CANADIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
2019, VOL. 49, NO. 4, 564–579
https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Practical reasoning and practical knowledge

Rowland Stout

School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

ABSTRACT

The judgement that provides the content of intention and coincides with the conclusion of practical reasoning is a normative judgement about what to do, and not, as Anscombe and McDowell argue, a factual judgement about what one is doing. Treating the conclusion of practical reasoning as expressing a recommendation rather than a verdict undermines McDowell's argument; the special nature of practical reasoning does not preclude its conclusions being normative. Anscombe's and McDowell's claim that practical self-knowledge is productive of action may be accommodated by identifying the content of practical knowledge not with the conclusion but with a premise of practical reasoning – a kind of practical reasoning that occurs within rather than before action.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 7 July 2017; Accepted 8 April 2018

KEYWORDS Practical reasoning; practical knowledge; intention in action; Anscombe; McDowell

1. Introduction

While the nature of practical reasoning is highly contested in contemporary philosophy of action, I think we can safely start by assuming that it is a process of coming to think certain things – a process that is sensitive in some way to practical reasons.[1] Thoughts deriving from practical reasoning are described as 'judgements' in much of this literature, and although I will follow this usage here, I do not mean to suggest that such thoughts must be conscious mental acts. Whenever you do anything on purpose, like writing your name, for example, your thought about what you are up to results from practical reasoning. This does not mean that such a judgement must be generated by conscious deliberation, but only that it is always the result of some process that is sensitive to reasons.

The central claim of this paper is that practical reasoning leads to *normative* judgements about what to do. This contradicts a thesis that John McDowell (2010) has defended, taking his cue from Elizabeth Anscombe (1957)–that

CONTACT Rowland Stout rowland.stout@ucd.i.e.

© 2018 Canadian Journal of Philosophy

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

practical reasoning leads to *factual* judgements about what one is actually doing. I start by attacking an argument in McDowell, that he finds in Anscombe, that there is a special character of practical reasoning that can only be explained by seeing it as leading to factual judgements. In responding to this argument I describe what is special about practical reasoning (agreeing in large part with McDowell about this) and point out that this does not commit one to treat the conclusions of such reasoning as merely factual judgements about what one is doing.

There is a second – more challenging – argument in both Anscombe and McDowell, which is that the special character of practical *self-knowledge* (knowledge of what one is doing) can only be explained by thinking of practical reasoning as leading to factual judgements about what one is doing rather than normative judgements about what is the thing to be doing.[2] McDowell tries to accommodate Anscombe's (1957, 87) insight that practical self-knowledge, rather than being responsive to what one is doing, may be *productive* of it. This idea is hard to accept for many philosophers of action, yet I argue in Section 3 that not only is McDowell right to accommodate it, but also it may be accommodated very nicely within the account of intention that McDowell rejects. I argue that what explains the special character of practical knowledge is that when one is in the course of acting factual judgements about what one is doing may be *premises* in one's practical reasoning. This is not something that Anscombe and McDowell should have any problem with. But in that case, they should not argue that the special character of practical knowledge is explained by facts about what one is doing figuring as *conclusions* of practical reasoning.

One of McDowell's targets is Donald Davidson, who claims that an intention to act in a certain way is 'an all-out, unconditional judgement that the action is desirable' (Davidson 1980, 99). Davidson, in common with Anscombe and McDowell, takes intention to be directly derived from practical reasoning. So he takes practical reasoning to lead to judgements about what is desirable – i.e. normative judgements. My own task in this paper is to defend a slightly modified version of Davidson's conception of the conclusion of practical reasoning. But one way to challenge all three of them would be to deny that practical reasoning leads all the way through to your intending to act. One might argue that after you have finished thinking about what to do there is still something else that is needed before you get going and do it; you still need to form the intention that corresponds with your judgement, and this is the exercise of a different faculty from the faculty of practical intellect that is exercised in practical reasoning – we might call it the faculty of the non-rational will. This is to think of action as a two-stage process. In the first stage practical reasoning is supposed to determine judgements about what to do or what is best to do. In the second stage these judgements are transformed into intentions, which are then exercised in intentional action. In this model practical intellect – the faculty responsible for the first stage - is separated from the non-rational will – the faculty responsible for

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the second stage. Weakness of will is straightforwardly understood as a failure in the second stage of action – a failure to transform what is provided by reason into an intention to act.

The issue between these two models – the Davidsonian/Anscombian model in which practical reasoning leads to judgements that are thereby motivating and the alternative model that requires a further stage between the conclusions of practical reasoning and intention – is sometimes described as the issue of motivational *internalism*. I am going to assume that some version of motivational internalism is right and that the two-stage model of action is mistaken.[3] Constructing a proper argument for this assumption is beyond the scope of this paper. But the rough idea is that the two-stage model fails to respect the fact that in working out what to do you are determining what you *do* do. To get anything actually done, according to this model, you must rely on what seems like an arbitrary intervention by the non-rational will transforming your ideas into practice.

