trying to kiss Beth' functions as a name for that fact):

$(8_{R2})$ $\exists e(Agent(\text{Charlie})(e)$ & $Patient(\text{Alice trying to kiss Beth})$ & $See(e))$

[24] An anonymous referee worried that (10) sounds less natural than similar sentences in which the relevant behaviour isn't described as an attempt—e.g., 'Charlie saw Alice kiss Beth, and David saw it, too.' But compare (10) to the following dialogue:

Charlie: Alice just tried to kiss Beth.
David:I know, I saw it, too.

[25] *Objection:* Charlie *doesn't* see Alice; he only sees a *part* of her.
*Reply:* We only *ever* see parts of people (roughly, their surfaces). If generalized, this objection implies that we never see people at all.

This approach has some hope of accommodating (10). If (8) reports that Charlie saw a fact rather than a person, and (10) adds that David saw this same fact, then there's no reason to expect the presence of the impersonal pronoun 'it' to be objectionable.[26]

Problems remain, however. First, it's not clear how the fact of Alice trying to kiss Beth can be visible. If we follow Armstrong, then a fact is just the instantiation of a property by a particular (or, in the case of relational properties, some particulars). But it's not clear how anyone could see the instantiation of the property *being an x such that, had x been in condition C, x would have kissed Beth*. That property doesn't seem to be, or bring along with it, a power to affect our visual systems, and so to instantiate this property isn't to *look* a certain way. What, then, could seeing the instantiation of this property amount to?[27]

Moreover, even if you think that this fact can in principle be seen, it's not clear that ($8_{R2}$) gets the truth-conditions of (8) right. Recall the case where Charlie is hiding under the table and can only see Alice from the waist down. If (8) reports that Charlie saw an attempt *qua* event, we can explain why (8) is false in this case: since that event involves only parts of Alice's body that are out of Charlie's view, that event is out of his view, as well. But believers in facts tend to think that they're located where their constituent objects are: the fact of *a* being *F* is located just where *a* is.[28] Since Charlie can see Alice, he has perceptual access to her location, and so he should be able to see the fact of her trying to kiss Beth, if that fact can be seen at all. Thus, ($8_{R2}$) should be true, and so (8) should be true, too. But (8) is *false*, so some other account of the location of facts is needed.[29]

Perhaps these problems can be solved. But in the absence of satisfying solutions, I conclude that the evidence regarding perceptual locutions and trying sentences favours my Neo-Davidsonian approach.

## 5 Adverbs

### 5.1 The basic problem

Returning to the issue of adverbs, Ruben has a problem accounting for the occurrence of adverbs outside the scope of 'try'. Recall the schemata from Sect. 3:

[26] Ruben (2018, 90–92) suggests that apparent anaphoric reference to attempts can *always* be treated as anaphoric reference to facts.

[27] Note: the problem isn't that this property is understood using a conditional—you might think that dispositional properties like colours, whose instantiations *are* visible, are to be understood in conditional terms. The problem is just that it's not clear how the instantiation of *this* property could be visible. Compare: the property *being a philosopher* isn't, and doesn't bring with it, a power to affect anyone's visual systems; the fact of my being a philosopher doesn't seem to be the kind of thing one can *see*.

[28] See, e.g., Armstrong (1978, 122–125, 1988, 1997, 188–189) and Barker and Jago (2012, 120–121).

[29] Perhaps seeing *F*'s being *a* requires somehow cognizing that *a* is *F*? I.e. perhaps the reason Charlie can't see the fact of Alice trying to kiss Beth is that he doesn't *know*, or is otherwise *unaware*, that she's trying to kiss Beth? But this risks confusing *seeing* with *seeing that*. (In Payton (2021, 147–149), I suggest that this is a general problem for those who believe in Armstrongian facts and think they can be seen).

**Rubenesque Schemata**

$$[\![x \text{ try to } \phi]\!] = C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&\varphi(e_1)\&Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi \text{ F-ly})]\!] = C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow \exists e(Agent(x)(e_1)\&\varphi(e_1)\&Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\varphi(e_2)\&F(e_2)))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi) \text{ F-ly}]\!] = C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow ???$$

These schemata account for the wide-scope readings of adverbially modified trying sentences easily enough. Like my Neo-Davidsonian schemata, these schemata make use of two event-variables. And like my schemata, the second variable, '$e_2$', takes ϕ-ing events as its values. Thus, on the wide-scope reading of (2), 'noisily' modifies *what Alice tried to do*: it reports that, had condition *C* obtained, Alice would have intentionally *opened the door noisily*.

