Donald Davidson

Actions, Reasons, and Causes (1963)
(page numbers according to Essays on Actions and Events, Second Edition)
p. 10: “... we can’t infer, from the fact that giving reasons merely redescribes the action and that causes are separate from effects, that therefore reasons are not causes. Reasons, being beliefs and attitudes, are certainly not identical with actions, but more importantly, events are also often redescribed in terms of their causes. (Suppose someone was injured. We could redescribe this event ‘in terms of a cause’ by saying he was burned.)”

What is going on here is:

Someone might object that since we give a reason for an action by merely redescribing this action, reasons cannot be causes. For causes must be separate from their effects. Davidson replies, first, that the redescribed action is not itself the reason. The reason is that in terms of which the action is described. Second, we also often describe events in terms of their causes (just as we describe an action in terms of a reason). But this cannot mean that these causes are not the causes of what we redescribe in terms of them.

Davidson gets back to this on p. 14: “In any case there is something very odd in the idea that causal relations are empirical rather than logical. What can this mean? Surely not that every true causal statement is empirical. For suppose 'A caused B’ is true. Then the cause of B = A; so substituting, we have 'The cause of B caused B', which is analytic. The truth of a causal statement depends on what events are described; its status as analytic or synthetic depends on how the events are described.”

Causal Relations (1967)

Claim: “causes” is not a sentential connective. (Exception: where one of the relata is a non-occurrence or other negative item; then it is not an event.)

The sentence (1) “A caused B” does not have the logical structure (2) “the fact that A caused the fact that B”; for it does not behave in the same ways when equivalents are
substituted. Causal statements are stable under substitution of singular terms, but not under substitution of propositions (slingshot argument). For instance, if A=B, then A’s doing F caused C iff B’s doing F caused C. But if (p iff q), then it is not the case that the fact that p caused r iff the fact that q caused r.

Davidson’s references to events are always de re.

**The Individuation of Events (1969)**

(page numbers from Essays on Actions and Events)

Two events are identical iff they have the same causes and effects.