There are Kantian and Humean versions of motivational internalism depending on whether practical reasoning is taken to be a purely cognitive process or whether it is thought that there must be some non-rational emotional input to it. But deciding between them is not relevant here. My concern is with the issue of whether the internalist one-stage model must take the judgements that issue from practical reasoning to be *normative* or *merely factual*. Davidson takes the judgement that he identifies with an intention to be normative – the judgement that the action is desirable, while McDowell takes the conclusion of practical reasoning to be a factual judgement about what one will do or what one is doing. He describes this as a claim about the content of intention (McDowell 2010, 416), where the content of an intention is what it is appropriate for someone to say in expressing their intention.[4]

2. McDowell's conception of practical reasoning

One reason to think that practical reasoning has some special character emerges from consideration of the paradox of Buridan's ass. What if two bales of hay are equally desirable and there is absolutely no reason to pick one rather than the other? The ass cannot judge of either bale of hay that it is the most desirable thing to eat, and so she cannot intend to go for either one, and ends up starving. If a motivating judgement has to be the judgement that one course of action is better than the rest, we appear to be in danger of suffering the ass's fate. Since we never do suffer that fate, there must be something wrong with the idea that practical reasoning leads to judgements about what is the most desirable thing to do.

A solution to this may be found in McDowell's development of Anscombe's approach to practical reasoning. McDowell criticizes a conception of practical reasoning he attributes to Davidson as issuing in 'an outright *verdict* in favour of

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

acting in a certain way' (McDowell 2010, 418). He considers Anscombe's (1957, 60) example of a piece of practical rationality, which I'll simplify as follows:

> Eating tripe provides vitamin X; vitamin X is good for the health; so I'll eat some tripe.

The point of this example of a piece of practical logic is that the argument only takes into account one desirable characteristic, and yet it would be quite possible for someone to be sensitive to just this piece of logic and accordingly be eating tripe. There is no need for practical reasoning to go on to take into account all reasons and make an overall desirability judgement – something McDowell takes Davidson's position to require.[5] And this, of course, solves the problem of Buridan's ass. The ass may be perfectly rational in being moved by the consideration that the left hand bale of hay will feed her without taking into consideration the fact that the right hand bale of hay will do just as well.

So McDowell endorses Anscombe's (1957, 57–8) claim that the true character of practical reasoning is obscured by thinking of it as ordinary reasoning towards the truth of a proposition like the proposition that one ought to do such-and-such or that doing such-and-such is all-out desirable. Rather than thinking of it as ordinary reasoning towards a normative judgement, he recommends that we think of it as practical reasoning towards an ordinary factual judgement. In this case the proposition that expresses the tripe-eater's intention is, according to McDowell, the factual claim that he is eating some tripe, not any normative claim about what is the most desirable thing to do.[6]

But a factual judgement is not the only alternative to a judgement of all-out desirability. Verdicts are not the only kinds of normative judgement. We might (and should) accept McDowell's insistence that practical reasoning may pick up on just one desirable characteristic, as in his tripe argument from Anscombe, while thinking of the result of practical reasoning as something that would be expressed in a *recommendation* – the thought that such-and-such is *the thing to do*. A recommendation may be made on the basis of a single desirable characteristic – as in the tripe argument–whereas a verdict requires considering the issue in the round. If I conclude that eating tripe is the thing for me to do, I am not claiming any overall desirability for eating tripe. I may have picked that desirable characteristic for no further reason; and the conclusion may be practically reasonable just on that basis. So, whereas there is an implicit comparison involved in a verdict, no such comparison is part of a recommendation.[7]

Thinking of the conclusion of practical reasoning as something that would be expressed in a recommendation heads off another sort of objection to the claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a normative judgement. Consider the normative judgement that one has good reason to be eating tripe. I think McDowell would be right to deny that such a judgement counts as the standard conclusion of practical reasoning. As Sebastian Rödl observes: 'As a reason for doing something is something from which one may reason practically to a conclusion, this describes practical reasoning as reasoning from a reason for

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

doing something to the conclusion that there is a reason to do it.' (2007, 18) But we do not have to accept that the judgement that eating tripe is the thing to be doing is a second-order judgement about what is favoured by reasons. Making a recommendation is not the same thing as claiming that the recommendation follows from practical reasoning. That a judgement concerns the conclusion of a process of reasoning is neither necessary nor sufficient for that judgement to be normative.