(2) Alice tried to open the door noisily.

($2_{R\text{-}W}$) $C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow\, \exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)$ & $Patient(\text{door})(e_1)$ & $Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.Open(e_2)$ & $Noisy(e_2)))$

But what about the narrow-scope readings? Recall, on my Neo-Davidsonian schemata, the first event-variable, '$e_1$', takes actually occurring events (attempts) as values. That's why the narrow-scope reading of (2) implies that Alice did something noisily, and hence that she actually made noise while trying to the open the door. By contrast, on the Rubenesque schemata, the first event-variable, like the second, takes ϕ-ing events as its values; the difference between the two variables is that one occurs inside the scope of '*Int*' and the other doesn't. Thus, if Ruben attempts to account for the narrow-scope reading in the way that I do, we get:

($2_{R\text{-}N1}$) $C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow\, \exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)$ & $Patient(\text{door})(e_1)$ & $Noisy(e_1)$ & $Int(e_1)(\lambda e_2.Open(e_2)))$

In English: Had condition *C* obtained, Alice would have intentionally opened the door, and that event would have been noisy. But this gets the truth-conditions for the sentence wrong, since it doesn't imply that Alice *actually* made noise as she tried to open the door.

In short, it's not immediately clear how Ruben's conditional theory can accommodate the narrow-scope readings of adverbially-modified trying sentences. Ruben is aware of this problem. Considering various kinds of adverbs, he offers various accounts of how the narrow-scope readings of trying sentences can be accommodated, without taking those adverbs to contribute properties of attempts (2013, 2018, 73–85). Here, I'll consider only two adverbs, which Ruben discusses in detail. My arguments can be extended to other examples.

### 5.2 Adverbs of manner: 'noisily'

Sticking with 'noisily' for the moment, Ruben's first suggestion for accommodating the narrow-scope reading of sentences like (2) is that adverbs outside the scope of 'try' sometimes modify the *agent* rather than an attempt. In (2): 'noisily' somehow describes Alice herself, not an attempt (2013, 724–725, 2018, 74).

There are two ways to understand this suggestion. First, it may be that 'noisily' simply contributes a predicate '*Noisy*' which, in (2), applies to Alice.

$(2_{\text{R-N2}})$ $\mathit{Noisy}(\text{Alice})\ \&(C(x)\ \Box\!\!\rightarrow\ \exists e_1(\mathit{Agent}(\text{Alice})(e_1)\ \&\ \mathit{Patient}(\text{door})(e_1)\ \&\ \mathit{Int}(e_1)(\lambda e_2.\mathit{Open}(e_2))))$

That is, (2) reports, not that Alice's *attempt* was noisy, but that *she* was noisy as she tried to open the door.

This gets the truth-conditions of (2) wrong: it's possible for Alice to be noisy as she opens the door, even though she doesn't open the door noisily. Suppose that everything Alice needed to do in order to open the door (insert a key, turn the handle, etc.), she did quietly, but that as she did those things she also sang loudly to herself. Then, $(2_{\text{R-N2}})$ is true: Alice was noisy as she tried to open the door. But (2) is false: strictly speaking, she didn't noisily try to open the door, since *that* is something she did quietly.

If this isn't immediately clear, suppose that Beth was down the hall from Alice, and heard her singing. If (2) is true in this case, then (11) should be, as well:

(11) Beth heard Alice try to open the door noisily.

But on its narrow-scope reading, (11) implies (12):

(12) Beth heard Alice try to open the door.

And (12) is *false*, in this case: although Beth heard Alice sing, she didn't hear Alice try to open the door. Therefore, (2) is false as well.

The second way to understand the suggestion (and this is Ruben's preferred way) is that in (2) 'noisily' functions as a 'phrase adverb' Taylor (1985, 20–23). The idea is that for some adverbs, '$x$ ϕ-ed F-ly' doesn't report that $x$'s token behaviour of ϕ-ing had the property of being $F$, but rather reports something about the general behaviour of ϕ-ing that $x$ engaged in, or perhaps $x$'s reasons for engaging in that behaviour. E.g. 'Cruelly, Alice stomped on a snail' seems to be equivalent to 'It was cruel of Alice to stomp on a snail'. According to the 'phrase adverb' view, this sentence doesn't attribute the property *cruel* to Alice's token stomping, but rather says something like (i) stomping on a snail is an inherently cruel act or (ii) that Alice did it out of cruelty, i.e. she did it in the way a cruel person would, or for reasons that a cruel person would.

