Acting in Light of One's Acting:
Practical Reasoning and the Excellences

by

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Abstract

This dissertation draws from certain recent accounts of action, action explanation and reasons to illuminate our conceptions of practical reasoning, fallibility, expertise, virtues, advising, and practical intelligence. My thesis is that, in the course of her ongoing acting, an agent can respond to evaluative features by deliberately adjusting her acting, and that this represents a form of practical reasoning that casts significant light on the nature of action, the practice of advising, and on the prospects for Aristotelian naturalism more generally. The majority of the dissertation is devoted to articulating and defending this idea.

I proceed by first describing Michael Thompson's, John McDowell's, and Jonathan Dancy's work in action theory, thus providing context and introducing central ideas. Chapter Two responds to Bernard Williams's concerns about the role of virtues in first-personal deliberation by defending a novel, but controversial, conception of practical reasoning. Chapter Three asks and answers the question of how we should understand the nature of the *evaluative features* and our *responsiveness* to them in exercises of practical intelligence, and supports the general account of knowledge of goodness developed by those who claim goodness is attributive. Chapter Four defends the positions that practical reasoning can conclude in acting and can take the form of fully absorbed acting, replying to Joseph Raz, John Broome, and Hubert Dreyfus' arguments to the contrary. Chapter Five examines how, in a way analogous to testimony, giving advice can convey practical knowledge and argues that advising's greater action-guiding

potential lies in the cultivation of understanding and practical intelligence. Chapter Six presents

and criticizes Judith Thomson's views on how evaluative features inform practical reasoning and

advising, contrasting her in-respects-similar positions with this dissertation. The work concludes

by considering McDowell and Williams' objections to Aristotelian naturalism and reflecting on

how the dissertation's achievements might change one's assessment of the position.

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Introduction

This dissertation is about action. In particular, it is about the nature of *acting well*, so is about

action as understood in the progressive aspect—action as ongoing *acting*. Acting well often

involves *adjusting* what one is doing *in light of* how what one is doing is *going*. We can think of

a person who is acting in this manner as *deliberating* and as exercising a *certain practical*

intelligence. Hence, this dissertation is also about the development and exercise of deliberative

powers, the formation of which is at the heart of various *action-guiding practices*.

 Out of context, much of this is bound to look either highly technical or utterly

uncontroversial. So I will try to provide some context. After offering some, I will introduce the

principal thesis defended in this dissertation.

 Philosophy of action has typically focused on actions as particular doings. Examples such

as "I flipped the switch to turn on the light" and "The driver raised her arm in order to signal"

tend to serve as starting points in reflections on the nature of action. Following Davidson, many

philosophers think of actions as particular events, capable of being temporally and spatially identified. In this way, actions are generally thought of as "datable particulars".[1]

Such a starting point lends a certain shape to theorizing about action. We distinguish between the events of a driver raising her arm to signal and mere bodily movement. Yet the "snapshots" of each event can be identical—what looks like a signaling could be the arm unintentionally rising. As Wittgenstein puts it: "Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?"[2] While Wittgenstein himself may not have been entirely comfortable with the question as it stands, for others this became the essential question of action theory.

So conceived, action theory looks to be investigating what, in addition to mere bodily movement, is needed for intentional action. And a popular reply is that bodily movement must be related in the correct way to the actor's *psychology* in order to be *intentional*, with different views about what constitutes the correct relation. In terms of the two snapshots of events discussed above, the difference is that in only one case can the event be "*rationalized*". The intentional arm raising can be explained in light of *reasons*. There are no *reasons* for acting in the case of mere bodily movement, though such events may be explained by subsumption under natural law.

This difference is illustrated by Davidson's famous example in which a man is *flipping the light switch for a reason* and is *thereby alerting burglars,* though he is not *alerting the*

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[1] Others think of actions as universals (an action is a *kind* of happening) that are instantiated in particular cases.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §621.

burglars for a reason, even though these are, in one sense, the same event. The example clarifies how the same event can fall under different descriptions, and how the agent's understanding of what he was doing, expressed in his answer to the question "Why are you acting thus and so?" is relevant to how the event is described. The case also helps to explain how there can be *unintentional* actions. By intentionally flipping the light switch, the man unintentionally alerts the burglars. The same event under one description is intentional, under another is unintentional, thus there was an unintentional alerting of burglars because there was an intentional flipping of the switch.

What is wrong with this approach? Nothing as such. Rather, where there are errors, they are typically errors of omission. This is both in part because there is typically a lack of attention to the context of action and in part because philosophers have focused on so-called basic actions, rather than on actions as they are extended over time. As a result, the standard picture of action is oddly of limited use in thinking about what it is to be acting well. This dissertation attempts to better understand the nature of acting well by overcoming these constraints.

To illustrate, consider the philosopher's notion of a basic action. This is the idea of the simplest acts, such as finger raisings, brain activity, or willings, that initiate the events like "flipping a light switch" or "opening a fridge", that in turn might compose a further action, such as going downstairs to make a late night snack. Thinking of an extended action as a composite of basics directs one's attention towards the basic action that starts off the whole sequence—does action have its origin in something like brain activity, willings, believings, or intendings? Coupled with an understanding of science that would have nature disenchanted, this implies a

contracted view of an agent's powers, restricting agency to the site of basic action. McDowell describes such a contraction when he argues:

> This withdrawal of agency from nature, at any rate from the ordinary nature in which the movements of our bodies occur, strains our hold on the idea that the natural powers that are actualized in the movements of our bodies are powers that belong to us as agents. Our powers as agents withdraw inwards, and our bodies with the powers whose seats they are—which seem to be different powers, since their actualizations are not doings of ours but at best effects of such doings—take on the aspect of alien objects.[3]

The pressure for such inward withdrawal, described here by McDowell, has consequences, too, for understanding the nature of acting well. The pressure to withdraw inward and focus our thinking about action on inner psychological states (intentions or acts of will) has the consequence of directing attention away from extended doings, and this, I contend, makes it difficult to understand the nature of acting well.

On a broadly Aristotelian conception, living well involves activity modulated by an agent's responsiveness to the salient features of her circumstances. Yet popular understandings of how action is rationalized would make a responsiveness to reason appear largely inward and self-directed. Likewise, insofar as acting well requires us to develop a certain character (as

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[3] McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 91. McDowell additionally describes the pressures towards this view when he writes:

> But just as a naturalism that disenchants nature excludes the understanding from actualizations of our sentient nature as such, so here it excludes our mastery of concepts from what ought to be recognizable as actualizations of our active nature as such: goings-on in which natural things, like limbs, do natural things, like moving. And this exclusion has characteristic results when we reflect about action. Shut out from the realm of happenings constituted by movements of ordinary natural stuff, the spontaneity of agency typically tries to take up residence in a specially conceived interior realm. This relocation of spontaneity may be seen as a renunciation of naturalism, or the interior realm may be conceived as a special region of the natural world. Either way, this style of thinking gives spontaneity a role in bodily action only in the guise of inner items, pictured as initiating bodily goings-on from within, and taken on that ground to be recognizable as intentions or volitions. The bodily going-on themselves are events in nature; in the context of a disenchanting naturalism, combined with a conviction that the conceptual is sui generis, that means that they cannot be imbued with intentionality. They are actualizations of natural powers, and for that reason they can figure in this style of thinking only as mere happenings.

Mind and World, p. 90.

Aristotelians maintain), the traits of character we are interested in are not like useful reflexes: we want to say that one's practical intellect is in operation in one's character-revealing behavior.[4] Yet the relevant notion of intelligence-in-acting is elusive. For on some popular conceptions of action, once the acting has begun, there can seem to be little left for the intellect to do.[5] One could still say that the intellect controls action by *steering* the body's movement, but this begins to treat one's body as something somewhat alien from oneself. Likewise, on such a conception, we are pushed to re-describe our *powers* for acting; instead of having simply the power to grab a coin, such a steering notion leads us to think that what I have is the power to manipulate a hand so as to grab a coin. This is phenomenologically unhappy.

Fortunately, recent work in action theory has opened up conceptual spaces in which these notions better fit. Take the views on the nature of rationalization. For a while, the dominant understanding of rationalization in philosophy of action had a psychologistic character. Why is she flipping the light switch? Well, perhaps because:

...she *wants* to see better.

...she *believes* it will help her find her keys.

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[4] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 185.

[5] McDowell offers some intriguing remarks for how to think of our other options in understanding intentional bodily action, but there is work to be done to more fully understand such alternatives. See, for instance:

> Kant says "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind". Similarly, intentions without overt active are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency. I have urged that we can accommodate the point of Kant's remark if we accept this claim: experiences are actualizations of our sentient nature in which conceptual capacities are inexorably interacted. The parallel is this: intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated.

Mind and World, p. 90.

...she *intends* to make a late night snack.

...she is *trying* to figure out which bulb is broken.

In such ways, the *physical* act of flipping the light switch was thought to be rationalized only in light of some *mental* act or state: the desiring, the believing, the intending, or the volitional trying. One finds this idea in play when Davidson writes:

> But of course there is a mental event; at some moment the driver noticed (or thought he noticed) his turn coming up, and that is the moment he signaled. During any continuing activity, like driving, or elaborate performance, like swimming the Hellespont, there are more or less fixed purposes, standards, desires, and habits that give direction and form to the entire enterprise, and there is the continuing input of information about what we are doing, about changes in the environment, in terms of which we regulate and adjust our actions. To dignify a driver's awareness that his turn has come by calling it an experience, much less a feeling, is no doubt exaggerated, but whether it deserves a name or not, it had better be the reason why he raises his arm.[6]

For Davidson, action is rationalized by appeal to an agent's mental states, such as beliefs or desires, and perhaps only so.[7] Why did the driver raise his arm? Because he *thought* his turn was coming up and *desired* to reach his destination. The driver's responsiveness to reason on this conception then looks to consist in his inward access to what he thinks and desires. He can know the states of his own mind, the states that "give direction and form to the entire enterprise..."

Such a psychologistic conception of rationalization has been increasingly challenged in ways that look to escape such a constraining take on responsiveness to reasons. Jonathan Dancy, for example, rejects the psychologistic picture by arguing that the reasons in light of which a person acts must be the sorts of things that can favor acting. The reason to leave the building is

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[6] Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", p. 694.

[7] Davidson thinks we rationalize an agent's actions by specifying the agent's intentions, what he calls primary reasons, which he thinks are composed of beliefs and desires. See again "Actions, Reasons, and Causes".

because the building is on fire. It is *the building's being on fire*, not any belief of the agent, that favors the act of leaving the building. So, we should resist the attempt to treat "she is leaving the building because the building is on fire" as a paraphrase for "she is leaving the building because she believes the building is on fire".[8] Responsiveness to reason on Dancy's view looks more and more like a responsiveness to features of the world.

Similarly, Michael Thompson has questioned the idea that what he calls "naive action explanations" ought to be treated as paraphrases of more sophisticated action explanations. He draws readers' attentions to such explanations of action:

Why are you *pulling that cord*? I am *starting the engine*.

Why are you *cutting those wires*? I am *repairing a short circuit*.

Why are you *crossing Fifth Avenue*? I am *walking to school*.

He argues that such naive explanations succeed in explaining action just as much as explanations that make reference to what a person believes, desires, or intends.

So, returning to the question of why she is flipping the light switch, we can add to our list another form of explanation, explanation by appeal to what she is *doing*. Why is she flipping the light switch? Well, perhaps because:

...she is sending a message in morse code to her neighbor.

...she is reading a book.

...she is going to bed.

Here, Thompson observes, it is not so much a *state*, like a state of believing, desiring, or intending, that explains her action. Rather, her acting so is explained by action in the *progressive*

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[8] Issues are also raised by the following kind of example: That I believe I am invincible is no reason to begin a crime-fighting career; rather, it is is a reason to seek therapy.

aspect, by what she is *doing*, such as reading a book. Action in the progressive aspect, act-*ing*, is something incomplete and still in the process of unfolding. Her action of sending the morse code by flipping the light switch might complete with a code being sent, but it need not. For instance, her action could be interrupted by the appearance of enemy agents, so that what she was *doing*—sending the morse code—did not get *done.* In this case, she did not perform an action in the perfective sense—she did not send the code, while she did perform the action in the progressive aspect; what she was doing was sending the code, even though she did not ultimately do this because she was interrupted.

Thompson's approach makes room for the thought that a person's responsiveness to reasons consists in her awareness of what she is doing. His focus on actions described in the progressive aspect stands in contrast to atomistic styles of thinking of extended actions. The question is not so much "how do these basic actions combine together in this context to compose a complex action", but why some acting that breaks off before completion should nonetheless be understood as having been of a given action type. That is, why is it that we can say that what she was doing was going to the store, when a description of the action in the perfective sense—she went to the store—is not applicable. Here and elsewhere, we see the influence of Anscombe's *Intention* on the field in the crucial thought that what an agent *is doing* depends on her *understanding* of what she is doing. Likewise, Thompson draws readers' attentions to the wider context or practice that must already be in play in thinking of the subject as performing actions of a certain sort: growing, digesting, or pitching.[9] Our perceptions of such particular goings-on in

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[9] See Michael Thompson's *Life and Action,* pp. 54, 58.

this sense contain reference to something general—the life-form or practice—and our conceptions of these can be seen as pervading our perception.

In these ways, the notion of *acting*, in the *progressive* aspect, does not take a back seat to the notion of action, in the perfective sense. Hence, Thompson's view raises questions of how to understand the goodness or intelligence of *acting* in a manner not derivative of the action being done. For there may be intelligent acting that unfortunately gets nothing done—acting that was being done well may break off before it completes. She may have been playing Beethoven's Fifth well despite being interrupted, so never played it, or intelligently navigating the snowfield despite her bindings breaking en route to crossing, or expertly avoiding getting hit by her opponent's series of attacks despite ultimately being struck, etc. The question becomes: what about her manner of acting made it such that the acting was being done intelligently or well?

This focus on the *doing* over what was *done* further stands to illuminate conceptions of the practical intellect. Davidson, in "Knowing One's Own Mind", quotes two passages, the first by Graham Wallas, the second by Robert Motherwell, before going on to briefly reject Gilbert Ryle's position. Those passages are:

> The little girl had the making of a poet in her who, being told to be sure of her meaning before she spoke, said 'How can I know what I think till I see what I say?'

and...

> I would say that most good painters don't know what they think until they paint it.

Davidson himself goes on to say:

> Gilbert Ryle was with the poet and the painter all the way in this matter; he stoutly maintained that we know our own minds in exactly the same way we know the minds of others, by observing what we say, do, and paint. Ryle was wrong. It is seldom the case that I need or appeal to evidence or observation in

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order to find out what I believe; normally I know what I think before I speak or act.[10]

Davidson's concern is with how we know our own minds. Ryle's position, in his view, represents an implausible picture of how we do this. Davidson rightly rejects the idea that a person works out what she thinks by observing what she is doing or has done, together with the idea that we only know our own minds the same way we know the minds of others. It is interesting, however, to contrast Davidson's presentation of Ryle's thought with Ryle's own language:

> When a person *is described by one or other of the intelligence-epithets* such as 'shrewd' or 'silly', 'prudent' or 'imprudent', the description imputes to him not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but *the ability, or inability, to do certain sorts of things*.

or...

> But when a person talks sense aloud, ties knots, feints or sculpts, *the actions which we witness are themselves the things which he is intelligently doing*, though the concepts in terms of which the physicist or physiologist would describe his actions do not exhaust those which would be used by his pupils or his teachers in appraising their logic, style or technique.

and...

> If I am competent to judge your performance, then in witnessing it I am on the alert to detect mistakes and muddles in it, but so are you in executing it; I am ready to notice the advantages you might take of pieces of luck, but so are you. You learn as you proceed, and I too learn as you proceed. *The intelligent performer operates critically, the intelligent spectator follows critically.*[11]

Ryle's critiques of intellectualism in philosophy of mind are motivated by a deep appreciation for the ways *acting* is *intelligent.* Here, it is not that the action done is evidence for ascribing a belief, but rather that the agent's *intelligence* is manifested in the *performance.* Ryle everywhere

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[10] Davidson, "Knowing One's Own Mind", p. 441.

[11] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, pp. 27, 50-51, and 55, respectively.

emphasizes how a person is *acting* and is at pains to say that her intelligence consists in her ability to be *acting so.*[12]

Philosophy of action that overly focuses on the *completed* act at the expense of the *doing* of it is apt to misunderstand certain views about the nature of mind. Davidson is preoccupied with the act done, so seems to miss that Ryle's remarks concern the ongoing *acting* and not so much the completed *action*. This is unfortunate, as there is a richness of insight in Ryle's view, and the quotations Davidson is commenting on are distorted by his conception of action.

It is not because of some problem with the painter's access to her own mind, as Davidson would have it, that the painter would say that she does not know what she thinks until she paints it. Rather, the painter may reasonably expect to learn what she thinks through the critical performance of painting. When a painter or poet is acting, there is space for her to make up her mind about what to think or do, as she is doing this, and for her to do this intelligently or not, out of a critical awareness of her own activity. Sometimes, through the very act of painting, she *is* making up her mind about what to do or think. In this way, the acting can be the formation of thought.

Likewise, by painting she can come to have a new and richer *understanding* of that which she is doing. Her initial understanding changing as she is drawn to painting her subject in a specific way, she comes to view her initial characterization of what she is doing as inadequate. Again, as Anscombe stresses, her understanding of what she is doing crucially informs the description of what she intentionally does.

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[12] Ryle's examples would appear to make room for the idea that her intelligence consists in her ability to react, rather than act. My own position is that acts of practical intelligence should be distinguished from otherwise skilled action on lines that a person with practical intelligence adjusts what she is doing *because* her acting is of a certain character, rather than just adjusting *when* her acting is of such character. This thought gets touched on in multiple places in this dissertation; see especially Chapter Three.

These, then, are some of the trends of thinking I draw on in my work and some of the relevant background. The position I articulate and defend can be put thus: acting can be informed by an agent's awareness and understanding of the evaluative character of her acting. When a person is acting in light of how her action is going, she can be *deliberating* amidst acting, and such reasoning can take the form of absorbed, minded acting. Such a conception of *reasoning* better allows us to understand the way our acting is shaped by our awareness of evaluative features of the world, the ways individuals are capable, and allows for a richer conception of our ethical and practical practices.

In arguing this, I owe a great debt to many contemporary philosophers. I am indebted both because of the extent that my views are informed by these philosophers' hard-won insights and also because of the vast groundwork done to shift philosophical sentiments so that I can offer this thesis and it be taken seriously.

Some of this debt is owed to philosophers working on concepts of action and self. My work here is much informed by Michael Thompson's work in philosophy of action, Sebastian Rödl's work on self-consciousness, Richard Moran's discussion of authority and estrangement, in addition to John McDowell's various monumental contributions to the conversation on self and action. These philosophers, in turn, owe a great debt to the groundbreaking work of Elizabeth Anscombe, whose voice has been pronouncedly enhanced by numerous contemporary commentators.

As I am indebted to such works that broaden our understanding of action and self, I am likewise indebted to works done to make innocuous talk of *normative* and *evaluative* features of the world. David Wiggins, in "Truth, Invention, and The Meaning of Life", is writing for an

audience whose prominent philosophical sensibilities differ from those current today. Realist views on reasons and evaluative features have been developed by Jonathan Dancy and Judith Thomson, and a resistance to certain once-popular conceptions of the universality or generality in ethics is found in the works of particularists and certain virtue ethicists.

Finally—although there are admittedly more—I would like to acknowledge my debt to work in epistemology, especially that concerning perception as a basis for thought and knowledge. P.F. Strawson and Gareth Evans' work has raised awareness of the sense in which perception rationalizes thought and the nature of the explanation involved in "She thinks such and such *because* she perceives that it is so". This work allows us fruitfully to develop the idea that perceiving and acting are manifestations of our rational capacities, an idea central to my own approach.

CHAPTER TWO

Virtues in Acting

2.1 Introduction

The ascription of virtues and vices has both evaluative and predictive functions. My assessment

of this knife is informed by certain descriptions of it. Being told that one knife is a sharp knife

and the other dull, I judge that this one is a better knife than that one with respect to the ability to

cut. Likewise, in hearing now that this knife is a sharp knife, I form certain reasonable

expectations for how the knife will behave in the future. This knife will cut cleanly certain

materials and not others—tomatoes vs. tin cans—when handled in specific manners in

appropriate environments.

If I am thinking about the virtues and vices that can be ascribed to me, it might appear

that my attention is largely other-directed.[13] For thinking about my virtues and vices is to think

about how others will evaluate me and what expectations they will have about how I will act.

Bernard Williams expresses this view when he writes:

> The trouble with cultivating the virtues, if it is seen as a first-personal and deliberative exercise, is rather that your thought is not self-directed enough. Thinking about your possible states in terms of the virtues is not so much to think about your actions, and it is not distinctively to think about the terms in which you could or should think about your actions: it is rather to think about the way in which others might describe or comment on the way in which you think about your actions, and if that represents the essential content of your deliberations, it really does seem a misdirection of the ethical attention.[14]

Williams' criticism partially rests on the thought that, while a range of facts will become ethical

considerations for a benevolent person, the concept of a virtue is not typically a content of her

first-personal deliberation: she does the benevolent act *just because* she sees so-and-so is in need

of aid. The fact that the action would be virtuous does not enter her first-personal deliberations.

Contra Williams, I think such first appearances are misleading. Concern about virtues and

other evaluative terms used to describe one's acting is more self-directed than Williams suggests.

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[13] I use "virtues" here with some reservation. On the one hand, I think Judith Thomson is correct that the term virtue is used broadly enough to include evaluative features like "being a sharp knife". On the other hand, using virtue so broadly covers up an important distinction between exercises of abilities, such as a knife's ability to cut and a cook's ability to make stew.

Part of what I will be arguing is that the latter exercise can exhibit a cook's practical intelligence, her ability to adjust her stew-making in light of how the stew-making is going. Once we have this, it's easy to see how such a power to act could be used to delineate abilities; built into the idea of a person having such and such an ability is the idea that she is exercising such and such a practical intelligence. I suspect that some virtue ethicists might want to reserve the term "virtue" for those powers for whom the exercise of practical intelligence is essential. In this case, ascription of evaluative features is better thought the ascription of areté—excellences—some species of which are virtues. See Chapter Three for a more extensive discussion of some of the ideas here.

[14] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, p. 11.

My goal in this chapter is to begin clarifying why this is. To do so, I will introduce a view that

will be articulated and defended throughout the whole dissertation.

That view is this: from the perspective of a person *already* in the process of acting,

judgments about her acting's evaluative character can inform her understanding of how the

action in progress is *going*. She can make up her mind about what to do next in light of this. For

she might know generally that she must adjust her behavior so as to realize her intentions or,

more specifically, she might now know to take such-and-such specific measures. In this manner,

her attention to the evaluative terms used in describing her acting represents both a care about

her power to successfully realize the actions she intends to do or is in the process of doing, and a

care with developing herself into the sort of person she aspires to be. And attention towards how

your actions are turning out or with what sort of person you are becoming is better understood as

self-directed than a focus on what others may expect of you or how they might evaluate you.[15]

For example, an instructor planning to meet with a student might not only intend to

explain the paper's shortfalls and how to improve the writing, but intend to do so in a *kind*

manner. Her attention to her acting's evaluative character guides how she acts next: recognizing

that she is critiquing the student's paper *too harshly*, she starts describing what was done well,

adjusting her acting for that reason. My view is that such absorbed-minded acting can be

understood as reasoning, so evaluative features like her acting's harshness can be understood as a

proper and appropriate part of her first personal deliberation. That reasoning or deliberation can

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[15] This reply to Williams complements replies already offered in the literature. Responses of a different form are offered in Rosalind Hursthouse's discussion of V-rules (*On Virtue Ethics*), Michael Slote's development of "agent based" virtue ethics (*Morals from Motives*), Christine Swanton's virtue-centered account of right action (*Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View*), or Julia Annas' critiques of the demand for a theory of right action (*Intelligent Virtue*). Since I am not offering a competing account, I remain neutral as to the extent that these accounts succeed.

take this form is controversial, and I expand on the notion, address criticism, and offer support

for the view in Chapter Three.

2.2 Virtues and Concern with One's Actions

When considering a person deliberating, we sometimes think of the deliberation as finishing

when the person makes up her mind about what to do. Looking for an open teammate, she

deliberates about who to pass to, and such deliberation ends when she decides to pass the frisbee

to Sally. Thinking of deliberation in this way, deliberation precedes acting. On this view, then,

the primary way virtue language looks to inform acting lies in whatever contribution virtue

concepts make to the formation of intention.

However, a fixation on such cases of deliberation can obscure the fact that a person who

has made up her mind about what to do still has her mind at work in the process of *achieving*

what she set out to do.[16] Her acting may or may not exhibit an awareness of how what she is

doing is going, an awareness in view of which she may modulate what she is doing. We can

think of her as exercising a form of practical knowledge in so acting. We might say she really

knows what she is doing because of how she adapts what she is doing in accord with her

awareness of how it is going. A broader conception of deliberation makes room not only for

deliberation in the formation of intentions but also for reasoning that takes the form of acting:

when she is adjusting how she is doing what she is doing (slowing down, repeating herself, using

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[16] One might object that "deliberating about what to do" precedes acting, whereas "deliberating on how to sustain" occurs together with the action. I would not object to the distinction. My bigger target then is to argue that "deliberating on how to sustain" need not only be conceived of as occurring 'a step back' from the acting. There are times when we should say her fully-absorbed performance of adjusting her acting thus and so *was* her deliberating on how to sustain the acting. My defense of this claim occurs in Chapter Four.

more force) because she perceives that her acting is of a certain character (she is speaking too quickly or hammering too softly), she is employing her conception and understanding of the action form she exemplifies to work out how to achieve her intentions. Recognizing this as a form of deliberation or reasoning provides us a model where the role and relevance of evaluative features in practical reasoning can be more clearly understood.

Making room for this form of reasoning also allows us to respond to Williams' criticisms and to say more about how a concern with virtues is self-directed. For the characterization of how an action-in-progress is going is often made using the language of virtues and vices—we might describe the frisbee pass as being thrown *too hard.* Such a description makes use of evaluative terms. Passing too hard is not *passing well,* just as *lecturing too quickly* is not *lecturing well*, or writing as to belabor the point is writing badly. Thus, if I am lecturing and am concerned about whether I am speaking *too quickly* or not, my attention to evaluative features represents a focus on the current ongoing action, its potential success or failure (where lecturing that is being done too quickly is apt to be bad lecturing), and on my possible state of "vice" as a lecturer (am I doing what a good lecturer would do?). This is a self-directed concern and not one primarily focused on how others will evaluate me. (Though it is also other-directed in the sense that I care whether I am making myself understood to others). My question is not just, "What will they think of me as a lecturer?" but also "I am lecturing as I should be?"

Virtue ascriptions characterizing how an action is faring inform the efforts of a person working towards doing what she has chosen to do. Such ascriptions can inform her acting in a number of ways. Consider, for instance, Jen, who is learning to hammer nails. In the process of learning, she may not yet have a fully-formed conception of the action that would aid in

discerning those respects in which she is hammering well and those in which she is hammering poorly. The advice, "You are using too much force; try hammering more softly", is used to assist Jen to adjust her hammering. In this way, a person learning to perform some action for the first time can rely on others' judgments in moderating her behavior. By acting in light of another's characterization of her particular hammering, she can make use of another's conception of hammering in general to achieve what she is doing.

The way such evaluative language works in this case expresses a use of virtue/vice terms additional to the predictive and evaluative uses identified earlier. The point of characterizing the hammering as "too soft" is not to *predict* to the person hammering how she will act. (Although a similar ascription could be made to others—the expression "Look, Jen is using too much force" could be used to inform onlookers what to expect next.) Directed to Jen when what she is trying to do is to hammer some nails, the ascription can function to *assist* her *in behaving as she intends*. In this sense, the language of virtues and vices has a *formative* use: the language is used by her to produce a complete action (to have hammered the nails), so assists in the formation of the ability to act that way (i.e., to become able to hammer with the appropriate force).

Such use is found in first-personal reasonings as well. When one acts in light of one's own vices, both *predictive* and *formative* uses can be made of such ascriptions. In a popular example, a squash player, recognizing he is *intemperate,* decides not to shake hands with his opponent because he expects rude behavior to issue from his intemperate state.[17] He predicts how he will act based on an evaluative feature he has and reasons about what to do in light of this. In this way, his choice of action is informed by his awareness of his vice, yet in quite a

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[17] This case was popularized by Michael Smith and Philip Pettit, though originated from Gary Watson. See Smith and Pettit's "External Reasons" and Watson's "Free agency".

different way than Jen's action of hammering is informed by her awareness of vice. He relates to himself as to an object that behaves with a fixed and predictable nature. She also acts in light of her vice but relates to herself as a being with some say over how what she does next can alter the way she is acting. In realizing that such-and-such evaluative feature applies to her hammering, she acts in light of this feature in a way that respects her power to change the overall evaluative character of her acting by acting differently.

Besides helping her adjust her behavior, Jen's attention to the language others use in characterizing her acting can serve to deepen her own understanding of what she is doing. The evaluative language used to characterize her acting provides a vocabulary for conceptualizing what well-done and poorly-done hammering consists of. Such conception can go beyond the here and now, informing her understanding of the kind of act. Thus, not only does she *adjust* her behavior by means of others' ascriptions, she comes to *understand herself* and *the act* in such terms—understanding herself as hammering now with too much force or here at an off angle. Her attention to the evaluative features others use to characterize her acting can then be understood as focused on developing her own conception of the action form her acting exemplifies. Coming to think of particular acts of hammering as done too softly here and too forcefully there, as others describe them, is to come to adopt the understanding of hammering under which ascription of such evaluative features to these particular instances is appropriate.

Evaluative ascriptions are additionally formative in the sense that they contribute to the formation of Jen's own understanding of action forms, an understanding that she can deploy in acting so as to realize that she has *reason* to change how she is acting. In this sense, her adopting the relevant vocabulary also represents a development of her *autonomy.* In coming to have a

handle on the relevant virtue concepts, she becomes less dependent on others' judgments about the character of her acting and more capable of acting in light of her own conception. Her performance is now done in a different manner—it is moderated on the basis of her own perception and understanding of her acting's character. She does not need to be told that she is hammering too softly but perceives for herself that she is. In describing what Jen is able to do, we can now think of Jen as capable of adjusting her hammering by her own lights.

As adjustments to acting can be done in light of the acting's character, the evaluative language used to characterize acting's character contributes to her understanding of when some adjusting is justified and when not. For instance, in using others' evaluative ascriptions to form her own conception of the action form, she may also come to be in a better position to give her *reasons for acting*, to herself or to others.[18] For, if she can additionally *articulate* her reasons for acting, she may now explain *why* she adjusted what she was doing by appeal to the *character of her acting*: "I added more liquid to the bisque because it tasted too salty" or "I slowed down because I felt I was speaking too quickly". Explaining her reasons for acting as she does in this way is a form of justifying her actions to others.

Similarly, her developing ability to rely on her own understanding and judgment in moderating her acting also increasingly opens her eyes to the character of others' actions. She is in a position to be *critical* of others' reasons for acting, in addition to rationalizing her own acting by appeal to its evaluative character. Jen, commenting on Jan, remarks: "You were not, in fact, speaking too quickly. Hence, you had no reason to slow down." Here, since his adjustment

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[18] One question is whether we need to think of Jen as capable of articulating her understanding in order to conceive of herself as acting in light of it. To the extent that these capacities may differ, it is not necessarily the case that Jen's ability to act in this manner will coincide with her ability to justify her action to others or to criticize others' acting.

was done *on the basis of* his *speaking too quickly*, their disagreement can be characterized as one over the *reasonableness* of his *speaking more slowly*.

So, in this manner, aspects of my acting are *justified* when I am right to characterize my action as I do and are not justified when an alternate characterization obtains. For an agent who is alive to how acting can be called into question in this way and who is quite capable of judging herself how her action is going, another person's characterization can sometimes serve more to *undermine* her judgments than to be *useful* for moderating her behavior. The same characterizations that are helpful for a novice can be insulting to an expert. "You are hammering too forcefully" directed to a journeyman woodworker may not convey any information that she is not already capable of determining herself. Thus, an attention with the terms others use in characterizing your acting can be focused on whether they are *questioning your judgmen*t, intentionally or otherwise, and the *reasonableness of your acting as you are*.

Besides being alert to *differences* in characterizations of acting for these reasons, there are additionally reasons to be on the lookout for *sameness*. Jen is coding a flash animation. She recognizes that how she is coding is *inefficient*: she is copying the data too many times and repeating a function too often. For these reasons, Jen reworks the code. Jen thereby expresses a certain *practical intelligence*, an intelligence mostly only accessible to those similarly discerning of how to code well. Those without the same sensibilities may, of course, discern some aspects of Jen's intelligence—she achieved what she intended to do and got the flash animation to work, after all—but are largely not discerning to other aspects. To appreciate how she modified her acting requires having a sense of what constitutes inefficiency in coding. Without such a

sensibility, one does not understand that there was reason for Jen to adjust her coding, so does not understand what was so good about Jen's change in acting.

Jen's attention with how others describe her acting thus can represent her care with others' recognition of her *intelligence* or *skill,* that intelligence being expressed by her adjusting her coding in accordance with her knowledge of how it was going. This could matter to Jen because she identifies as a programmer and prides herself on her abilities. A person who does not get that coding so is to be coding well does not get what Jen is doing and, in a sense, may not *get* Jen.[19] For a certain closeness becomes possible between people who can recognize in the actions of each other the intelligence employed and the understanding underlying this. While such recognition is desirable for its own sake, the recognition by others of one's practical intelligence in some sphere is also desirable for the social goods this may procure: renown, prestige, promotion, employment, and so on.

These, then, are some reasons to believe that thinking about one's virtues can involve thinking about one's actions—the character of one's acts-in-progress—and some ways that the ascription of virtue has a formative use in addition to its evaluative and predictive uses. These help explain why a person's attention to the evaluative language used to describe her is more self-directed than it may first appear.

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[19] Understanding Jen can involve sharing the understanding with which she acts. I can understand why her manner of responding to the unexpected difficulty in programming is careful and innovative because I have the same vantage point as she of the situation. In this sense, I can see how her manner of acting is meritorious so appreciate her approach in a way that someone who lacked the same understanding of the practice could not.

2.3 Virtues and Self-Development

I have now given some reasons to think that concern over one's virtues can be self-directed in the sense of being directed at how one's action-in-progress is going. Next, I clarify how it can also be self-directed in the sense of attending to the sort of person one is becoming.