If I ask myself or someone else asks me what to do or which bale of hay to pick I may say that such-and-such is the thing to do or the left hand bale is the one to pick. This is a recommendation. It is a normative claim as it creates a standard for right or wrong behaviour. It is a bit like an order inasmuch as accepting it has implications for behaviour. And like an order it is not a verdict of overall desirability. Recommendations do not need to be universalizable in Richard Hare's sense.[8] Recommending (or accepting the recommendation) in this example that the left hand bale is the one to pick does not commit me to recommend any relevantly similar action. In particular it does not commit me to recommend also that the right hand bale is the one to pick.

Hellie (2016) has argued that the conclusion of practical reasoning should not be thought of as a belief or judgement whose content is a proposition, but rather as a command whose content is an imperative. Commands motivate action; accepting a command is forming an intention. In response to the question: 'What to do?', Hellie thinks the proper sort of answer is 'Flee!', not 'The thing to do is to flee,' nor 'I am fleeing.'

But thoughts with propositional content have more logical flexibility than commands with imperatival content. In particular, present tense first-personal answers to the 'What to do?' question should have logical links with past and future tense answers as well as second- and third-personal answers. There is a link between answering the question, 'What was the thing to do then?' now and answering the question 'What is the thing to do?' then. The two answers can contradict one another. But the answer to the first question needs to be propositional not imperatival, and a command and a belief cannot contradict one another. And as Hawthorne (2002, 171) argues in a point against Gibbard's expressivism, if you are describing the thing to do for a third party, the utterance expresses nothing other than a belief. No command can capture that.

In addition, you can qualify a propositional utterance in various ways that cannot be done with the command. 'Flee, probably!' does not work very well, compared with 'Probably the thing to do is to flee.' You can step back from the practical reasoning and make claims about it. 'If I'm right that the thing to do is to flee, then you'll need to locate the way out.' Or 'I had thought that the thing to do was to flee, but changed my mind and decided to stand my ground since it meant death either way.'

The Anscombe/McDowell specification of the form of the conclusion of practical reasoning as a non-normative judgement about what you are doing suffers

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from a similar lack of logical power and flexibility.[9] The issue is how to contradict the result of someone's conclusion of practical reasoning if it is expressed by saying: 'I'll eat some tripe;' or 'I'm eating some tripe'. The factual contradictions of these factual claims are: 'You won't eat some tripe,' and 'You aren't eating some tripe.' But these claims, as ordinarily understood, do not oppose the person's practical reasoning. Likewise you cannot reflect on your past practical reasoning and criticise it by saying: 'I was wrong, I wasn't eating some tripe.'

Anscombe and McDowell might well respond that this is the whole point of what they are saying about practical reasoning. It does not take you to a normative conclusion but takes you all the way through to intention and action. Given that, the only way to contradict the result of practical reasoning is to contradict the action. Perhaps the word 'contradict' is out of place here since an action is not necessarily a dictum. So one might say that the way to challenge the conclusion of someone's practical reasoning is to 'contra-act' or counteract this conclusion. It is to stop the action getting performed. When the person concludes the tripe-eating piece of practical reasoning, one may respond by tipping the contents of their bowl of tripe into the garbage.

And just as the action which is the conclusion of a piece of practical reasoning may be expressed by the factual judgement: 'I am eating some tripe,' according to Anscombe and McDowell, so the contra-action that challenges that piece of practical reasoning may be expressed by saying: 'Oh no you're not,' as you tip the tripe into the bin.[10] Perhaps an alternative way of contra-acting the conclusion of someone's practical reasoning would be with a command: 'Don't do it, tripe's disgusting.' But what these challenges to the results of someone's practical reasoning cannot do is challenge these results from a reflective distance. There is no scope within this conception of practical reasoning to think that someone one is not presently engaged with (or oneself in the past) is wrong, since, according to this conception, the only way to attack the conclusion of someone's practical reasoning is to attack the action directly. This is by contrast with the conception of practical reasoning that I am defending, which results in this case in thinking that the thing for me to do is to eat some tripe. This can be contradicted from any reflective distance just by saying that this isn't (or wasn't) the thing for this person to be doing.

It might be thought that we do not need a way to contradict the conclusion of someone's practical reasoning from a reflective distance, as long as we have a way of challenging their *process* of reasoning. For example, we might criticise someone's reasons or just complain that they are not entitled to the inference they are making. But we sometimes just want to challenge the conclusion of practical reasoning without criticising the process. We want to be able to say: 'I don't accept your conclusion,' without saying anything about the process that led to that conclusion. And Anscombe and McDowell must accept this, since their conception of practical reasoning does not commit the reasoner to be having any thoughts about the quality of their inference. This means that the

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

criticiser too need not be having any thoughts about the quality of the other person's inference. I might think the tripe-eater is wrong as a result of a piece of practical reasoning on my part that does not engage with any aspect of the tripe-eater's reasoning except its conclusion.