We might object that alleged examples of phrase adverbs *do* denote properties of events, and that their semantics simply needs to be made more complex. Perhaps '$e$ is cruel' means that $e$ is a token of an inherently cruel type of behaviour. Or perhaps 'cruel' denotes a relational property that connects an event, $e$, to a behaviour type, ϕ, which obtains just in case (i) $e$ is a ϕ-ing and (ii) the agent of $e$ ϕ-ed out of cruelty.[30]

But even if Ruben is right about how phrase adverbs function, 'noisily' doesn't function in this way. (2) isn't equivalent to 'It was noisy of Alice to try to open the door'—indeed, the latter sentence is of dubious coherence. Nor does (2) report that

[30] Thanks to an anonymous referee for discussion.

trying to open the door is an inherently noisy act (it might be very easy for someone to do it quietly), or that Alice did it 'in the way a noisy person would'.

Ruben's second suggestion for accommodating the narrow-scope reading of (2) is that although 'noisily' modifies a token action—and so it contributes a predicate of events, just as the Neo-Davidsonian claims—it doesn't modify an *attempt*. In general, he says, adverbs outside the scope of 'try' sometimes modify neither the thing $x$ tried to do nor $x$'s attempt to do it, but rather an "implicit by-act" (2013, 725, 2018, 75). The suggestion seems to be that, although (2) makes no mention of by-acts at the level of surface form, it *does* make mention of them at the level of logical form: at the level of logical form, (2) contains a variable for by-acts, and on the narrow-scope reading of the sentence, the predicate '*Noisy*' applies to *this* variable. So, if Alice tried to open the door by turning the handle, (2) may be true because the handle-turning was noisy, not because an attempt was noisy.

This suggestion requires that we slightly modify Ruben's view. Trying sentences can't *merely* express subjunctive conditionals anymore, since they must also report the occurrence of by-acts. On Ruben's behalf, I propose the following modification. '$x$ tried to $\phi$' reports (i) the occurrence of some event, $e$, of which $x$ is the agent, (ii) that for some $\psi$, $e$ is a $\psi$-ing, (iii) that if had $x$ been in condition $C$, $x$ would have intentionally $\phi$-ed *by* $\psi$-ing. For simplicity, I omit the higher-order quantification over event-types and represent this last conjunct using a two-place predicate, '$By(e_1)(e_2)$', which says that $e_1$ is the by-act of $e_2$.[31] Adverbs inside the scope of 'try' modify the variable for $\phi$-ings, as before, while adverbs outside the scope of 'try' now modify the variable for by-acts.

**Rubenesque Schemata (Revised)**

$$[\![x \text{ try to } \phi]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&(C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow \exists e_2(Agent(x)(e_2)\&\varphi(e_2)\&Int(e_2)(\lambda e_3.\varphi(e_3))\&By(e_1)(e_2))))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi \text{ F-ly})]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&(C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow \exists e_2(Agent(x)(e_2)\&\varphi(e_2)\&Int(e_2)(\lambda e_3.\varphi(e_3))\&By(e_1)(e_2)\&F(e_2))))$$

$$[\![x \text{ try to } (\phi) \text{ F-ly}]\!] = \exists e_1(Agent(x)(e_1)\&F(e_1)\&(C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow \exists e_2(Agent(x)(e_2)\&\varphi(e_2)\&Int(e_2)(\lambda e_3.\varphi(e_3))\&By(e_1)(e_2))))$$

Thus, the narrow-scope reading of (2) is analysed as ($2_{\text{R-N3}}$):

($2_{\text{R-N3}}$) $\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)$ & $Noisy(e_1)$ & $(C(x) \,\Box\!\!\rightarrow\, \exists e_2(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_2)$ & $Patient(\text{door})(e_2)$ & $Open(e_2)$ & $Int(e_2)(\lambda e_3.Patient(\text{door})(e_3)$ & $Open(e_3))$ & $By(e_1)(e_2))))$

In English: Alice did something which, had she been in condition $C$, would have resulted in an intentional door-opening, and the event of her doing this thing was noisy.

There are two problems, here. First, it's no longer clear that the view avoids a commitment to attempts. '$x$ tried to $\phi$' now quantifies over events of which $x$ is the

[31] On my preferred view, the status of one event as the by-act of another, like the status of an event as intentional, must be relativized to event-types. This requires a four-placed predicate, '$By(e_1)(e_2)(E_1)(E_2)$'.

agent, and which seem to be aimed at ϕ-ing, or to have ϕ-ing as their object. Why don't these count as attempts?[32]

Second, this semantics is incompatible with the possibility of naked trying. When Landry's patient tries to raise her arm, there's nothing she does *in order* to try to raise her arm: she simply tries to raise it, and fails. Thus, there's no by-act for the sentence 'The patient tried to raise her arm' to quantify over, and the semantics predicts that that sentence is false. Since that sentence is *true*, the semantics fails.