David Wiggins, in his "What is the Order Among the Varieties of Goodness?", notes that a judgement of technical goodness, as in "good carpenter" or "good orator", is parasitic on the subject's excellence at certain kinds of activity. Wiggins writes:

> What, after all, is a carpenter or orator? One only qualifies as such by being passably good or passably skillful at working wood or being well enough capable of persuading others by public speech. Or, as von Wright puts the point: "an attribution of technical goodness of its kind is a secondary valuation. Its basis, the primary valuation, is a judgment to the effect that this being is good at something.[20]

Wiggins is right to think that becoming a certain sort of person requires becoming passably good at a certain set of activities, at least for some vocations. As I have argued, a person's attention over her virtues can be directed at the character of her action-in-progress; at how well what she is doing is going or how her acting is faring. While she might care about how her acting is faring for its own sake—enjoying coding well, she discovers that she is a good programmer after coding more as a hobby—she could also attend to the character of her acting for the sake of becoming good enough at that kind of activity, as part of a larger project of becoming a certain sort of person. If Jen did not care so much about doing the activity of coding well but was interested in becoming a programmer (or becoming recognized as a good programmer), she would have reason to pay attention to the evaluative language used to do describe well- and

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[20] David Wiggins, "What is the Order Among the Varieties of Goodness? A Question Posed by Von Wright and a Conjecture Made by Aristotle", p. 33.

badly-done coding. For being a programmer involves becoming passably skillful at coding, and one way to be passably skillful at coding is to be capable of adjusting one's coding in light of one's understanding of how well it is being done.

On the other hand, the relevant notion of being "passably skillful" may not require an agent to act in a manner that exercises her practical intelligence. Jen might, by training and repetition, become able to drive a nail with the right force without needing to adjust her hammering in light of its evaluative character. She may reach a point where she just uses the proper amount of force whenever she drives a nail. Hence, the bare notion of acting well enough, appealed to by Wiggins, may obscure some of what a person is trying to accomplish in becoming the sort of person she aspires to be, since the ability one seeks to develop in the course of becoming that sort of person may or may not require practical intelligence to be exercised.

For, as we have seen, some activity may be done *intelligently*. What the agent does next can issue from her awareness of how the action is going and her knowledge of that form of action. And some notions of acting well enough focus merely on the question of whether she *succeeds* in doing what the activity requires (and so what she intends to do) or produces some desired product or effect, independent of considerations of her *manner of acting*—whether her acting displayed practical intelligence or skill. Other notions of acting well enough, like coding that is performed in light of an awareness of how the coding is going, do look to *the manner in which the action was done,* so can be such that the relevant conception of acting well enough requires the exercise of practical intelligence.

Further, we have seen how, if one can articulate the understanding that one acts with, one is in a position to *explain* and *justify* one's actions by articulating the evaluative features that

were the reason for the change in acting. If I am able to lecture with an awareness of how my lecturing is going and can articulate what this awareness discloses to me, I can explain why I am adjusting my acting by specifying my acting's character; I am slowing down because I was speaking too quickly. Being passably good at explaining one's acting in this manner is something we would think prerequisite for being an instructor, coach, or mentor. And Jen's ideal of a programmer is not just of someone with a knack for getting coding to work, nor of a programmer who can guide her own programming in light of her understanding of how it is going, but is of someone capable of articulating and explaining the norms and values of the practice; Jen's ideal programmer is someone who can explain the *point* of refactoring the code *when* you are repeating the same few lines—it is more efficient.

So, where becoming a certain type of person requires becoming capable of articulating and justifying my actions in this way, we have reason to think that the relevant notion of acting well enough requires the formation of practical intelligence. Attending to the evaluative terms others use to characterize my acting and understanding my own acting in these terms can be done as part of a process of becoming capable enough to be the sort of person I aspire to. Not all of such limiting capabilities require the development of practical intelligence; the relevant threshold of being capable of hammering well enough could just require developing a disposition to use the right amount of force, a disposition that does not exercise practical intelligence.

Thus we must examine our ideals to identify what the relevant notions of acting well enough are, which will guide our thinking about what ways a person must develop to become the sort of person she aims to be. One notion of becoming a programmer involves becoming a person who has a knack for successfully writing code. Another conception of a programmer is of

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a person who codes as she does because she's conscious of how well or poorly her coding is going; she has a rich conception for how code writing goes badly or well, a conception expressible through the language of virtues and a conception that informs her acting. I would wager that, upon critical reflection, the capabilities of the kind of persons we aspire to be are better understood as capabilities that exercise practical intelligence. Hence, there is reason to attend to and think about the evaluative language others would use to characterize how well your acting is going, a language of virtues and vices, as this can contribute to developing the sorts of capacities exercised by the kind of person you aspire to be.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter responds to Bernard Williams' misgivings with the role of virtues in first-personal deliberation. It does so by making use of the novel, but controversial, view about practical reasoning this dissertation advances. The view allows us to respond to Williams by showing how an agent's attention to evaluative language can be directed at achieving her intentions, developing practical intelligences, and becoming the kind of person she aspires to be. If a person's reasoning can take the form of adjusting her ongoing acting in light of how her acting is faring, then her concern is not the misdirection of ethical attention Williams suggests it to be.

This chapter also introduces a central thesis of this dissertation. A person who is practically intelligent is capable of responding to evaluative features by deliberately adjusting her acting. Her understanding of goodness and virtue allows her to conceive of what she is doing as done too quickly or too slowly, enabling her to modulate what she is doing as to better achieve what she set out to do. The role of evaluative features in practical reasoning is better understood

through exercises of practical intelligence.

My arguments here take advantage of progress made in understanding action in the progressive aspect—action as ongoing acting. Thinking about acting this way makes clearer how there is time within acting for an agent to either attend to or fail to attend to her acting's evaluative character. Her attention to her acting's character allows for a different kind of performance, a performance that exercises her capacity to adjust her acting in light of how her acting is faring. Comparing actions by the manner that they are performed, there is much to be said for acting that is guided in this way. Thinking of her acting as exercising her practical intelligence helps explain the sense that she is acting well and is capable.

Again, my arguments rely on a contentious view of practical reasoning and deliberation. I claim that an agent's reasoning on matters practical can extend beyond 'choice' of action in one sense (forming the intention to build a fence, or believing that I should) and into 'choice' of action in another sense (choosing how to sustain the fence building by adjusting one's building in light of reasons). I thus owe readers an explanation for why practical reasoning can take the form of acting, an explanation I attempt to offer with Chapter Four. This chapter also did not fully clarify the nature of the evaluative features responded to by a practically intelligent agent, nor the appropriate conception of responsiveness. I turn to address these issues in the next chapter.

Understanding Evaluative Features

3.1 Introduction

I claim that reasoning can take the form of acting, and that we can think of a person who adjusts her acting in light of her acting's character as *deliberating.* Deliberation does take forms more removed from action, as when one stops lugging the equipment up the hill and thinks about how to get it over yonder ridge. Yet reasoning not only occurs a step back from acting but can consist in acting, as when an agent adjusts her acting in response to evaluative features. This is a contentious view of practical reasoning, for which a defense is given in the next chapter. One of the view's major appeals is the work evaluative features perform in such deliberation. This chapter aims to better understand how an agent's awareness of evaluative features informs her acting by considering the nature of those evaluative features employed in deliberation so conceived.

After first examining how evaluative features are employed, I distinguish between ways agents are responsive to virtues. Then I consider how the variety of Aristotelian naturalism advocated by those claiming that goodness is attributive contributes to our understanding of evaluative features. In an attempt to assess how helpful these views really are, I characterize two

directions advocates take the thesis that goodness is attributive, clarifying what is objectionable and what is not.

3.2 Some Evaluative Features Employed

What are some evaluative features in light of which an agent adjusts what she is doing, or appealed to in explaining why she is acting as she is? A survey of such features includes:

1) **The character of her action.** She recognizes that she is *lecturing too slowly* so speeds up. The character of her action is one feature she can be responsive to, as when she adjusts how she is acting out of her awareness that she is lecturing badly.

2) **The character of objects or beings she is interacting with.** She is aware that the plant she is tending, a laurel tree, is *wilting*, so she gives it more water. Here, her awareness of the laurel's character *indirectly* informs her how her acting is faring. Rather, *tending the laurel* is a type of action that goes well or badly depending on how one affects the laurel's well-being. *Tending the laurel* aims at maintaining or improving the laurel's well-being. Seeing the laurel wilt is to see it change in a way that informs the agent's understanding of how the tending is going. Other types of acts that aim at *different* changes in excellence will also be informed by such evaluative features. The act of *sabotaging a bridge* goes poorly when the sabotaging, in fact, only makes for a sturdier bridge. Discovering that the solvent is in fact *fortifying* the cable is similarly informative of how one's

acting is going. Similarly, the lecturer may modify what she is doing in light of her effect on the students—that they are sleepy and unresponsive may be indicative of the quality of her lecturing.

3) **The character of a foreseen outcome.** For actions that aim to *produce* fine objects, questions of how such actions are going look to features indicative of the final product's qualities. She is making bread but the dough is *over-proofed*, so she scores the dough more shallowly.[21] Unlike the case of the laurel, there is not at this time some bread whose well-being her action is currently responsive to but only some bread in the sense that the dough is potentially some bread.

4) **The suitability of her environment.** She recognizes while skiing that a patch of snow ahead of her is *too icy* so steers clear of it. Features of the environment can *impede* or *facilitate* what we are doing, and our acting may be responsive to such features. Unlike the case of the laurel, the judgment that this snow is too icy is not one about the snow's *excellence as snow* but rather is a judgment that this snow is not *good for skiing*.

Some of the evaluative features an agent responds to are virtues. In what sense are they virtues? They are not like virtues in the narrower sense in which courage is a moral virtue. Rather, they are virtues in the broader sense that describing the respects in which an object (or action) is a

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[21] This bread-making language and prescription are taken from: http://www.seriouseats.com/2014/11/troubleshoot-bad-bread-messed-up-loaf.html

good one of its kind is to describe its virtues (though 'excellence' or 'areté' are also appropriate

terms).[22]A tailor who sees that he is cutting the cloth cleanly sees that he is cutting well, at least

in part. Cleanness in cutting is an evaluative feature—a virtue in cuttings—that partially explains

why some cutting was done well.

Of course, aware that I am doing something well, I hardly need to adjust my acting so to

perform better. Adjustments tend to be in response to a different sort of evaluative feature. Many

of the evaluative features appealed to in the above cases are such that to ascribe them to an object

(or action) is to represent the object as *falling short* of an ideal. Lecturing that is too slow *falls

short* as lecturing, just as sabotaging that is fortifying the bridge is bad sabotage. A person

responsive to these evaluative features is not responsive to virtue in the sense of being *responsive

to good-making features*. Rather, discerning that she is speaking too slowly and adjusting her

lecturing accordingly, the agent is responsive to virtue in the sense that she is concerned with the

general excellence of her lecturing, this being informed by her knowledge that her lecturing is

falling short in a respect. So, in describing a person as responsive to virtue, I mean not to portray

her as exclusively responsive to an object's fine qualities. Goldilocks is not only responsive to

virtue when she eats this porridge because she perceives it is just right but is also responsive to

virtue when she stopped eating that porridge because it was too cold.

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[22] This draws from Judith Thomson's discussion of virtue/kind properties in *Normativity*, p.69. Note also that the term 'virtue' can also have religious associations that I do not mean to import to this discussion. I myself think it is better to describe these features as excellences or lack of excellences. Using the term 'virtue' in this way is more consistent with Judith Thomson's analysis of such features, which I discuss and critique.

The case of being responsive to snow that is bad for skiing is also not quite a case of responsiveness to a virtue or a lack of virtue, as it is not a case of directly or indirectly responding to the good of the snow, but rather is a case where the skier's understanding of what some activity's goodness consists in is the focus for the evaluative characterization of her environment.

These cases clarify the sense in which there *exist* evaluative features a person's acting can be responsive to (or *fail* to be responsive to). The notion of being responsive to virtue also requires some clarification.[23] For there are at least two distinct ways we can characterize a person's responsiveness to such features. I might be habituated to act a certain way whenever a feature occurs. A person who understands bread-making could train another to act in specific ways in certain circumstances without explaining to the person *why* he is to do such-and-such. I do not understand why I am to score dough that looks like *this* and not score dough that reacts like *that*, yet I can still be trained to score the bread whenever it is not *over-proofed*—I'm told "when the dough does not spring back from your touch, do not score it". Following these instructions, I score the bread only in circumstances when the bread is not over-proofed, though never because I *understand* the bread to be *over-proofed*. In Aristotelian terms, I know the "that" but not the "why". This is one way my behavior could be described as responsive to the dough's being over-proofed. Following Sebastian Rödl, we can call this "*situationally responsive behavior*".[24]

Situationally responsive behavior does not involve an agent's knowledge in the same way other responsive behavior does. Some behavior is only characterized as responsive to virtue when the agent is knowingly responding to the virtue *as such*. So, the agent's understanding of the relevant good is part of the explanation of why the behavior exhibits such responsiveness. My behavior and the baker's behavior can be the *same* in the respect that we both score the dough whenever it is not over-proofed. Yet our behavior is *unalike* in that the baker's behavior is

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[23] In distinguishing between these two ways of being responsive, I draw from the language and concepts Sebastian Rödl uses to discuss time-consciousness in *Categories of the Temporal*.

[24] See Chapters Two and Four of *Categories of the Temporal* for a general discussion of situational responsive behavior and situational thought, especially p. 69.

guided in light of her understanding that the bread is *over-proofed* and her knowledge of good

bread-making, while my behavior is not. [25]

One might wonder what is the point in distinguishing between these forms of

responsiveness. Given that both reliably produce bread under the right circumstances, what does

it matter that one person's bread-making exhibits understanding of what she is doing, and

another's does not? Replying, we should note that not all activities' value lies in what gets

produced or done. Rather, the point of engaging in certain actions is that the acting itself is

meaningful or enjoyable. The example of skiing illustrates this: the point of recreational skiing is

not merely to successfully traverse some terrain; rather, it lies in the enjoyment of traversing the

terrain. This still leaves the question of productive actions, however. Where the value of an

action is thought to lie in what the action *produces,* such attention to the *manner* in which the

action gets done appears *superfluous*.[26] But there are some reasons to resist this thought.

First, I don't think the meaning or enjoyment a person can find in the performance of a

productive action such as baking is superfluous. Baking being valuable for producing bread does

not exclude it from being valuable in other ways. An action that is valuable for its product can

still be conducted in a more or less meaningful, fulfilling, or enjoyable manner. What can be

fulfilling about baking that exercises an agent's practical intelligence is how the baking expresses

her understanding. Think of the surprise and joy found when you realize through your acting that

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[25] In following her instructions, my behavior is, in a sense, organized by knowledge of good bread-making but not yet by a knowledge that is *my own*. So, while my behavior in this example might still yet be described as the product of *some* understanding, it is not the product or achievement of *my own understanding*. Her knowledge of bread-making might be glimpsed through what I do when I follow her instructions, but my mistakes in scoring bread are not indicative of a misunderstanding by me of the activity, as I do not understand what I am doing in such a way as to be also displaying an understanding of bread-making.

[26] Some of the disagreement between virtue ethics and consequentialism is over this issue. For the consequentialist's conception of the value of actions can appear blind to such ways acting is worthwhile.

you are beginning to understand what you are doing, such as when you are first suddenly riding the bike, juggling the balls, or teaching. Similarly, I can find satisfaction in *still* understanding how to do something that I haven't done in a while—I am delighted I still can ride a bike or make a grass whistle. Such joy can be vicariously experienced when one helps others, cultivating in them the powers of action, judgment, and understanding necessary to exercise practical intelligence.

Second, when a productive action is guided by an agent's understanding of the action, the agent can explain and justify her performance through giving her reasons for adjusting as she did. (Though this additionally depends on her ability to *articulate* her reasons.) In this sense, when my bread-making is organized in light of my understanding its character, I open myself up to certain forms of acceptance or rejection. I am more praiseworthy and blameworthy for the action's productive value. There is a risk that, in acting on my own understanding of bread-making, I will reveal my knowledge to be deficient, overly narrow, or otherwise lacking. I put myself "out there" when my actions flow from *my* understanding of what I am doing. At the same time, the mode of performing makes it that it is *my* practical knowledge that is recognized and valued. So, where my responsiveness is guided by my understanding of what I am doing, I am more clearly a subject of criticism and affirmation.

Further, not only can an action's products be pleasing to others but so, too, the action's manner. Theatre, music, hospitality, and teaching are examples of activities where satisfaction is taken in how a person performs. Such manners of performance can express a commitment to certain aesthetic ideals. The way a musician plays a piece can express an active commitment to grace and subtlety, these aspects of excellent music guiding how she performs. A discerning

audience listening to the piece critically might appreciate the ways the artist's performance manifests grace and subtlety, or pick up on it but not see the ideal's attraction. To the extent the artist is committed to certain ideals or committed to being a musician of a certain kind, the acceptance and rejection of her manner of acting can affirm, refine, or call into question her commitment.

Finally, this mode of acting is notably one where two people can be of the same mind and, being of the same mind, can stand in a certain kind of relationship. In explaining why she scored the dough shallowly, her reply that the dough was over-proofed serves as an explanation for her scoring insofar as she and her interlocutor both share an understanding of the nature of bread-making, both understanding what it is for bread-making to go well or poorly. The process of justifying her actions to others in this way involves not only ascertaining some evaluative feature—judging that the dough is over-proofed—but also involves getting her interlocutor to see that the 'why' question is answered by appeal to this feature. This requires that the interlocutor comes to share the agent's understanding of what she is doing and of the relevant good.[27]

An agent conveys something of her understanding and knowledge of goodness through her responsiveness to her acting's evaluative character. Her responsiveness to evaluative features may make her actions produce valuable goods and outcomes more reliably, but we want to say that responsiveness matters for more than this. Sabina Lovibond, critiquing mere *reliableness* in good behavior as an ideal, writes:

> But we want this expectation to be borne out not just by the existence of a suitable
> system of conditioned reflexes, but by the fact that (enough of) those with whom
> we have dealings have adopted the relevant values or principles as their own, so

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[27] E.g., I can ask why she did what she did, and she can explain why, without my yet being in a position to see that her reply answered the question because I might lack an understanding of the activity that is the principle of her explanation.

that their behavior is, in the relevant respects, predictable in the particular way associated with that fact. This is the desideratum that Aristotle seems to have in mind when he characterizes a moral virtue as a "fixed and unchangeable" disposition to pursue certain ends, this disposition being grounded in a "true apprehension" of the ultimate human good... [28]

That a person's responsiveness to evaluative features is not merely borne out of a 'suitable system of conditioned reflexes' but can express her understanding and knowledge of goodness bears importantly on how we think of agents *justifying* their actions to other agents. Strictly appealing to the habits of a practically intelligent performer does not explain why she acted. In thinking of how her understanding of and responsiveness to virtue *explains* what she is doing, what we are trying to get a grip on is how her understanding of goodness contributes to her acting.

Asking 'what is the nature of the goodness in question', then, is pertinent to better understanding responsiveness to evaluative features. There is a choice about how to understand the knowledge and understanding involved. We could think that good lecturing, good gardening, good baking, good skiing, good dough, good plants, and the like are all to be understood by appeal to what feature these activities have in common which makes them good. Red cars, red lamps, red strawberries, red wine, and red sunsets all have something in common: they are all in normal circumstances productive of certain visual experiences in humans. Perhaps something akin can be said for goodness.

There are reasons, however, to think that goodness is an odd attribute, much unlike redness, so argue those claiming goodness is attributive. Through examining this thesis, I will

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[28] Sabina Lovibond, *Ethical Formation*, p. 70.

show how the view that goodness is attributive illuminates how we should think of an agent's knowledge and understanding of goodness as informing her acting.

3.3 What Does It Mean to Say that Goodness is Attributive?

The thesis that goodness is attributive is taken in two directions in the relevant literature. First, the thesis is taken to express or to ground a denial that there is such a property of goodness. Second, there is also a positive view suggested by the thesis: an individual's nature—what it is to be some individual—constitutes an internal standard for the goodness of that individual. I will clarify both of these options shortly. I think the view is at its most plausible when these two claims are taken as insights about the sort of knowledge that is knowledge of goodness.

3.3.1 Goodness Is Not a Property

Early in G.E. Moore's influential *Principia Ethica,* the subject matter of ethics is framed thus:

> Ethics is undoubtedly concerned with the question what good conduct is; but, being concerned with this, it obviously does not start at the beginning, unless it is prepared to tell us what is good as well as what is conduct. For 'good conduct' is a complex notion: all conduct is not good; for some is certainly bad and some may be indifferent. And on the other hand, other things, beside conduct, may be good; and if they are so, then 'good' denotes some property, that is common to them and conduct; and if we examine good conduct alone of all good things, then we shall be in danger of mistaking for this property, some property which is not shared by those other things: and thus we shall have made a mistake about Ethics even in this limited sense; for we shall not know what good conduct really is.[29]

Moore's writing presents a view on the nature of goodness that suggests the following two claims. First, goodness is that property which all and only good things share. Second, the

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[29] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, rev. edn., edited by Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 54. Judith Thomson quotes the same passage in *Normativity*, p. 2.

goodness of good conduct is such that something counts as an instance of good conduct if it has

two properties: the property of being good and the property of being conduct. Advocates of the

thesis that goodness is attributive reject these claims, summarized as a rejection of the view that

goodness is a property. Keiran Setiya, for instance writes:

> When I say that *good* is *attributive*, I mean three things: First, that for some kinds,
> at least, things can be evaluated as members of that kind; second, that being a
> good F (or good *as* an F) is not just a matter of being an F and being *good*; third,
> that the *standards* for being a good F may differ from the standards for being a
> good G, even when Fs are a kind of G. We can illustrate the last two points with a
> familiar example: being a good theft is not a matter of being a theft and being
> good; and the standards for being a good theft are not the standards for being a
> good act, even though theft is a kind of act.[30]

Being a good F is not a matter of being an F and being good. Mario Batali is a good chef. Were

this a matter of having the property of being good and the property of being a chef, then should

Mario Batali come to have a new property, the property of being a race car driver, we would be

led to conclude right away that Mario Batali is a good race car driver. For, on this view, all that

requires is both being good and being a race car driver. According to those claiming goodness is

attributive, to draw this conclusion is to make an invalid inference. Being a good chef does not

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[30] Keiran Setiya, *Reasons Without Rationalism,* p. 80.

entail that one is a good race car driver, as it would if goodness were the sort of property Moore suggests.[31]

This is also seen through the inference patterns that hold of the adjective "good", as noted by Peter Geach in his "Good and Evil". Unlike redness, which, from the facts that this is a red mouse and that mice are animals, it follows that this is a red animal, such inference pattern does not hold for goodness. Setiya's familiar example further illustrates this: from the fact that this was a good theft, it does not follow that this was a good act, even though thefts are acts.[32]

Now, the thesis that goodness is attributive has attracted interest in part because, in rejecting the view of goodness on offer by Moore, a key premise in many ethical and meta-ethical debates is thereby rejected. Judith Thomson describes the influences Moore's views had

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[31] Frank Sibley raises some concerns with this:

> But with essentially attributive adjectives, though it may seem to be simply an entailment failure in that 'x is a big star' does not entail 'x is big', the reason 'x is big' fails to follow from 'x is a big star' is not that it may be either true or false, but that, standing alone, it lacks a truth−value. I assume that entailment concerns a relationship between propositions. The question of entailment arises when, if 'p' and 'q' are both true, 'r' must be true if they entail it, but may be false if they do not. Taking it in the other direction, the question of entailment or its failure can only arise if we start with complete propositions or propositional functions capable of having a truth−value when values are applied for their variables. But if 'x is big', like 'x is utterly' or 'x is redder', is incapable in isolation of having any truth−value assigned to it, the question whether, in conjunction with a genuine proposition, it entails or fails to entail anything simply cannot arise.

Approach to Aesthetics, p. 167-168.

[32] On this subject, Peter Geach writes:

> I could ascertain that a distant object is a red car because I can see it is red and a keener-sighted but colour-blind friend can see it is a car; there is no such possibility of ascertaining that a thing is a good car by pooling independent information that it is good and that it is a car. This sort of example shows that 'good' like 'bad' is essentially an attributive adjective.

"Good and Evil", pp. 33-34

for meta-ethics and moral theory in her *Normativity*.[33] Jay Wallace, in his *Virtues and Vices,*

describes Aristotle's rejection of the Platonic idea that all good things have some character in

common, a precursor to Moore's view. Wallace remarks briefly that:

> With the rejection of the notion that all good things must have some character in common as do all white things, Aristotle rejected the key premise in a variety of arguments for such things as a transcendent form of the good, a nonnatural property of goodness, a special faculty for intuiting goodness, and a distinct sentiment evoked by things we call good.[34]

This point is developed more strongly in the first three chapters of Thomson's *Normativity.*

Thomson, in characterizing Moore's influences, claims that Moore's overlooking of the

possibility that goodness is attributive had major ill effects on 20th century moral philosophy and

meta-ethics.[35] Among them, in her view, was the rise of *non-cognitivism*, well-motivated in its

rejection of a non-natural property of goodness, and *consequentialism*, whose plausibility is

inflated by the thought that there is something wrong about producing less of the property

'good' than one could have otherwise done.[36] Understood this way, the claim that goodness is

attributive raises a serious critique of such positions in meta-ethics and problems for any account

that would treat goodness as the sort of property Moore takes it to be.

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[33] Thomson, *Normativity*, pp. 10-17. In her view, Moore's conception of goodness makes it hard epistemically and metaphysically to say what the property goodness could be. This helped make emotivism and variants appear more plausible than they are. His conception likewise contributed to the plausibility of consequentialism, in that it appeared as if consequentialism's critics had the burden of explaining why it was all right to produce less of what had the property goodness than she could otherwise produce.

[34] Jay Wallace, *Virtues and Vices*, p. 29.

[35] Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 11.

[36] Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 12.

The point of denying that goodness is a property can also be better understood if we think in terms of *knowledge* of goodness. Wallace, describing the point of Aristotle's rejection of the view that all good things must have some common character, helpfully writes:

> Aristotle's point might be put this way. The knowledge of goodness in one kind of thing is apt to be different from the knowledge of goodness in another sort of thing. This is to be contrasted with the knowledge of whiteness in different kinds of things. If a child is taught to recognize white in slips of paper, he is then expected, without further tuition, to recognize white in clouds, snow, chalk, and white lead. If he cannot in this way transfer what he learned with slips of paper to these other things, he has not grasped what it was that was being shown to him with the slips of paper. By contrast, when someone is able to recognize good tactics after a study of strategy, we do not expect him on the basis of this knowledge to be able to recognize good courses of treatment for diseases, good architecture, or good gymnasts. That someone cannot transfer his knowledge of good tactics to other things in this way does not incline us to suppose that he did not really have a good grasp of the goodness of tactics.[37]

When we think of the point this way, it is the *plurality* and *independence* of accounts of good that ultimately matters, and less so the other ways the term 'good' can be used. Thinking about knowledge of goodness in this way may contrast with more contemporary ethical thought, as the content of a person's knowledge of goodness is here *architecture*, here *gymnastics,* here *laurel trees*, and so on.

This is not to think that morality is all-pervasive nor to make light of it. In understanding knowledge of goodness in this way, we need not deny that there is good motivation to think carefully about what to do when the moral stakes are high, nor must we assert that every situation is of such high stakes. Rather, it is to recognize that knowledge of goodness must be more local than is often envisaged and, as a consequence, may appear to have a *broader* purview than is typically captured in contemporary ethical theorizing. As Aristotle denied there was a

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[37] Wallace, *Virtues and Vices*, p. 28.

science of being qua being, so, too, we are led to see that there is not a science of good qua good.[38] Knowledge of goodness involves appreciating its character with respect to particular things that are good. Given that knowledge of goodness can be *mundane* in this way, the thought that an agent's practical intelligence employs her knowledge of goodness is a less far-fetched and more palatable claim.

In these ways, then, those claiming goodness is attributive reject Moore-style views on goodness. The theorists' rejection is motivated by the idea that there exist many varieties of knowledge of goodness and the idea that knowledge of some good is not necessarily transferable to other areas. These motivations are worth keeping in mind as we turn to examine criticisms and objections to the thesis that goodness is attributive. Some of these criticisms, while fair, do not abate such motivating forces.

Frank Sibley does much to explain how the attributive thesis is unclear, at least as Peter Geach articulates it. In Chapter Twelve of his *Approach to Aesthetics*, Sibley persuasively argues that Geach's presentation of and argument for his thesis is muddled, in that it does not distinguish between terms or noun-phrases that *are* essentially attributive and terms that can be *used* attributively. Sibley argues that adjectives fall into three categories, essentially attributive adjectives (big, small, hot), essentially predicative adjectives (omniscient, ultimosweet), and 'Janus' adjectives (sweet, red), the latter which can be *used* either predicatively or attributively, but not both at once.

Types of adjectives are thus distinguished from types of uses, these including, again, predicative and attributive *uses* of adjectives. For an adjective that is neither essentially

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[38] Remarks by Steve Leighton helped make clear to me this point about the locality of goodness, as well as the connection between this view about knowledge of goodness and Aristotle's denial of a science of being qua being.

attributive nor essentially predicative may be *used* both predicatively and attributively. "Sweet"

is Sibley's example of such an adjective. "Sweet" can be used attributively, as in "this is a sweet

crab-apple", where to ascertain the claim's truth requires a person to know something about the

criteria for sweetness set by crab-apples. "Sweet" can also be used predicatively, such that there

is not some term or noun-phrase that the claim's truth is ascertained in light of: "Sweet crab-

apples are sour, not sweet, but a sweet Riesling is sweet."[39] A sweet crab-apple may be *sweet for

a crab-apple*, and a sweet Riesling may be *sweet for a riesling*, but there still remains a

predicative use of "sweet" that distinguishes between what is sweet simpliciter, the Riesling, and

what is not sweet, the crab-apple.

Sibley's distinctions suggest there are two theses that may be held by those claiming

goodness is attributive. On the "strong" reading, goodness is attributive in the sense that the term

'good' is held to be an *essentially attributive adjective* so is not capable of meaningful

predicative use. On the "weak" reading, goodness is attributive in the sense that the term 'good'

is a *Janus type* adjective but has attributive uses that are notable in certain respects. Varieties of

weaker readings would be distinguished by how such respects are spelled out, with some

possible criteria being that:

   a) The attributive uses are not elucidated in light of the predicative use(s) of "good".

   b) The predicative uses are just an abstraction from or function of the attributive uses.

   c) The attributive uses are the more ethically concrete and pertinent uses of "good".

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[39] This has implications for how we think about perceiving that such and such is too salty or too sweet.
For a person might either (a) perceive that the crab-apple is too sweet *a crab-apple* or (b) perceive that the
Riesling is too sweet *simpliciter*.

There is also a question of whether Sibley's examples should be assimilated into the account of "being
good for". A person going about making a crab-apple pie might include this crab-apple because it is too
sweet a crab-apple. In this way, crab-apples that are too sweet are just sweet enough *for the purposes of
crab-apple pie making*. Being able to pick out a crap-apple that is good for pie-making thus would
involve perceiving that this crab-apple is too sweet a crab-apple.

d) The attributive and predicative uses of "good" are distinct and independent.

Sibley reads Geach as holding the stronger view and ultimately takes Geach to implausibly disregard ways "good" is used in everyday language.[40] I am sympathetic to Sibley's critique in this regard and present the above weaker versions of the thesis as an attempt to formulate some more defensible variants of the view which preserve the points made against Moore and for Aristotle. I think such insights can still be captured while allowing for the intelligibility of sentences that use the term good *both* attributively and predicatively, such as "good bombs are never good, but only bad".[41]

One final, further clarification needs to be made here. There are, as I take it, *two* reasons why someone claiming goodness is attributive would say that a given use of "good" is meaningless. One reason would be that the theorists hold the afore-discussed stronger version of the thesis. Thomson, for example, writes: "In the end, then, Geach was right: the philosopher who asks 'Is knowledge, or pleasure, good?' is not asking an intelligible question—it is no more intelligible than the question whether the melon your grocer points to is (not a good melon, but all simply) a good thing."[42] Thomson may think that "knowledge is good" is ultimately a meaningless claim because it is a predicative use of good, and goodness is an essentially

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[40] Sibley, *Approach to Aesthetics*, Chapter 12. See especially pp. 171-175.

Sibley's reading has merits in that Geach presents his central thesis thus: "I can now state my first thesis about good and evil: 'good' and 'bad' are always attributive, not predicative, adjectives." "Good and Evil", p. 33.

[41] One might counter that this and other apparent predicative uses are implicitly attributive uses that merely look predicative. What is relative is not specified but left to the reader to employ. I am largely sympathetic to this position myself but am unsure that it is as persuasive to those attracted by the predicative uses as the reply I offer.

[42] Thomson, *Normativity,* p. 13.

attributive adjective. Reading Thomson this way, she would be committed to the stronger version of the thesis.

On the other hand, Thomson could think instead that the claim "knowledge is good" is meaningless because its content is ultimately "knowledge is a good thing", and Thomson, like Geach, holds that some kinds, like "things", are *too thin* to set standards of goodness. Hence, the fact that a use of the term "good" is said to be meaningless is not sufficient to show that a theorist is committed to the stronger version of the thesis. For the claim that some use of "good" is unintelligible or meaningless may either follow from (a) the facts that the use is a predicative use and that goodness is an essentially attributive term or (b) from the fact that the use in context appeals to a kind that is too thin to provide standards of goodness.

3.3.2 A Nature Is a Measure of Goodness

The advocates of the thesis that goodness is attributive tell us what goodness is not—a property. Do they have a more positive account of the nature of goodness to offer? Their positive account is roughly this: What something is, its nature or kind, *determines* the measure of what its good consists in. For instance, Keiran Setiya writes:

> In defending as innocuous the claim that good is attributive, I rejected the implausible suggestion (due to Hare, as a reading of Geach) that the standards for being a good F can always be deduced from analytic or conceptual truths about what it is to be an F...
> ...Still the idea of "deduction from the concept" has a residual appeal. It is, I think, the psychologized version of a metaphysical truth, that *the standards for being a good F are determined by the nature of Fs, as such*. If it makes sense to speak about good Fs at all, then Fs must have a common character that serves to fix the criteria of goodness for things of that kind. Such rhetoric is notoriously obscure, in part because the idea of "determining" is so difficult to understand.[43]

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[43] Setiya, *Reasons Without Rationalism*, p. 82.