On McDowell's view, the sort of practical reasoning that leads to someone acting is a different sort of thing to the sort of reasoning that leads someone physically separated from the agent to question what that person is doing or to agree with it. And it is different from the sort of reasoning the agent may have at a later time in considering what they were doing. The two sorts of reasoning do not connect directly, and it is impossible from any perspective other than that of the agent in the process of acting or of another agent directly involved to assess the reasoning of that agent – to disagree or agree with them. This seems to be a very undesirable position.

McDowell does concede that we can reason towards normative conclusions about what to do; but he insists that this is not really *practical* reasoning (2010, 421). Let us call such reasoning to normative conclusions *normative* reasoning. But normative reasoning is certainly an exercise of sensitivity to some structure of practical rationality. And that is just what practical reasoning is. Why wouldn't the two types of reasoning automatically result in corresponding conclusions assuming they are sensitive to the same considerations?

As we have seen, McDowell suggests that they may not be sensitive to the same considerations inasmuch as practical reasoning need only consider one desirable characteristic whereas normative reasoning involves an overall desirability judgement. But, as I have shown, normative recommendations (as opposed to verdicts) need not express overall desirability judgements. And even if practical reasoning takes just one reason into account it is still sensitive to the possibility of countervailing considerations. Anscombe's tripe argument might be a perfectly good argument even though it takes no account of other possible desirable characteristics. But once we add in the fact that there are less revolting ways to remain just as healthy, it becomes a bad argument. Practical rationality is non-monotonic, which means that we can turn a good argument into a bad one by adding further premises. Faced with the fact that there is a less revolting way to be just as healthy, practical reasoning must result in the agent changing their intention and going from favouring eating some tripe to favouring eating the less nauseating alternative. And this is without treating them as making an overall desirability judgement.[11]

So although practical reasoning need not take into account all considerations, it must be sensitive to countervailing considerations. And this is exactly the same as with normative reasoning. There is no reason why the difference between the two types of reasoning with respect to the different kinds of conclusion – factual vs. normative – should correspond to a difference between the ways they are sensitive to countervailing considerations. Both can take into account a single desirable characteristic. And both must be sensitive to the

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

possibility of countervailing considerations. It looks now as if there is really no distinction between practical reasoning and normative reasoning.

3. Practical reasoning in action and practical knowledge

McDowell takes his conception of practical reasoning to make sense of Anscombe's conception of practical self-knowledge (knowledge of what one is doing), which he describes as follows:[12]

> When one knows something observationally, things are as one takes them to be independently of one's taking them to be that way. One's taking them to be that way is an exercise of a receptive capacity. But if I express an intention in saying 'I am crossing the street', and I am indeed crossing the street, my utterance is a statement of knowledge that is not derived from the fact known, and in fact knowledge that is practical, in the sense G. E. M. Anscombe borrows from Aquinas. (McDowell 2010, 417)

For McDowell, insofar as a statement expresses an intention it also expresses a judgement that is the conclusion of practical reasoning. As we have seen, he takes this to be a factual judgement about what one is doing. It follows that such a statement has the same content as a statement of practical knowledge. 'I am crossing the street' is both an expression of one's intention for McDowell and a statement of one's non-observational knowledge of what one is doing. It is important not to confuse this claim with the thought that knowledge of what one is doing is just knowledge of what one is intending to do. Knowing what one is doing certainly involves knowing what one intends to do, but does not exhaust it, according to Anscombe and McDowell. That is because the practical knowledge that is under consideration here is knowledge of what one is *actually* doing, and of course one may intend to do something without actually doing it.

Somehow the claim that the judgement that concludes one's practical reasoning is the very same judgement as that which expresses one's knowledge about what one is doing is supposed to help us understand how that knowledge can be both non-observational and also practical in the special sense that Anscombe attributes to Aquinas. And this is supposed to provide some indirect support for McDowell's claim that practical reasoning issues in merely factual, rather than normative, judgements. But exactly how it is supposed to help us understand the special nature of practical knowledge is not fully explained by McDowell. I will argue here that it is not this claim, but a different, similar–looking, claim that really helps us to understand the special nature of practical knowledge.

A tempting, but false, move in defence of McDowell's argument would be to say that practical reasoning is the *source* of our practical knowledge. There are two ways this might be thought to work. One would be the idea that we know what we are doing because, by reasoning practically, we have worked out what we are doing, and we know what we have worked out. This would mean that

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

practical knowledge was *based* on observation of one's own practical reasoning. But this is explicitly ruled out by McDowell, since he denies that practical knowledge involves the exercise of a receptive faculty. That such knowledge is not observational goes deeper than its not being based on observation of one's behaviour. The idea is that it is not based on any observation, including internal observation of one's practical reasoning.