Ruben might reply that trying sentences are ambiguous: on one reading (captured by the original schemata), they don't report the occurrence of by-acts; on another reading (captured by the revised schemata), they do. In cases of naked trying, '*x* tried to ϕ' is to be evaluated on the first reading, and so it isn't falsified by the absence of a by-act.

Even if it succeeds, this reply could only address the second problem, not the first. It would still be true that some trying sentences quantify over token actions aimed at ϕ-ing.

Moreover, the reply doesn't succeed. I can utter a sentence of the form '*x* tried to ϕ' without knowing whether *x* did anything *in order to* ϕ. And whether my utterance is true, in such a case, doesn't depend on whether a by-act occurred. E.g., if I say, 'The patient tried to raise their arm', my utterance is true regardless of whether the patient tried to raise their arm in the normal way (as in a case of naked trying) or, having realized that that arm was paralysed, attempted to raise it using their other arm. It would be miraculous if my utterance just *happened* to quantify over by-acts in the latter scenario but not the former.

I conclude that Ruben's conditional theory doesn't provide a satisfying explanation of how 'noisily' functions on the narrow-scope reading of (2). We should treat (2) as quantifying over attempts, and 'noisily' as contributing a property of such events.

### 5.3 Adverbs of speed: 'quickly'

Another adverb about which Ruben says quite a bit is 'quickly'. He allows that 'quickly' can contribute a property of events when it occurs outside the scope of 'try', as in (13):

(13) Alice quickly tried to dance with Beth.

But he insists that the event which possesses this property needn't be an attempt.

Ruben distinguishes two readings of 'quickly'. On the first reading, it functions as a manner adverb, just like 'noisily': '*x* ϕ-ed quickly' reports that *x* ϕ-ed in a quick manner; equivalently, *x*'s ϕ-ing was quick. On the second reading—what Ruben calls the 'temporal relational' reading—'*x* ϕ-ed quickly' reports, not that *x* ϕ-ed in a quick manner, but that the temporal duration between *x*'s ϕ-ing (or perhaps a related event; see below) and a 'triggering event' was short; on this

[32] Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.

reading, '$x$ ϕ-ed quickly' is equivalent to '$x$ ϕ-ed promptly' (2018, 76). Borrowing his example, consider the non-trying sentence (14):

(14) Alice quickly danced with Beth.

On the manner reading, (14) reports that Alice danced with Beth in a quick or hurried manner. On the temporal relational reading, it reports that Alice began dancing with Beth shortly after some contextually salient 'triggering event', e.g. an announcement that all couples should make their way to the dance floor.

Ruben doesn't explicitly consider whether the manner reading of 'quickly' makes trouble for his view when it occurs outside the scope of 'try' (e.g. a case in which Alice makes a series of hurried movements in an attempt, perhaps unsuccessful, to dance with Beth). Presumably, he thinks that such cases are already covered by his treatment of manner adverbs like 'noisily': on the manner reading of (13), it reports either that Alice was quick as she tried to dance with Beth or that an implicit by-act was quick. The arguments I made against this approach to 'noisily' apply here, too.

What of the temporal relational reading? Suppose that Alice and Beth are at a party, that all couples are called to the dance floor, and Alice promptly tries to get to the dance floor to dance with Beth. (The attempt may be successful or unsuccessful; perhaps Beth has stepped outside, so that while Alice promptly *tries* to dance with Beth, she fails.) (13) seems true on the temporal relational reading of 'quickly'. On the Neo-Davidsonian approach, this reading of (13) is analysed as ($13_{\text{ND-TR}}$), where the truth-conditions of '$Quick_{\text{TR}}(e)$' are spelled out as something like '$e$ occurs at some time $t$ which is not long after $t$*', where $t$* is the contextually salient time of the triggering event.

($13_{\text{ND-TR}}$) $\exists e_1(Agent(\text{Alice})(e_1)\ \&\ Try(e_1)(\lambda e_2.Patient(\text{Beth})(e_2)\ \&\ Dance(e_2))\ \&\ Quick_{\text{TR}}(e_2))$

That is: Alice's attempt to dance with Beth was quick, in that it occurred not long after the triggering event. How can the temporal relation reading of (13) be analysed on Ruben's conditional theory?