And Judith Thomson:

> I take the following ideas to be true. The kind umbrella is a goodness-fixing kind, since *what being an umbrella is itself sets the standards that an umbrella has to meet if it is to be good qua umbrella.* (We learn what being good qua umbrella is in the course of learning what being an umbrella is.)[44]

While Geach writes:

> The traits for which a thing is called "good" are different according to the kind of thing in question; a knife is called "good" if it is UVW, a stomach if it is XYZ, and so on.

although admitting that some kinds are not such as to convey standards:

> "Event", like "thing", is too empty a word to convey either a criterion of identity or a standard of goodness; to ask "Is this a good or bad thing (to happen) is as useless as to ask 'Is this the same thing that I saw yesterday?' " or "Is the same event still going on?", unless the emptiness of "thing" or "event" is filled up by a special context of utterance.[45]

Finally, although not explicitly working from such tradition, we find a similar idea expressed in

the work of Sebastian Rödl, who writes:

> Imperatives and "good" depend on a suitable order; "what to do" is a schema that acquires a sense as a determinate order interprets it. Now, something may fall

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[44] Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 35.

[45] Geach, "Good and Evil", p. 37, 38.

Sibley again offers some good criticism:

> When 'A' is an essentially attributive adjective you have to understand something, when 'A' is not you do not. But it need not be a noun. What you must have in mind is some class of things, without necessarily knowing the noun by which they are called. You may recognize elephants, monoliths, excavators, and, provided you know their average size, without knowing what they are or what they are called, you can ascertain it is a big one of those things.

Approach to Aesthetics, pp. 174-175.

I take Sibley's point that it need not be a noun but suspect there are alternatives to classes of things. Wiggins' views on substance, and Michael Thompson and Sebastian Rödl's discussion of life forms and generic thought are applicable here.

under an order in two ways. *It may be that its own kind, or what it is, is its measure.* For example, we explain that a house provides shelter for men and goods, and say that our house is not as it should be because its roof leaks. *Our house falls under a measure in virtue of what it is: a house.*[46]

There are three dimensions to these formulations worth briefly contrasting. First, the thesis can be taken in either a more *metaphysical* or a more *epistemological* direction. Setiya, for instance, emphasizes the fact that the *nature* of Fs *determines* the standards for being a good F. As he notes, there is something obscure about the notion of a kind *determining*, or (to put it differently) *setting* or *fixing,* the measure of goodness for an individual. Given that *setting* and *fixing* are (typically) causal notions, this raises the further question of what form of causation or explanation is presupposed when such advocates claim that a nature determines such standards.

The metaphysical thought expressed can be divided again between a nature *determining* a standard for goodness, as is claimed by Setiya and Thomson, and nature's *being* the *measure* of goodness, as Rödl maintains. The former formulation conceptually allows that a nature might *act upon* a thing's standard for goodness so thereby make the standard how it is. While the latter suggests that the relation between a nature and a standard of goodness is one of sameness. Both formulations, however, somewhat obscure the main point being made about natures and criteria, which I take to be better illuminated by what Geach has to say about identity.

Geach claims that 'event' and 'thing' are words too empty to convey either a criterion of identity or a standard of goodness.[47] Geach's point might be illustrated in this way: A group is watching television. One person leaves briefly and comes back. She asks "Is this the same event?" A game is a kind of event and so is a series of games. And what is on the television

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[46] Rödl, *Self-Consciousness,* p. 20.

[47] Geach, "Good and Evil", p. 41.

might not be the same game, yet still be the same series. Some answer yes, it is the same event, and speak the truth because it is the same series. Others say no, it is a different event, and speak the truth because it is a new game in the same series. Thus, questions of whether A and B are the same, when answered with reference to events, are apt to get such "yes and no" answers; one suspects the question was not well formulated in the first place. This is, I believe, the point of Geach's claim about the emptiness of terms like 'event' or 'thing'.

David Wiggins, in "Identity, Individuation and Substance", gives the above thought a more nuanced and careful characterization, writing:

> Sortalism is the position which insists that, if the question is whether a and b are the same, it has to be asked *what are they*? Any sufficiently specific answer to that question will bring with it a principle of activity or functioning and a mode of behaviour characteristic of some particular kind of thing by reference to which questions of persistence or non-persistence through change can be adjudicated.[48]

A less careful formulation of sortalism might well have claimed that a thing's nature or kind determines that thing's criteria for identity and change. Such a formulation would likewise introduce the above sorts of questions about the relation between kinds and criteria for identity. Wiggins avoids such abstract questions and makes clearer that the real issue is whether one set of questions must be answered by reference to the suitable answers to a second set of questions. Borrowing Wiggins' phrasing, the above metaphysical issues arising from the positive formulation should be de-emphasized and the real issue be made clearer:

> Attributivism is the position which insists, if the question is whether a is good, or whether a has improved or otherwise changed in excellence, it has to be asked *what is a*? Any sufficiently specific answer to that question will bring with it

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[48] David Wiggins, "Identity, Individuation and Substance", from the Abstract, p. 1.

principles of activity and characteristic modes of behavior by reference to which questions of evaluation and change in excellence can be adjudicated.[49]

As we have now seen, the positive formulations of the view that goodness is attributive can be taken to express metaphysical claims. Alternately, a more epistemic thought is expressed through Judith Thomson's formulation. By learning what it is for something to be an umbrella, one learns a criterion by which individual umbrellas are said to be good or bad umbrellas in different respects. A person who understands what an umbrella is can adjudicate questions about the relevant standards for being a good umbrella. People without specialized philosophical training have, or are able to pick up, this sort of understanding independently and can justify their evaluative judgments by appealing to how umbrellas are in general, despite lacking some richer theory of how the nature of umbrellas *is* the measure of goodness.

While it is plausible that a person learns a standard of goodness when learning what something is, this leaves open questions of what methods of inquiry are relevant to establish such knowledge. Artifacts, living beings, institutions, and practices vary as entities, and one might come to understand such entities by different methods. Wallace advocates such a view when writing on the differences between the studies of biology in general and the study of humans:

> The way to discover what it is for a given kind of creature to live well is to study that creature and the life that it leads. If we approach the question of good human life in this way, however, our difficulties at the outset are just the opposite of those encountered in the study of exotic and unusual forms of life. We already know an enormous amount about human beings and human life, and there is a bewildering collection of conflicting theories and theses about human life. The task before us is not to make new discoveries or turn up new information, but to select from what is already known, to criticize existing theories, and to arrange what is left in a way that will enable us to understand the nature of human virtues and why they are valuable.

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[49] This is a re-working of the above paragraph by Wiggins that substitutes attributivism for sortalism and questions of evaluation and change in excellence for those of persistence.

Wallace goes on to claim, plausibly, that:

> The conventional aspect of human life is a natural phenomenon. It is essential to human life. It is closely connected with the conceptions of the normal, the defective, the well, and the good in human life. They are as fit subjects for objective study by serious inquirers as any other natural phenomena. The fact is, though, that, with some exceptions, biologists do not concern themselves directly with the conventional aspects of human life. They relegate such matters to less successful disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Language, knowledge, morality, and community are extremely complicated phenomena and not very well understood. Modern inquirers are apt to come to the study of these matters with the assumption that their normative aspects must be purged or ignored for scientific purposes. Thus, the central ideas of human life are reduced to something else that seems better understood. These Procrustean operations are sometimes so radical that all that remains of the victim in bed is a thin slice of the torso.[50]

The shape of such a 'nature'-informed view of ethical inquiry will vary depending on whether or not one views the study of human life as Wallace does. For, by taking knowledge of goodness to be explicated in light of what something is, the view of goodness on offer is not one that can be separated from questions about the inquirer's grounds and methods. Should a mode of inquiry claim to revolutionize our understanding of a kind K or provide reasons for reducing one account to another, then the conduct recommended on the basis of the relevant evaluative claims would need to be critically scrutinized in light of the new mode of inquiry's merits. That said, as Wallace makes clear, one must also insist that there are ways of studying human beings that unduly narrow our conception of a human, so we should resist some attempts at reducing the study of human beings into a more limited inquiry.

Wallace diagnoses what goes awry in some studies of human beings. In Wallace's view, some conceptions of scientific practice are so reductive as to ignore or obscure those

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[50] Wallace, *Virtues and Vices,* pp. 33 and 35.

normative elements essential to understanding human life. In this way, they distort their subject. Wallace, in contrast, is committed to thinking of our mode of life as involving finding or constructing meaning, justifying our actions to one another, and behaving in accordance with norms. Such activities, though they are hard to explain in strictly naturalistic terms, are not supernatural. They are ways of actualizing ourselves as the animal we are and thus cannot be omitted from the study of human beings.[51] A question that will reassert itself time and again with the development of scientific practice is whether such an attitude can be reasonably maintained. This question admits of no quick and easy answer.

While Wallace rightly takes up issues with the proper methods for understanding a given kind, for our purposes, questions of how an individual comes to understand the kind *human* are as important as questions of how knowledge of the kind is developed by academic disciplines. That is, the question is not only what the natural sciences or the humanities will ultimately reveal about the kind, but also how an individual's understanding of the kind develops. Sometimes a person's conception is shaped by participation in or exposure to the sciences and humanities. Yet, other times, a person's conception of a kind develops through her struggle to conform to her own conception of its norms.

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[51] See John McDowell, *Mind and World*, p 78.

> But what became available at the time of the modern scientific revolution is a clear-cut understanding of the realm of law, and we can refuse to equate that with a new clarity about nature. This makes room for us to insist that spontaneity is sui generis, in comparison with the realm of law, without falling into the supernaturalism of rampant platonism.
>
> To reassure ourselves that our responsiveness to reasons is not supernatural, we should dwell on the thought that it is our lives that are shaped by spontaneity, patterned in ways that come into view with an inquiry framed by what Davidson calls "the constitutive ideal of rationality". Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living. And our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. So we can rephrase the thought by saying: exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. This removes any need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, wit a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections.

For instance, a person with a shallow understanding of some kind, say *portrait painter*, might emulate what a painter does and be frustrated with her manner of acting because it is clumsier, messier, and more demanding than she expected. Her struggle to conform to the norms she takes there to be can lead to a richer understanding of the norms of painting, and that can transform her previous understanding of how what she was doing was going. She might realize, after being frustrated in trying to get the face's proportions right, that the features she painted are quite expressive as they were and that her actions were not entirely without artistic merit. What she thought was done quite poorly can change in her later judgement and reflect a new understanding of painting that emerged as a result of her struggles.

In this manner, a person's understanding of a good might develop in concert with, not prior to, the actions that conform to or express such understanding. Given that a person can come to better understand a good this way, we need not think that the sort of learning that takes a person to an understanding of a good will be like that which takes place in the lecture hall.

Now, as I mentioned, Thomson claims that "we learn what being good qua umbrella is in the course of learning what being an umbrella is". Thomson further offers a view about how goodness and virtue are related. The core of Thomson's view of virtue/kind properties is that, with qualifications, a feature F is a virtue in K if it is the case that a K is as good a K as a K can be only if it has F.[52] The property of being a sharp knife is a virtue in knives, and the property of being a witty secretary is a virtue in secretaries. Thomson argues that virtues so understood are a) natural properties, in the sense that to ascribe a virtue to a thing is to describe it, and b) such that, to *ascribe* a virtue to a member of the relevant kind is to *praise* it *qua* member of that kind: "For

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[52] Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 72.

there is no inconsistency in a property's being such that to ascribe it to a thing is to describe that thing, and its being such that to ascribe it to the thing is to praise the thing."[53]

The main problem I find with Thomson's view is that, while it answers the question which properties are virtues and says something about their nature—they are natural properties that serve jointly to describe and praise a thing—the view ultimately leaves us wanting a richer understanding of the nature of virtue. This is because Thomson does not finely enough distinguish differences between the virtuous activities of, say, a sharp knife cutting through vegetables and an eloquent speaker. As McDowell says:

> For Aristotle, virtues of character in the strict sense are distinct from a merely habitual propensity to act in ways that match what virtue would require. Virtue of character properly so called includes a specifically shaped state of the practical intellect: "practical wisdom", in the standard English translation. This is a responsiveness to some of the demands of reason (though that is not Aristotle's way of putting it.)[54]

Expanding on this thought, the way I take the virtues of knives and certain human virtues to be different is that a sharp knife reliably cuts a certain way, but its cutting is not informed or organized by either its understanding of how it is cutting or by its knowledge of what good cutting consists in. This is not to deny that sharpness is a virtue in a knife, or that sharp knives behave reliably in certain ways, but it is rather to say that the way a knife's behavior exhibits virtue is different from some ways the activities of a self-conscious being can exhibit virtue. In contrast with the knife, when I'm speaking, I can continue or adjust how I'm speaking based on my awareness of features like whether I'm speaking too quickly, too slowly, or confusedly. By doing so, I organize my manner of acting such that it is ultimately expressive of my

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[53] Thomson, *Normativity*, pp. 78-79.

[54] McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 79.

understanding of how my action is going, whose measure is my conception of goodness in lecturing.

From the fact that a human being *can* act in such a self-conscious manner and employ knowledge of a good in organizing an ongoing action, it does not follow that she *must* be behaving in such a manner for a virtue to be aptly ascribed. Some virtues possessed by humans are possibly akin to sharpness in knives, so the apt ascription of such a virtue will not require us to understand the person as acting self-consciously.[55] A soccer player may have the virtue of being able to "find space" on the field, but they may manifest this form of intelligence without being aware that they do. And a well-trained bread-making assistant performs more meritoriously than a poorly-trained assistant, even though both performances may only be situationally responsive. In describing how the apt ascription of virtue can require us to represent a person's action as done self-consciously and in a way expressive of understanding, I simply want to show what needs to be added Thomson's account of virtue so as to adequately encompass the different forms virtue can take.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter asks how we should understand the nature of the *evaluative features* and *responsiveness* found in exercises of practical intelligence. It ultimately supports a conception of knowledge of goodness developed by those claiming that goodness is attributive. An agent can be directly or indirectly aware that her acting is good or bad in a respect, that her circumstance are suitable or unsuitable, or that the materials she works with are excellent or deficient for her

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[55] Again, I am using the term "virtue" here in a way that is consistent with Judith Thomson's use. Her use of the term describes what others would call "excellences" as virtues.

purposes. Her knowledge of such goodness and badness is local, deriving more from her knowledge of particular action forms, substances, artifacts, or life-forms than from a property common to all good things. In this way, her understanding of a nature is the measure for the evaluative features she predicates.

This chapter also articulates a key distinction between ways agents *respond* to evaluative features. Articulating these different forms of responsiveness is crucial to understanding how humans' virtues and excellences, virtues of beings capable of *responding to reasons,* vary from the virtues and excellences of beings not capable of responding to reasons. For virtues are typically understood as dispositions or as habits that perfect exercises of a power. The virtues of a good knife include its capacity to cut a specific way. Likewise, because the apprentice baker's habit of scoring bread whenever the bread is over-proofed contributes to his success in baking, that disposition is also in a respect a good trait in bakers.

It is correct to understand virtues as kinds of dispositions, yet this also threatens to obscure what can be distinctively excellent about a human's powers for acting. A practically intelligent performance is explained with a different "because" than skilled but situationally responsive behavior. Situationally responsive behavior conforms to laws like "whenever A is the case, she does B". You can explain why the agent scored the bread by subsuming the behavior under such laws—she has such a habit. A baker who has the habit of scoring the bread whenever the bread is over-proofed need not think of herself as scoring the bread *because* it is over-proofed; to have such a habit, her behavior need only conform to the law.

In contrast, to explain why a person's acting was practically intelligent, we need to represent her as *acting for reasons*. The practically intelligent baker can also have the habit of

scoring the bread whenever the bread is over-proofed. Yet appeal to the habit is insufficient to explain her action because the practically intelligent agent is responding to reasons by changing how she is acting. She is scoring the bread *because* she understands it to be over-proofed. Her understanding of bread and bread-making discloses to her features of her circumstances—the over-proofedness of the bread—that she acts in knowledge of. Her ongoing act of baking is also an exercise of her autonomy: her capacity to determine what to do, think, or feel in light of what there is reason to do, think or feel.

Of course, if the practically intelligent baker can more or less *consistently* and *effectively* respond to features of her situation like the over-proofedness of the bread, then she will likely also tend to score the bread whenever the bread is over-proofed. But then she has the habit *because* she is actively exercising her autonomy. Her disposition, unlike a knife's disposition to cut cleanly, is pervaded by her rationality. To look at it from another angle, the habits an agent has through exercising her practical intelligence are not traits that *constrain* her freedom in acting, like a squash player's short temper, but rather are expressions of her autonomy.

Misgivings with Deliberating Amidst Acting

4.1 Introduction

What can Aristotelian Naturalist views contribute to our understanding of action guidance,

ethical practice, and practical reasoning? Not satisfied with the direction taken by some

prominent theorists, such as Judith Thomson, I have been developing an alternative view of how

evaluative features figure into practical reasoning. In this, I have advanced a novel, but

controversial, conception of practical reasoning and deliberation. Deliberating, I suggest, can

take the form of absorbed acting. Moreover, deliberation can occur amid acting and can be

continuous with it. Akin to Gilbert Ryle, I think there are forms of intelligence consisting in a

person's self-critical performances.[56] A person with a sufficient understanding of what she is

doing and awareness of her acting's character can adjust what she is doing in light of how it is

going, so manifest a form of practical intelligence.

Many philosophers will be skeptical of my favored conception of deliberation, either

because they think that deliberation is mental while action is physical or because they think that

deliberation is something that is essentially antecedent to acting. In any case, for them,

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[56] See Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, especially pp. 27, 50-51.

deliberating is one thing and acting another, and I am wrong to run them together. This chapter articulates this concern and argues against it.

4.2 Why Can't Reasoning Conclude in Acting?

Reasoning gets called "practical reasoning" because of its content. The reasoning is *about* practical matters. Would it be good to accept the job? Should I? Must I? In forming a view about such a practical matter, I am engaging in practical reasoning. The controversy over the nature of practical reasoning is not over whether we can engage in practical reasoning so understood. It is basically accepted that we can. The deeper issue is whether acting can be understood as a constitutive part of such reasoning. The question that is usually made the focus of this issue is whether reasoning can conclude in action. This focus is partly for historic reasons. Aristotle introduced the notion of a "practical syllogism" and thought of practical reasoning as reasoning that concludes in an act.[57] So philosophers sometimes frame the discussion as a response to Aristotle's contention.

But the question "can reasoning conclude in action?" is not ideal for a few reasons. First, some philosophers are happy to think that reasoning can conclude in a mental action, like an intention, but doubt that reasoning can conclude in a physical action, like tasting food.[58] So, it is more the *type* of action that is at issue rather than action as such. Second, in asking whether reasoning can conclude in acting, it is rarely considered whether we are asking about action in the perfective or imperfective (progressive) aspect. This can make a difference, as we shall see. Finally, as Eric Wiland brings out, the focus on the *conclusion* of reasoning ignores the question

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[57] This borrows from John Broome's formulation. "Normative Practical Reasoning", p. 175.

[58] Broome, "Normative Practical Reasoning", p. 175.

of whether action can be a *premise* in some reasoning. Action as conclusion can look unlike the

other constituents of some piece of reasoning, raising the question of how something with the

form of action could come to be from something of a different form. But if acting can be

conceived as a premise of reasoning, this problem abates.

These are some issues I would like to flag before looking at some of the better reasons for

thinking that reasoning cannot conclude in action.[59] I think someone who is adjusting what she is

doing in light of how her acting is faring can be described as deliberating. She is figuring out

what to do next by responding to the evaluative character of her acting and her circumstances.

And some ordinary expressions of reasoning seem to support this: "I paused in my lecturing

because I noticed I was talking too quickly, and he looked confused." What, then, are the

philosophical concerns with thinking that reasoning cannot conclude in acting?

4.2.1 Reasoning and Acting Are of Different Natures

One concern is raised by Broome, who argues that reasoning cannot conclude in action because

reasoning and acting are of different natures. He writes:

> Aristotle identified practical reasoning as reasoning that concludes in an act, and
> he was thinking of a non-mental act such as tasting food. But reasoning is a
> mental process, which takes place in the reasoner's mind. Its conclusion must be a
> mental state or a mental event; it cannot be a non-mental act. I therefore identify

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[59] Patricio Fernandez provides a more comprehensive summary of objections made to the thesis that
reasoning can conclude in action in his "A Realistic Practical Conclusion", p. 117. Fernandez writes:

> Thus practical philosophers object that (i) reasoning is a purely mental process while action is at least partly
> a physical one; (ii) the conclusion that she ought to do something must be available to the agent prior to
> action so that it can guide her performance, or, in cases of akrasia, be contradicted by it; (iii) actions are
> actual particulars whereas conclusions derived through reasoning are always in some sense general; (iv)
> practical reasoning is impersonal—we can reason on behalf or in place of others, as when we give advice or
> think about what others should do—while actions are first-personal.

I take Joseph Raz and John Broome to be some of the best critics of the thesis so here focus on
responding to their arguments that primarily address issues i and ii of Fernandez's taxonomy of problems.

practical reasoning as reasoning that concludes in an intention, which is a mental state. This is as practical as reasoning can get. When reasoning concludes in an intention to act, the intention is in turn likely to cause the intended act. But that last bit of causation is not part of the reasoning process.[60]

The main claims advanced by Broome are that:

a) Physical acting, like tasting food, is non-mental, but reasoning is mental.

b) Reasoning takes place in the mind, but physical acting takes place in the world.

These dichotomies are questionable. Is it clear that physical action is non-mental? The nature of

an intentional action is determined, at least in part, by my understanding of what it is I am doing.

My going upstairs is a taking of my jacket to the closet only if I understand myself as doing that.

In this sense, mental reasoning need not be thought to conclude in a non-mental event, since to

come to be acting intentionally is to come to have a certain understanding of what one is doing.[61]

And is it clear that *all* reasoning takes place in the mind? Consider cases of thinking where one

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[60] Broome, "Normative Practical Reasoning", p. 175.

Broome's view on practical reasoning expressed in the above passage invites John McDowell's critical remark that:

> Ordinary modern philosophy addresses its derivative dualisms in a characteristic way. It takes its stand on one side of a gulf it aims to bridge, accepting without question the way its target dualism conceives the chosen side. Then it constructs something as close as possible to the conception of the other side that figured in the problems, out of materials that are unproblematically available where it has taken its stand. Of course there no longer seems to be a gulf, but the result is bound to look more or less revisionist.

Mind and World, p. 94.

[61] See also Eric Wiland:

> Secondly, the premises of the action-to-action conception of practical reasoning make no mention of merely psychological attitudes, thereby complying with Anscombe's point (should that really turn out to be a desideratum). After all, if I'm playing chess, that's something I am really doing, not merely something in my mind. But notice that even if such a premise is not merely psychological, it is still psychological in one respect. I'm not playing chess — not intentionally — unless I think that I am. More generally, one who is V-ing intentionally thinks that she is V-ing, as Anscombe herself taught. If the action that serves as the starting point of practical reasoning is intentional, as it surely must be, then the starting-point itself of practical reasoning is neither merely psychological nor purely material, but both at once."

"In the Beginning was the Doing", p. 312.

writes on paper, moves blocks or puzzle pieces around, looks at images, sketches, and so on. These cases cast doubt on the idea that reasoning cannot include physical activity.[62]

The force of Broome's argument also rests on a presumption that the premises and conclusions of reasoning must be of the same form. When Broome claims "Its conclusion must be a mental state or a mental event; it cannot be a non-mental act", what is the reason that the conclusion must also be mental, and not physical? Eric Wiland offers an explanation in "In the Beginning was the Doing." Wiland thinks that Symmetry, the claim that the starting point and ending point of practical reasoning must have the same form, helps motivate the general disbelief that reasoning can conclude in action. He illustrates the force of Symmetry in this way:

> For how could a bit of reasoning conclude in an action, if all of its premises are of a completely different form? The form of an action, whatever it is, differs from the form of an ordinary judgment or assertion. And we should expect anything that deserves the name of reasoning to be disciplined enough to avoid the mistake Hume put his finger on. Just as we cannot reason from an "is" to an "ought", so too we cannot reason from something merely believed or merely intended to something actually done. There should be some sort of symmetry between the conclusion of any form of reasoning and at least one of its premises.[63]

As one might doubt that something with the force of an imperative could follow from premises that are non-imperatives, one might equally doubt that something with the form of an action could follow from the form of an ordinary judgment or assertion.

While Wiland thinks that Symmetry helps motivate the general disbelief that reasoning can conclude in action, he is not among the deniers. Instead, he argues that, by recognizing that acting can be the starting point of reasoning, we can overcome doubts about the possibility of practical reasoning concluding in action. If action, specifically ongoing acting, is understood as

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[62] I owe this remark to Steve Leighton.

[63] Wiland, "In the Beginning was the Doing", p. 308-309.

practical reasoning's starting point, then practical reasoning that terminates in action does not complete in something of a different form than its starting points.

To help readers understand how action could be the starting point of practical reasoning, Wiland appeals to Michael Thompson's work on action explanation. In *Life and Action*, Thompson argues that action can be explained by other action and that such "naive action explanations" have a priority over "sophisticated action explanations", which would explain an action by appeal to a psychological state. Both completed actions (typically described in the perfective sense) and ongoing, in-progress actions (typically expressed by means of a progressive, or in the imperfective sense) can have as their explanans an ongoing action. An instance of the first case (complete action explained by an ongoing action) is:

Q. "Why *did* you write the letter A?"

R. "I'm writing the word 'Action'."[64]

And an instance of the second case (ongoing action explained by an ongoing action) is:

Q. "Why are you climbing up the ladder?"

R. "I am gathering all the expired cans."

Actions in progress take time, and various things can be done along the way. In the process of gathering all the expired cans, I might end up climbing the ladder, checking the labels, and putting the cans in a basket. In the service of this aim, I might also engage in something more easily recognizable as deliberation, such as stopping my can gathering to think about how I am going to down the ladder with this laden basket, before continuing acting.

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[64] Wiland, "In the Beginning was the Doing", p. 311.

Wiland argues this conception of action explanation and these features of ongoing action help us understand how practical reasoning can start from acting. He offers two examples of practical reasoning that begin and end in an ongoing action: one of an agent who, starting a dairy farm, reasons to traveling to Hereford and the other of an agent who, playing chess, reasons to castling. And his comments on the dairy farm case are insightful:

> It matters that the agent in question is already starting up a dairy farm. That's something he's in the midst of doing, not already complete. (If he had instead retired from farming, he probably wouldn't be reasoning his way to Hereford, except out of nostalgia.) It's probably not something he's got in the forefront of his mind while reasoning, but it can be something he reasons from all the same. In order for him to run his new farm, he reasons toward doing something particular: traveling to Hereford. So, to the extent that it is reasonable for him to travel to Hereford, it's on the grounds he is now starting up a small dairy farm. And traveling to Hereford turns out to be a (small) part of his starting a dairy farm.[65]

I think Wiland's action-to-action conception of practical reasoning is plausible and provides a way of responding to the Symmetry concerns motivating Broome's argument. Wiland also offers a way of understanding reasoning as taking the form of acting: reasoning is part of an action-in-progress. Given that intentional acting is, as Wiland describes it, "...neither merely psychological nor purely material, but both at once", then one can both agree with Broome's assertion that reasoning is a mental process yet think that reasoning can both begin and conclude in intentional action.

The view I am developing is compatible with Wiland's account. A teacher who is adjusting how she is lecturing because she is lecturing too slowly begins her deliberating in action (lecturing) and concludes in action (lecturing more quickly) and she moves from one action to another in light of evaluative features that favor the adjustment. It matters that we think

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[65] Wiland, "In the Beginning was the Doing", p. 311.

of her as already acting, as this explains why her response "So I slowed down" casts the conclusion of her reasoning in the same form as its starting point.

4.2.2 Being Unable to Act

The way we speak suggests that we treat actions as conclusions of reasoning. "The sidewalk was icy and my balance was impaired. So I took a cab home from the pub." Should we take this at face value? In looking at Broome's argument and Wiland's reply, we have seen both some grounds philosophers give for thinking that the way we talk is misleading and some responses to these misgivings that would permit us to take ordinary language at face value.

The fact some people are unable to act in certain ways, or might fail to act because of some sudden impairment, or are weak-willed, has led a number of philosophers to doubt that reasoning can conclude in acting. Wiland explains:

> And then there's the worrisome paralysis problem. Suppose that, unbeknownst to you, your legs are suddenly paralyzed. Feeling thirsty, you think a beer would be nice, and then you remember that there's beer down at the pub. So you desire or intend to go to the pub. Or you believe that it would be good to go the pub, or even that you ought to, or (even more comically) that you must go the pub. These details don't really matter, because the point of the example is to show that your reasoning seems complete despite being unable to move your legs, and so despite your inability to go to the pub. Failing to act in these circumstances shows no defect in your capacity to reason practically. Practical reasoning seems to be over well before action even begins.[66]

As Wiland puts it, failing to act because one is physically unable to is no defect in one's capacity to reason. Some philosophers believe this shows that practical reasoning has ended before the acting has begun. This line of argument is offered by John Broome and developed by Joseph Raz. Broome argues:

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[66] Wiland, "In The Beginning Was the Doing", p. 310.

Aristotle took practical reasoning to be reasoning that concludes in an action. But an action—at least a physical one—requires more than reasoning ability; it requires physical ability too. Intending to act is as close to acting as reasoning alone can get us, so we should take practical reasoning to be reasoning that concludes in an intention.[67]

Joseph Raz concurs with Broome but thinks the argument extends to mental acts as well, such as formations of intention favored by Broome. Raz argues:

One way of explaining why it [reasoning] cannot take us as far as to physical acts is that failure to perform the act need not be a failure of reasoning. Even when we reason with a view to acting, the failure to act as a conclusion of the reasoning need not be a failure of reasoning. But if that is the argument then it applies to mental acts and omissions as well. In both these cases people may fail to act or to omit to act even when they reason correctly, and their reasoning instructs them to act or to omit. Reasoning cannot take us as far as action, for intentional action (which is the only kind of action reasoning can lead us to) depends on the will. The possibility of weakness of the will is precisely the possibility of failure to act that is not due to failure of reasoning, and we can fail to intentionally omit an action, or fail to perform a mental act through weakness of the will.[68]

What should we make of these sorts of arguments? We should observe first that the case in point is somewhat vague. Imagining a person who is unable to act, we can have in mind one of two kinds of cases.

The first kind of case is where a person has the capacity to act a certain way, but that capacity is impaired to an extent that she cannot now do it. She can normally recite the Cyrillic alphabet but is unable to while drunk. A person who is held down has not lost the capacity to go to the pub but is rather unable to exercise it. Likewise, a person who lacks the will to get out of bed is unable to do so but (typically) has the capacity to do so.

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[67] Broome, "Normative Practical Reasoning", p. 132.

[68] Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility*, p. 132.

In the second kind of case, a person entirely lacks the capacity to act a certain way: she is unable to read minds, levitate, breath underwater, fly unassisted, and so on. There are no exercises of capacity to be impaired by a being that lacks that capacity. Placed in a sound-proof booth, a rock is not impaired in its ability to hear what is going on outside because rocks lack the capacity to hear.

I will first discuss the doubts raised by the first kind of case, cases of impairment, before turning to the doubts raised by the second kind of case, cases where a capacity is lacking.

4.2.3 Impairment and Weakness of Will

Why do cases of impairment purportedly undermine the idea that reasoning can conclude in action? Because if we think that reasoning can conclude in acting, then we seem to be committed to the view that a failure to act is a failure in reasoning—the reasoning is incomplete. However, failing to get to the pub because because one's legs are paralyzed is a failure to act that is not a failure in reasoning. Likewise for failing to get to the pub because one is weak-willed (akratic), or so Raz argues: "The possibility of weakness of the will is precisely the possibility of failure to act that is not due to failure of reasoning." Since the premise that reasoning can conclude in actions has such false implications, we should not think that reasoning can conclude in action.

In response to these arguments, first note that Raz is making a contentious claim when he states that failures to act caused by weakness of will (akrasia) are not failures in reasoning. Some cases of akrasia do look like failures of reasoning: when I cannot help but stay indoors where it is warm despite thinking I have most reason to go to class, weakness of will looks like a failure of reasoning. Second, note that it is contentious that the cases generalize. Why does the fact that the

reasoning ends without action in these particular kinds of situations tell us anything about the possibility of reasoning ending in action in others? Raz responds to this question, and we will examine his response shortly.

To the concerns raised by cases of impaired actions and weakness of will, I offer two replies. First, I think many purported examples of incomplete practical reasoning are not, in fact, incomplete. Some examples of incomplete practical reasoning look that way: A person whose legs become paralyzed, or who is held down, might become unable to do what she intends to do. Her capacity to act is impaired. Is her reasoning prevented from concluding in action? This depends on whether we are thinking of action in the perfective sense or the progressive aspect.

If, by concluding in action we are imagining a complete action, then it seems that being impaired does prevent us from acting. She was going to the pub but she never got there because she was injured midway. So, yes, being impeded can prevent reasoning from concluding in action, if we are thinking of action only in terms of complete actions.

On the other hand, if the question is whether her reasoning can conclude in acting, in the ongoing acting sense expressed by the progressive aspect, then, no, being impaired in such ways does not prevent her from acting. Imagine a case where a person's response to being playfully splashed while gardening is to go for the hose. Jessa can still be going for the hose despite being held back. She is going for the hose despite her currently being prevented from getting it. Being held back, should it continue long enough, might prevent her from getting the hose, but it does not prevent her from going for it. So, understood this way, her reasoning is not incomplete and *does* conclude in acting.

Thus, whether we think the reasoning is complete or incomplete here depends on what we mean to claim in saying that reasoning can conclude in *action*. The more defensible position is the view that reasoning can conclude in act-*ing*. As such, reasoning concluding in incomplete action is not incomplete reasoning. There is no fault in the reasoning when practical reasoning concludes in acting that is impaired, interfered with, or thwarted.[69]

Second, if we think that an action *can* be the conclusion of some reasoning, it is not as though we think that an action *must* be the conclusion of some reasoning. Thinking that reasoning sometimes concludes in acting is compatible with thinking that reasoning sometimes concludes in belief or in the formation of intention. Sometimes, a person can reason to a belief, such as the belief that it would be nice to go to the pub, and stop there without having engaged in any incomplete reasoning.