Alternatively, one might think that practical reasoning was the source of one's practical knowledge because practical reasoning towards a judgement about what one is doing justifies that judgement, and justified judgements constitute knowledge. But this does not work either, as the practical justification of my judgement that I am eating tripe – namely that tripe is a healthy food – is not the sort of justification that constitutes knowledge of the fact that I am eating tripe. It does not justify thinking the judgement is true, but only justifies me in making the judgement. That tripe is healthy is not how I know that I am eating some tripe.

Rather than thinking of practical reasoning as the source of practical knowledge, we should think of practical knowledge as *exercised* through practical reasoning, and this does seem to accord with what Anscombe and McDowell are saying.[13] This is an idea not about what leads to our practical knowledge but about what that practical knowledge leads to. I will try to show that this makes better sense of the Anscombe/Aquinas thought, but it does not give McDowell the conclusion he is after. The content of a statement of practical knowledge is not the same as the content of the *conclusion* of practical reasoning, as McDowell would have it; it is the same as the content of the *premise* of a piece of practical reasoning. And this means that the consideration of the relationship between practical reasoning and practical knowledge does not support any claim about the nature of the conclusions of practical reasoning.

The first step in explaining the special nature of practical knowledge is to observe that practical reasoning does not merely occur in advance of acting, but continues within an action. This is significant for McDowell too, as he is very careful to limit his claim to intention in action rather than prior intention. For McDowell, it is judging that I am eating tripe rather than that I will be eating tripe that is the conclusion of practical reasoning within action. Practical reasoning does not end with the judgement about eating tripe – whether it is the judgement that I am eating tripe (McDowell) or the judgement that eating tripe is the thing to do. Even when all the preparation has been done and the cooked tripe is in the bowl in front of one there are still things to be worked out with regard to the positioning of the fork and its movement as well as chewing and swallowing. Being sensitive to the judgement that eating tripe is the thing to do now (or, as McDowell would have it, that one is eating tripe), one is embarked on the process of eating some tripe. That one is embarked on this process and has reached the chewing stage of the process is a reason for chewing (as opposed to spitting it out). So the judgement that one is eating some tripe does figure

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in one's practical reasoning in the model I recommend, not as a conclusion of practical reasoning but as a premise for the further practical reasoning that determines how to eat some tripe.

(1) I'm eating tripe.
(2) I've reached the stage of that process where spearing a bit of tripe on my fork is the thing to do given that I am eating tripe.
(3) So the thing to do now is to spear a bit of tripe on my fork.

(1) I'm eating tripe.
(2) I've reached the stage of that process where chewing is the thing to do given that I am eating tripe.
(3) So the thing to do now is to chew.

In both cases the first premise is required to provide something for the second premise to refer back to. It would not be sufficient just to start with the normative premise that eating tripe is the thing to do. To work out what to do when in the course of eating tripe one needs the premise that one is actually eating the tripe. Of course, we do also reason practically from normative premises about what to do. For example I might conclude from the thought that eating tripe is the thing to do and the thought that the local butcher sells tripe that the thing to do is to go to the local butcher. But this is the sort of practical reasoning that occurs *in advance* of my eating some tripe. The practical reasoning that uses the fact that I am actually eating tripe as a premise is the sort of practical reasoning that occurs *in the course* of my eating the tripe.

I am assuming the one-stage model in which such practical reasoning results in someone intending the actions that it recommends. If I conclude that the thing for me to do now is to chew, and nothing stops me, then exercising this judgement results in my chewing. So the practical reasoning that takes off from the judgement that I am eating tripe results in my doing all the things I have to do in order to be eating tripe. And my doing all the things I have to do in order to be eating tripe amounts to my eating tripe. Practical reasoning from the fact that I am eating tripe results in my eating tripe.

How can my eating tripe result in my eating tripe? Isn't this a case of *causa sui*? Practical reasoning is a causal process which exercises one's capacity to be sensitive to reasons. The fact that I am eating tripe is one reason that this capacity is sensitive to, and when this capacity is exercised it results in my eating tripe. But this isn't really a paradox since my eating tripe is a continuing process and there is nothing paradoxical about a process sustaining itself.