Ruben claims that, while '$x$ ϕ-ed quickly' sometimes reports that the duration between a triggering event and a ϕ-ing event was relatively short, it sometimes reports that the duration between a triggering event and some *other* event related to the fact that $x$ ϕ-ed was relatively short, and this is what happens in trying sentences like (13). But what is this other event?

In cases of non-naked trying, Ruben seems to suggest, this event is the agent's by-act. (13) reports that the temporal duration between the triggering event and Alice's ψ-ing was relatively short, where ψ is whatever Alice did, in order to dance with Beth, e.g. walking towards the dance floor and looking for her there (2018, 77–78).

This suggestion, of course, runs into the same problems I discussed regarding 'noisily'. Ruben's suggestion seems to be that, while (13) makes no mention of by-acts at the level of surface form, it does make mention of them at the level of logical form. If he claims that *all* trying sentences quantify over by-acts, he renders his semantics incompatible with the possibility of naked trying. (E.g. 'The patient quickly tried to raise her arm' will come out false in the Landry case, even if the

patient promptly tries to raise their arm after being instructed to do so, since no by-act occurs.) If he claims that trying sentences only quantify over by-acts when such events occur, he requires us to believe in something miraculous.

What of cases of naked trying? If no by-act occurs, then *what* is said to have occurred shortly after the triggering event? Ruben claims that it's the onset of a token belief, namely *x*'s (false) belief that *x* is ϕ-ing (or has ϕ-ed). E.g. in the Landry case, the patient is unaware that her arm is prevented from rising, even as she tries to raise it. Thus, before the prevention is revealed to her, she holds the (false) belief that she has raised her arm. To say that the patient quickly tried to raise her arm, in this case, is to say that the onset of this belief occurred relatively shortly after the triggering event, i.e. the request that she raise her arm (2018, 81–82).

Unfortunately, this suggestion doesn't generalize. The fact that Landry's patient forms the false belief that they're raising their arm (or have raised it) is due to a contingent feature of the case, namely that the patient is unaware that their arm is prevented from rising, even as they try to raise it. But consider a different case: suppose that Alice wants to test her strength, so she asks Beth to hold her arm down while she tries to raise it; Alice watches her arm as she tries to raise it, to confirm the results; as it happens, Beth is much stronger than Alice, and completely prevents her arm from rising. If Alice tries to raise her arm shortly after some triggering event (e.g. Beth saying, 'Go!'), then (15) should be true:

(15) Alice quickly tried to raise her arm.

But I see no reason to suppose that Alice would form a belief that she was raising her arm (or had raised it) in this case. She's watching her arm in order to see what happens, after all. Since she can see her arm remain where it is, she won't form such a belief.

Ruben might reply by modifying his claim: although Alice doesn't form the belief that she's raising her arm, she presumably *does* form the belief that she's *trying* to raise her arm. More generally: if *x* tries to ϕ then *x* believes that they're trying to ϕ. so perhaps (15) reports that the onset of *this* belief occurred shortly after the triggering event.

This proposal isn't obviously subject to counterexample: it *does* seem that if *x* tries to ϕ then *x* believes that they're trying to ϕ, and so, if we believe in token beliefs at all, we should think that if *x* tries to ϕ shortly after a triggering event, then *x* will form a belief to that effect shortly after the triggering event. Nonetheless, the proposal faces a problem. It would be odd to suppose that 'quickly' only sometimes functions in this way, when it occurs outside the scope of 'try'. Given that a belief that one is trying to ϕ *always* accompanies trying to ϕ, we should expect that if the temporal relational reading of 'quickly' is *ever* used to report that the onset of this belief was prompt, then it is *always* used that way. So, it should function in (13) to report, not that Alice promptly *did something* in an attempt to dance with Beth (e.g. that she made her way to the dance floor), but rather that she promptly formed the belief that she was trying to dance with Beth. And that just seems wrong. (13) doesn't describe Alice's belief states any more than the non-trying sentence (14) does.

I conclude that Ruben's conditional theory doesn't provide a satisfying explanation of how 'quickly' functions on the narrow-scope reading of (13). We should treat (13) as quantifying over attempts, and 'quickly' as contributing a property of such events.

## 6 Conclusion

I've argued that linguistic data regarding perceptual locutions and adverbs favours a Neo-Davidsonian approach to trying sentences, over Ruben's conditional approach. Thus, trying sentences report the occurrence of attempts, and so those sentences can only be true if attempts exist. Along the way, I've sketched my preferred view of what attempts are, but a more complete development and defense of that view must wait for another day.

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