This response looks less plausible in some cases. There is something troubling about reasoning to the belief that you *must* go to the pub and yet you do not act. The intuition that the agent is somehow at fault here is stronger, and one explanation of why the agent is at fault is

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[69] This conception of practical reasoning is supported by McDowell in "What is the Content of an Intention in Action?" McDowell writes:

> Here is a suggestion, then. The content of an intention in action is given by what one would say in expressing it, or what one would say in stating the practical knowledge one has in executing it, which comes to the same thing. And the appropriate form is 'I am doing such-and-such'.
> p. 417

and

> Drawing the conclusion of a bit of practical reasoning is something one does at a determinate moment. If the reasoning is for the here and now, drawing the conclusion is embarking on an action; that is the Aristotelian doctrine. To bring the action to completion, one needs to sustain the intention that begins to be in action at that time, over a period during which, if it was as a result of reasoning that one started to act, the reasoning, including whatever move is appropriately conceived as drawing a conclusion from it, is receding into the past. Going on intentionally doing something cannot be equated with drawing a conclusion from some practical reasoning, any more than going on believing something can be equated with drawing a conclusion from some theoretical reasoning, even if the way one came to believe it was by considering the premises of the reasoning and drawing the conclusion.
> p. 422

because she is rationally required to complete her reasoning. This is not the only way to explain

the fault; the agent can at fault without a failure of rationality. Jonathan Dancy makes this point

in his *Practical Shape* and illustrates it with the following example:

> Suppose, when you get to that stage in your reasoning, you have seen where it is
> taking you but have not yet committed yourself to the relevant course of action by
> forming the intention so to act. Suddenly the door opens and in rush your three
> grandchildren, all ready for an afternoon at the zoo – at which point you forget
> about the whole thing and never return to it, since once you get back from the zoo
> it is too late. Now: how do you stand from the rational point of view (if there is
> such a thing, analogous to the famous moral point of view)? Is it that, rationally
> speaking, you ought to have committed yourself by forming the relevant
> intention? Somehow I doubt it. Is it that your reasoning is incomplete? Yes, I
> would say, but that incompleteness is not something for which you are (in this
> case) at fault. Of course in other cases you might be at fault, but this is not enough
> to establish that the fault at issue is a failure of rationality.[70]

Incompleteness in reasoning is not something an agent is always at fault for, and the fault at issue

in cases of incomplete reasoning is not necessarily that of a failure of rationality. The sense in

which the agent *ought* to be going to the pub, given that she reasoned to the belief "I must go to

the pub", need not be explained in terms of rational requirements. She is not rationally at fault

for her incomplete reasoning, but, depending on the circumstances, is failing morally (she

promised to go) or failing as the publican (it is the tenth anniversary of the pub's opening, and

the publican ought to be there). These are alternative explanations for why she is at fault in only

reasoning to the belief that she ought to go to the pub.

The case of weakness of will presents us with similar issues but arguably has stronger

consequences. Broome thinks that practical reasoning is reasoning that concludes in intention.

Raz doubts that reasoning can take us that far, on grounds of weakness of will. If we are

reasoning with a view to acting, we can fail to act because we are *weak-willed.* Unlike the cases

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[70] Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Shape*, Ch. 6. (From manuscript.)

of paralysis or of being held down, where the reasoner is *acting*, a weak-willed person is *not* acting as she thinks she should be. Raz concludes: "The possibility of weakness of the will is precisely the possibility of failure to act that is not due to failure of reasoning, and we can fail to intentionally omit an action, or fail to perform a mental act through weakness of the will."[71]

Supposing reasoning can conclude in acting, is the akratic agent a person with a defect in her ability to reason practically? Is the akratic agent incomplete in her practical reasoning? As noted earlier, it is contentious to think that weakness of will is no failure of reasoning. Further, there are still issues with how much such cases generalize, and Dancy's argument is still available to us.

Additionally, those holding that reasoning can conclude in acting have open to them an alternative way of conceiving weakness of will. The problematic case of akrasia is one where there is a failure to act because of weakness of will. Yet one might insist on an alternate conception of akrasia, where weak-willed reasoning *does* end in action, just the wrong action. This is most clearly the case when a person *does* what she knows she should not do. McDowell's discussion of akrasia suggests how the problematic cases of weakness of will could be re-described:

> I can bring out the significance of the divergence I am urging by noting that it makes room for a picture of weak-willed action that differs from Davidson's, and seems superior to it.
>   A weak-willed person acts for a reason that she takes to tell less compellingly in favour of doing what she does than she takes some other reason to tell in favour of doing something else. By acting for that reason, she reveals that she takes it to be enough to act on. As before, saying this is just registering that she acts for that reason. She is irrational in that she acts for a reason that, by her own lights, is not as good a reason for doing what she does as another reason she has is for doing something else...

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[71] Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility*, p. 132.

> ...The irrationality of the weak-willed person lies precisely in the fact that she judges that the reason for which she acts is outweighed by other considerations, even while, in acting as she does, she treats it as enough to act on. There is no need to strain, as Davidson does, to find a sense in which she judges her weak-willed action preferable to the course, better supported by reasons in her own view, that she does not take.[72]

Following McDowell, then, we can say that she is not weak-willed because she *believes* she ought to go to the pub and her will fails to move from this belief to action. Rather, she is weak-willed because she is *acting* for a reason—sitting there because it is comfy—that is not as good a reason than her reason to be going to the pub. Weak-willed reasoning *does* end in action, only the wrong one. In this way, then, weakness-willed reasoning need not be conceptualized as reasoning that fails to take one to action.

Raz draws another lesson from cases of weakness of will and his argument is worth looking at. Anticipating objections to his position, Raz writes:

> Those who claim that an action or an intention is the conclusion of practical reasoning would simply reject my claim that the failure to act or to form an intention is not a failure of reasoning (and need not result from a failure of reasoning). They will claim simply that, given that an action or an intention is the conclusion of practical reasoning, it follows that failing to act or to intend is a failure of reasoning. I failed, the objection goes, to produce an argument against them. *But that is to misconceive the nature of the argument. It merely, but crucially, reminds us that we know that the reasoning is over before the act is performed or the intention formed. We know that if someone fails to act or to intend as he should have and is challenged: 'why did you interrupt your reasoning midway? Why did you not complete it?' he will reply, truly, that he did.* The problem was not with his reasoning but with his willpower.[73]

The argument is that cases of weak will and impaired acting remind us of what we already know: that an agent's reasoning is complete before acting or intending. Her reasoning being complete in

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[72] McDowell, "What is the Content of an Intention in Action?", pp. 426-427.

[73] Raz, *From Normativity to Responsibility,* p. 133. Emphasis is mine.

the case where she believes she ought to go to the pub but she is weak willed, reminds us that her reasoning is complete in the case where she believes that she ought to go to the pub and does act. She engages in the *same* reasoning regardless of whether she goes or not. This shows that knowing what she did is irrelevant to knowing her reasoning.

Appealing to intuitions about sameness of reasoning to settle whether reasoning can conclude in acting is a questionable maneuver. A conclusion is a constitutive part of some reasoning, such that reasoning that reaches different conclusions is not the same reasoning. Whether reasoning can *conclude* in acting and whether the *same* reasoning occurs in two cases are not independent questions. Insisting that *the reasoning is the same* in both the cases already presupposes that the acting is not the conclusion.

If we are supposing that reasoning can conclude in acting, then we doubt that two people really engaged in the same reasoning despite acting differently. For, granting that acting can stand as the conclusion in reasoning, reasoning that concludes with different acting is reasoning that reaches different conclusions. This can look odd; two people seem to be deliberating the same when, seeing the viscous raccoon outside, they come to believe that the cat should be put inside. But, if reasoning can conclude in acting, then we might insist that their reasoning was not the same. One reasoned:

I saw the vicious raccoon outside and thought "I really should put the cat inside; that raccoon is dangerous." So, I put the cat inside.

and the other:

I saw the vicious raccoon outside and thought "I really should put the cat inside, that raccoon is dangerous." So, I went on reading my book.[74]

*Putting the cat insid*e and *going on reading a book* look like two very different conclusions, the former action looking supported by the considerations adduced, and the latter action not.

These, then, are some of the concerns raised by cases of impaired action and weakness of will. Replying to philosopher's grounds for denying that reasoning concludes in acting, I explained why the conception of deliberating in acting on offer is defensible, vindicating some ordinary forms of expressing one's reasoning.

4.2.4 Lacking the Capacity to Act

We've now examined issues raised by cases where an agent's ability to act is impaired, either physically or by weakness of will. What about cases where the agent entirely lacks the capacity to act, such as paralysis?

The misgiving here, as Broome brings out, is that physical action requires not just reasoning ability, but physical ability as well. A person may entirely lack the capacity to act a certain way. Reasoning alone, then, cannot get us all the way to action. Failing to act in such circumstances then looks like no failure of reasoning.

As before, we might think these cases, at best, show that reasoning cannot conclude in action in these circumstances. Even granting that reasoning cannot conclude in acting when an agent lacks the capacity to act a certain way, why cannot reasoning conclude in action otherwise?

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[74] This may looks like such bad reasoning that some might say it is not reasoning at all. (That could be an artifact of setting the reasoning out into propositions.) I think the example is in fact a clear example of failing to reason well and is one that brings out the differences in conceptions of practical reasoning.

We have also seen how even if the reasoning is incomplete, one can deny that an agent is failing rationally in failing to draw the conclusion.

It is additionally unclear what we are imagining when we consider an agent who has lost her capacity to act, lost either all out or in a specific way. Our earlier reflections on action bring out some of the difficulty in imagining an agent losing a capacity to act in a certain way. As Wiland remarks, for an action-in-progress, there are various concrete ways of acting that amount to doing the same action. If I am gathering the expired cans, I could gather cans by climbing the ladder but also by using a stool, an extended reach tool, knocking the shelf over, or asking you to reach them as I hold the basket. It is hard to tell what we are committed to in imaging that a person has lost the capacity to gather the expired cans because specific forms of acting, like gathering cans, are variously realized.

Further, it is also unclear why the case of total paralysis, considered by Wiland, should be characterized as a case where the agent has *lost* her capacity to *act*. For we are also asked to imagine the agent forming beliefs and intentions and are so led to think that her reasoning is already complete. But these look like mental actions—why is the performance of a mental act not an exercise of a being's capacity to act, which has been lost ex hypothesi? Reading the argument charitably would have us re-describe the capacity as lost, but then there is the issue of how to characterize it. What is the description of the capacity she has lost? And what other capacities are we also committed to imagine her lacking?

Moving on to respond to the concerns so raised, we should grant that one's ability to act depends on one's physical abilities. But the ability to reason can also depend on one's physical abilities. Take a case where a person thinks that the stove is on because she smells that the

griddle is smoking. She can only reason this way because she has a certain physical ability, though she might come to have the same thought on other bases—seeing that it is smoking, being told that it is, inferring, and so on. Broome's idea that reasoning is a mental process that takes place in the mind prevents him from seeing that forms of reasoning which conclude in belief, such as the thought that the stove is on, can depend on a person's physical abilities as well.

So, like forms of theoretical reasoning, forms of practical reasoning are such that practical reasoning cannot be engaged in by a person who lacks altogether the capacity to act in certain ways. Wiland takes this idea to show that a person could think she can practically reason when really she cannot and presents this as a solution to the case of being unable to act because of total paralysis:

> We now also have a way of handling the paralysis problem. A person who is unaware that she is paralyzed might form some beliefs and even intentions about what to do based upon some of her other psychological states. It is tempting to think of this as practical reasoning itself. But since she is paralyzed, she won't do anything as a consequence of such psychological state-formation. This fact can lead us to think that practical reasoning is completed before action begins. But if practical reasoning instead takes us from action to action, then the paralyzed agent has the same relation to practical reasoning's starting-point as she does to its stopping-point. If it is insisted that the paralyzed agent is unable to act at all, then she cannot practically reason at all. She might think she can practically reason. She might be able to do part of what practical reasoning comprises. But she cannot fully practically reason. Just as someone unable to form new beliefs cannot propositionally reason, even if he thinks he can, so too someone unable to act cannot practically reason. Just as a dreamer can think she is flying like a bird, but not really be, so too a dreamer can think she is reasoning practically, but not really be.[75]

Wiland here makes the striking claim that, if it is insisted that the paralyzed agent is unable to act at all, then she cannot practically reason at all. This may look question-begging. In Wiland's

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[75] Wiland, "In the Beginning was the Doing", pp. 310-312.

defense, it is not clear that the argument he is giving here means to identify practical reasoning with the capacity to reason from action-to-action. Rather, Wiland is asking what does the paralyzed agent who is unable to act have the capacity to do? She probably has the capacity to reason to a belief about a practical matter, and she might have the capacity to reason to an intention. But does she have the capacity to reason from action-to-action? If we are being asked to imagine an agent who is unable to act at all, she can neither begin nor conclude such reasoning in action. So, *if,* contra Broome and Raz, we identify practical reasoning as the capacity to reason from action-to-action, then we would characterize the case as one where the agent mistakenly thinks she has an ability she does not have.

Hence, we can agree that there is no defect in practical reasoning in cases of total paralysis, not because the reasoning, in fact, concludes before acting, but because the agent was not engaging in practical reasoning. Adopting Wiland's action-to-action conception of practical reasoning allows for this way of dealing with the paralysis case. So, again, the issues motivating philosophers' doubts that reasoning can conclude in acting are not decisive.

4.3 Conceptualizing Deliberating Amidst Acting

We have now examined some philosophical grounds for thinking that reasoning ends before acting. Besides thinking that reasoning does end so, we may also be tempted to think that it really *should* end before action. A responsible surgeon, for example, plans her surgery prior to acting. She is culpable if she is forced to stop and reason about what to do mid-operation in response to a problem she should have foreseen. This ideal of responsible reasoning can even

inform the way people are taught to deliberate: through play, children are taught to *plan* their next move, and to think about what they will say or do before they do it.

Yet there clearly are cases where one is forced to deliberate in the course of acting. The question is how to conceptualize deliberating amidst acting. Some of our judgments about the ideality of prior deliberation and the deficiencies of deliberating amidst acting are influenced by a conception of deliberation as something highly intellectual, done separately and at a distance from some acting.

While granting that some forms of deliberation can be like this, I want to endorse the McDowellian position, contra Dreyfus and Humphrey, that deliberation can genuinely occur in the midst of acting, even when the agent is totally absorbed in acting. She can be engaging in reasoning from action-to-action without the need to "step back" or "go upstairs". So, when I say that a person's awareness of evaluative features (her acting's character, her circumstances' suitability, the deficiencies of the materials she is working with, etc.) can enable in her a certain practical intelligence, I mean to be characterizing a deliberative power that is not perniciously intellectual.

Admittedly, there are forms of deliberation that are not ideal to engage in while acting. The case of the surgeon is one. One reason why deliberating amidst acting can be irresponsible is because it can be inefficient. The activities we engage in can be ongoing, taking time to complete, and circumstances can intrude upon acting so as to prompt deliberation that extends them further. Carrying the ice chest to the camp site, you reach a ridge. You are not sure how to carry it over, so you stop, think about how you are going to get the ice chest over the ridge, then execute the plan you have now devised. The time spent acting is extended by the need to

deliberate. And this can prevent or impede doing other important things: there is less time to set up the tent now. So, there are forms of deliberation that one can engage in over the course of reasoning from one thing one is doing (carrying the ice-chest to camp) to another more concrete action (pulling the ice-chest over the ridge with a rope) that make the acting take longer to complete than had one thought the whole thing out first.

On the other hand, there can be something pathological about the need to settle things too far in advance. I relate to myself in an overly paternalistic manner when I expect me to use my knowledge of my habits and character to anticipate what *I* will later do and plan accordingly. I fail to treat myself in my deliberation as the kind of being that can make up its mind about what do. In thinking that I *must now* decide what to do if there is no ice at the store, I fail to treat my present authority to make up my mind as extending into the future.[76]

By realizing that one's authority to make up one's mind is not limited to the present, one is less inclined to think a deliberation imperfect or incomplete for not settling matters ahead of time. I can deliberate well about how to explain John Wisdom's paper to my students without having to anticipate ahead of time every question that my students might have. For I am the kind of being that can make up my mind on the spot, even by determining what to say as I'm saying it. So, deliberation that does not determine ahead of time what to think or do is not in all respects less ideal. Deliberation that leaves space for me to spontaneously make up my mind about what to do or think in the moment can be perfectly good deliberation.

There are also forms of deliberating that are not ideal to engage in while acting because they break one out of the flow. Consider the following poem:

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[76] This reply is informed by Richard Moran's *Authority and Estrangement*.

> A centipede was happy – quite!
> Until a toad in fun
> Said, "Pray, which leg moves after which?"
> This raised her doubts to such a pitch,
> She fell exhausted in the ditch
> Not knowing how to run.[77]

or a case like:

> The infielder, regularly quite able to catch easy pop flies, happens to think about how he is going to do it this time and, in doing so, misses the catch.

George Humphrey, who drew attention to this phenomenon, advanced views that have been encapsulated into "Humphrey's Law". Humphrey's Law holds that conscious thought about a task impairs habitual performance. When we conceive of the phenomenon this way, it can seem that deliberation is not a part of an expert's habitual acting. Rather, deliberation is a separate activity that inserts itself into the acting when the agent becomes self-aware in certain ways. This makes for a distinctive conception of expert activity; it is the novice or journeyman who typically needs to engage in deliberation as part of her performance, where the expert does not.

Hubert Dreyfus' work in some ways supports Humphrey's conception. Dreyfus claims that, when we are at our best and most expert in acting, we act in an unminded way, which he describes as "embodied coping".[78] The philosopher tends to overlook the fact that many of our active modes of engagement with the world proceed without conscious ratiocination. Rather, it is

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[77] See George Humphrey, *The Nature of Learning*. Humphrey is a Queen's philosopher/psychologist, after whom the Humphrey Hall, home to the psychology department, is named.

[78] Hubert Dreyfus writes, for instance:

> In response, I will seek to show that mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping—that, indeed, McDowell's view that "in mature human beings, embodied coping is permeated with mindedness," suggests a new version of the mentalist myth which, like the others, is untrue to the phenomenon.

Dreyfus, "The Return of the Myth of the Mental", p. 353.

only when the "flow" of embodied coping breaks down—such as when I see the ridge and have no idea how to get the cooler over—that I begin deliberating at all.

Dreyfus and Humphrey are right that there is this phenomena and that some forms of deliberation inhibit performances in this way. The question is whether Dreyfus is also right to insist that "...mindedness is the enemy of embodied coping..."[79] As McDowell puts it, Dreyfus' picture of acting is shaped by his assumption that mindedness necessarily brings detachment with it.[80] We can see this assumption in play when Dreyfus writes:

> Moreover, in evaluating the pervasiveness claim it is important to bear in mind that taking a critical distances undermines absorption and so degrades mastery. In the case of kindness, the reflective response would most likely be delayed and general rather than instantaneous and specific.

and...

> In blitz chess, at a second a move, the absorbed master does not have time to make a move because he thinks that it is the thing to do. Likewise, the kind person absorbed in the blitz of human interactions does not normally act in a kindly way because he thinks the person before him needs help. After much experience, the chess master is directly drawn by the forces on the board to make a masterful move, and, in the same way, the kind person, as Sartre sees, is directly drawn to act by the force of the needy person's apparent need. In neither cases does the master make his move for a reason.[81]

McDowell rejects the assumption that mindedness brings detachment with it. The chess master, drawn to make his move by the forces on the board, and the kind person, drawn to respond to the other person's need for help, are cases where these agents' cultivated rationality is at work.[82] McDowell's view is that, in embodied coping, we are exercising concepts of *what to do*, rather

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[79] Ibid.

[80] McDowell, "The Myth of The Mind as Detached", p. 45.

[81] Dreyfus, "The Myth of The Pervasiveness of The Mental", p. 34-35.

[82] McDowell, "The Myth of The Mind as Detached", p. 47.

than concepts of *what to think*. As such, an agent absorbed in the blitz of some activity—speed chess, hockey, or fencing—can sometimes be thought of as deliberating towards (or at least deciding) what to do, even though there is no time for thinking it through.

What is it to exercise a concept of what to do? McDowell thinks rationality pervades the actions of rational agents. Some abilities, like the ability to catch a frisbee, are had by both rational and non-rational animals. But there is a difference between the two exercises of ability: a human's exercise of her ability to catch a frisbee is informed by her rationality in a way that a dog's ability to catch a frisbee is not.[83] In catching the frisbee, she is *realizing a concept of a thing to do*.[84] Her rationality can be in operation more broadly than just in cases where she first deliberates about what to do and then acts in light of the results.[85]

In response to the case of blitz chess, McDowell contends that the master's being absorbed in playing blitz chess does not prevent him from having certain self-knowledge— knowledge of what he is doing and why he is doing it.[86] He is *moving his bishop* to *threaten the opponent's queen*. (Such self-knowledge is not tied to being a master chess player. Rather, a rational agent's knowledge of what she is doing is unmediated—she knows by being the agent whom she has knowledge of.)[87] The chess master has such self-knowledge, even if it goes unexpressed. Of course, the flow of the absorbed acting would be broken were the master to

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[83] In a similar fashion, I distinguished between a person whose ability to bake well consisted in situationally responsive behavior, and a person whose ability to bake well was informed by her practical intelligence.

[84] McDowell, "The Myth of The Mind as Detached", p. 48.

[85] Ibid.

[86] McDowell, "The Myth of The Mind as Detached", p. 47.

[87] This idea is explored in much greater detail throughout Chapters One through Three of Sebastian Rödl's *Self-Consciousness*.

express this knowledge or were to reflect upon what he knows. Yet this does not entail that he lacks the forms of self-knowledge characteristic of rational agents when he is absorbed in blitz chess play.[88]

Just as the human capacity to act is pervaded by rationality, so, too, are our perceptual capacities. In McDowell's view, humans, unlike some other animals, do not just inhabit an environment, but are open to the world. The perceptual experiencing of rational animals is itself a rational openness to the world, including an openness to the affordances Dreyfus appeals to— the forces manifest on the board, another person's need for help.[89] Significantly, McDowell's conception allows him to say that we normally just find ourselves knowing things that experience gives us to know. We do not need to get ourselves into a position to know that such-and-such is the case by wondering whether such-and-such is the case and judging that it is.[90] In this way, we can conceive of the speed chess master as acting on the basis of what he knows by experience when he is responding to the forces on the board by castling. Experience can immediately disclose facts, and the chess master need not detach himself from his acting to become aware of them.

The difference between Dreyfus' and McDowell's perspectives is perhaps most starkly contrasted through their different conceptions of acting for a reason. In Dreyfus' eye, the speed-chess master does not make his move *for a reason*, as that would, in his view, require conceiving

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[88] McDowell, "The Myth of The Mind as Detached", p. 46.

[89] McDowell, "What Myth?", p. 315.

[90] McDowell, "Myth of the Mind as Detached", pp. 42-43.

of the chess master as taking a critical distance from his acting that undermines absorption and

degrades mastery.[91] As Wayne Christensen puts it:

> And if Dreyfus is right, then elaborated after-the-fact explanations for actions will
> be reconstructions that do not accurately describe the situational sensitivities that
> actually guided the actions. The expert can't give accurate explanations for
> actions because the guiding sensitivities don't present themselves to the individual
> in a cognitively graspable form.[92]

In my view, this does not make for an attractive conception of expertise. As the expert does not

make his moves for a reason, it is not possible even *in principle* for the expert to justify or

explain his move to another by articulating what was his reason for acting. Granted, it is too high

an expectation to think the expert as always capable of here and now explaining her action. For

the ability to articulate one's reasons is distinct from one's ability to respond to reasons, and it

can take time to recognize and articulate the reasons for which one acted. Yet to think of the

expert as *in principle* incapable of giving his reasons for acting makes the expert's ability to act

look very mysterious.[93]

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[91] Dreyfus, "The Myth of The Pervasiveness of The Mental", p. 34

[92] Wayne Christensen. Review of Joseph Schear's *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate*.

[93] David Bakhurst makes a similar point, emphasizing the differences in McDowell's and Dreyfus' conceptions of responsiveness to reason:

> Dreyfus argues that 'embodied coping', practical wisdom (what Aristotle called *phronesis*) and the
> manifestation of expertise all proceed independently of conceptual thought and are thus forms of non-
> conceptual interaction with the world. Dreyfus makes this criticism because he thinks of reasons as
> articulable, general, rule-like considerations, with reference to which the agent determines what to think
> and do. But this is a view of reasons and rationality that McDowell disavows. For him, embodied coping,
> *phronesis*, and expertise are all forms of responsiveness to reasons. As such, they are permeated with the
> conceptual (how could expertise not be?), but the responsiveness in question involves sensitivity to relevant
> factors rather than explicit rule-following.

The Formation of Reason, p. 126.

So, I concur with McDowell that "...if he really is a master, it must be within his powers to be more specific."[94] And I follow him in thinking of the speed-chess master as acting for reasons in responding to the forces of the board:

> As I have insisted, he is giving expression to something he already knew if he explains his move as a response to the forces on the board, and that is to give a rational explanation of it; his response to the forces on the board is a rational response.

and...

> On a sane conception of what acting for a reason is, a conception we bring within our reach by disregarding the Myth of the Mind as Detached, the master *is* acting for a reason when he makes his move in response to the board.[95]

I think McDowell's conception has several other advantages.[96] First, I think if we think about forms of expertise more broadly than that exhibited in speed-chess and sports, we recognize that some forms of expertise require the ability to articulate, explain, and justify one's actions. A capable judge not only can rule in light of law and evidence but can be expected to explain why he ruled a certain way in light of the law and evidence. A masterful ski instructor can both demonstrate an advanced turn and explain what is good about turning this way. Becoming capable of articulating what you were responding to in your minded embodied coping is also to come to have a certain expertise.

Second, there is a rich conception of autonomy in which an individual is autonomous when she can determine what to do in light of what there is reason to do and where this freedom

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[94] McDowell, "Myth of the Mind as Detached", p.47.

[95] McDowell, "Myth of the Mind as Detached", p. 48.

[96] McDowell's view is not without its challenges. His view that rationality pervades human capacities for thought and action in some respects makes the ways we behave and perceive radically different from other creatures in the world. So there are reasonable concerns that McDowell's view might bring with it a pernicious human exceptionalism.

is manifested in her responses to reasons.[97] Dreyfus' conception of mastery does not allow us to understand the absorbed chess master's actions as done for reasons. So, masterful actions, in his view, are not in this sense free acts. In rejecting the premise that mindedness requires detachment, McDowell makes room for us to think of the masterful absorbed copings of the chess master as exercises of his autonomy.

Finally, Dreyfus sometimes fixates on the ways mindfulness detracts from activities. Thinking about how to catch the baseball can inhibit performance. But the fact that deliberation interrupts the flow of some activity does not show that self-conscious awareness cannot *enhance* other activities. Take, for example, team sports. Becoming aware that you and your teammates are playing well need not interfere with your ability to play but, rather, may increase your confidence, drive you to play better, and improve your experience of the game.

R.G. Collingwood provides a further and persuasive example of how mindfulness enhances activities in his *Principles of Art*. Collingwood writes:

> Any theory of art should be required to show, if it wishes to be taken seriously, how an artist, in pursuing his artistic labour, is able to tell if he is pursuing it successfully or unsuccessfully: how, for example, it is possible for him to say 'I am not satisfied with that line; let us try it this way...and this way...and this way...there! That will do.'

and

> The watching of his own work with a vigilant and discerning eye, which decides at every moment of the process whether it is being successful or not, is not a critical activity subsequent to, and reflective upon, the artistic work, it is an integral part of the work itself.[98]

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[97] See Chapter Four of Sebastian Rödl's *Self-Consciousness*.

[98] R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 281-282.

The image of the artist at work we find here is not of someone acting without a consciousness of her act of painting but rather of someone whose work proceeds from, integrates, and so is *expressive* of her critical eye and the understanding underlying what she perceives. The artist's consciousness of what she is doing—the watching of her own work—is not portrayed by Collingwood as interrupting the artistic process, but as *essential* for an artist to be engaged in that distinctive manner of acting. Her mindfulness does not detract from her expertise but enhances her powers of acting. This, then, represents a much different conception of expertise than Humphrey's conception of expertise as automated, unconscious, performance of habit or Dreyfus' unminded embodied coping.

I have now presented some reasons to think that mindedness is not only present at a critical distance from acting, but can be present in an agent's absorbed coping. My hope is to have made it plausible to say that deliberating can occur in the form of this minded absorbed acting. Consider, for instance, a person walking across a particularly icy stretch of sidewalk on the way to the store. She is absorbed in what she is doing. Yet she is also reasoning from one ongoing action, *walking to the store*, to a more concrete action, *walking along this snowy patch of the sidewalk*, on the basis that her walking is now unsteady, and the ice on that side is too slick to walk on. She has self-knowledge, knows what she is doing and why, and can be acting for a reason in responding to features of her situation. Her understanding of an action form, nature, or practice helps disclose to her salient features of the situation that she comports her acting in light of.

This is practical reasoning as a form of minded embodied coping. And it is in this form of reasoning that the perception of evaluative features has a significant place.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter defended the positions that practical reasoning can conclude in acting and that reasoning can take the form of fully absorbed acting. As I have been repeatedly emphasizing, a number of differences are made by attending to action's progressive aspect. Since an action can be ongoing, numerous more concrete actions can be explained as parts of the ongoing act—an agent who is *starting a dairy farm* may both *deliberate* about where to get cows and *travel* to Hereford as part of that action. We saw Wiland make use of this, arguing that concerns about how mental reasoning could conclude in physical acting are better met by understanding practical reasoning as both beginning and ending in acting.

Conceiving of practical reasoning as concluding in act-*ing* also helps address objections motivated by cases of impairment and weaknesses of will. When Jessa fails to get the hose and spray me, we need not think of her as having failed to draw the conclusion of her practical reasoning. For Jessa's reasoning still concludes in acting when she is *going for the hose* and is held back. Similarly, weak-willed reasoning need not be conceived of as reasoning that concludes in a belief that one should do such-and-such with no action, but can instead be conceived as acting for a "...reason that, by her own lights, is not as good a reason for doing what she does as another reason she has is for doing something else".[99]

This helps address some of the better grounds philosophers have for denying that practical reasoning can conclude in action, so helps support the conception of practical reasoning and deliberation articulated and made use of in earlier chapters. I offer additional support through

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[99] McDowell, "What is the Content of an Intention in Action?", pp. 426-427.

my attempts to resist the thought that, by characterizing certain cases of skilled acting as reasoning, I am bringing to the cases a mindedness that is enemy to fully-absorbed acting and that is not present in an expert's acting. I find McDowell's responses to Dreyfus compelling; his views on how rationality can pervade the exercises of human capacities makes better sense of our capacities for knowledge, and he offers the richer conception of what is to act for a reason. McDowell's views' merits also come out in his conception of the fallibility of human powers for knowledge. This will come out in the next chapter's discussion of advice.

In these ways, I hope to have made innocuous the employed notion of practical deliberation. Next, we will begin to see how our understanding of ethical practices is enriched for taking on board these views on acting and deliberating, specifically, through examining the practice of advising.

Giving Advice, Advising, and Empowerment

5.1 Advice, Command, and Testimony

Giving advice and giving a command differ as acts that attempt to influence action.[100] My only

reason to close shop early may be the fact that you ordered me to. Advising, in contrast, must

work through reasons already present, though not necessarily reasons presently *recognized* by the

one advised—advising me to wear the less formal outfit, you are pointing out something you

think I already have reason to do. Without already having discerned it myself, your advice

enables me to recognize that wearing the less formal outfit would be good to do.[101]

In this way, giving advice involves getting an agent to see what she already has reason to

do and is limited by her ability to recognize what she has reason to do. Advising affects another's

behavior in a way respectful of her *autonomy*—her ability to determine what to do, think, or feel

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[100] See Eric Wiland, "Trusting Advice and Weakness of Will", p. 373.

[101] Another example: I might be unaware that the pot is boiling over and so be unaware that I have reason
to lower the heat on the stove. That the pot is boiling over is a reason for me to lower the heat.
Characterizing my reason in this way is to take what one might call a realist, objectivist, or externalist
position on reasons, a view vigorously defended by Jonathan Dancy in his *Practical Reality*.

in light of what there is reason to do, think, or feel. This helps explain why advising is an attractive method for guiding another's behavior.

Giving advice is not to give a command. It is more similar to testimony. Indeed, in some cases, giving testimony *is* part of giving advice:

Jessa: "Where should I eat in Portland?"

Matt: "Try Papa Haydn's. They have amazing desserts I think you'd like."

Jessa: "Oh? What is the nearest bus line to Papa Haydn's?"

Matt: "Line 42."

When receiving advice on where to eat, Jessa comes to know by Matt's testimony that Line 42 is the bus nearest to the restaurant. In the right conditions, she learns by testimony not what Matt *thinks* is the nearest bus line, but what *is* the case. Matt's telling her the nearest bus line provides *theoretical knowledge*, knowledge of what is the case.

Jessa's request for advice solicits more than just an answer to the question what to *believe*. It primarily solicits an answer to the question of *what to do*. We might then wonder whether advice is to practical knowledge as testimony is to theoretical knowledge. Perhaps acts of giving advice can be understood as a form of testimony, one that aims to convey *practical knowledge*. Giving advice *conveys* practical knowledge, or *assists* the advisee at *discerning* practical knowledge. If so, the practice of giving advice represents an important way we learn from others.

Acts of giving advice and giving testimony share a parallel structure in a few significant respects. In both, a person is trusted for knowledge. Likewise, for advice and testimony to convey knowledge, a reliable source is needed and what is said can be backed with reasons. A

significant difference between the two acts is that advice must be *followed* to enable practical knowledge, not just believed. I will elaborate on these structural similarities between advice and testimony before turning to the question of what it is to follow advice.

5.1.1 Trusting Another for Knowledge

Testimony and advising both involve *trusting* another for knowledge. With testimony, you are trusting another person for theoretical knowledge. In the right circumstances, you can know what is the case by believing what is said. In contrast, with advice, you are primarily trusting another for practical knowledge, though this can involve trusting her for theoretical knowledge as well.

The fact that *trust* is involved in both helps bring out the interpersonal dimension in our practices of giving advice and giving testimony.[102] My knowledge of what is the case can have different grounds—I could know that the water is boiling by *perceiving* that it is or by *inferring* it from the sound of the lid rattling. But though my perceptual and inferential capacities are sources of knowledge, we do not typically think of them as taking *responsibility* for that knowledge. (While I might humorously exclaim "My eyes, why have you let me down?", pressing the point would be bizarre.)

In contrast, when Matt tells Jessa that Line 42 is the nearest bus, he is asking Jessa to believe *him*. *Matt* is Jessa's grounds for knowing that Line 42 is the nearest and she may reasonably feel wronged if the route takes her nowhere near the restaurant. Likewise, were Jessa to disbelieve him, Matt's would justifiably feel resentment at Jessa. Furthermore, were Jessa to pass on this knowledge to a different person, she is entitled to expect she can count on Matt to

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[102] David Bakhurst, "Learning from Others", p. 197.