Michael Thompson (2008, part 2) has also observed that a fact about what one is doing may figure as a premise in practical reasoning. In answering the question: 'Why are you breaking eggs?' you say: 'Because I'm making an omelette.' He describes an explanation of action that appeals to this sort of reason as naïve action explanation, and he argues that such explanation has a primacy

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

over explaining actions in terms of mental states. He also infers with what he calls 'a special metaphysical abandon' that 'it is among the marks of intentional action that such a thing is a 'cause of itself' in a certain sort of way.' And he develops this by suggesting that 'it is not so much by its being caught up in a rationalizing order, or in a 'space of reasons', that behaviour becomes intentional action; rather, the rationalizing order, that peculiar etiological structure, is inscribed *within* every intentional action proper.' (2008, 112)[14]

So now we should explore the idea that understanding how practical reasoning can simultaneously be based on the fact of one's ϕ-ing and result in one's ϕ-ing may help us to understand the thought that *knowing* what one is doing results in one's doing it – the thought that Anscombe attributes to Aquinas by saying that practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands.[15] Anscombe herself provides a rather disappointing gloss on this by saying that without practical knowledge 'what happens does not come under the description – execution of intentions' (1957, 88). So practical self knowledge causes one's action – e.g. one's action of intentionally painting a wall yellow – in the sense that it makes what happens correctly describable as the intentional action it is–e.g. as the action of intentionally painting a wall yellow. This does not capture any sense in which practical knowledge might be taken to be *productive* of action. Richard Moran (2004, 47 and 54), defending this way to understand Anscombe's thought, argues that we should not try to make sense of the thought that practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands by thinking of cause here as efficient cause rather than formal cause. The notion of an efficient cause is generally treated in modern philosophy in Humean terms as an event that leads to the result. And, of course if one's action is conceived of as an event – a dated particular – knowledge of its occurrence would have to follow the event and could not at the same time result in its occurrence.

But, as we have seen, we may think of action as continuing process rather than as completed event, in which case it is not automatically illegitimate to think of knowledge of action as productive of the very same action. And making use of the Aristotelian idea of a cause as a capacity or power that in its exercise or realisation includes the result may give us a better way to understand the Aquinas/Anscombe thought. In this way, we may think of knowledge as an efficient cause by thinking of knowledge as a capacity. Then practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands if the exercise of this capacity of knowing what you are doing results in your actually doing it.

What sort of capacity is knowledge? I suggest that it is the capacity to act for reasons in a way that is sensitive to the thing known – rational sensitivity to the world. This would mean that *S* knows *X* if and only if *S* is sensitive to *X* in the way S responds to reasons.[16] John Hyman has recently proposed in the same vein that knowledge is the ability to be guided by the facts, and in particular that knowledge that P is the ability to act for the reason that P.[17] Given this, knowing that I am painting a wall yellow is having the ability to act for the

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reason that I am painting a wall yellow. This ability is exercised by dipping the brush in the pot because I am painting the wall yellow, spreading paint on the surface of the wall because I am painting the wall yellow, looking to see what colour is emerging on the wall because I am painting the wall yellow, going off to buy some better paint when the wall starts looking green rather than yellow because I am painting the wall yellow, and so on. It is exercised by doing all the things I do in order to paint the wall yellow. Doing all the things I do in order to paint the wall yellow amounts to actually painting the wall yellow. So, we may say that my actually painting the wall yellow results from exercising my knowledge that I am painting the wall yellow. In this way we can see that practical knowledge – knowledge of what one is doing–is productive of actually doing it.

It is worth noting that it is exercising knowledge of my actually painting the wall yellow rather than of merely trying to paint the wall yellow or intending to paint the wall yellow that is productive of my actually painting it yellow. I go off and buy different paint when the first batch makes the wall look green because I am actually painting the wall yellow, not because I am merely trying to paint the wall yellow. If I cannot do anything about the colour and the wall turns out green, then I didn't really know I was painting the wall yellow, even if I thought I did. I just knew that I was intending or trying to paint the wall yellow, and my failed effort to paint the wall yellow was an exercise only of that knowledge. In the circumstances I might say: 'I don't know what I am doing,' even though I do know the goal of what I am trying to do. In the same sort of way, if someone gets lost even though they know what their desired destination is, we may say that they don't know where they are going. In both cases we are treating them as *incapable* in some way – lacking a capacity. If I do know what I am doing and I am exercising this capacity, then I am successfully doing it.

If we take knowledge to be rational sensitivity – the ability to act for reasons – then exercising knowledge is acting for reasons. In particular, exercising knowledge of what you are doing is doing the things you should be doing in order to be doing that. And this involves practical reasoning. It follows that if practical reasoning is productive of action then so is practical knowledge. But the practical reasoning that is productive of my eating tripe is not practical reasoning towards the conclusion concerning eating tripe; it is practical reasoning *from* the fact that I am eating tripe to conclusions concerning how to eat tripe. And this means that we do not have to treat the conclusion of practical reasoning as having the same content as practical knowledge – namely the fact that I am eating tripe. As far as this argument about practical knowledge is concerned the conclusion about eating tripe may, as I have argued, be the normative judgement that eating tripe is the thing for me to do now.

Much of what I am saying about practical knowledge sits well with what Anscombe and McDowell are saying. They too claim that practical knowledge is exercised in a process of practical reasoning and is thus productive of the very thing that it is knowledge of. It should be clear that the practical reasoning

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that is productive of action in this sense takes off from the fact that one is doing something. That this fact is a premise of one's practical reasoning explains the productivity of practical knowledge. The trouble is that McDowell insists that this fact is a *conclusion* of one's practical reasoning, and without making the argument very explicit, suggests that it is this that explains the productivity of practical knowledge.

One might wonder why the fact that one is doing what one is doing might not figure as both premise and conclusion of practical reasoning. After all, one may use the conclusion of one piece of reasoning as a premise for another piece of reasoning. Apart from the two ends of a chain of practical reasoning isn't every other link both a premise and a conclusion? I presume McDowell would be happy to concede that judgements about what one is doing, which he takes to be conclusions of practical reasoning, are at the same time premises of further practical reasoning. But my response is that factual judgements about what one is actually doing only figure on the left-hand end of a chain of practical reasoning. While conclusions of practical reasoning may become premises of further practical reasoning, it does not follow that premises of practical reasoning also have to be conclusions of other pieces of practical reasoning. My claim is that only normative judgements about what to do are conclusions of practical reasoning. It follows that only normative judgements about what to do can figure as both premise and conclusion in the middle of long chains of practical reasoning. If A is the thing to do then B is the thing to do, and given that, C is the thing to do, etc. But I claim that factual judgements about what one is actually doing only ever figure as premises and never as conclusions of practical reasoning.

I have focused on the productivity of practical knowledge not on its status as non-observational. But this too must be explained. The fact that I might think I am painting a wall yellow but really be painting it green, may make it difficult to see how knowledge that I am in fact painting it yellow can be non-observational. If my knowledge of what I am doing is that I am actually painting the wall yellow rather than merely trying to, then such knowledge automatically involves knowledge that the wall is becoming yellow. How can I know *that* without observation?

The right move here is to acknowledge that observation may be necessary for *doing* the action, but that no further observation is necessary for *knowing* that I am doing it. Anscombe goes some way in this direction by conceding that observation may figure as an 'aid' to our action (1957, 53). But I think that it is not best to think of observation as an aid to action but, rather, as part of action – internal to action. You need to be looking around and feeling the tarmac under your feet in order actually to be intentionally crossing the street, just as you need to be checking the colour that is emerging on the wall in order to be painting it yellow intentionally. What Anscombe objects to is the need for *further* observation in order to *know* that you are crossing the street or painting

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the wall yellow. And a simple way to make sense of this is to observe that you need to know what you are doing, and not merely what you are trying to do, in order just to be doing it intentionally. You need to be sensitive to whether or not you are actually succeeding with achieving your goal of crossing the street or painting the wall yellow, so that you can adjust your behaviour if necessary.[18] The very same observations that you need to make in order to be crossing the street give you knowledge that you are actually crossing the street. There is no need for further observation.

So, to conclude, the special status of practical knowledge is best explained by observing that a judgement about what one is doing – a judgement with the same content as one's practical knowledge – is a premise of practical reasoning when one is in the course of the action. This is something that McDowell and Anscombe should be able to accept. It is not best explained by thinking of this judgement as a conclusion of practical reasoning. This means that a consideration of Anscombe's idea of the special status of practical knowledge does not support McDowell's claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a judgement about what one is doing rather than a normative judgement about what to do. As I showed in the previous section, there are independent reasons to reject this claim.

Notes

1. For just one set of views on the nature of practical reasoning see the essays in Tenenbaum (2010).
2. McDowell also thinks that his approach best handles the phenomenon of weakness of the will, though I will ignore this aspect of the argument for present purposes.
3. This is notwithstanding the fact that the two-stage model is still a dominant model in the philosophy of action. A determined proponent of the model is Al Mele; see for example Mele (1992). The one-stage model may be attributed to Aristotle (*De Motu Animalium* 701a4). But the attribution is controversial, as what Aristotle says in the *Nicomachaen Ethics* has suggested to some commentators that he did not take practical reasoning to lead all the way to intention. Practical deliberation takes one to a choice about what to do (*prohairesis*) and perception (*aesthesis*) is required to implement that choice. However, even though perception takes place in the non-rational part of the soul, according to Aristotle, it clearly slots into practical reasoning, which means that both processes may be taken to involve sensitivity to reason and so be construed as practical reasoning – firstly practical reasoning in advance of acting and then practical reasoning in action. Anscombe (1957, section 33) and McDowell (1979), taking themselves to work in an Aristotelian spirit, defend a one-stage model, and, more recently, so do Tenenbaum (2007), Rödl (2010) and Marcus (2012).
4. In setting up the issue as a debate between two conceptions of the judgement that derives from practical reasoning I have ignored the possibility that practical reasoning does not result in judgements as such at all, but rather results in commands. I consider this in the next section.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