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back her up.[103]

These are just some of the interpersonal issues raised by the practice of *testimony*, which follow from the fact that, with testimony, one is 'trusting another for the *truth',* in Anscombe's expression.[104] With advice, additional issues are raised, as the adviser is trusted, not only for the truth, but, in a sense, the good. Jessa trusts Matt's advice about what to do because she takes him to understand her conception of a good restaurant. She reasonably feels misunderstood or wronged by Matt when the advised local turns out to be a Szechuan food cart specializing in, what is for her, overly spicy food.

In this sense, advice must be respectful of the agent. The end of health might make good Matt's recommendation of a restaurant specializing in local, organic, farm-to-table cuisine. But Matt is not respectful of Jessa's autonomy if he makes this recommendation knowing that this is not the sort of dinner Jessa is in the mood for, without also giving his reasons.

Similarly, while theoretical knowledge can be passed from person to person by testimony —Sal tells Hal, then Hal tells Mal—advice must be more agent-specific. When Matt tells Jessa to eat at Papa Hadyn's, she trusts him for knowledge of what to do. But unlike the case of testimony, *Matt* has not let Jessa down if Jessa passes on the same advice to Chris, only for the advice not to be suited to him.

We have now seen how advice and testimony both take an agent as grounds for knowledge and so bring with them trust-centered interpersonal issues. This makes clearer the notion that one is *trusting* another for practical knowledge in receiving advice. How then should

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[103] Though she can also come to have additional grounds for the knowledge, such as when she has tried many bus lines herself, so no longer relies on Matt's word alone.

[104] G.E.M. Anscombe, "What Is It to Believe Someone?".

advice be understood as a source of *practical knowledge*?

What is practical knowledge? One line of thought, originating from Gilbert Ryle, is that *knowledge that* differs fundamentally from *knowledge how*.[105] One thing that students learn in science class is that water's boiling point is 212° Fahrenheit. Another is how to use a microscope. An agent can enable practical knowledge through the sharing of *know-how,* in that the *know-how* conveyed can make *effective* advice that convey's knowledge of what to do. For some advice will not effectively convey knowledge of what to do unless the advisee is able to follow the advice.

Advice such as "when the water comes to a rolling boil, add the noodles" or "take the first right after Tailor street, unless it's a Tuesday" looks especially suited for offering know-how. To the extent that the advisee can *follow* the advice, she can perform an act of a certain type that she did not know how to do before (she did not know how to get to the dentist from campus but now has directions) or can perform an action in a certain manner (the doctor did not know how to break the news *gently*).

The scope of practical knowledge is not just limited to know-how.[106] Advice can additionally be thought to convey knowledge-*when* to act (strike while the iron is hot), knowledge-*when-not* (don't ski in fog), knowledge-*where* (turn there), and knowledge-*to* (he knows to call Tom if there is a problem). Hence, acts of giving advice can also be thought of as a form of testimony providing practical knowledge when an agent conveys these kinds of knowledge in the course of conveying knowledge of what to do.

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[105] Gilbert Ryle, "Knowing How and Knowing That". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 46 (1945 - 1946), pp. 1-16.

[106] David Wiggins, "Practical Knowledge", pp. 112-113.

Two questions are raised by this way of understanding how advice conveys practical

knowledge. When an agent learns a procedure for preparing pasta by being given advice, should

we think of her as having come to share the *same* know-how as the adviser? Or should we think

of the adviser's practical knowledge as something richer, capable of being expressed in

propositional form, but not fully exhausted by that expression? This is a contested issue in the

literature on know-how.[107] Here, I find David Wiggins' remarks compelling:

> ...the advice Starbuck needs is to steer for the church tower (etc.). By report, a
> non-mariner can come to know that this is what a helmsman must do. But a non-
> mariner will scarcely arrive thereby at agential knowledge concerning how to
> bring a ship to anchor in harbour H. For Starbuck, on the other hand, given *all his
> other experienc*e, to get this information in his emergency may lead him all the
> way to some sufficiency of practical or agential knowledge.[108]

Whether some advice given will be sufficient for practical knowledge will depend on the agent's

experience, powers of practical judgment, and competence. A person lacking the judgment to

apply a principle or procedure to her particular circumstances does not arrive at practical

knowledge in being offered such a principle as advice. The advice "Let a red breathe for ten

minutes when it tastes too tannic" given to someone inexperienced with wine is not helpful if she

cannot discern whether the wine is too tannic or not. Wiggins proposes that some advice is

gathered up from the adviser's own know-how, competence, and experience, and that "[i]ts

whole usefulness presupposed an existing competence of some kind in any recipient who would

deploy it."[109]

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[107] See Jeremy Fatm's SEP entry "Knowledge How" for an overview. Jason Stanley and Timothy
Williamson are the main proponents of reductionist views.

[108] Wiggins, "Practical Knowledge", p. 112. Note that Wiggins prefers the term agential knowledge to
practical knowledge, but is speaking on the same subject.

[109] Wiggins, "Practical Knowledge", p. 119.

This helps explain how theoretical knowledge conveyed in acts of giving advice can lead to practical knowledge. Shared theoretical knowledge can make up for inexperience, imperceptiveness, or a loose grasp of some concept. Serving a red wine to guests, Jen asks her more experienced friend whether the wine tastes too tannic. Jen has practical knowledge in the senses of knowing what she is doing (serving the guests red wine) and knowing when to let a wine breathe (when it tastes too tannic). But she does not know whether to let the wine sit longer, and, in this sense, her friend's testimony enables her to see what to do. That theoretical knowledge, given all of Jen's existing competences, is sufficient for practical knowledge.

A second conception of practical knowledge is also relevant to understanding how acts of giving advice convey practical knowledge. This conception originates from Anscombe's *Intention*. Anscombe conveys what is distinctive about practical knowledge in two ways: she draws our attention to a contrast between how what is happening is known and how practical knowledge is related to an agent's understanding.

Anscombe illuminates the first contrast with a famous example.[110] Imagine that a detective is watching a man put groceries in his cart, and she records what happens. The detective can make certain kinds of mistakes: she could include on her list an item not in the cart or fail to include an item that is. Here, the error consists in what the detective *believes*. Her beliefs are not representative of what is the case. The shopper, in contrast, can make a distinctive practical error by putting into the cart items he did not intend to. The error here was not in what he *believed* but in what he *did*.

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[110] Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 56.

What makes his error a practical error is that he does not act as he intends to act. Whence his knowledge of his intention? Anscombe explains:

> Practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands, unlike speculative knowledge, which is derived from the objects known. This means more than that practical knowledge can be observed to be a necessary condition of the production of various results; or that an idea of doing such-and-such in such-and-such ways is such a condition. It means that without it, what happens does not come under the description—execution of intentions— whose characteristics we have been investigating.[111]

The central idea is that the description of what the agent is intentionally doing has, as its basis, the agent's knowledge of what she is doing. That is, if it were not for the intention, there would not be the relevant fact.[112] Richard Moran elaborates on Anscombe's view:

> Rather, Anscombe's point is that practical knowledge, whose object is specified within an intentional context, determines which descriptions of 'what happens' may count as descriptions of what the person is intentionally doing. So, the sense of the phrase from Aquinas is not about the *efficient* causal role of intention in producing movements, but rather concerns the *formal* or *constitutive* role of the description embedded in one's practical knowledge making it the case that this description counts as a description of the person's intentional action. If the agent didn't know this happening under this description, then as so specified, it would not be 'what he is intentionally doing.' It is in this sense that 'practical knowledge is the cause of that which it understands.' What practical knowledge understands is an intentional action, and it would not be the action it is, or perhaps any action at all, if it were not known by the agent in this way.[113]

How, then, is it that giving advice can enable practical knowledge so conceived? A person's ability to act intentionally depends on her understanding and self-knowledge. I might make up my mind about what to do without sufficiently understanding how to do it. For example, advised

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[111] Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 87-88.

[112] I am paraphrasing John McDowell here. See McDowell, "What is The Content of an Intention in Action".

[113] Richard Moran, "Anscombe on 'Practical Knowledge'", pp. 54-55

that I should replace my computer battery, I start performing some actions under that description

—I am *unscrewing the case* because I am *replacing the battery*. But then I unexpectedly find that

the battery in this computer is connected to a fan. I understand in a general sense what it is to

replace the computer battery, yet have reached a point where I no longer understand the action in

a way that discloses how to act in these particular circumstances.

As my understanding breaks down, I no longer have the self-knowledge I once had; I do

not know what I am doing. Lacking that knowledge, what I am doing no longer is the action it

was—I am no longer *replacing the battery*. I cannot begin intentionally doing something I do not

understand, nor can I go on intentionally doing what I cease to understand.

Giving advice can then enable practical knowledge because the advice allows an agent to

begin or continue an intentional action. Finding myself puzzled, I can call Dan for advice as part

of the same ongoing action—I am *calling Dan for advice* because I am *replacing the battery*.

And I know that I am replacing the battery now, in clipping this wire and soldering that one,

because I can trust Dan for knowledge of how to do it. In the right circumstances, relying on Dan

and his advice allows me to sustain my self-knowledge of what I am doing.

5.1.2 Reliable Sources and Reasons

How advice and testimony both involve trusting another person for knowledge should now be

clearer. Next, I will clarify how both require a reliable source, being *fallible* capacities for

knowledge. Both advice and testimony can also be backed by reasons, which matters to

respecting autonomy and exercising doxastic responsibility. Elaborating on these structural

similarities will help explain why acts of giving advice can be understood as a form of testimony

that aims at practical knowledge.

Matt tells Jessa that Line 42 has the nearest stop. Jessa believes him. Does she thereby *know* that Line 42 has the nearest stop? It depends. If Matt is mistaken, misremembers, misspeaks, or is lying, then Jessa does not come to know that Line 42 has the nearest stop. Likewise, if Jessa mishears Matt, or misunderstands what he says, then she has not learnt from him what is the case. One can learn what is the case by testimony, but only in the right circumstances.

David Bakhurst's "Learning from Others" offers a persuasive account of how we learn from others by testimony.[114] On the conception favored there, testimony is a form of non-inferential knowledge. Testimony is non-inferential because you are not working by inference from knowledge of how things appear to knowledge of how things are. Rather, you can apprehend how things are by taking the word of someone who knows. The capacity to understand the testimony of others is such that its non-defective exercise are productive of knowledge of what is the case. If all goes well, "She learnt it from Matt" expresses the grounds for Jessa's knowledge that Line 42 is the nearest bus line.

Yet people and their capacities are fallible—an exercise of capacity can fail to be sufficient for knowledge. In the case of testimony, this can occur when we mishear or misunderstand what is said, or when we misjudge how reliable or trustworthy a speaker is. In these circumstances, an exercise of our capacity to understand another's testimony does not

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[114] Bakhurst, "Learning from Others". This summary in the preceding paragraphs draws from Bakhurst's discussion on pages 190-194.

arrive at theoretical knowledge.[115] The successful exercises of our capacities for knowledge require that we show 'doxastic responsibility'—a person's capacity to gain non-inferential knowledge through testimony will not enable her to know what is the case if she is not also "alive to considerations relevant to whether the speaker is to be believed."[116]

Hence, Jessa will not arrive at theoretical knowledge by testimony when she is not suitably alive to considerations like Matt's competence, reliability, or trustworthiness. Her exercising doxastic responsibility allows her to gain knowledge by testimony but does not guarantee that she will learn what is the case. Matt can be a competent and reliable source, yet err on occasion. So, Jessa can arrive at a false belief despite exercising doxastic responsibility. Bakhurst recommends a particularist view of doxastic responsibility, envisioning it as context sensitive and resistant to codification:

> In matters of testimony one must be neither unduly credulous nor unduly sceptical, but the appropriate attitude to take to a speaker involves sensitivity to context. The playground requires one blend of epistemic open-mindedness and vigilance, the classroom another. The kind of sensitivity to context demanded by doxastic responsibility resists codification—there is no algorithm to determine the standards to which one must adhere, just as there is no recipe to discern when a speaker is truthful, reliable, trustworthy, and so on.[117]

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[115] It would be a mistake to think, on the basis of such unsuccessful exercises of capacity, that testimony in suitable circumstances cannot arrive at knowledge of what is the case. Bakhurst writes:

> Similarly, our powers of understanding and judgement enable us to gain knowledge from the testimony of others, even though those powers sometimes let us down. We can misunderstand what is said, or misjudge the reliability or trustworthiness of our informant. The cause may be a failure of doxastic responsibility, or plain bad luck: we can end up with a false belief despite our doxastic diligence. But that does not show that the exercise of our capacities is never sufficient for knowledge. And when it is, then citing their successful exercise is enough to characterize our warrant for belief (I saw it; I remember it; I learnt it from . . .).

"Learning from Others", p. 193.

[116] Bakhurst, "Learning from Others", p. 191. Bakhurst gets this notion from McDowell.

[117] Bakhurst, "Learning from Others", pp. 191-192.

In these ways, testimony is a source of theoretical knowledge, but a source that requires a person to exercise doxastic responsibility for this capacity for knowledge to be productive.

One way we exercise such responsibility is to ask that testimony and advice be *backed up by reasons* when the context calls for it. While both testimony and advice can be backed by similar types of reasons, there is a wider range of considerations to be alive to with advice. I think the explanation for this lies in the fact that advice must be *followed*—there is not typically a question of *how to believe* some testimony, but there are questions of how to *do* what was advised.

In some circumstance—such as where testimony is implausible, out of the ordinary, or of great impact—you act with doxastic responsibility in asking me to offer additional reasons for believing what I say, and I am respectful of your autonomy in providing you all of the relevant reasons for belief. Navigating to the appropriate balance of credulity and skepticism requires tact.

Suppose I say "She said the test was cancelled." You reply "That's unlike her. Did Jake hear her say that too?". If it is *really* unlike her, then you do need to seek additional evidence in order to learn from my testimony what is the case; it would be irresponsible not to.

On the other hand, asking for additional evidence does not always come across as asking for additional reasons to believe the *testimony*—to believe that she said the test was cancelled. Rather, asking for additional evidence can come across as asking for reasons to accept the *grounds* for that knowledge—what additional reasons are there for you to believe *me*. As we saw in looking at issues of trust, if context does not call for skepticism, my resentment at not being

trusted for my word is justified. (What does it matter whether Jake also heard her say the test was cancelled? I heard her, and I am giving you my word that she said say that.)

Thus, doxastic responsibility can require you to inquire about my reliability as a source, but tact in the inquiring is needed to maintain trust. Though the agent *receiving* testimony (or advice) may appear the one primarily called upon to exercise care and sensitivity, the person *giving* testimony (or advice) must also be mindful of her interlocutor's autonomy. As adviser, I, too, can be sensitive to the context and recognize that the circumstances warrant some explanation of why *I* am to be believed. (Hey, we haven't met, and I know this odd to say, but I'm a carpenter and your deck is off-level—you really shouldn't have so many people on it.)

Advice can be backed by reasons to believe the advice and reasons to believe the adviser as well. When Jen's friend advises her that the wine is too tannic, Jen also needs to exercise doxastic responsibility to know what is the case—is her friend competent to tell whether some red wine is too tannic? Yet, with advice, there are additional contexts where doxastic responsibility requires you to seek reasons why an act is good and reasons to believe that the adviser knows *you* well enough. When Matt advises Jessa to try Papa Hadyn's, he can back up this advice with reasons why this is a good thing to do—he remarks that they have amazing desserts. And part of what makes Matt a good source is that he knows *Jessa* well enough—she values good desserts. Matt's advice is helpful here because it is *suited* for Jessa.

In a different context, Jessa exercises doxastic responsibility in doubting that Matt knows her well enough to (non-accidentally) offer helpful advice, or in asking Matt to offer further reasons why such-and-such would be good to do. Suppose she no longer eats dairy and knows that Matt does not know this about her. She acts with an appropriate amount of skepticism in

asking for Matt for the reasons in favor of trying Papa Hadyn's, since reasons that once would

favor her going there no longer apply.

Matt, on the other hand, respects Jessa's autonomy in offering reasons why it would be

good to follow the advice—especially where the reasons that favor the action are not clearly

reasons Jessa is alive to. If Matt ventures to give unsolicited advice on issues where that

presupposes he must know Jessa very well enough—whether to stay friends with so-and-so,

whether she will find this line of work meaningful, whom to have a relationship with—he must

be sensitive to his own status as a grounds for knowledge. For he puts Jessa in a position where

doxastic responsibility calls on her to question him in a way that can undermine trust.

5.1.3 Following Advice

A significant difference between giving advice and giving testimony lies in the fact that, with

some advice, an agent must be able to *follow* the advice if it is to enable practical knowledge. As

Wiggins put it, the usefulness of some advice already presupposes some existing competency in

the agent who would deploy it. Starbuck, with all his experience as a mariner, can arrive at

practical knowledge concerning how to dock in *this* port in *this* storm by learning that he should

"steer for the church tower" and following that advice. But the same advice would hardly

empower a non-mariner to dock the ship.

As we saw above, helpful advice must fit the agent in question. Part of this requirement is

that the agent must be capable of following it. You have given better advice when you have

considered whether I am capable of performing the advised action (can he drive a stick shift?),

capable of performing the advised action in a suitable and appropriate manner (can she break the

news *gently*?), or capable of making the sort of judgment required to be following the advice (can she tell by tasting that the wine is too tannic, so know by tasting to leave it out?). And you can fail to give helpful advice because you have given it in a form or manner that is difficult for the advisee to understand and thus act on, despite having advised the doing of something good to do.

We will have a better handle on this notion of *fitting* advice when we get clearer on what it is to follow advice. My view is that, in following advice, an agent exercises not just her physical abilities, but also her powers of judgment and understanding. An agent's acting is only *guided* by some advice when the action is done *on the basis* of the advice. For example, you advise me to "add more liquid to a bisque whenever it tastes too salty". But I forget your advice, yet add more liquid to the bisque when it tastes too salty anyway. To an extent, I perform the same action I would have performed had I been following your advice, yet I do not perform the action for the *same reason*. When I am guided by your advice, I am acting as I am *because* you advised me to.[118] To adopt Kant's distinction, in the case where I forget your advice, my action is in *accordance* with the advice, but not *from* the advice.[119]

When a person's actions are not merely in accordance with the advice, but from it, we can think of her as *representing her action to herself* as a case of *following the advice* and so, crucially, *understanding herself to be following the advice.* This explains why advice is unhelpful when given in a form or manner that is hard for the advisee to understand. Your giving me advice can provide me *knowledge of what to do*, but only if I *understand* the advice. For, if I do not

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[118] Though the actions are not the same in this respect: one is an act of following the advice, and the other is not.

[119] See Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

understand the advice, I cannot understand myself to be acting on the basis of it, hence cannot be acting as I am *because* I am following the advice. Further, I may also, in some respects, understand the advice, but not understand the advice in a way that discloses how to act. So not only must I understand your advice, but understand it in the right way.

To illustrate these points, consider this: I might advise you to carry a Brengun to the top of the hill. If you do not understand what a Brengun is, my advising you will not convey knowledge of what to do, because you cannot intend to do what you do not understand. Similarly, a person can understand what it is to do a kind of action in certain respects—he is able to give a lecture on it—yet still not understand the action in a way that discloses how to act. Understanding and being able to explain the physics behind skipping a stone need not enable one to skip stones. A person who is able to skip stones understands stone skipping in a manner different than the physicist—as Anscombe remarks, "A man has practical knowledge who knows how to do things; but that is an insufficient description, for he might be said to know how to do things if he could give a lecture on it, though he was helpless when confronted with the task of doing them."[120]

Following advice is also not solely a matter of believing it—an agent is *acting* in following advice. Some acting, like my adding more liquid to the bisque when it tastes too salty, is in *accordance* with advice, but is not a *following of advice* because I do not understand myself to be acting on the basis of the advice. What makes the acting in *accordance* with the advice? We can think of some advice, such as "add more liquid to the bisque whenever it tastes too salty" as

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[120] Anscombe, *Intention*, p.88.

Bakhurst, in *The Formation of Reason*, remarks on the different ways Sissy Jupe and Thomas Gradgrind know horses (p.14). His observations there are also pertinent.

specifying an *action form* to be performed when specific circumstances obtain.[121] A person's

acting is in *accordance* with such advice when her acting is of the form specified by advice *when*

the circumstances obtain. For a person's acting to have *followed* the advice, her acting must also

be of the form specified by the advice *for reason that* the circumstances obtain.

So, Jen could happen to let the red wine breathe for ten minutes without knowing that it

tastes too tannic, when the wine does taste too tannic. Her action is in accordance with the

advice, but is not guided by it; it was not that her capacity to follow advice enabled her to know

what to do here. For her to have *followed* the advice, she must not only understand herself to be

following the advice but also perform the specified action *for reason that* the wine tastes too

tannic.

Like one's capacity to understand testimony, a person's power to follow advice is fallible.

Jen can be following advice, yet make a mistake and end up not having followed it. Suppose Jen

is advised to "heat the sugar until it reaches a soft-ball stage". As acting takes time, Jen can know

herself to be heating the sugar until it reaches a soft-ball stage and understand herself to be doing

so because she was advised to. Yet Jen can err in judgment—judging that the sugar is not at soft-

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[121] What is an action form? Following Sebastian Rödl (*Categories of the Temporal*, p. 58), an action form
is:

> ...what someone is doing, has done, wanted to do, will never do, does every day, etc. What someone is
> doing at a certain time and place, someone else may do at a different time and different place. So we must
> distinguish an action then and there, performed by a certain subject, from its form, which is bound to no
> time nor place nor subject.

An action form is not bound to a time nor a place nor a subject. Saying "add noodles" leaves unbound
who adds noodles, *the point in time* at which noodles are, were, or will be added, and *place* at which
noodles are added. Different substitutions for subjects, times, and places will individuate different actions
of the same action form. Some such substitutions will individuate actions that did occur, and others will
individuate actions that did not occur. An action form, unbound to subject, time, and place, is not true or
false, but an instance of an action form can occur or not occur at a specific time and place—"Turn off the
phone" is neither true nor false, but "Tom turned off the phone 9:30 Tuesday in class" is true or false,
depending on whether or not the event occurred.

ball stage when it is, she continues to heat the sugar past a soft-ball stage. Here, though Jen was *following the advice*, she did not end up *having followed it*.

This helps clarify how a person's capacity to follow advice is limited by her powers of judgment. Some advice poorly fits some agents because, to follow the advice, the agent must make a judgment of a kind that she has a poor handle on or that she is incapable of making. An agent who, like Jen, makes a conceptual error in following advice was exercising her capacity to follow advice, but does not arrive at practical knowledge.

Much the same can be said for an agent's physical abilities as well. As we saw with Anscombe earlier, an agent can make *practical errors* in following advice, errors that consist in what the agent *did*, not what she *believed*. Surveying the run, my partner advises me, a novice skier, to side slip down that steeper section over *there*. But when I reach that section and begin side slipping down the slope, I mis-execute the side slip and fall. Though I was following my friend's advice, I do not end up doing what she advised me to do because my capacity to side slip, like other physical abilities, is fallible.

Finally, following advice may sometimes require an agent to exercise her capacity to act in a specific *manner*. You should ask what the yelling was about, but only if you can do so tactfully and politely. What is crucial to the following of some advice is not just that the act be performed but be performed in a certain manner (critically, tactfully, professionally, gracefully, diplomatically, friendly, etc.) or not be performed in some other manner (rudely, boorishly, naively, clumsily, recklessly, harshly, etc.).

When advice specifies a manner of acting, an agent must understand herself to be acting in the specified manner to be following the advice and not merely acting in accordance with it.

An agent who is settling the bill *diplomatically* is sensitive to the context of her situation, alive to her interlocutor's mood and emotions, and acts from an awareness of how her acting is faring—she can see that pressing the point now is making him frustrated and what she does next is informed by this. As with doxastic responsibility, the sensibilities exercised in acting in a manner can be context sensitive and resistant to codification.[122]

In conceptualizing what it is to *follow* advice, we are now in a better position to understand what it takes for advice to *fit* an agent. Giving advice can convey practical knowledge, but, with some advice, this depends on the agent's capacity to follow the advice. Following advice must exercise the agent's powers of understanding (else the agent is only acting in accordance with the advice) but can also exercise her judgment and capacities to act and act in a specific manner—so as to perform the right act in the right manner for the right reasons. With respect to enabling practical knowledge, certain advice is entirely unhelpful for a person who lacks a capacity to make a certain judgment or to perform certain actions because the advice cannot be followed. Advice is of poor fit, too, for an agent who *can* exercise the appropriate capacities called for by the advice but who is *incompetent*, since conceptual and practical errors can prevent the agent from having followed the advice.

Yet, as we have now seen, our powers of judgment and action are fallible, such that conceptual and practical errors are a possibility even in competent judges and actors. A competent skier still can mis-execute a turn, and a discerning cook can misjudge the sugar's hardness. So, even when advice fits an agent, this does not preclude conceptual and practical errors in the following of the advice. Because our powers of action and judgment are fallible in

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[122] See again Bakhurst, "Learning from Others", pp. 191-192.

this way, we should be careful of reading too much into a person's failure to follow advice and exercise humility in accessing advice as helpful or not.

I hope to have now clarified how acts of giving advice are similar to acts of giving testimony. As you can share a person's theoretical knowledge in believing her testimony, so, too, can you sometimes share a person's practical knowledge by following her advice. Yet both testimony and advice are fallible powers of knowledge, and depend in their success upon an agent exercising doxastic responsibility. The utility of some advice rests on our capacity to follow it, and the successful exercise of this capacity relies on an agent's powers of understanding, judgment, and action.

By appreciating how an act of giving advice's helpfulness rests on an agent's existing experience and competencies, we can better consider whether other interactions should be understood as acts of advising. So let us next move out from examining solitary acts of giving advice and examine other forms of advising.

5.2 From Giving Advice to Ongoing Advising

Advice can focus on whether an agent should do a specific action. When Jessa asks Matt to give her advice on a choice of restaurant to dine at during her stay in Portland, the advice will be limited to that one decision. In such cases, the advising terminates after the adviser has given his advice, his reasons for it, and has responded to requests for clarification and additional information. Yet some acts of advising occur over a longer period of time suggesting there is more to the act of advising than just giving particular pieces of advice.

Some advising takes place over a longer period of time because an adviser is frequently

called upon to give advice. The secretary to the Dean can play the role of an adviser. He can give advice to the Dean by informing her what would likely be the students' and faculty's attitudes to a proposed policy: "The students are largely in favor of shorter periods, but the faculty is opposed." This theoretical knowledge aids the Dean in knowing what to do. Unsure about how to pitch the proposal to the board, she comes to know to adopt such-and-such a tone. His advising is more supportive of her practical knowledge than formative; something has probably gone wrong if the secretary is providing the Dean knowledge how to do the Dean's job or assisting the Dean in developing the appropriate skills.

As adviser, the secretary must continuously be prepared to give advice. Not only must he understand the university's structure and culture, and the Dean's vision and capabilities, he must also be capable of articulating his knowledge into advice that is understandable and relevant, and be discerning of *when* it is appropriate to give the advice. His capacity to advise well relies on these abilities. As with testimony, he is trusted for the truth when advising and advises in a manner respectful of the Dean's autonomy by exercising tact, prudence, and wit.

Advising can also be understood more as a continuous action than a series of discrete advice-givings, as house-building can be a unified event despite progressing gradually at disparate points in time. A pianist working with a student advises him how to play the piano, but does so in an ongoing action that unifies temporally different acts of giving advice. For the perspicacious pianist adjusts how she is advising as the student's capacities develop, keen to developments in the student's powers of understanding, judgment, and action.

The development of *this* power of acting (he now has some control over pressing the appropriate keys) and *this* power of judgment (he now can interpret some musical score) makes

it that certain advice is now *fitting* of the student, thus useful for him (practice playing this score twice daily until you are comfortable playing from score). Aware of this development and re-accessing what the student is capable of, the pianist adjusts what she advises the student to do. Further, her *intention* in giving certain advice (play the scales each time you warmup) and acting with the student (listening to a simple piece, they take turns identifying the keys played) can be to help form or develop the capacities (to discern keys, pitch, and tone by ear) that will make other sources of know-how useful to the student.

5.2.1 Parts of Advising

Reflecting on two examples of extended advising, we observe that some shared activity and advice intentionally contributes to the *formation* and *development* of an agent's interests and powers of judgment, action, and understanding. This leads us to question whether such activity can be understood as *part* of an ongoing act of advising. My view is that it can. Acts that intentionally cultivate interests and capabilities, and acts of *re-assessing* an advisee's interests and capabilities are acts that ongoing advising may consist in.

Why think advising can take such forms? The pianist is one example of a person who takes up the role of adviser, and whose actions in that role would, *prima facie*, include acts of training, education, habituation and the shaping of interests. Coaches, friends, family, supervisors, teachers, and the like are others. Besides appealing to specific examples for support, I think the fact that some acting is made *intelligible* by being *part of* another action provides

additional support for the view.[123]

Various more concrete acts can be performed as part of an ongoing action. When I am *replacing my computer's batteries*, I can be unscrewing the case *because* I am replacing the batteries. This mode of explanation also makes intelligible actions seemingly further removed from the act of replacing my computer's batteries. I am driving to the hardware store to buy a screwdriver *because* I am replacing the battery—I don't have the right bit for this case. Or, I am calling Dan *because* I am replacing the battery—the wire is connected to the fan, and I don't understand how to replace the battery in this situation.

In the same way, actions seemingly removed from an ongoing act of advising can be made intelligible. If I am advising you over a period of time—say we are playing disc golf together weekly, and you have asked me to help you with your forehand throw—some of the advice I could give will not be helpful to you until you have developed certain competencies.

This relation between advice's helpfulness and an advisee's ability need not go unrecognized by an adviser. We are working on your ability to transfer your weight *because* I am advising you to throw the disc *this* way, yet I see that merely giving you such advice is not enough to convey practical knowledge. As a person who understands what he is doing in replacing the computer battery may recognize that he will not get further in his replacing the battery without first getting the screwdriver, an adviser can recognize that her advising is unlikely to succeed in conveying practical knowledge of a sort unless her advisee develops in ability or experience.

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[123] This draws on the views of action explanation expressed by Michael Thomson in *Life and Action* that was touched on in more detail in Chapter Four in conjunction with Eric Wiland's views on practical reasoning.

The examples of the pianist's and frisbee partner's advising elucidate how an ongoing act of advising draws upon an adviser's ability to *discern changes* in her advisee's capacities to understand, judge, and act. With acts of giving advice, advisers typically need not consider how much an advisee's interests and capacities have changed during the giving of advice.[124] When we consider advising of longer duration however, it is more plausible that an advisee's interests and capacities might change during the act of advising. In such cases, these changes occur in virtue of having followed the advice so far: I start to *like* exercising because following my fitness trainer's advice enables me to exercise in a *fulfilling* way; and, of course, moral advice can lead one to revise one's preferences and values.

Thus, when advising is ongoing, an adviser may need to *re-assess* what the advisee is capable of and adjust her advising accordingly, this re-assessment also being part of the advising. Such re-assessment may be needed for numerous reasons: It can be needed to offer more *suitable* advice—she can tread water, but she has the coordination and endurance to do the breaststroke, which would serve her better. It can be needed to recognize some advice is no longer *fitting*— now that he can read musical notes, he should not practice this way. It could be needed to recognize that the advisee should work with someone more discerning, capable, or knowledgeable—you have helped her develop her ability to identify musical keys, but now she should work with someone more sensitive to pitch and tone.

Or re-assessment may be needed to recognize that the advisee is now in a sufficient position to exercise her own understanding and practical intelligence. She should be allowed to practice exercising these capacities, even though these powers are fallible and she may not

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[124] Though perhaps some agent's interests really change from moment to moment—she likes dairy, she abhors dairy, she likes it again. This would make it difficult to give her suitable advice.

perform as well as she would had she been aided. She has become self-aware, able to discern how her writing is faring, and understands what she is doing in a way sufficient for her to guide her own acting—she will need to exercise these powers of self-guidance to grow in the right way.

These, then, are some reasons to think that actions that intentionally contribute to the *formation* and *development* of an advisee's interests and capabilities, as well as an adviser's acts of *re-assessing* an advisee's interests and capabilities, can be part of an act of advising. Having provided *some* support (albeit limited) for conceiving of some advising as single ongoing action, an action that can unify as parts acts of cultivating and re-assessing, I want to conclude by making three observations about ongoing advising.

5.2.2 Three Observations on Ongoing Advising

First, the fact that an advisee's interests and capacities can change makes for distinctive challenges in maintaining the appropriate trust in an act of ongoing advising. We saw already that, when we conceive of our powers of judgment and action as fallible, even a capable agent can make mistakes that prevent her from having followed some advice. A competent skier still can mis-execute a turn, and a discerning cook misjudge the sugar's hardness. A genuine capacity need not be infallible.[125] This fallibility of an advisee's powers adds to an adviser's difficulties in aptly assessing the advisee's capabilities.

From the adviser's perspective, it can be unclear from an advisee's actions whether some advice given was unhelpful because it was unfitting, or is helpful but was mis-executed. Suppose

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[125] See Bakhurst's "Learning from Others", p. 193.

you ask me what to do when skiing too fast, and I say "Don't sit back when you find yourself skiing too fast—you may start to instinctually, but you'll lose control if you do. Lean forward instead." Then, going down the run, I see that you start skiing too fast, sit back on your skis and fall.

Reflecting on the advice I gave you, I ask myself whether you did not understand the advice because I spoke too quickly or what I meant by "sit back" was unclear. Or was it that you understood the advice but were lacking or undeveloped in capacity—you were unable to perceive that you were skiing too fast there or unable to lean forward on your skis at uncomfortable speeds? Or was it that you understood the advice, are quite capable of both perceiving that you are skiing too fast and leaning forward at uncomfortable speeds, but made a conceptual or practical error—your excitement for this run perhaps impeding your normal powers for self-awareness? Or perhaps you just forgot or chose to ignore my advice?

It is thus challenging to determine from a solitary action whether advice given is fitting, and, if unfitting, what must change to make the advice helpful. From the advisee's perspective, a adviser's hesitancy in addressing what went wrong may appear a sign that the adviser is a poor source of the relevant practical knowledge, undermining trust. The adviser's adjustments in advising—he suggests practicing leaning forward at uncomfortable speeds—can to the advisee indicate that the adviser does not really understand her capabilities, so is a questionable guide; she believes she erred, not that she is deficient in ability.

Sometimes this easily can be sorted out in conversation with the advisee. You can know by her testimony that she knew she was skiing too fast. But other times, when an advisee relies on you for such knowledge, she might think that she is not leaning back when she is, and trusts

you for what is the case. This can lead to situations where trust between adviser and advisee is non-mutual—the advisee is trusting the adviser for practical knowledge, but the adviser is exercising skepticism about the advisee's testimony.[126]

Change in interest also creates difficulties for maintaining trust. An unexpressed or unrealized change in interest in an advisee can leave an adviser giving advice that is no longer suitable. An adviser respects an advisee's autonomy by being sensitive to her interests and aims, fully giving the reasons for the advice. Doing so, she advises well. But this presupposes that an advisee has some interests or aims already. She might not. A child growing up, trusting her care givers, may be without any initial interests and aims but is instead shaped and formed by others. Or, the advisee might only know what she is doing in a broad and indefinite manner.

So, when people work together to develop or understand their interests and aims, this can also be understood as part of some ongoing advising. A person might not know what she wants to do, yet work out what she cares about, by frank conversation, introduction to literature, experimentation, and other such experiences. Her adviser can assist in this in a way respectful of her autonomy by helping her understand what is good about an action, a practice, or a mode of life.

My second observation is that, if cultivations, re-assessments, and interest shapings can be parts of an act of advising, then we should recognize that advising occurs by non-linguistic means and can occur indirectly. Acts of *giving advice,* though representing a significant action-

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[126] Another interesting consideration is that, in some cases, one might not be able to sort things out by asking "What happened?" because the skills in question are hard to codify. In the skiing case, I will likely be able to explain whether the fault lay with the advice or my competence—whether it was a one-off case or reflects enduring problems (I still can't bring myself to lean forward). But in the case of, say, learning a musical instrument, it may be hard to express what went awry because the novice doesn't have the language for it and maybe the expert doesn't need the language for it, as she can *display* the competence.

guiding practice and way we learn from others, do not represent all that there is to advising. A father who loves skiing and who is repeatedly correcting his daughter's posture can be understood as advising her on how to ski. A wine lover working with friends to develop their sense of taste can be opening their eyes to the reasons to go for this or that varietal.

Similarly, advising can be more indirect than giving advice. A person can act in a manner so that her practical knowledge rubs off on those she interacts with. For example, a teacher of philosophy might not *tell* students how to do philosophy but ask and answer philosophical questions, or engage with authors, texts, or movements in a *critical* manner that exemplifies an approach to doing philosophy. Practical knowledge is *picked up* and *emulated* by the students through their awareness of how the professor approaches the subject. Students actively listening to the professor's lecture pick up the way she weaves in historical context to frame the debate or, when she is asked a good question she does not know the answer to, the way she thinks on her feet, drawing from views she knows the author to hold to offer a tentative reply on the author's behalf.[127] In this way, the students' understanding of philosophy develops not so much by being told about the practice, but by being included in it.

My final observation concerns the relation between ongoing acts of advising and particular acts of giving advice. We have seen how the cultivating part of an ongoing act of advising can make advice useful to an agent. The cultivating side of advising could be judged

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[127] As Gilbert Ryle remarks:

> If I am competent to judge your performance, then in witnessing it I am on the alert to detect mistakes and muddles in it, but so are you in executing it; I am ready to notice the advantages you might take of pieces of luck, but so are you. You learn as you proceed, and I too learn as you proceed. The intelligent performer operates critically, the intelligent spectator follows critically.

The Concept of Mind, p. 55.

valuable for just that end—valuable for the sake of getting an agent into the position where she can follow some advice. Advising's action-guiding potential, then, looks to peak in acts of giving and following advice.

Advising is a valuable practice for additional reasons. In the long-term, advising can additionally aim to empower the agent to act in certain ways or to make certain kinds of choices, or to inculcate specific habits, dispositions, commitments, and values. Advising not only fosters an agent's ability to follow advice, but can advance the development of both practical intelligences and an understanding of an ethos sufficient in itself for guiding action.[128] I will elaborate on this so as to clarify my meaning, first, by examining some nuances in how cultivation can be conceived and, second, by discussing these higher aims of advising.

There are at least two ways to conceive of how the cultivating part of advising makes advice useful to an agent. First, cultivation could be conceptualized as forming in an agent a capacity to judge or act that was not there before—the capacity comes to be. Cultivation in this sense *transforms* what an agent is capable of judging or doing. Second, cultivation could be conceptualized as working with capacities an agent already has, aiming to make exercises of the capacity less vulnerable to unsuitable circumstances or conceptual and practical errors. Cultivation in this sense *perfects* a power already possessed by an agent.[129]

Perfective cultivation can make advice useful to an agent by making the following of

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[128] Getting an agent into the position of being capable of following certain advice can be instrumental to these ends. The point of following an instructor's advice— to read such and such a cannon of texts, discuss them twice weekly, and write a research paper— can be for students to develop *intellectual curiosity* and *openness,* and for the students to come to care about good scholarship for its own sake.

[129] This difference in ways capacities change is a key issue in a series critiques and replies between Sebastian Rödl and David Bakhurst. First see Rödl's "Education and Autonomy" then Bakhurst's "Training, Transformation, and Education" to follow how the discussion unfolds.

advice less vulnerable to errors and unsuitable circumstances, thus making it more likely that she will succeed in following the advice. Yet we should not think of perfective cultivation as making a *power* to act or judge *less fallible*—our powers of action and judgment are exercised in unsuitable circumstances despite impediment, and even the expert is capable of making mistakes. This raises a question: if the expert's capacity to ski is as fallible as the novice's, why is the expert often able to ski the difficult terrain without falling down and the novice not?

We should, I think, reply that it is not that an agent's capacities become *less fallible* by perfective cultivation, but rather that, by cultivation, the agent develops habits and practical intelligences that operate during an exercise of capacity. The operations of these habits and intelligences then make the difference in how the acting terminates. For instance, some acting terminates when the agent makes a mistake: if she plays C-sharp there, she will not have performed the concerto *exactly* as written. But not all acting does. Some practical and conceptual errors are recovered from in the course of acting. Seeing that I have misjudged the shade used in painting the fence a salmon color—the paint is actually more a red than salmon—I mix in some of this white paint and re-paint the red areas. There is still room within this exercise of capacity to re-examine the fence's color and adjust what I am doing.

There can be periods of time where we cannot say whether or not an agent was able to perform some action because the acting is still in progress. Was our advisee able to ski comfortably the full run? We cannot know yet; she is still skiing it. The habits and intelligences she possesses make some difference in how she skis the run and to what action her exercise of capacity terminates in. Some training and habituation make us behave in a situationally responsive manner. She leans forward on her skis *whenever* she *feels* off-balance. The

manifestation of this habit during an exercise of capacity to ski can make it such that she leans forward when she *is* off-balance, so reacts well to something that would impede her in her capacity to ski.

Such a habit could also work against her in other situations—*feeling* off-balance, she leans forward when she *is not* off-balance, hence speeding up too fast. Advising her, we would say that optimally, she should not be just leaning forward automatically, but rather adjusting her skiing in light of reasons that favor an adjustment. In her absorbed skiing, she should side slip there *because* she sees that the slope is too steep for her, and not merely from the beneficent unconscious habit. With this, she is more able in her exercise of capacity because her acting is organized by her practical intelligence. Of course, if she consistently exercises practical intelligence in skiing, she is liable to lean forward *because* she is off-balance, hence tend to lean forward *whenever* she is off balance—so she, too, has developed a habit of sorts.[130]

Transformative cultivation also makes advice useful to a person, though not by making a person less vulnerable to what would impair following the advice. Rather, transformative cultivation can make it possible for a person to *even be following* certain advice in the first place. This functions to initiate an advisee into sphere of discourse. The advisee, now able to perform

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[130] More precisely, her habit is governed by her practical intelligence. The relevant "because" is not one that ultimately looks to subsume her behavior under a law of nature but rather is a "because" that explains her act by rationalizing it.

that act of following advice, can now express her experience on following the advice—a knowledge she does not have until she has, in fact, been doing the action.[131]

Transformative cultivation makes it possible for a person to be following certain advice because an agent cannot exercise a capacity she lacks. Lacking the capacity, she is not *erroneously* acting or judging in some way—side slipping but falling. To be *as that* requires us to think of her as exercising the capacity she lacks.[132] So, an agent who lacks a capacity and an agent who has the capacity but is impeded in its exercise are not making the same kind of mistake when both fail to have followed the same advice. The novice wine-taster need not be thought exercising the same capacity as the sommelier but failing. To close the gap in ability, not only must the novice's capacity be perfected, but a capacity to perfect must first come to be.

Should persons vary in capacity this way, this makes a difference in what their

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[131] This idea finds life in Jonathan Dancy's discussion of moral perception. In considering the question of how moral perception could be possible, Dancy supports his position by arguing for the transformative powers of training, knowledge and experience. ("Moral Perception", p. 111.) He writes in a key paragraph:

> Some would want to insist that even if he categorizes what he is hearing as 'how it sounds when a water pump is failing', there has to be a more basic level of description of what is going on than this. Such an insistence is likely to be built upon what I take to be a fundamental mistake in the philosophy of perception, namely the view that the primary, or basic, object of perceptual awareness must be things for the sensing of which no training, knowledge or experience is necessary. Those tempted by this view suppose that training, knowledge and experience cannot alter the way in which things look, sound or feel to us. All they can do is to enable us to notice things we would not have noticed before, and no doubt when we are able to do that, our attention may be distracted from the more basic features that are still the primary and proper objects of sensation. Now I think of this view as a mistake. I have always found very persuasive John McDowell's example of the way jazz sounds to an aficionado and the way it sounds to a tyro. To the tyro it is just a whirl of unorganized noise, while to the aficionado it sounds like the development of a theme. It just doesn't seem promising to insist that at a basic level the two people share a common phenomenal awareness.

Dancy suggests that training, knowledge, and experience alter the way things look, sound, or feel to us. It is not that the tyro *could notice*, but simply *fails to notice* that a theme was developing in the jazz piece. Rather, the suggestions seems to be that *the very capacity* to perceive such properties comes about as the result of training, knowledge, or experience.

[132] Though perhaps she is erroneously judging or acting in the sense that she mistakenly thinks she is judging or acting, a different sort of error than a person with the capacity makes.

experiences can tell us about advice and practices. When Starbuck, following the captain's advice, steers for the church tower, he can *draw from his experience in doing so* to comment on the advice's merits. When he makes an error in following the advice, he and others might learn something about what impedes the action—the wind is too strong to steer this way. Starbuck and other mariners, who are capable but fallible in performing certain actions and making certain judgments, can contribute to a discourse on the practice of sailing by speaking from their experiences *in sailing*.

In contrast, suppose the non-mariner lacks the capacity to steer for anything in particular, let alone the church tower. Unlike Starbuck, the non-mariner cannot speak to his experience of *steering for the church tower*, for he does not have experience of performing the action so described. Nor does the non-mariner make any mistakes in *steering for the church tower* by which he or others could learn about the potential impediments to such acting. The non-mariner is not in the same position to contribute to the discourse on a practice by speaking to his experience (though he might perhaps contribute in other ways) despite the fact that he acted in some respects as Starbuck.

Advice can be made useful to an agent by perfective and transformative cultivations. It is significant that advising can make practices of advice-giving useful to an agent, but it is also important not to lose sight of higher aims advising has. One higher aim is to foster an understanding of a practice that itself is sufficient for disclosing how to act. We have seen already that *following* advice requires understanding the advice in a way that discloses how to act. But the point of developing my understanding of a practice is not only to enable me to *follow*

advice but so that I can *generate* instruction for myself. In this respect, I concur with Wiggins

where he writes:

> We are rediscovering this, but we are emphasizing how central the importance is
> of the *understanding* that agents need to bring to bear if they are to look in the
> right spirit (as we have been wont to say) for that which is 'appropriate to the
> occasion'. This is not a small concluding detail. It lies at the heart of the idea of a
> mentality, outlook, or ethos. One who participates fully in an ethos or way of
> being does not need specific instructions. One generates them for oneself.[133]

Wiggins' description of what the understanding empowers agents to do might suggest that the

understanding's operations occur *prior* to acting and perhaps are completed in the formation of

some specific instructions. R.G. Collingwood's description of how education empowers an art

student to act could then supplement Wiggins remarks, providing a more compelling picture.

Collingwood claims that "...what a student learns in art-school is not so much to paint as

to watch himself painting..." and proceeds to describe an exercise of this capacity:

> Any theory of art should be required to show, if it wishes to be taken seriously,
> how an artist, in pursuing his artistic labour, is able to tell if he is pursuing it
> successfully or unsuccessfully: how, for example, it is possible for him to say 'I
> am not satisfied with that line; let us try it this way...and this way...and this
> way...there! That will do.'

and...

> The watching of his own work with a vigilant and discerning eye, which decides
> at every moment of the process whether it is being successful or not, is not a
> critical activity subsequent to, and reflective upon, the artistic work, it is an
> integral part of the work itself.[134]

To adopt Wiggins' language, the image we get from Collingwood is this: The artist's full

participation in an ethos not only empowers her to *generate* instructions for herself, but also

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[133] Wiggins, "Practical Knowledge", p. 105.

[134] R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 281-282.

makes possible, as *part of the ongoing act of painting,* the critical activity involved in judging that "trying this way" is or is not to pursue her end successfully. Such critical activity is integral and constitutive of artistic activity and allows the student to speak to the practice in a certain way. Able to act in light of the norms of the practice, the student's criticism can be of the norms of the practice itself, which then helps further internally develop and shape those norms.[135]

In this way, cultivating an ethos or understanding of a practice and its goods, not only takes one up to action and goes no further, but rather is present, guides, and organizes the ongoing act. Doing so, it can transform the nature of what is done and allow the individual to help shape the practices' norms. A higher aim in advising is to develop in an agent practical knowledge, knowledge of how to act, which is more fully exemplified in the critical activity characterized by Wiggins and Collingwood.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter examined how advice is analogous to testimony and can convey practical knowledge. Like testimony, one's capacity to know what to do by understanding advice is fallible, depends on trust, and requires the exercise of doxastic responsibility. Unlike testimony, advice is typically followed, not merely believed, so relies on an agent's fallible powers of understanding, judgment, and action.

Concurring with Wiggins that some advice's utility presupposes background competencies in any who would deploy it, I argued that advice is made helpful to an agent by cultivating capacities of understanding, judgment, and action. Further, I offered reasons why

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[135] Thanks to Steve Leighton for helping me make this connection.

such cultivations may be understood as part of an unified ongoing act of advising. Advising as a practice makes works and acts that give advice useful to an agent, and the act of advising ought to be sensitive to changes in the advisee's interests and capacities.

Finally, I argued that advising's greater action-guiding potential lies in the cultivation of understanding and practical intelligence. I again concurred with Wiggins. A person who participates fully in an ethos or outlook does not need specific instructions, but generates them for herself.[136] Drawing from Collingwood's powerful image of the artist "watching his own work with a vigilant and discerning eye", I suggested that we supplement Wiggins' view with the thought that participation in an ethos also enables, as part of some ongoing acting, the critical activity Collingwood describes.[137] Participation in an ethos not only allows the artist to instruct herself on what to do, conceived of as choice of action, but also allows the critical, practically intelligent artist to adjust her acting in light of how it is fairing—she can say "I am not satisfied with that line; let us try it this way...and this way...and this way...there! That will do."[138]

Throughout this dissertation, I emphasize the significance of action's progressive aspect. This chapter is no different. The promising way to understand a capacity's fallibility is to think of an agent as having been exercising a given capacity despite the exercise not arriving at where it would have unimpeded.[139] The expert is not expert because she is immune to errors in judgment or performance. Rather, an agent's habits and practical intelligence can perfect a given capacity

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[136] Wiggins, "Practical Knowledge", p. 105.

[137] I also drew from Ryle's remarks on intelligent performers and spectators. See *The Concept of Mind*, p. 55.

[138] Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, pp. 281-282.

[139] I.e., in the description of what occurred, there is a contrast between the progressive and perfective aspects. See Sebastian Rödl's *Categories of the Temporal*, Chapter 5.

to act by allowing her to react or respond to impediments to her ongoing performance. Her

exercise of doxastic responsibility perfects her capacity to know what is the case by

understanding testimony, just as her various practical intelligences perfect her capacity to follow

advice.

Attending to action's progressive aspect also leads me to a conception of advising that

contrasts with that found in Judith Thomson's *Normativity* and *Goodness and Advice*.

Thomson's distinguishes between two senses of 'ought', an *expectation* sense (the sugar ought to

come to a soft ball stage at 235° Fahrenheit) and the *advice* sense (you ought to pour the sugar

when it is at a soft ball stage). Thomson's focus on advice is much more concerned with the

meanings of the term 'ought' and what makes a given ought claim true; she thinks the concept of

defect provides insight into this.

So, while holding a similar position on goodness and evaluative features, Thomson thinks

evaluative features play a much different role in practical reasoning, reasoning which she does

not conceive of as concluding in acting.[140] We will turn next to examining the alternative views

of advice and practical reasoning Thomson offers.

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[140] See Judith Thomson's *Normativity,* pp. 257-262.

Judith Thomson and the Advice Sense of 'Ought'

6.1 Introduction

Judith Thomson's *Normativity* begins by diagnosing how contemporary ethics and meta-ethics

have gone awry (the possibility that goodness is attributive was overlooked to ill effect) and ends

by analyzing what she describes as 'the *advice* sense of ought'. I concur with much of what

Thomson has to say so will focus on three points of disagreement to highlight some key

differences in our views. All three points concern Thomson's views on directives, which she

describes as judgments that a thing A ought, should, or must V.[141]

> 1) Thomson thinks that acting is only good in certain circumstances and so thinks
> that directive claims are only true when those circumstances obtain. I agree with
> Thomson that *some* acting is good circumstantially, but I think that other acting is
> good absolutely, and so some directive claims are true regardless of
> circumstances.

> 2) Thomson claims that *avoidance of defect* is at the heart of the concept *ought*. If
> I have understood what she means by this, I do not think it is true. Directives are
> also intelligible in terms of other other kinds of changes in excellence, like

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[141] Judith Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 207. I add should and must because Thomson thinks they differ only in emphasis. 'V' here stands for verb-phrase.

improvements and *maintenances*, and the grounds for privileging avoidance of defect are not strong.

3) Thomson thinks that conflicting advice represents a problem for her account, a problem that she addresses with her 'condition gamma'. I think the introduction of this condition leaves Thomson's account worse off and do not agree that conflicting advice constitutes a problem.

Digging into these issues brings out a deeper background disagreement between Thomson and me on the nature of action guidance. I have argued that certain evaluative features can be action-guiding: a person can deliberately respond in her acting to evaluative features that directly or indirectly inform her understanding of how her action is faring.[142] Her understanding of a good permeates her awareness of her acting and circumstances, and can disclose how to act. Advising, an action-guiding practice, proceeds sometimes by giving and following advice. Here, offering reasons why such-and-such *should* be done does matter. Yet advising can take the form of cultivating an agent's powers of understanding, acting, and judgment, or initiating her into an ethos that empowers her to instruct herself.

Judith Thomson thinks evaluative features are action-guiding in a different sense: claims about what a kind of being *ought* to do are made true by facts about what it is for *that kind of being* to avoid defect. In cases where directives conflict, we know what a subject ought to do by knowing that one directive is generated from a more general kind. Grounding directive judgments in truths about kinds suggests there can be a sort of inquiry; informed by our knowledge of goodness-fixing kind, we produce an account of what we ought to do. While I

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[142] Certain ones only, both because certain evaluatives can but need not be action-guiding, and because other evaluatives are aesthetic.

agree that kinds or natures play a critical role in practical reasoning, Thomson's appeals to them strike me as problematically 'sideways-on'.[143]

I would also like to note, before proceeding further, the problematic character of Thomson's deployment of the term "defect". While the term is innocuous when applied to beings like toasters, applied to human beings or persons, the term has connotations that have been attacked, especially in disability studies. A more neutral or technical term would be preferable to the language Thomson uses.

6.2 Thomson on the Advice Sense of 'Ought'

Why is it that a toaster ought to toast bread? Guided by the thought that directives reflect the requirements of decency, not perfection, Thomson argues that it is facts about what is for a toaster to avoid defect that make such a directive true.[144] A toaster that does not toast bread is a defective toaster and this explains why a toaster ought to toast bread. Of course, there are many circumstances where a toaster will fail to toast bread yet not be defective. A toaster fails to toast

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[143] John McDowell's "Two Sorts of Naturalism" articulates what is problematic about 'sideways-on' ethical accounts.

[144] Thomson writes:

> To forestall an objection, I should add that the words I wrote in writing [b] have to be understood as an abbreviation. A toaster is a defective toaster if it does not toast bread, but not in just any circumstances. A toaster is marked as defective when it fails to toast bread only if it has been plugged in, the bread was inserted in the slots, the bar was depressed, and you aren't sitting in the bathtub while doing all that. A toaster is marked as defective when it fails to toast bread only if it fails to toast bread in suitable circumstances—that is, circumstances such that toasters are manufactured to toast bread in them.

> But then the words I wrote in writing (1) also have to be understood as an abbreviation. The same abbreviation. It is only when it is in those circumstances that a toaster ought to toast bread. I won't try to spell out exactly what all those suitable circumstance are; I leave them to intuition.

Normativity, pp. 208-209.

Thomson does not explain what avoiding defect has to do with decency, but perhaps the thought is that neither decency nor avoiding defect requires one to pursue perfection.

bread when left unplugged, submerged in water, or its lever not depressed. Thomson concludes that, as genuine defect depends on failing to toast in *certain circumstances*, we should hear directive claims as similarly qualified: a toaster in appropriate circumstances ought to toast bread.[145]

Thomson's approach to assessing capabilities fails to recognize how powers of action are fallible and this I take issue with. As we saw last chapter, the capable skier can err even in suitable circumstances. Failures to act in certain ways are not necessarily marks of defect. In assessing capability, an action's progressive aspect is more relevant to look to than its perfective aspect—we should look to what she was *doing* (and how), not just what she did (or did not do).

This line of thought leads me to two further criticisms that I summarize here before expanding on. First, some ways of acting are such that to be acting in that manner *is* to be acting well or badly *regardless of circumstances*. A football pass may have been thrown well regardless of the high winds. If this is so, some directive claims hold independently of circumstances. This conclusion about *manners of acting* also provides insight on *action*s, since, for at least some actions, whether a person *did* such-and-such depends on whether the person was *acting* in such-and-such a *manner*. Arguably, an apology is not genuine unless it is made remorsefully—one has not really apologized unless one's apologizing was of a specific manner. This illustrates how acting's manner can be criterial to having done a certain action. Thus, certain directive claims can be understood to focus on *manners of acting* and to be claims that apply regardless of circumstances.

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[145] Thomson's discussion of directives here makes use of language similar to Aristotle and can be read as expressing a contemporary form Aristotelian Naturalism.

Second, although Thomson thinks that some directives are true only in suitable circumstances, she leaves it to *intuition* to tell us what counts as suitable. Leaving intuition to determine what counts as suitable does not leave much explained. We can better explain why circumstances are suitable should we start from a conception of action where acting can be impeded. For then we identify unsuitable circumstances as those that impede an exercise of a being's powers of acting. My characterization of circumstances can be grounded in my practical knowledge, and our understanding of action forms and forms of life underly our judgments about a circumstance's suitability.

6.2.1 On Manners of Acting's Goodness

Thomson claims that a toaster is a defective toaster if it fails to toast bread in suitable circumstances. Her reflections on this example shape her initial account of directives. Thomson is surely right that *some* acting is only good circumstantially, so is correct to think that some directive claims are circumstantially true. Yet some acting is good or bad regardless of circumstances.

Normativity's discussion of directives examines a narrow range of cases. This is unfortunate, for when we examine more closely the actions of entities other than toasters, we notice agents are described as acting well or poorly regardless of circumstances. A person's acting poorly might nonetheless succeed due to fortunate circumstance—her shot was wide off the mark but was tipped in by a careless defender. Likewise, a person acting well might not succeed due to unfortunate circumstances—she made the best of the hand she was dealt.

Consider, too, the joke:

A: "Doctor, will I be able to play the piano when these bandages come off?"

B: "Yes."

A: "Amazing! I could not play before!"

Such a joke contains a lesson: circumstances *impede* an agent's capacity to act *only if* the agent *has* such a capacity to act in the first place. Returning to Thomson's toaster example, what can we say about a toaster's *ability* to toast bread in unsuitable circumstances? Thomson makes it look like we can say nothing, since failure to toast in unsuitable circumstances is not a mark of defect. Yet a malfunctioning toaster and a toaster are different in their ability to toast bread even when both are unplugged. Likewise, though we cannot assess the toasters' capabilities from what they *did* in unsuitable circumstances, we can still assess the toasters capabilities from what they were *doing*. A toaster in unsuitable circumstances may be marked as defective in light of *how* it is toasting, the mechanic not needing to observe the complete action of toasting to know the toaster is malfunctioning.

A broader survey of cases reveals that *manner of acting* constitutes a way that some action is good or bad and that, to be acting in a certain manner, is to be acting well or poorly in one respect, independent of circumstances. Take two football players in strong winds. Though strong winds blow both passes off the field, her passing was good because of its manner, while his passing was bad. Her passing exhibited skill, expertise, and her practical intelligence as a football player, while his was overly hesitant, off-balanced, and too forceful. Thus, despite the

fact that the winds became too strong for either to pass, she was passing well and he poorly.[146]

Their manners of acting were good or bad independent of the wind.

McDowell's remarks on wicked acting offer another perspective:

> "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" Obviously we are not meant to answer "The profits are outweighed by the counterbalancing losses". The intended answer is "Nothing". At that price, whatever one might achieve does not count as profit. Or, in the terminology of reasons: the attractions of whatever wickedness might bring do not constitute some reason for wickedness, which is, however, overridden by reasons against it; rather, given that they are achieved by wickedness, those attractive outcomes do not count as reasons at all.[147]

One ought not act wickedly. Such advice is not just true in suitable circumstances, such that the advice becomes false when a great enough profit becomes involved. And one would say much the same about good manners of acting. McDowell again writes:

> Genuinely courageous behavior, on this view, combines a lively awareness of risk, and a normal valuation of life and health (see *Nicomachean Ethics,* III. 9), with a sort of serenity; taking harm to be, by definition, what one has reason to avoid, we can see the serenity as based on the belief, paradoxical in juxtaposition with the valuing of life and health, that no harm can come to one by acting thus.[148]

McDowell's thought "...no harm can come to one by acting thus..." illustrates the sense that some ways of acting may not merely be held circumstantially good. While we need not whole-heartedly endorse the position, there are reasons to be open to the possibility.

Here is one way the position is attractive: some inquiries take self-interest to constitute a reason for wickedness, so ask whether there is greater reason to abstain from wickedness. If

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[146] This is easier to see if we use counterfactuals. She was passing well because, had the wind not interfered, she would have succeeded, where he likely would not have. This is like the toaster case – had it been plugged in, it still would not have worked because the power was off.

[147] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?", p. 26.

[148] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?", p. 27.

manners of acting can be absolutely good or bad, not just circumstantially, this helps explain

what is misguided about these attempts. We also find position's pull when we observe that, if,

regardless of circumstances, a person acts well (at least in a respect) by acting in a certain

manner, then her capacity to act well is more greatly free from chance and not accidental. (More

greatly free from chance to the extent that she has more control over the manner in which she is

acting than what her acting produces or how her acting completes.) Hence, whether or not

manners of acting are rightly thought good or bad in this way, the position clearly represents a

live option. The conclusion that directives are only circumstantially true thus looks too hastily

drawn.

Now, the argument so far could be thought to miss its target. The judgments Thomson

focuses on concerns what *action* is to be performed or omitted. The advice Thomson finds to be

circumstantially true expresses judgments about action, not manners of acting. All the above

shows is that advice concerning a *manner of acting* can express judgments absolutely true. So

this is beside her point.

This line of thinking fails to recognize that the question 'did he *do such-and-such*?'

occasionally depends on the question 'was he *acting* in *such a manner*?' While the same action at

times can be performed in different manners, other times, a certain manner of acting will be

criterial to having performed an action. Take apologizing as an example. To genuinely apologize,

the apology must be given in a remorseful manner, or so one could maintain sensibly enough.

Acts might get described as apologies because, except for manner done, they are like apologies

in other respects—perhaps using the same words or conventions. But lacking the right manner,

these acts are not really the same as genuine apologies; they are pseudo-apologies.

In this sense, answering whether she Φ-ed or not requires determining the manner in which she was Φ-ing. Apologizing is one clear and plausible example, with promising, forgiving, redeeming, ordering, loving, confessing, defending, praying, protesting, and expressing as other candidates. Yes, we agree that he was Φ-ing—he said the words or acted in a way—but was he Φ-ing *intentionally*, or *whole heartedly*, or *autonomously*, or *free of coercion*, or did his Φ-ing exhibit *practical intelligence*?[149]

An action can be good in its manner, regardless of circumstances, when manner of acting is criterial to having acted. Hence, if a manner of acting can be good or bad absolutely, we should conclude that some directives concerning action are true regardless of circumstances —"one ought not to act so". Inquiries into the nature of intentionality, wholeheartedness, autonomy, freedom, or practical intelligence are apt to shed light on what we ought to do, because such an inquiry clarifies a way *acting* can *be* and because that the acting *is* so explains the respect in which the action is good.[150]

6.2.2 Suitable Circumstances

Thomson thinks directives are true only in suitable circumstances and leaves it to intuition to tell us what counts as suitable: "I won't try to spell out exactly what all those suitable circumstance

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[149] Anton Ford's "Action and Generality" argues that the division between whole-hearted action and action is an instance of essential generality. The relation between remorseful apologies and apologies can be understood on that model.

[150] The italics on acting here are to stress that it is the progressive sense of action that we are talking about, and not the perfective. The goodness of action in the progressive sense explains a respect in which an action in the perfective is good.

are; I leave them to intuition."[151] Thomson's account is weaker for appealing to intuition as she does, for we can better explain circumstances' suitability.

Why is it an issue to 'leave it to intuition' which circumstances are suitable? First, appeal to intuition leaves unexplained *how* intuition sorts out such matters. This leaves a gap in how suitable circumstances are identified, a gap that can be filled by positions not amenable to Thomson's overall position. Not just any understanding of intuition fits Thomson's positive account of goodness. Holding that one's intuitions on suitable conditions are largely the product of one's upbringing, or that one's intuitions reflect how those in power have shaped the social institutions formative of intuitions, would undermine Thomson's *realist* view of evaluative properties.

Similarly, Thomson thinks directive claims only hold in suitable circumstances, so thinks a subject only ought to Φ when the circumstances are suitable to Φ-ing. Thus, knowing that a directive applies to some given circumstances requires knowing that the circumstances are not unsuitable. If we know circumstances are suitable *by* knowing that the circumstances are not unsuitable, this would be grounds for skepticism about our judgments of suitability. For the ways circumstances are unsuitable are of a great, perhaps limitless, number, such that one cannot, with any high degree of confidence, think that one has considered them all.

Fortunately, we can better explain why some circumstances are unsuitable. If you think of action as impedible, then circumstances' suitability is explicable in terms of impairments of powers of acting. Work in action theory stands to bolster this aspect of Thomson's account.

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[151] *Normativity*, p. 209. There is a Kantian use of intuition where 'leaving it to intuition' is consistent with leaving it to perception. Although this would be an interesting proposal, the textual context appears not to support such a reading.

On some theories of action, an action, activity, or doings is *impedible,* and a subject's powers of activity are *fallible*. Sebastian Rödl and Michael Thompson's views of action allow for this. To hold that actions are impedible and powers of activity are fallible is to think that a subject can be described as *doing* an action even if the action should fail to complete in the way typical of unimpeded instances of that action. (Only *some*, not *all*, forms of action need permit this to think that action is impedible.) Action, on this conception, is such that the characterization of a subject as Φ-ing is not dependent on a certain state of affairs, Φ, coming to be. What the agent was *doing,* was Φ-ing, even though she never Φ-ed.

Thinking it a mistake to say that she was doing what she did not accomplish, one might deny this, insisting that a subject is to be characterized as Φ-ing only when a certain state of affairs exist. The differences between these two conceptions of action is brought out by how advocates would describe the case of a person walking to the store but, being interrupted midway by a snowstorm, abandons the trek.

On the former view, Jill can be described as *going to the store*, even in cases where Jill never gets to the store. The description of what Jill was doing is going to the store, despite the fact that Jill never gets there. This provides the sense in which Jill's acting is impeded by the snowstorm and the sense in which her powers of acting are fallible.

In contrast, were we to think that the characterization of Jill as acting so depends on her actually having done the action, we would describe the case differently. In the case where Jill does not get to the store, what Jill was doing was not *going to the store.* Rather, since Jill never got to the store, one could hold that what Jill was doing was merely *trying to,* or *intending to,* or *wanting to* go to the store. Jill is still *impeded* by the snowstorm, though not in the same sense as

the former case. In this way of thinking, what gets thwarted is not so much her *acting*, but rather her *intentions* or *desires*.[152] Similarly, her powers of acting's fallibility need to be understood differently. Her powers of acting are perhaps fallible in the sense that her formations of intention are only *more or less likely* to cause her to act as she intends, not in the sense that she can be *acting*, exercising a power of action, and fail to *act*.

For the sake of bookkeeping, call the former conception A.I.—acting impeded—and the latter conception W.I.—willing impeded. We tend to say that Jill was *trying* to go to the store in cases where she does not get there, which seems to favor W.I.'s way of characterizing acting.[153] This appears to support describing what Jill was doing (going to the store), as merely trying, wanting, or intending to go to the store in cases where she never gets there. However, I think this advantage is only apparent. For Jill can consistently be described as both *trying* to go the store and *going* to the store; Jill was *trying to go to the store* by *going to the store*. (Sometimes the only way to try to Φ is to start Φ-ing.) So we can explain her *trying* to go to the store in terms of what she was doing and need not resort to a more sophisticated rationalization that appeals to Jill's intentions or desires.[154]

This difference between A.I. and W.I. bears further on when a person is thought to have *done* what a directive holds she should *do*. For some directives, you have failed to act as the directive would have you do, if you only were *doing* the action but did not succeed. In having

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[152] Here, I mean more her 'intentions to act'—like a prior resolution to behave a certain way. On both conceptions, there is a sense that her intentions are impedible, but only on the former is it the intention *in acting* that is being thwarted.

[153] This is a bit of a simplification; "trying" makes more sense to use when there is a struggle. Saying that "I was trying to go to the store" in conversation would lead one to expect some obstacle. "I was trying to go to the store but never left the house because the baby was crying and crying." Absent such obstacle, it is not so natural to say that one was *trying* to do something but rather merely that one was *doing* it.