5. See McDowell (2010, 426). It is not clear to me that he is right to attribute this conception of practical reasoning to Davidson, but that is not my concern here.
6. See McDowell (2010, 420–421).
7. It would be a mistake to conclude from the consideration of Buridan's Ass that practical reasoning leads to the judgement that such-and-such is *a* thing to do rather than the judgement that it is *the* thing to do. Even if the premise of a piece of practical reasoning just picks up on a single desirable characteristic it does not follow that the conclusion is just that the action is desirable in *some* respect. If the one-stage model of action is right then practical reasoning needs to take us further than that.
8. See Hare (1963, 2.2)
9. This lack of logical flexibility applies also to Sellars' formulation using the word 'shall' as a marker for the expression of an intention. This has the added disadvantage, pointed out by McDowell, that it cannot be used to express an intention in action. See for example Brandom's treatment (1994, chapter 4), following from Sellars (1966, 110).
10. This is precisely Anscombe's move. 'The contradiction of "I"m replenishing the house water-supply' is not "You aren't", since there is a hole in the pipe', but "Oh, no, you aren't"' said by someone who thereupon sets out e.g. to make a hole in the pipe with a pick-axe.' (Anscombe 1957, 55).
11. See Harman (1989) and Brandom (2001, 84 ff.).
12. Anscombe (1957, 49 ff). From now on I will follow the convention of describing this sort of knowledge simply as practical knowledge, dropping the 'self'.
13. See also Rödl (2011, 212): 'practical knowledge causes its object through reasoning.'.
14. To defend this very profound idea about the nature of intentional we would need to show that for every intentional action proper the fact that you are doing it figures as a premise in further practical reasoning. This seems to be at odds with the familiar idea in the philosophy of action that there are basic actions – things you do without having to do anything else in order to do them. But I think that Thompson's strong claim may be defended by distinguishing between things that you will have been doing and those things that you might do without ever having been doing them. See Stout (2018).
15. See Anscombe (1957, 87) and Aquinas (1947 edition, first part of second part, q. 3, a. 5, objection 1).
16. I argue for such a conception in Stout (2006, chapter 9).
17. Hyman (2015,162 ff.).
18. Note also that if your beliefs about what you were doing were only accidentally true and thus not amounting to knowledge, then you would not be acting intentionally. The person unknowingly in a virtual reality suit whose feet get them across the actual street based on accidentally true beliefs that came fortuitously from the virtual reality suit rather than the street did not intentionally cross the street.

Notes on contributor

Rowland Stout is a professor of Philosophy at the School of Philosophy, University College Dublin (UCD). His recent work in the philosophy of mind and action includes consideration of the metaphysics of processes, normativity, intention and the nature of emotions.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press

References

Anscombe, G. E. M. 1957. *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Aquinas, T. 1947. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York, NY: Benziger Bros.

Brandom, R. 1994. *Making It Explicit*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Brandom, R. 2001. *Articulating Reasons*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Davidson, D. 1980. *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hare, R. 1963. *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harman, G. 1989. *Change in View*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Hawthorne, J. 2002. "Practical Realism?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 64 (1): 169–178.

Hellie, B. 2016. "Obligation and Aspect." *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 59 (4): 398–449.

Hyman, J. 2015. *Action, Knowledge and Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McDowell, J. 1979. "Virtue and Reason." *Monist* 62: 331–350.

McDowell, J. 2010. "What is the Content of an Intention in Action." *Ratio* 23: 415–432.

Marcus, E. 2012. *Rational Causation*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Mele, A. 1992. *Springs of Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moran, R. 2004. "Anscombe on 'Practical Knowledge'." In *Agency and Action*, edited by John Hyman and Helen Steward, 43–68. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rödl, S. 2007. *Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Rödl, S. 2010. "The Form of the Will." In *Desire, Practical Reason and the Good*, edited by Sergio Tenenbaum, 138–160. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rödl, S. 2011. "Two Forms of Practical Knowledge and Their Unity." In *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*, edited by Anton Ford, et al., 211–241. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sellars, W. 1966. "Thought and Action." In *Freedom and Determinism*, edited by Keith Lehrer, 105–139. New York, NY: Random House.

Stout, R. 2006. *The Inner Life of a Rational Agent*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Stout, R. 2018. "Ballistic Actions." In *Process, Action and Experience*, edited by Rowland Stout, 210–228. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tenenbaum, S. 2007. "The Conclusion of Practical Reason." In *Moral Psychology*, edited by S. Tenenbaum, 323–343. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Tenenbaum, S., ed. 2010. *Desire, Practical Reason and the Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, M. 2008. *Life and Action*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1463839 Published online by Cambridge University Press