[154] See Michael Thompson, *Life and Action*, Chapter 4. Naive Action Explanation.

been typing out the e-mail but not pressing send, you have not acted as you should have, given that "you should contact the client by noon". Sometimes, there is no reason to be doing an action independently of successfully completing it.

In contrast, we also advise a person by specifying what she should be *doing,* rather than focusing just on what should be done. Take the advice "You should write" (or *draw, paint*, *run*, *sing*, *cook*, and so on). You reply: "Write what?" And your advisor says, "It doesn't matter, just write something every day, if you can."

A directive like "You should write" can recommend that you be *acting* in a particular way, regardless of whether that type of action gets done. You do what the directive would have you do in the *doing* of the action, so have not *failed to act as you should* when your writing produces nothing useable or your cooking produces something inedible. There can be reasons for *doing* an action independent of the reasons for successfully completing the act. Merely *acting* in a certain way (writing) can in itself be good or bad to be doing, independent of what the acting terminates in (a chapter).

This shows how directive claims of the form "you should *do* such-and-such" are ambiguous and can require clarification. Has one done what one should have done in *acting* so, or *only* when the acting completes a specific way? (You should clean the house. Have I done what I should in *cleaning* the house, or only if the house gets cleaned?) These distinctions matter because, when we reflect on the ultimate ends of life, we should recognize that the value could be in acting and responding in certain ways, not necessarily getting particular things done.[155]

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[155] Thanks to Steve Leighton for this observation and way of expressing the point.

When the goodness of a kind of action consists in the goodness of acting, the goodness of one's acting notably *does not ensure* that what one is doing will get done. As such, there is excellence in acting that can ultimately be thwarted by circumstances. This, I will argue, allows for the right way to understand circumstance's suitability.

A.I.'s conception of action is compatible with the previous distinctions, but, having no room for acting that does not terminate in the standard action, W.I. needs to do some footwork if it is to accommodate advice like "just write". Going for W.I., one might be tempted again to make sense of this as merely *trying* to write, and *trying* because of the *intention* or *desire* from which the action issued forth. As such, we would not then say that her *acting* so was good independent of what got done, but rather that her *intention* or *desire* made what she did good; she was not acting well in *writing the paper*, but she was acting well in *trying to write it*.[156]

An odd consequence of W.I.'s conception of action is that *acting well* looks as though it ensures the success of the acting. This is largely because W.I. has no room for acting that does not accomplish what it is doing. For instance, when M. fails to defend his dissertation, what M. was doing will be described as *trying* to defend his dissertation, not *defending* his dissertation. The sense M. was doing *something* well won't be explained by the defending but perhaps will again be explained in terms of the beliefs, desires, or intentions M. had during that activity which was his *trying*.

This might appear an advantage of W.I. because of its fit with a concept of expertise; an expert is a person who is more likely to succeed in her acting than a novice. Again though, the

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[156] In introduction to ethics, students are often asked to reflect on the question of whether it is *intentions* or *consequences* that matter to ethical conduct. A third possibility is that a *manner of acting* is independently good, and only on certain conceptions of action does this collapse into the idea that a person's *intentions* were what made her acting good.

advantage is merely apparent. The *guarantee* offered by W.I's conception of acting well is merely technical. *Responsive* acting, *thoughtful* acting, and *skillful* acting turn out to be no better than *inept* acting at ensuring that a person's acting does what it set out to do. For *inept* acting can only be understood as either *acting* or *non-acting*. If it is *acting*, then acting ineptly only characterizes what a person was doing in cases where she was both doing it and did it. So acting ineptly is as much of a guarantee of success in acting as any other manner. And if inept acting turns out to be *non-acting*—her inept pass is not the same act as a pass—then there is no real contrast between two manners of acting, one being done well and the other poorly. Skillful passing is not, then, better *as passing* than inept passing.

A.I., the impedible view of action, is more satisfactory. While maintaining that even excellent acting is fallible, A.I. can accommodate the intuition that acting well has to it a certain *anticipation of* and *responsiveness to* circumstances that improves the acting's odds of success. The manner that her acting was done also explains why her acting was better than another's, even when her acting does not succeed; in getting the two parties to agree, she was the more kind, shrewd, and responsive arbitrator, despite failing to produce an agreement. Her unsuccessful arbitration still was performing the act better than her colleague's lucky successful arbitration.

The view further helps explain favorable and unfavorable circumstance. A person's knowledge of circumstances' suitability for acting arises from her practical knowledge. She can know that some circumstances are unsuitable for the exercise of some capacity precisely because she can be acting intentionally exercising this capacity, and yet discover that her acting in these

circumstances is ineffective. Her powers for acting are exercised even as they are impeded. As

Sebastian Rödl argues:

> On the other hand, circumstances unfavorable to juggling cannot be specified
> except as circumstances unfavorable to juggling. For example, it is not possible to
> determine the relevant strength of the wind independently of what juggling is. The
> only way to correctly specify it is as the strength of wind that makes juggling
> balls impossible. We do not first have a conception of an action-form, juggling
> balls, which then is limited by the condition that certain impediments be absent,
> e.g., that there not be too much wind. Rather, the conception of the action-form
> already excludes the impediments, which therefore must not be added to the
> description of the power. [157]

Thinking of action as impedible, we are able to describe her as juggling, even juggling well,

despite the high winds making the act impossible to maintain or complete. In light of exercises of

her power to juggle, she comes to understand the winds here as too strong. She juggles as

skillfully as she can, but her juggling is still made impossible by wind like this. By this process,

she refines her conception of her circumstances' suitability by acting the same in different

circumstances (juggling skillfully in different winds) or by experimenting with acting differently

in the same circumstances (juggling this way rather than that, and seeing if the strong winds

impede this manner of acting, too.) In this way, a person's knowledge of circumstances'

suitability for acting arises from her practical knowledge. And we are only able to explain her

knowledge of circumstances' suitability in this manner because we were prepared to say that her

acting is impedible in A.I.'s sense.

Besides providing a more compelling explanation of our knowledge of circumstances'

suitability, A.I. permits a more nuanced view of the goodness of acting. Juggling well, in one

sense, is revealing of when the strength of the wind is too strong for juggling. Juggling well, in

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[157] Sebastian Rödl, *Self-Consciousness*, p. 152.

another sense, requires *anticipating* the impediment, or *adjusting* one's juggling in accord with one's awareness and understanding of circumstances, such that one's manner of acting perfects one's performance.

The notions of practical intelligence and deliberating amidst acting that I have been articulating are significant in this way: practically intelligent acting is a manner of acting that can *unify* two ways of acting well. Your acting may be good in one sense because you are adjusting what you are doing in light of your acting's character. In explaining to the car owner why your friend's fender-bender was an accident, you are aware that your explanation is confusing so adjust your language. Your acting may be good in another sense because what you are doing is kind, or just, or honest, and so on. The fender-bender was an accident, and it is kind of you to stick up for your friend. And these two manners of acting are not incompatible, but rather the one enhances the other. It is good to be kind and to be defending your friend's action, yet not succeed, but it's better when the car owner is placated. In this way, one's practical intelligence enhances the goodness of what one is doing.[158]

6.3 Directives and Decency

What makes a directive true? Thomson's account of directive claims offers the following reply: the fact a toaster is defective insofar as it does not toast bread is what makes the directive 'a

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[158] Compare:

> If activities are, as we said, what determines the character of life, no blessed man can become miserable; for he will never do the acts that are hateful and mean. For the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances, as a good general makes the best military use of the army at his command and a shoemaker makes the best shoes out of the hides that are given him; and so with all other craftsmen.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1101a9-1101a13, p. 1739.

toaster ought to toast bread' true. Her general point is that evaluative judgments bear on directive judgments because the notion of *avoiding defect*, at the heart of the concept *ought*, is understood through kind-grounded evaluative ascriptions.

What does Thomson mean when she claims that avoidance of defect is at the heart of the concept *ought*? In part, she means that avoidance of defect articulates what decency requires; "What true directives about us require is only decency."[159] In summarizing her account's strengths, Thomson suggests that her analysis of directive statements is superior to consequentialist and certain virtue analyses because "It does not demand that we do something unless we would be defective human beings if we wittingly failed to do it. This does not demand saintliness, and positively rules out injustice."[160] Doing what one ought to do, Thomson adds, is rarely high praise.

This helps explain Thomson's focus on avoidance of defect but goes only so far in clarifying the notion. How does Thomson's positive account of evaluative judgments help readers understand the notion of avoiding defect? Thomson largely leaves it to the reader to work out the connection. This is a substantial task for two reasons. First, oddly enough, Thomson does not, in *Normativity*, specifically discuss the concept of *defect* in any great detail. Readers can infer some details about defect from her discussion of 'virtue/kind' properties, but this is an indirect way to clarify what looks to be a central notion. Second, the relevant notion of *avoidance* is not greatly specified.

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[159] *Normativity*, p. 231. Admittedly, decency is an odd requirement for artifacts and other beings, despite being plausible in the case of humans.

[160] Ibid.

For these reasons, clarifying how 'avoidance of defect' is 'at the heart of directive claims' matters to understanding and assessing Thomson's arguments. I will argue that, once we think about Thomson's position in more detail, we will see how Thomson's account excessively focuses on avoidance of defect. While some directive claims are plausibly made true in light of facts about avoiding defect, directive claims in general are not plausibly limited to expressing claims about avoidance of defect.

In Thomson's view, kinds fix evaluative standards, standards by which a member of the kind is *now* judged as excellent, a good K or a good K in some respect, and *later* judged as lacking in excellence. To judge that a member of some kind has *decreased in excellence* is to judge that the member has undergone a specific *type* of change: it *was* excellent and now is less excellent. The knife *was* a sharp knife, *now* is dull, thus has undergone a specific type of change in excellence, a *decrease*, with respect to the knife's ability to cut. Kinds in this way are *grounds* for representing a subject S as undergoing different types of changes in excellence because of the role kinds play in *explaining* why a feature of S is a favorable or unfavorable evaluative feature for entities of that kind. This knife's being dull is an unfavorable evaluative feature, while this knife's being shiny is not, because of what a knife is. Thus, facts about kinds *explain* why a given change is the type of change that it is—a decrease as opposed to an increase.

Hence, Thomson's views let us see why our understanding of kind K commits us to representing different changes in Ks as decreases in excellence. My understanding of the kind K commits me to characterizing certain features of Ks as favorable or unfavorable, so commits me to characterizing changes in features as a specific form of change in excellence. We can thus say

that kinds are a principle of change, since kinds account for why a given change of features is an instance of a certain type of change in excellence. I will call such changes aretaic change.

How does this bear on directive judgments? Directive judgments represent actions, omissions, states, and such as *sources* of aretaic change. This seems to be Thomson's general suggestion. We can know that a directive claim is true by knowing that an action is a source of such a certain aretaic change, an *avoidance of defect*. The act of toasting bread is a way toasters *avoid defect*, since failing to toast bread is a defect in toasters. So a toaster ought to toast bread.

If this is the right way to understand her, Thomson's analysis of evaluative features provides some insight into directive claims. My conception of a kind informs my judgments about whether an individual has undergone an increase or decrease in excellence, so informs my judgments about what is or is not a source of such changes. Seeing that this knife has dulled by cutting tin cans, I think of cutting tin cans as source of defect in knives. The supposed connection between avoidance of defect and directives would account for why analysis of evaluative judgments' ground applies to something more than mere classification. If Thomson is correct, deliberation about what one ought to do relies on evaluative judgments. Hence, her analysis of kinds and evaluative features still pertains even should practical reasoning be reasoning to a conclusion about what one ought to do. I have thus articulated a way of understanding the meaning and significance of Thomson's claim that avoidance of defect is at the heart of the concept *ought*.

6.3.1 Other Varieties of Aretaic Change

In my view, Thomson focuses too heavily on avoidance of defect, so fails to notice how some directives can be understood a judgments about other varieties of aretaic change. Nothing prevents us from giving the previous argument from the vantage point of *maintaining* or *increasing* excellence. What can make it true that I ought to do such-and-such is that acting so maintains or improves an excellence. In explaining this, I will suggest Thomson's focus on giving the truth conditions for directives overemphasizes the cognitive element of ethical practice at the expense of other considerations.

Thomson's analysis of what makes directives true suggests that *assessing* the truth of any normative ought-claim requires *understanding* the directive as directing with respect to *avoiding defect*. Her analysis of what makes the claim "S ought to Φ" true, initially that "S is a K" and that "If an S does not Φ, then it is a defective K", would be true for *any* directive. Directives are intelligible, and their truth conditions understood only in light of one type of aretaic change, avoiding defect.

The focus on avoidance of defect is mysterious, since kinds stand the same to other varieties of aretaic change as they do to avoidance of defect. While Thomson claims that directives only require decency and argues this is an advantage over consequentialism and some varieties of virtue ethics, this position follows not from her positive views about goodness. She may nonetheless be right that directives only require decency. If so, the arguments in *Normativity* do not establish it.

Thomson's account's limits can be seen through the following case. Imagine that a student has written a perfect paper—a paper that cannot become better as a paper in any respect,

only the same or worse—and now shows the paper to three advisers, looking for guidance. One adviser says that there is nothing the student ought to do; nothing would make the paper better. Another adviser says that the student ought to let the ink dry and ought not expound more on the second example. These actions would not make the paper any better but would help preserve the paper's excellence. The incompetent third adviser tells the student that she ought to cite less and make broader generalizations, advice that, if followed, would make the paper worse.

What should we make of the directive claims made in such a case? One thing to note is that, while the directives "You ought to let the ink dry", "There is nothing that you ought do", and "You ought to cite less" in some sense conflict, it's unclear whether determining which directives are true and which are false entirely settles the question of which advice to follow. Truth and falsehood is of course relevant to deciding which directives to consider, but it is entirely possible that an advisee is given multiple true claims about what she ought to do and still must decide which advice is the most helpful. Further, the advisers may offer the advice "You ought to let the ink dry" and "There is nothing that you ought to do" with different concerns in mind. One adviser focuses on what would make the paper better and the other on what would keep it from becoming worse.

Adopting Thomson's views, we would be committed to saying that the first adviser's claim "There is nothing you ought to do" is false, strictly speaking. For true directives represent sources of avoiding defect, and, while nothing can *improve* a perfect paper, there are plenty of ways to avoid changes to the worse. Expounding more on an already clear example would worsen the paper's flow—the student ought not write more. A problem with insisting that the first adviser's claim is false is that such insistence is uncharitable. For it is uncharitable to

interpret all the adviser's claims as claims about sources of avoiding defect. Genuine communication depends on understanding what someone is saying, and the same sentence, "You ought to do nothing", makes a different claim read as pertaining to avoiding defect than it does read as pertaining to increasing excellence. While the advice is bad advice in terms of avoiding defect and makes a false claim, to hear advice this way is not to hear it in the spirit it was given. The connection between evaluative and directive judgments suggested by Thomson's analysis is more plausible when directives are not understood in terms of a fixed aretaic change (avoidance of defect), but rather when the type of aretaic change a speaker is concerned with is used in ascertaining the truth of what she says.

As such, determining whether a directive claim is true or false arguably is of less central importance in to figuring out what to do. Determining which advice is erroneous only goes so far, and, rather than thinking about whether advice is 'true or false', we are better served by judging that advice is beneficial or unhelpful. A directive given as advice may be true but unhelpful.[161] Restructuring a section would improve a student's paper, so ought to be done. Yet restructuring may also be unfeasible to do within time constraints or be beyond the student's current abilities, so be unhelpful advice. As we saw in the last chapter, agent's follow advice, not only believe it, and advice is not helpful when not fit to an agent's ability.

Matters may appear different when we focus on the bad advice of the incompetent third adviser. There, it is much more tempting to think that the advice is *bad* because it is *false*. No, the student should not cite less. Ruling out the third adviser's advice because it is false supports the view that the way to arbitrate between conflicting advice is to figure out which directives are

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[161] Thanks to Steve Leighton for helping me see this point.

erroneous and which are not. This treats conflicting advice in the manner of conflicting beliefs.

Bernard Williams, critical of the imposition of such a structure in the moral case, characterizes

such a cognitive approach so:

> It seems to me a fundamental criticism of many ethical theories that their accounts of moral conflict and its resolution do not do justice to the facts of regret and related considerations: basically because they eliminate from the scene the 'ought' that is not acted upon. A structure appropriate to conflicts of belief is projected on to the moral case; one by which the conflict is basically adventitious, and a resolution of it disembarrasses one of a mistaken view that for a while confused the situation. Such an approach must be inherent in purely cognitive accounts of the matter; since it is just a question of which of the conflicting 'ought' statements is true, and they cannot both be true, to decide correctly for one of them must be to be rid of error with respect to the other, an occasion, if for any feelings, then for such feelings as relief (at escaping mistake), self-congratulation (for having got the right answer), or possibly self-criticism (for having so nearly been misled).[162]

While not denying that the adviser offers bad advice—since it is not true that the student should

do what the adviser advises—we need not be so quick to think that all that is wrong with the

third adviser's advising is the giving of false advice. Suppose the advisee aims at writing a

passable paper. The incompetent adviser has not given good advice because he has failed to be

sufficiently sensitive to the advisee's project and interests. The advisee aims at producing a good

enough paper, not a worse one—the incompetent adviser's advice is unsuitable.

This is clearer in cases where some advice is true but irrelevant to the advisee's pursuits:

the paper would look better mounted in a wooden frame than a steel frame, but this is irrelevant

to the advisee's interest in improving the paper. So, the advice's falsity need not be the reason the

third adviser's claims are not to be trusted. The claims may be suspect because the adviser has

either misunderstood what the student is doing or doesn't appreciate the nature of the task. In

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[162] Bernard Williams, "Ethical Consistency", p.113.

these ways, what's wrong with how the third adviser advises is that his standing as a source of practical knowledge is undermined. The student cannot come to know what to do through the third adviser.

As such, even in the case where Thomson's account seems strongest, there is no great pressure to resolve the tension among such directives by imposing a structure that reveals some advice true and other advice false.

I want to end this section by raising two further concerns with the concepts of defect and avoiding defect employed by Thomson. First, Thomson often writes as though a single failure to act is enough to make a being defective; toasters are defective if they *fail* to toast bread, not if they are *unable* to. This conception of defect becomes especially contentious when we think about persons. Her concept of defect implies that acting inadequately is a failure of a person. But with persons, we would want to distinguish between cases where inadequate action reflects poorly on the person and cases where the action is just an error that does not reflect a defect. A good player will sometimes make a bad pass. Making a bad pass may reflect poorly on a player, or it may not. Similarly, in the moral domain, we might want to distinguish between cases where a bad action reflects a defective character, and cases where a bad action is a one-off event brought about by a brief loss of perspective, annoyance, or a tired judgment. Good people can act badly sometimes.

Second, Thomson's concept of defect can be contrasted with a more comparative notion. A teaching assistant might fail to give great advice on some occasion, yet still give advice that is better than the advice of many other teaching assistants. Does giving this advice reflect poorly on her? We might think she is not defective as a teaching assistant, since her advice is still better

advice than that of many teaching assistants. The sense that she is a defective teaching assistant is more in contrast with an ideal than in contrast to the general nature of her fellow teaching assistants. While Thomson might resist characterizing her appeal to kinds as an appeal to an ideal, a worry about her approach is that she is analyzing "x is a bad" in terms of x's falling short of an ideal, an approach that looks trivially true, so unsatisfying as an analysis.

6.4 Making Sense of Conflicting Directives

In Thomson's analysis, the same individual can be of multiple kinds, and she takes this possibility to create issues for her initial account of directive claims. Thomson argues that, when an individual ought to Φ, what makes this true is that the individual is of a kind K such that not Φ-ing is a defect in Ks. So, the fact that the same individual can be of multiple kinds thus makes it possible that the same individual both ought to Φ, in virtue of one kind, and ought *not* to Φ, in virtue of another. Her analysis thus could be thought to generate a contradiction.

Thomson explicitly considers such a scenario in her Fido example. Fido is a terrier advertised by a pet shop as a "quiet dog", a dog whose vocal cords have been removed for the purpose of making the dog unable to bark. Thomson suggests that Fido is of at least two kinds, the kinds 'terrier' and 'quiet dog'. Suppose that, if a quiet dog is able to bark, then that dog is a defective quiet dog, and if a terrier is unable to bark, it is a defective terrier. Thomson notes that, by her analysis, both "Fido ought to be unable to bark" and "Fido ought to be able to bark" are true. For Fido is of both kinds, and, by supposition, the evaluative standards fixed by the kinds

terrier and quiet dog are so. Thomson claims that "Fido ought to be able to bark" and "Fido ought to be unable to bark" obviously cannot both be true.[163]

This problem motivates Thomson to introduce condition "gamma" to her account of what make directives true. Gamma adds to what makes a given directive claim true that "There is no directive kind K+ such that K is a sub-kind of K+ and such that, if a K+ does V, then it is a defective K+." The improved formulation then states:

> For it to be the case that A ought to V is for it to be the case that there is a directive kind K such that:
> (α) A is a K, and
> (β) if a K doesn't V, then it is a defective K, and
> (γ) there is no directive kind K+ such that K is a sub-kind of K+, and such that if a K+ does V, then it is a defective K+. [164]

Thomson motivates gamma by appealing to *generality*. Thomson says in favor of gamma that "When we reason about what a thing ought to do, we look for generalizations, and we take what issues from the more general to have more weight than what issues from the less general if what issues from the more general conflicts with what issues from the less general."[165]

Thomson's approach to this problem raises two issues. First, whether anything like gamma is even necessary is debatable. The conclusion far more consistent with the reflections on evaluative judgment offered by Thomson is that directives, like other evaluative judgments, are kind-sensitive, in the sense that there is nothing one ought to do *simpliciter* but only ought to do as a K.

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[163] See Thomson, *Normativity*, pp. 209-211.

[164] Thomson, *Normativity*, p. 214.

[165] Thomson, *Normativity,* p. 213.

Second, even granting a real need for conditions like gamma, does *gamma* really represent a sensible approach to this task? I argue that the introduction of gamma is inconsistent with the positive account of goodness Thomson has given and ultimately is not plausible. This raises the question whether Thomson's account has the resources to "weigh" directives in a more plausible manner.

These are the questions that I now address. I will start by saying why Thomson's gamma condition is not plausible. I will then consider the option of rejecting the issue motivating gamma's introduction, that of the implausibility of conflicting directives. Finally, I will consider alternative ways of weighing what directives demand. Both are live options in my view, and my discussion does not aim to persuade one otherwise.

6.4.1 Against Gamma

While Thomson may ultimately be correct that a principle is required for arbitrating between conflicting directives, Thomson's gamma condition is not the way to go. The most immediate concern is that its addition is ad hoc. It does allow Thomson to deal with her case of *quiet dogs* and *terriers*, yet the addition does not appear to follow from the prior line of reasoning. Further reflection on gamma reveals greater flaws.

There is some difficulty in deciding how to read Thomson. On the one hand, Thomson *motivates* gamma with talk of *weighing* "what issues from the more general" against what issues from the less. This suggests that the ought not acted upon is *preserved.* This matters because one could think that the outweighed directive still has a force to it that should mitigate and shape *how* one does the action that is more favored. Read this way, Thomson could take advantage of

Williams' argument, discussed previously, that: "It seems to me a fundamental criticism of many ethical theories that their accounts of moral conflict and its resolution do not do justice to the facts of regret and related considerations: basically because they eliminate from the scene the 'ought' that is not acted upon."[166] This would allow her to further distinguish her account's advantages over the consequentialist's, of whom she is critical.

On the other hand, whether Thomson can be read as concurring with Williams is not entirely clear. While at times she talks in terms of weighing, she also holds that, in the case of conflicting directives, it is "obvious" that one directive is false, so does not seem to be thinking like Williams that the ought not acted upon is preserved. Further, she also presents her account as one that explains what makes a directive claim *true,* so the introduction of gamma looks as though its use is to delineate true directives from false. If Thomson is to be read this way, then she misleads in describing conflicting directive claims as *weighed* against one another, since gamma partially determines whether it is the case that A ought to V.

When we are determining that a directive is true in the first place, we are not comparing a true directive, generated by one kind, against another true directive, generated by another kind, and then determining that one of the two directives is of greater significance. So the weighing metaphor hardly seems appropriate. As Thomson formulates it here, it is not that two directives are generated by the kinds *terrier* and *quiet dog*, then one directive is determined to be weightier than the other. Rather, gamma ensures that only one directive is the case, that of the more general kind. It is not the case, after all, that Fido ought to be unable to bark.

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[166] Williams, "Ethical Consistency", p.113.

Read this way, Thomson is then committed to saying that the conflict between the two directives concerning Fido is merely apparent. Once we know whether the kind *terrier* is more general than the kind *quiet dog*, we know that one directive claim is false, so know what to do. But if this is so, then Thomson's introduction of gamma does not *resolve* a problem of conflicting directives but rather aims to ensure that the problem never arises. The problem was that the same individual, in virtue of being of different kinds, might be demanded to do what is incompatible. Fido ought to be able to bark, and Fido ought to be unable to bark. What should we make of these demands? Gamma is such that the issue never arises in the first place. For it turns out that, in Thomson's view, it is not the case that Fido ought to be unable to bark, and so not the case that Fido ought to be able to bark and Fido ought to be unable to bark.

The case is further complicated in that Thomson slips between two ways of specifying the subject of a directive claim. Thomson initially considers directives like "a *toaster* ought to toast bread" and uses such cases to support the thought that avoidance of defect is at the heart of the concept *ought*. Thomson then talks about directive statements like "*Fido* ought to be able to bark" in her discussion of gamma. The subject of a directive's demands thus varies in her discussion between a *particular* individual, like Fido, an individual that might be of both the kinds *terrier* and *quiet dog*, and what we might describe as the *generic* subject of a kind, *a toaster* or *a terrier*.

This is an issue for the account because it is not clear that directive statements like "Fido ought to V" are made the case by the same considerations as directive statements like "A quiet dog ought to V"—let alone the undiscussed cases of I, you, we, and they ought to V. *Fido* may be of multiple kinds so potentially be the subject of conflicting directives, but, when the subject of a

directive is *a quiet dog*, this is less apparent. Is talk of what a quiet dog ought to do talk of what a particular individual ought to do? Or is it talk of what *any* quiet dog ought to do?

These questions are pertinent because the topic of conflicting directives arises out of considering a particular individual like Fido and does not clearly arise when considering a generic subject. Thomson's analysis of directive claims treats both subjects alike when it is unclear that sameness in treatment is called for. Thomson's treatment of the case is not fully warranted, read this way, if the questions whether a *quiet dog* ought to be unable to bark and whether *Fido* ought to be unable to bark are different questions.

Further, using gamma to resolve the apparent conflict in this way undercuts Thomson's earlier line of argument, that avoidance of defect is at the heart of directive claims. For gamma entails not only that it is not the case that Fido ought to be unable to bark, but also that it is not the case that *a quiet dog* ought to be unable to bark. For a *quiet dog* is a sub-kind of the kind terrier, and being unable to bark is a defect in terriers.

Gamma would lead us to conclude that it is not the case that a quiet dog ought to be unable to bark. What then are we to make of the property of 'being a quiet dog that is able to bark'? Is being able to bark not a defect in a quiet dog then? If the property still is a defect in a quiet dog, then the notion of avoiding defect does not appear at the heart of the notion "ought" after all. And if not, then it appears that directive judgments are what are elucidating evaluative judgments, and not the other way around. Either conclusion undermines Thomson's analysis, which takes avoidance of defect to be at the heart of the concept *ought* and seeks to elucidate directive judgments through evaluative judgments.

Besides creating such problems for Thomson's account, gamma's introduction is further unsatisfying because comparable cases of conflicting directives can be found where neither kind is a sub-kind of the other, so gamma's introduction leaves intact the general question of what to say about conflicting directives. For gamma only applies to cases where what is a defect in the supra-kind is a source of avoiding defect in the sub-kind. The kinds 'teaching assistant' and 'sibling' are not such that one is a sub-kind of the other—a teaching assistant is not a kind of sibling, nor a sibling a kind of teaching assistant—and yet, in Thomson's view, these kinds can presumably generate directives that conflict in very mundane respects.

One response open to Thomson here is to expand gamma so that what issues from the more general kind trumps what issues from the less general in all cases, and not just when the kinds stand in a supra/sub-kind relationship. This option is not promising because more general kinds are, on the whole, thinner guides. *Corded toasters* are a kind of *corded appliance*, yet the notion of a *corded appliance* is arguably less relevant to avoiding defect in corded toasters than the kind *corded toaste*r. Likewise, while the kind *terrier* is in certain respects more general than the kind *quiet terrier*, the kind *quadruped* is more general still. Yet reflection on the kind *quadruped* is surely not such as to elucidate what decent activity for a terrier consists in.

These are thus some reasons why Thomson's account is not made more plausible by the introduction of gamma, reading gamma as a condition under which a directive claim is true. Gamma is limited to conflict between supra/sub-kinds when conflict is at least plausible for directives issuing from kinds not standing in such relation. Thomson moves from considering directives that have a generic subject, toasters, to directives concerning a particular subject, Fido, without explaining why the two types of subjects can be treated equivalently.

Finally, Thomson leaves unexplained why the fact that "A ought to V" and "A ought not to V" are both true constitutes a genuine problem. She merely asserts that both cannot obviously be true. One wonders whether this can simply be denied, and whether such denial fits better with her overall account. For these reasons, I think Thomson's focus on *weighing* directives is the more defensible position. But I doubt that Thomson can develop the metaphor while maintaining that one directive must be false, and I cannot see why weighing never leaves us with cases where, after all the weighing is done, what is to be said is that A ought to V and A ought not to V.

6.4.2 Two Approaches to Addressing Practical Conflicts

Ethicists distinguish deontology, broadly the study of duty or what one ought to do, from axiology, broadly the study of values, with various attempts made to unify the two inquiries. Thomson's own attempt represents an interesting variation in that the underlying account of value, since she denies there is a way of being good *simpliciter* and instead seeks to avoid such an error through clarifying how goodness is *attributive*. Otherwise, Thomson's account is similar to that of the Consequentialist, whom she comments on:

> Second, both the Consequentialist and the friend of the Directive Constraint reduce directives to evaluatives, but the evaluatives they rely on are different: the Consequentialist relies on the property goodness (or the relation better world than), whereas the friend of the directive constraint relies on the properties being a defective K, for this and that K. [167]

One might have thought that the differences between the friend of the Directive Constraint and the Consequentialist would manifest themselves in the following way: directive claims, which

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[167] Thomson, *Normativity*, pp. 230-231.

both take to "reduce to evaluatives", are claims about values that, properly understood, are kind-sensitive. As such, there is no such thing as what one ought to do *simpliciter*.

One might think Thomson would hold this, as her views on value are everywhere so: Thomson has already argued that good is attributive, and there is no property of being good *simpliciter* but only of being a good such-and-such or good in a respect, and has argued that virtues are likewise attributive, with the property of being a boring poem being a negative evaluative property in poems. The question of what a subject ought to do *simpliciter* then is misguided for, properly understood, directives are claims about what a subject ought to do as a K. This is what one might reasonably expect someone in Thomson's position to conclude.

What's puzzling then about Thomson's considered case of conflicting directives is that the "oughts" involved are *not* kind-sensitive when the evaluative features they reduce to *are*. Following Thomson's *reductive* line of thought, it is hard to see why Thomson thinks the conflict of directives in the Fido case is implausible. Being able to bark is not, for Fido, to be defective *simpliciter* but to be defective as a quiet dog. Likewise, if Fido is not able to bark, Fido again would not be falling short as a quiet dog but as a terrier. In this vein, there is nothing objectionable in holding that Fido both avoids defect and does not avoid defect by being unable to bark.

What, then, is wrong with the idea that Fido ought, as a terrier, to be able to bark and ought, as a quiet dog, to be unable to bark? Selections from Thomson's earlier work, *Goodness and Advice,* provide something of a reply. Here, Thomson writes:

> Suppose that Alfred's paying Bertha five dollars would be good for Bertha but bad for Alfred. Alfred asks whether he ought to pay Bertha five dollars. A proponent of the Multiple Ambiguity Idea says that the only advice we are in a position to give him is that in the 'ought goodness for Bertha' sense of "ought"

Alfred ought to pay Bertha, whereas in the 'ought goodness for Alfred' sense of "ought," it is not the case that Alfred ought to pay Bertha. Surely there remains a further question, namely whether Alfred just plain ought to pay Bertha.

and...

Suppose that Alfred is ill, and that only a dose of a certain medicine will cure him. It truly tastes awful, however. Alfred asks us "Ought I really take it?" It is a wildly implausible idea that we can reply only: "Well, your taking it would be very unpleasant, so in one sense of 'ought', it's not the case that you ought to take it, namely the 'ought enjoyable' sense of 'ought.' But you taking it would be good for you, so in another sense of 'ought', you ought to take it, namely the 'ought goodness for Alfred' sense of 'ought.'" It is likely that Alfred will repeat his question: "But ought I take it?" It surely won't do to reply: "Are you deaf? I just told you that in one sense you ought to and in another sense it is not the case that you ought to, and that's all the advice anyone can give you." We can give more advice: we can say what the case presumably warrants saying, namely that he ought to take the medicine. [168]

It's tricky what to make of this. On the one hand, one might feel that the onus is on the hard dilemmist—the person holding there are cases where, after all things are considered, the agent still both ought to do A and ought to do B, even though the agent cannot do both—to show that there are hard dilemmas. In which case, showing that there remains an intelligible question of what ought to be done in the purported hard case serves to show that the case offered does not support the belief that there are hard dilemmas. Thomson offers reasonable critiques to many examples that would support the hard dilemmist position.[169]

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[168] Thomson, *Goodness and Advice*, pp. 46-49.

[169] See, for example, Thomson's discussion of Williams on regret. Thomson writes:

There just is no need for us to accommodate the requirement that Alice feel regret by saying both 'Alice ought to give the pill to Bert' and 'Alice ought to give the pill to Charles.'

Why?

In short, it is not an 'ought' that is not acted upon that has the consequences; it is a right that is infringed that has them.

Normativity, p. 178.

On the other hand, one might feel that the onus is on the hard dilemma skeptic to explain

why hard dilemmas are impossible.[170] In which case, showing that a particular case is not a hard

dilemma goes only so far. Showing that some cases are not hard dilemmas is not to show that

there are no cases of hard dilemmas, let alone that there can be none. Further, both of the above

replies rely on the idea that the further question "what ought A do?" is intelligible, that there

"remains a further question", or that "we can give more advice". From the hard dilemmist's

perspective, however, asking the further question looks a lot like asking the same question again

and expecting a different answer. Yes, in the sense that we can re-ask the question, we can ask

the further question, but it is pointless to do so, since it prompts the same question as before.[171]

Another complication is that Thomson's discussions of hard dilemmas focus on contexts

of giving advice. In the context of giving advice, saying "you both ought to do A and ought to do

B, even though you cannot do both" is to give advice that is impossible to follow. As advice, the

directive judgment is unhelpful. But directives are not only given as advice, and are appealed to

in other contexts, like when I am justifying my actions to you, or in the course of explaining why

I am holding you responsible. Thinking about the hard dilemmist's position in the context of

giving advice may obscure our assessments this way.

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[170] That is, the onus here is not for the skeptic to explain why a particular hard dilemma does not exist, but rather to explain in general why there cannot be any hard dilemmas.

[171] Thomson seems to recognize this when in *Normativity,* p. 176, she writes:

> That description of this further meaning of "A ought to V-act:—namely that it is its 'all things considered' meaning—is unfortunate, since it is not as if the Hard Dilemmist hasn't considered all things. He has. And what he concludes, having considered all things, is that Alice ought to give the pill to Bert, and that she ought to give it to Charles.

She brings this up in her discussion of Williams, who she reads as a soft dilemmist, and never quite says explicitly what in principle is wrong with the hard dilemmist's position.

So, I don't think Thomson has sufficiently explained why the hard dilemmist's position is off the table.[172] What's troubling about the possibility of hard cases is the possibility that prior deliberation will not generate a unique action to be done. This clashes with ideals of action guidance that take as a locus *choice* and think of choice as informed by an argumentative conception of advising that has as its success case the identification of a unique action to be done. The reality of hard cases would represent a limit to such a conception. If there are hard dilemmas, then there are times when the best choice is regrettable.

In this manner, the impetus to eliminate the possibility of hard cases speaks to a difference in vision and focus. In one ideal, our ethical character is revealed primarily through what we choose, and choice is a cognitive manner whose success in guiding action consists in the identification of a unique action that ought to be done. In another, our ethical character need not only be revealed in what we choose, but in the manner of acting in which we execute the choice and through the practices we engage in afterwards: seeking forgiveness, making amends, and so on. Here, the ideal is less the agent who chooses rightly but rather the agent who is aware of her overall ethical character, and whose acting is informed by that understanding and through her knowledge of human practices.

6.5 Conclusion

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[172] There are principles in deontic logic that one might hold that are inconsistent with the existence of moral dilemmas. That one such principle is independently plausible would be a better reason for denying the possibility of hard dilemmas. Were we aiming to robustly defend the possibility of hard dilemmas, we would need to consider what to say in response to these claims. Likewise, in considering such principles, one would also need to take into account the denial of an 'ought' *simpliciter*. For an overview, see Terrance McConnell's "Moral Dilemmas".

I have been expressing doubts on three aspects of Thomson's position. I try to understand why directives need a 'suitable circumstances' qualification, how avoidance of defect is at the heart of the concept ought, and why, given her positive views on goodness, Thomson rejects hard dilemmas. In doing so, I consider whether some directives are true regardless of circumstances, whether directives are not equally intelligible in terms of improvement and other types of change in excellence, and whether conflicting directives really represent a problem for Thomson's analysis.

I think some ought claims are true regardless of circumstance, while Thomson thinks ought claims apply only in suitable circumstances. One might ask then whether our positions can be recast in terms of Kantian versus Consequentialist reasoning. I want to conclude this chapter by responding to this question.

Judith Thomson thinks her positive views on goodness provide grounds for resisting consequentialism. She doesn't think there is a property 'good' that can be maximized, nor does she think the notion of a 'world' is goodness-fixing, such that we could reconstruct consequentialism in terms of better possible worlds. Likewise, she think the relation 'better than' makes no sense without a respect: the question whether St. Francis was (simply) better than chocolate is senseless.[173]

In these respects, Thomson's views resist being re-cast in terms of consequentialist thought. On the other hand, the comparison is also accurate to an extent, as Thomson brings out: "...both the Consequentialist and the friend of the Directive Constraint reduce directives to evaluatives, but the evaluatives they rely on are different..."[174] Thomson still reduces directives

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[173] Thomson, *Normativity*, Chapter 4.

[174] Thomson, *Normativity*, pp. 230-231.

to evaluatives but relies on the property of being a defective K, and, like the consequentialist, she is not willing to say that an act ought not be done regardless of circumstances.

The contrast between Kantian v. Consequentialist reasoning sometimes focuses on absolute prohibitions, with Kantians holding that there are certain acts one may not perform, no matter the consequences, and the consequentialists denying this.[175] Under examination, the onus appears to be on the Kantian to explain the rationality of adhering to absolute prohibitions. How it is rational for an agent to choose to perform an act that would produce less good than she might otherwise produce? This can cast consequentialism in a favorable light, but Judith Thomson argues the whole debate is mistaken. Goodness is attributive and there is no property of goodness to be maximized by an agent's actions. Thomson is instead led to her position on suitable circumstances by the thought that it is a mark of defect in toasters to fail to toast bread, but only in suitable circumstances.

I think Thomson is mistaken about what is a mark of defect. Even the expert skier makes mistakes that do not tell against her expertise. Powers of acting are fallible. As we saw in the last chapter, there is a temptation to think of excellence in capacity as driving out error, such that we might assess a person's capacities based on mistakes in her performance. While good habits and practical intelligence perfect exercises of capacity, this is not for the capacity to become less fallible.

Do I, like the Kantian, think there are absolute prohibitions? Have I given an argument

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[175] In popular discourse, the contrast between Kantian v. Consequentialist reasoning is also often cast in terms of intentions v. consequences, though this is an oversimplification. I do not say that it is a person's intentions that makes some acting good in a respect regardless of circumstances, but rather her manner of acting. We saw how, if one was tempted to deny the notion of impeded acting, one would be pushed to say that something other than the acting was excellent, with intention being a suitable candidate. But I give reasons to resist this.

for them? I am open to their possibility, though am ultimately unsure of what to make of my commitment to certain manners of acting's absolute goodness and badness. Unjust acting is always bad in a respect, yet might circumstances and consequences conspire such that I ought to act unjustly here and now? If circumstances can, then I am tempted to say so much the worse for the concept 'ought' (and right, wrong, should, etc.).[176] When doing what one ought to do is compatible with one's acting being bad in a respect, the commendation 'he did what he ought to have done' can be 'the praise of the vulgar'. Having done the right thing is no high praise when the only way to do it is cruelly. In this respect and others, I am sympathetic to Anscombe's refrains against contemporary ethical theorizing's preoccupation with the concept 'ought'.

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[176] Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy", Annas's *Intelligent Virtue*, and Lovibond's "Absolute Prohibitions without Divine Promises" all discuss this issue.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Conclusion

Practical reasoning is often viewed as reasoning that concludes in a belief about what one should do. Aristotelian naturalists, such as Peter Geach and Judith Thomson, defend an attractive conception of goodness and evaluative features. Yet it is hard to see how their accounts aid one in answering the question of what one should.

Judith Thomson thinks that the concept of defect will help settle questions of what one should do and writes in terms of giving and adjudicating advice. But her attempt is questionable in various respects: the appeal to avoidance of defect is not well grounded and, moreover, the concept of defect looks unhelpful in advising beings that act in light of reasons, and irrelevant for beings that do not. So it's not clear that Thomson's positive account of goodness stands to provide much insight into practical reasoning, as opposed to her sharp criticisms of prevailing views.

This dissertation draws special attention to action as characterized in the progressive aspect, and this stands to improve matters for the Aristotelian naturalist to some measure.

Conceptualizing action as ongoing contributes to an alternative understanding of practical reasoning. Some reasoning concludes in belief about what one should do. But other reasoning begins and ends in acting—reasoning from acting to more concrete acting. Following McDowell, mindedness pervades even fully absorbed acting, such that an agent can act for reasons even when engrossed in speed chess.

Evaluative features have a clearer role in this form of reasoning, as we have seen. An agent's understanding of natures helps disclose to her evaluative features that she can act in light of. Her awareness may be of how well or poorly her acting is fairing, her circumstances' suitability for acting, or of deficiencies in materials she works with. Utilizing her understanding of a good, she organizes and guides her acting by responding to such features with adjustments in her acting.

New perspectives on an agent's aptitudes and merits become available when we recognize that humans are capable of acting in this manner. An agent engaging in practical reasoning of this form may express *practical intelligence*. Compared to an agent who cannot adjust her acting in light of evaluative features, the agent who *can* is distinctly capable. Habits can enable or perfect exercises of her practical intelligence, providing us a way of understanding the goodness of good habits. These perspectives on human capacities provide a richer account of human virtues than that found in Thomson's writings, which leaves unclear ways human excellence and vice differ from the excellences and defects of artifacts.

Concern with cultivating one's virtues misdirects ethical attention if it is not sufficiently self-directed, or so objects Bernard Williams. The content of the *virtuous agent's* first-personal deliberation would not appear to reference virtues—she acted merely because she saw he needed

aid, and not additionally because she thought it would be kind. Recognizing that an agent's awareness of evaluative features factors into her absorbed practical reasoning permits novel responses to Williams' concerns. Attending to the evaluative language used to describe her acting, an agent forms her conception of the action form and develops her own understanding of how her acting is going—though this formation is shaped by the language of her immediate community, so her conception is, in part, an inheritance. Attending to other's characterization of her acting contributes to her ability to articulate her reasons for acting, an ability used in explaining or justifying her acting and assessing what she is capable of, and to her practical intelligences's formation.

We better understand how our practice of giving and following advice conveys practical knowledge by attending to action's progressive aspect, as well as how advising empowers agents to act with practical intelligence. As we can share a person's theoretical knowledge in believing her testimony, we can sometimes share a person's practical knowledge by following her advice. Yet our capacity to follow advice is fallible and depends on fallible powers of understanding, judgment, and acting. Ongoing acts of advising form and develop such powers, making advice useful. Better yet, advising possibly cultivates an agent's understanding of a practice to the extent that her understanding itself is sufficient for generating instructions, and advising possibly cultivates powers of discernment and practically intelligence that enable her to critically assess and shape the norms of a practice.

In these respects, this dissertation improves the Aristotelian naturalist's situation. However, there are compelling objections to naturalism yet to be addressed. John McDowell and Bernard Williams deliver poignant criticisms of Aristotelian naturalism that any sympathizer

would do well to address. I want to conclude by examining those criticisms, so as to try to persuade readers that offering an account of goodness in terms of kinds does not commit us to a one-dimensional view of how reference to a kind settles questions about how it is good for a member to behave; toasters are one thing, self-conscious rational beings quite another.

Sometimes, Aristotelian naturalism looks like a position that appeals directly and perniciously to natures to explain why someone should act in such-and-such a way. Judith Thomson's work appears to makes this move: What makes it true that *this* toaster ought to toast bread is that a toaster is a defective toaster insofar as it fails to toast bread.[177] Facts about a nature —K's Φ—are appealed to in explaining why this k falls short as a K when it does not Φ, thus providing the sense that this k ought to Φ.

John McDowell and Bernard Williams criticize this maneuver in its application to human action. Both doubt that the putative fact that it is in human nature to do such-and-such would persuade someone already questioning why she should be doing such-and-such, since her rational capacities permit her to subject her nature to critical scrutiny. McDowell, considering what a rational wolf would make of the fact that wolves are cooperative hunters[178], writes:

> Suppose now that a rational wolf finds himself in a situation in which some behavior would come naturally to him: say playing his part in the co-operative activity of hunting with the pack. Having acquired reason, he can contemplate alternatives; he can step back from the natural impulse and direct critical scrutiny at it. We cannot allow ourselves to suppose that God, say, might confer reason on

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[177] See Judith Thomson's *Normativity*, Chapter 12. Thomson at points varies between saying that failure to toast is a *mark* of defect, and that a toaster that fails to toast bread is a defective toaster. I myself think that a toaster ought to be *able* to toast bread, not that a toaster ought to toast bread. Thomson however seems to be trying to reach a conclusion about what a toaster should *do,* not how it should *be*, which I speculate stems from her views on practical reason and advice.

[178] Some studies of wolves suggest that wolves are not, as McDowell supposes, cooperative hunters. Whatever the case may be, McDowell's general point still stands: reason would permit a rational wolf to step back from that nature and question its impulses.

wolves, but stop short of his giving the materials to step back and frame the question "Why should I do this?"

and...

> So even if we grant that human beings have a naturally based need for the virtues, in a sense parallel to the sense in which wolves have a naturally based need for cooperativeness in their hunting, that need not cut any ice with someone who questions whether virtuous behavior is genuinely required by reason.[179]

McDowell takes such appeals to natures to be motivated by a certain inherited metaphysical conception of nature. This view, associated with the Enlightenment, precludes us from treating features visible only from the virtuous person's perspective as genuine reasons for action— features such as "that would be just", "that was overly cruel", and such. From the perspective of a modern 'disenchanted' conception of the natural world, ethical claims are in special need of grounding. Facts about human nature, disclosed by natural science, seem a firmer ground for ethical claims than evaluatively laden descriptions of the present circumstances, disclosed by the virtuous person's perception and experience. Opposed to this, McDowell writes:

> To understand his [Aristotle's] naturalism correctly, we need to achieve a willed immunity to some of the influence of our intellectual inheritance, an influence of which Aristotle himself was simply innocent. That way, we can stop supposing the rationality of virtue needs a foundation outside the formed evaluative outlook of a virtuous person.[180]

The route to such immunity lies through understanding the enlightenment conception of nature and its alternatives. Achieving this understanding, we apprehend the *shallowness* of the metaphysical standpoint that insists we "discount any valuations and aspirations that are special to one's historical or cultural situation" and that suggests we can *bypass* the need "to weigh, by

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[179] John McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", pp. 171, 173.

[180] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 174.

the best lights we have, the credentials of considerations purporting to appeal to reason" by possessing certain first-natural facts of the right sort.[181] While recognizing science's accomplishments in cleansing nature of certain meanings (there is no "book of nature"), we must also not take the claims of science dogmatically: "And logos has, everywhere, only its own lights to go by; the role of causation, in scientific thought's well-grounded conception of itself, does not rescue scientific thought from Neurath's boat. Empiricistic naturalism misses the significance of the fact that the Neurathian 'predicament' is quite general."[182]

McDowell's arguments target a certain type of maneuver, that of a *brute* appeal to human nature to ground the claim that an individual should do such-and-such. As the rational but uncooperative wolf is told she should cooperate because wolves are cooperative hunters, I might be told that *I* should keep my promise because *humans* are promise-keepers. The wolf and I are being told that the actions are a kind that contributes to our respective flourishing, given the kinds of beings we are. In my case, promise keeping is represented as an institution justified by appeals to considerations about the kind of being that I am. Alternatively, natures are appealed to in excusing putatively wrong actions on the grounds that beings of that kind cannot but act in such ways—the honey bee responds to threats to the hive by stinging, so there is no malice in its stinging you.

In my view, McDowell rightly insists that a virtuous agent's outlook allows her to apprehend features of particular situations that themselves constitute genuine reasons—features whose status as reasons does not require a special sort of grounding in first-natural facts, offered by a 'bald' naturalism in response to a neo-Humean conception of nature. We should avoid

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[181] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", pp. 189, 193.

[182] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 187.

attempts to ground the rationality of ethics in something like what it is for the life of a species to go well, for, as McDowell seeks to warrant, "A virtuous action's appeal to reason is captured by an evaluation, 'noble', which is internal to the standpoint of someone who already accepts that virtue's demands on reason are real. Accepting that, and accepting that 'for the sake of the noble' gives a reason for acting, are the same thing."[183]

However, the relation between natures and ethical judgments can be conceived differently, complicating the issue. A thesis, that thoughts about a particular individual and its attributes always already contain reference to the individual's form, provides an alternative way of understanding the Aristotelian naturalist's appeal to natures.[184] My awareness of a particular individual's features might then be thought both limited by and an achievement of my understanding of the individual's form. Thinking this way, the person with a right understanding of form and the person with a misconception do not have the same awareness of the features of their shared circumstance. One person might *see* what there is reason to do where the other cannot. That the *purported* virtuous person apprehends what is the case depends on the adequacy of her various conceptions of natures, conceptions which pervade, underlie, or are referenced by her thoughts about particular individuals, their features, and their circumstances.

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[183] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", pp. 169, 177.

[184] Michael Thompson expresses this idea in *Life and Action*, p. 81. Sebastian Rödl's views on substance and generic thought provide a similar expression. Rödl writes:

> In Kant's words, knowledge of the form is always encountered in the experience of the particular.

and...

> Any knowledge of particular Ns always already contains generic knowledge of the N. The generic knowledge is not reducible to particular knowledge, which, on the contrary, depends on it.

Categories of the Temporal, pp. 204, 206.

So, while acknowledging with McDowell that the particular features disclosed in light of the virtuous' upbringing and outlook constitute genuine reasons, we might still think the virtuous agent's knowledge of reasons for actions depends upon her knowledge of natures—her generic knowledge of substances, life-forms, and practices. For the purported virtuous agent's claim that "the particular situation is thus, therefore there is reason to do such-and-such" can stand or fall depending on the *understanding of natures* that underlies it. One's outlook has not disclosed reasons for action when the relevant disclosed features is the product of an inadequate, overly-narrow or overly-broad understanding of nature; we misjudge what we have reason to do when we act in light of a misconception. In this sense, whether the particular situation is really as the agent describes it, so whether the agent really is virtuous and has gotten things right, are questions not answered independently of questions about natures.

Natures and forms are highly abstract notions. So much is likely still unclear, despite my efforts to explain quite generally, how, even in appealing to the particular features disclosed by the virtuous' outlook, we are in a respect appealing to natures. Allow me to elaborate on this point less abstractly and in a way that highlights how this thought has found application in some recent philosophy. Elizabeth Anscombe writes: "When we call something an acorn, we look to a wider context than can be seen in the acorn itself. Oaks come from acorns, acorns come from trees; an acorn is thus as such generative (of an oak) whether or not it does generate an oak."[185] The idea here is that the thought 'this is an acorn' *already* brings with it a *wider context*, a context that informs our descriptions of what the individual as doing and, likewise, informs how we characterize what is happening to it. As Michael Thompson puts it, "A reference to the life

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[185] Elizabeth Anscombe, "You Can Have Sex Without Children", pp. 85-87.

form is already contained in the thought of the individual and its vicissitudes."[186] (The same can be said for certain characterizations of *circumstances* or of what other beings are *doing to one another*.)[187]

Understood this way, a person's awareness is pervaded by and made possible through a certain understanding of a life-form; her thoughts that "this creature is digesting", "this one is vulnerable", "this one is growing", "this one is four-legged" already bring with them a wider context. Imagine, for instance, Jane Goodall's experience with chimpanzees.[188] Her experience with chimpanzees provides her with a certain awareness of their forms of vulnerability—her thought that this chimp is vulnerable in these circumstances is already pervaded by her understanding of the chimpanzee. Someone lacking her generic knowledge of chimpanzees does not perceive a chimp's vulnerability in quite the same way she does and may be blind to the fact that these chimpanzees are now vulnerable. Thus, lacking Goodall's understanding of chimpanzees, he may not be in a position to recognize that there is a reason for doing such-and-such, the reason being the chimpanzees' vulnerability.

Additionally, take for example the judgment (perceptual or otherwise) that *digesting* is what some being is doing. Flies, cows, geese, and humans all digest food, but one's understanding of the activity is not made the better for factoring out what is specific to each form

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[186] Thompson, *Life and Action*, p. 81.

[187] Thompson, addressing the objection that natural historic judgments represent *ceteris peribus* judgments, writes:

> I object: the question "What *counts* as an intervention?" is surely to be answered, in any given case, by an appeal to the system of natural-historic judgments with the relevant kind as subject.

Life and Action, p. 70.

[188] This example was given by Alice Crary in discussion of her book *Inside Ethics: On The Demands of Moral Thought*.

of life. Although the activities are analogous in function, flies digest food externally, cows

through multiple stomachs, and geese with the aid of pebbles. One's judgment whether *this*

creature is digesting is crucially informed by one's understanding of what it is, where that itself

also bring a larger context and functional considerations. To understand this as a stomach

requires understanding it in terms of digestion and its purposes and results.[189]A person who does

not understand geese is unaware that a goose's eating of small stones is for the sake of digesting

food. In failing to recognize this behavior for what it is, we could be tempted to say that what she

lacks is an understanding of *digestion*, not *geese*. Yet, if her understanding of digestion is an

amalgamation of what is analogous between the digestions of different life forms, then we can't

entirely pull her understanding of digestion from her understanding of geese.[190]

Focusing on biological notions here illustrates the more *general* ideas that perception of

particulars already contains reference to a nature and that awareness of features of one's

circumstances constitutes an achievement in one's understanding. However, the examples

perhaps suggest a view too beholden to modern science's methods of knowing natures, as if the

right way to understand natures is always to do what the biologist does. This is a drawback to

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[189] Thanks to Steve Leighton for the suggestion on how to express this thought.

[190] These ideas resonate with Aristotle's views on health, and other homonymous attributes.

David Wiggins, in "What is the Order Among the Varieties of Goodness", describes Aristotle's strategy
for finding order among the different uses of "healthy, exists, good" and so on:

> Aristotle's most celebrated deployment of the first of the two strategies he mentions for finding order or
> system within homonymy – the focal strategy, as Aristotelians might call it – is in connection with the
> multiplicity of be. The thing which is (or has being) in the primary or central or focal sense is a substance, a
> man, a tree, God etc. Then, in radical dependence upon substances, there are other things which are (have
> their being) in related but distinguish-able senses of "is" or "are". These other things are by virtue of how
> some substance is qualitatively – white, say, or healthy – or by virtue of the size it is – six foot tall, say.
> Others have their being in other ways. Acts, for instance, are by virtue of what a substance does – run, say,
> or walk (see Metaphysics 1028 a20).

pp. 183-184.

clarifying the relation between an individual's particular features and its form using Anscombe's and Thompson's vivid examples. What the examples leave out is the sense that *participation* in a practice can also lead to knowledge of its form, providing one with an understanding of the practice that underlies one's immediate awareness.

Consider characterizations of action. The general point is applicable here too, yet one is hardly tempted to think that the right understanding of some action form is only available from the perspective of the sociologist or biologist. The understanding of what she is doing that a *practitioner* develops can equally be thought to grasp the nature of that practice. My awareness that I am lecturing too quickly is bound up with my understanding of the action form, of the practice of lecturing. My judgment that I am lecturing too fast is not made independently of my understanding of the action form—the question of what counts as lecturing at the appropriate speed is not answered independently of views about lecturing in general. Yet there is no good reason to have special doubts about the understanding of lecturing that develops over the course of my self-consciously and critically engaging in the practice over time (in the course of my *experience*) just because such knowledge of a nature was not had by the methods of sociology or biology. To entertain such doubts is to relapse into that shallow conception of the natural so effectively critiqued by McDowell.

For these reasons, we should say that natures are, in a respect, indirectly appealed to in the course of explaining why a person should do such-and-such. There can be disagreements about what to do because the features of our shared circumstances perceptually available you that are not perceptually available to me.[191] Your awareness of specific evaluative features can be an

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[191] Though this does not mean that the features are not available to me by other means. I take it that we can have knowledge of such features also by testimony. So, I can know that I am lecturing too fast by your telling me that is the case, even though I do not perceive it myself.

achievement of your understanding of an action form. Lacking that understanding, I do not see that those reasons for acting obtain—I should slow down because I am lecturing too fast here, but I cannot see that this is so. When we disagree that my lecturing is too fast, you persuade me to do what there is reason to do when you get me to *share* or *trust* the nature underlying your thoughts about this particular situation. In accepting that my lecturing is *too fast*, I accept a conception of lecturing that is the measure of its being too fast.

Holding that thoughts about an individual's feature already contain in them reference to its form thus opens up an alternative way of understanding how natures relate to practical and ethical judgments. This alternative raises a few different issues than the sort raised by the *brute* appeals to first-natural facts like "wolves are cooperative hunters". Bernard Williams' discussion of Aristotle on virtue and well-being makes the new issues especially clear.

As I read him, Williams is especially concerned with the perspective of the *non-virtuous*. (I find such focus touching and admirable.) What deliberative route is available to him, he who is without the 'right upbringing', such that he might, by his own lights, see that he should act this way? Williams comes across as frustrated with the replies he finds available to Aristotle. He writes:

> He [Aristotle] shares with Plato the idea that, if virtue is part of human good, then it cannot be external to the ultimately desirable state of well-being: that state must be constituted in part by the virtuous life. But this is not a consideration that one could use to any radical effect in practical reasoning, as he seems to suggest. One becomes virtuous or fails to do so only through habituation.

and...

> Some of Aristotle's reasonings might have an actual deliberative effect.... But, in general, Aristotle cannot reasonably believe that his reflections on the virtuous life

and its role in helping to constitute well-being could play a formative part in some general deliberation that a given person might conduct.[192]

Two issues are brought out by Williams' objections. First, Williams objects that Aristotle's account lacks the resources to offer a *deliberative* route from the non-virtuous' starting point to the virtuous' view of matters. It thus appears that *argument* will not make the non-virtuous aware of what there is reason to do, but rather non-rational means. Let us see, however, how things look in light of the broader conception of deliberation advocated in this dissertation.

Deliberation must not *only* be conceived as a 'step back', a withdrawal from acting into contemplation. I suspect that only by withdrawing our conception of deliberation to something "purely mental or contemplative" does it look like there is no deliberative route to the virtuous or expert's vantage point. Though granted nothing as quick as a verbal *argument* likely enables a person lacking the virtuous' perspective to follow virtuous' deliberation, this does not entail that an exercise of *practical reasoning* cannot get her any closer. Her understanding of a practice and herself can change as she participates in it in a critical and self-conscious fashion. To the extent that reasoning can take the form of acting, there *is* something of a *deliberative route* available to her. Hence, although not offering a full reply to Williams, I speculate that a broader conception of deliberation allows for a more satisfying answer to how the non-virtuous, *by her own lights*, comes to adopt the virtuous' understanding.[193]

Second, a certain conception of deliberation's starting points influences Williams' views on successful deliberations. First addressing Plato, Williams approvingly writes "He [Plato] thought that an account of the ethical life could answer Socrates' question, and combat

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[192] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, p. 39.

[193] As came out in discussion of testimony, trust can enable knowledge by testimony, which perhaps also makes possible an alternative deliberative route.

skepticism, only if it showed that it was rational for people to be just, *whoever they were and whatever their circumstances.*"[194] Aristotle disappoints Williams by failing to offer the non-virtuous an adequate response. One must ask, however, what premises are permitted in constructing a reply satisfying these constraints, and whether grounds for restricting premises are reasonable. Will the understanding-laden observations of the virtuous or expert be allowed as premises, or will they be held in abeyance, to be re-introduced only when sufficiently grounded by less questionable judgments? A shared starting point minimizes or eliminates prejudice, or so is its appeal, and the virtuous or expert's uncommon judgments may be allocated to the sidelines to establish a proper foundation, free of prejudice.

As McDowell would point out, there is a certain enlightenment inheritance to the thought that argument's ideal starting point is a characterization of how things stand "free of prejudice", so of an alleged higher epistemic standing. McDowell, describing a neo-Humean conception of nature, writes:

> The metaphysical rules do not change; the account of what doing well is for a human being can be shaped by a human perspective only in so far as what shapes the perspective can be supposed to figure in nature as seen from nowhere or from God's point of view. So in forming a suitable conception of what doing well is for a human being, one must discount any valuations and aspirations that are special to one's historical or cultural situation: anything one cannot regard as characteristic of human life as such.[195]

For a naturalism of the sort I have now outlined, an awareness of certain features of one's circumstances can be an achievement of understanding. A person does not start out able to see that this lecturing is *too quick*, or that these chimpanzees are *vulnerable* in this situation. To insist

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[194] Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, p. 31.

[195] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 193.

on starting from only the broadest shared description of how things stand discounts such epistemic achievements.

This means, however, that such a naturalist must be prepared to say that the non-virtuous are, in such-and-such circumstances, in *no position* to see what there is reason to do. Indeed, they may be prepared to say "...that this man misconceives his interests and, indeed, that his doing so is a main symptom of what is wrong with him."[196] Williams would avoid saying that a person's real interest lay somewhere other than in what he thinks, so is suspicious of the claim that this man misconceives his interest. He takes Aristotle's naturalism and teleology to provide a grounds for saying the man's real interests lies elsewhere, through appeals to what human by nature need, but he doubts its adequacy as response, sharing McDowell's views about our rational capacity to 'step back' and examine first-natural impulses.

I share some of Williams' concerns with real interests, mainly in contexts where real interest seemingly justifies modifying a person's behavior in a way that bypasses her ability to make up her own mind. On the other hand, saying she misconceives her interests need not commit us to saying her interests are not what she thinks they are, allowing that people have interests they do not fully understand.[197] Jen has an interest in her health, thinks of health as in her interests, and acts for the sake of health on many occasions—now in cooking vegetable curry, later in brushing her teeth, and tomorrow in hiking. But her understanding of health can

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[196] Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, p. 40.

[197] There is much more to be said about the notion of an interest than space here permits. In representing a person's interests here, I choose to represent them as *infinite ends*, where the same end can be acted for on multiple occasions and, in achieving, is never fully exhausted. In contrast, one could take a person's interests to be given by *finite ends*, such as the desire for that cake, which exhausts itself as explanation after satisfaction. I do so in part because its clearer with infinite ends that a person might have an interest in such an end, yet fail to see that the end is applicable to her situation, and so "misconceive" what is in her interest. See Chapter 2 of Sebastian Rödl's *Self-Consciousness* for the distinction between infinite and finite ends, and a discussion of their significance, pp. 34-43.

fail her, so her interest in health can bear on the situation without her realizing it—her interest in health warrants wearing a coat on such a day, but she does not ascertain this. She both rightly thinks of health as in her interest and misconceives her interest. Likewise, a person might honestly say that he has an interest in justice, yet understand justice in a way leaving him naively callous to the injustices surrounding him.

Neither Williams' concerns about real interests nor his objection to the lack of a deliberative route from the non-virtuous' perspective to the virtuous' decidingly show what is so objectionable about arguments that fall short of Plato's ideals. Conversely, there are some reasons for the naturalist to reject what motivates a common starting point. The naturalist ought not to concede that an account of why such-and-such behavior is appropriate here is the stronger for starting from a set of presumptions shared by both virtuous and non-virtuous. For the sort of shared understanding thought to free us from our prejudices—and so provide a more 'objective' foundation—can wrongly rob us from counting as genuine reasons those features only available through awarenesses that are achievements of understanding. Contrary to some conceptions of good argumentation and reasoning, ethical reflection is not necessarily better for starting from a common foundation. The question becomes whether an alternative exists.

These ideas take us back to what is appealing about McDowell's conceptions of reason and human nature. People often resist the introduction of the notion of "nature" into moral and political philosophy on the grounds that it is typically invoked for rather conservative reasons— we need incentives to work hard because human beings are essentially competitive; "boys will be boys"; euthanasia, genetic engineering, homosexuality, etc., are unnatural, and so on. Such bad company casts a shadow over attempts to understand what human nature can tell us about norms

of conduct, and it's not hard to see why this might make one suspicious of the whole endeavor—even to the extent of abandoning the idea of a fixed human nature.

The other side of this, as I hope now to have brought out, is that participation in an outlook can make available to one agent reasons for acting not immediately available to another. As McDowell writes: "Any second nature of the relevant kind, not just virtue, will seem to its possessor to open his eyes to reasons for acting. What is distinctive about virtue, in the Aristotelian view, is that the reasons a virtuous person takes himself to discern really are reasons; a virtuous person gets this kind of thing right."[198] Yet, as Williams drew our attention to, the virtuous person's perspective is a product of a certain upbringing and habituation. She is hardly in a position to convey that perspective *by argument* to someone of a different upbringing. Whence the virtuous' confidence then that hers are the eyes open to reasons for acting? What is there to say about her upbringing's rational credentials?

Hence, appeals to a generic subject "human" can appear suspiciously dogmatic, and appeals to particular features not immediately discernible to all (the action's "nobility") can appear suspiciously prejudiced, a judgment merely the artifact of one's upbringing or culture not revealing of what is the case. The interesting thing about McDowell's position is that he neither abandons the notion of human nature, nor merely uncritically accepts the virtuous' conception of how things stand.

Instead, he recognizes that what our nature asks of us is always, or at least often, an open question—indeed, it is in our *nature* as self-conscious beings to seek to ask how we *should* live and not simply acquiesce in conceptions of how it is natural for us to live. *Everything,* including

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[198] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 189.

the virtuous' standpoint, is open to questioning with the onset of reason; but *everywhere* the

paradigm of critical reflection is *Neurathian* and not of the form, made prevalent by

enlightenment philosophers, of foundationalist reconstruction. As McDowell explains in a key

passage:

> But, without abandoning a fundamentally Aristotelian outlook, we can let the question arise whether the space of reasons really is laid out as it seems to be from the viewpoint of a particular shaping of practical logos. What we must insist is that there is no addressing the question in a way that holds that apparent layout in suspense, and aims to reconstruct its correctness from a vantage-point outside the way of thinking one acquired in ethical upbringing. This allows for radical ethical reflection, as Aristotle himself seems not to. But, like any reflection about the credentials of a seeming aspect of logos, this reflection must be Neurathian; we cannot escape the burdens of reflective thought—the obligation to weigh, by the best lights we have, the credentials of considerations purporting to appeal to reason—by the fantasy of having some suitable first-natural facts force themselves on us in a way that would bypass the need for thought.[199]

The significance of McDowell's emphasis that critical reflection is ultimately Neurathian is both

that *no* material is irreplaceable—immune to criticism and lacking the need for justification—

and that *all* materials are considered in the reconstruction. The naturalist's appeals to natures and

the description of how things stand from the virtuous person's outlook are equally subjects of

critical reflection, reflection made no less critical for using in its assessment concepts that are

themselves part of a specific cultural inheritance.[200] "Good standing is, everywhere, for logos to

pronounce on, using whatever standards can lay hands on; nothing but bad metaphysics suggests

that the standards in ethics must be somehow constructed out of facts of disenchanted nature".[201]

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[199] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism" p. 189.

[200] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 194.

[201] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 187.

The Aristotelian naturalist's appeal to natures appears to offer facts of a disenchanted nature suitable for providing a foundation for ethics, when ethics needs no such foundation. That is the concern. Yet offering an account of goodness in terms of kinds does not commit us to a one-dimensional view of how reference to a kind settles questions about how it is good for its members to behave. What our nature asks of us is an open question, and we can resist foundationalist impulses—rejecting that particular role for "first-natural facts"—while still holding that first natural facts are part of what critical reflection takes account of.[202]

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[202] McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism", p. 190.

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