

Intellectual Isolation

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Abstract: Intellectualism is the widespread view that practical reason is a species of theoretical reason, distinguished from others by its objects: reasons to act. I argue that if practical reason is a species of theoretical reason, practical judgments by nature have nothing to do with action. If they have nothing to do with action, I cannot act from my representation of reasons for me to act. If I cannot act from those representations, those reasons cannot exist. If they cannot exist, neither can a species of theoretical reason about them. Intellectualism is thus self-undermining.

1. THOUGHT AND ACTION

‘HOW AM I TO ACT?’ As far as we know, only we human beings can act from our answers to this question. My cat can act in ways that are good or bad for others and for himself. I, though, can act in some way *because* it is good for others and for myself. In this way, only we have a self-conscious capacity to act, a capacity for practical thought.

There are at least two essential aspects of the exercises of this capacity. First, such thought is subject to a standard of correctness. For instance, I am wrong if I think that I am to belt ‘I Put A Spell on You’ in the middle of a colloquium. I am right if I think that I am to save my Nina Simone homage for departmental karaoke night. Second, I can act from such thought or self-consciously do what I represent as what I am to do. If I think that I am to ask my partner for menu suggestions for our *soirée*, I can thereby put the question to him. Putting these aspects together, our capacity for practical thought is a capacity to self-consciously act from thought about action that is subject to a standard of correctness.

This basic idea allows for many interpretations. In this essay, I will argue that many philosophers explain the standard of correctness of practical thought in a way that is incompatible with the possibility of acting from that thought. I call the view of practical reason that they invoke in order to explain the standard of correctness of practical thought *intellectualism*.¹ As I like to put it, intellectualism is the view that practical reason is a species of theoretical reason, distinguished from others by its objects: reasons to act.² The basic idea behind

1. I take the name from (Lavin 2012). More or less explicit statements of intellectualism include (Wallace 1999, p. 44; (Raz 2011 p. 4), (Parfit 2011, vol. II p. 424), and (Scanlon 2014, 54).

2. Intellectualists might claim that there is just reason, with theoretical reason and practical reason as species distinguished by their contents. However, as I will explain, what intellectualists call ‘reason’ has the same features as

intellectualism is that to exercise reason is to represent something that exists independently of my thought about it, and that I represent it well only if I non-accidentally represent it accurately. Just as a tree and the number 7 exist independently of my thought about them, so a reason for me to act exists independently of my thought about it. To exercise reason well with respect to any of them is to non-accidentally represent them accurately.

Intellectualism is compatible with many accounts of the *constitution* of reasons to act. They might be fundamental or they might depend on other normative or non-normative stuff. They might be ‘objective’ or ‘subjective’. They might be internal or external in the senses familiar from the internal/external reasons debate. They might be ‘ontic’ or ‘non-ontic’ facts, ‘substantial’ or ‘insubstantial’ properties, ‘world-involving’ or ‘non-world-involving’ truths. Some of them might exist, or error theorists might be right. And so on for many metaethical debates. Intellectualism is compatible with all of these views because it is about the form of the representation that constitutes an exercise of practical reason and its relationship to what it represents. An argument against it thus applies more broadly than many familiar criticisms in practical philosophy because it addresses what unifies intellectualists of various stripes.

I will show that intellectualism entails a ‘compositional’ account of practical thought, by which I mean that it decomposes practical thought into the exercise of two capacities, practical reason and the will. I shall argue that if practical reason and the will are distinct capacities, I cannot act from my exercise of practical reason and that, in consequence, intellectualism is incompatible with a certain condition on the possibility of reasons to act. Without reasons, though, a species of theoretical reason about them cannot exist. Intellectualism is self-undermining.

Before I begin, let me explain my rationale for some terminological regimentation that I employ. The primary question about intellectualism is whether it and a compatible account of the will can together explain certain essential features of our capacity for practical thought. ‘Practical thought’ is my name for what most practical philosophers accept—our capacity to act self-consciously.³ Our disagreements are about how to account for it. However, different philosophers

what philosophers who distinguish theoretical reason and practical reason on formal grounds call ‘theoretical reason’. My formulation is preferable since it does not define the alternative out of existence.

3. An exception would be old-school non-cognitivists who deny that practical thought has a standard of correctness. Global normative error theorists might seem like another exception, but they do not deny that practical thought has a standard of correctness. They just deny that any (positive) practical thought meets it.

use different terminology to pick out these things. For example, where I ask whether *practical thought* consists of an *exercise of practical reason* and an *exercise of the will*, Derek Parfit says that *practical reasoning* consists of *forming a normative belief* and *making a decision*. R. Jay Wallace picks out the same distinction by speaking sometimes of a *capacity for rational agency* whose exercise consists of a *normative judgment* and an *intention* or other times of such a capacity whose exercises consists in *reaching a normative conclusion* and *choosing*. For the sake of clarity, I shall stick with my terminology. Although I will not alter quotations to fit it, I shall discuss these quotations and the background philosophical issues in these terms. Importantly, I formulate intellectualism as a view of *practical reason*, not a view of *practical reasoning*. In fact, I entirely avoid the phrase ‘practical reasoning’ when not quoting others because many philosophers use it to refer to what I call ‘practical thought’.

Let me also at the outset state my ultimate aim in this essay. I wish to clear ground for a view that says that practical reason differs from theoretical reason in *form* or *kind* rather than merely in the content of its representations. I find this kind of *practical cognitivism*, as we might call it, in Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Elizabeth Anscombe, and Christine Korsgaard, among others, though interpretations vary.⁴ Regardless of who holds the view, though, these ideas are difficult to state, let alone defend, within the theoretical confines of contemporary philosophy. Just think about how ‘theoretical cognition’ and ‘theoretical thought’ sound like pleonasms. Think about what that implies about how we hear ‘practical cognition’ and ‘practical thought’. My goal is to expose intellectualism so that we may start developing an alternative.

2. Practical reason and the will

We can understand the explanatory structure and burdens of intellectualism only if we understand why intellectualists go in for it. To that end, I start with some issues that intellectualists take to show that practical reason and the will are distinct capacities.

Like many intellectualists, Wallace claims that Buridan cases and cases of akrasia show that practical reason and the will are distinct capacities even though often there ‘is no phenomenological gap between ... normative judgment ... and ... intention’ (Wallace 2001, p. 97).

4. I take the name from (Engstrom 2009). In light of it, we can call intellectualists ‘theoretical cognitivists’. These labels have the virtue of not assuming that all cognition is theoretical cognition and all objects of reason are objects of theoretical reason.

Say I come to two grassy roads wanting wear that diverge in a yellow wood. They lead to the same place, are equally long, are equally covered in leaves that no step has trodden black, and all the rest of it. Everything against or in favor of taking one route is against or in favor of taking the other. Although I can represent a reason to take either road, then, I cannot represent a reason to take one over the other. I therefore cannot form a judgment that I should take one over the other. If all there is to human agency is the ability to make judgments about reasons to act, I will never act. Yet unlike that donkey, I in fact can act, and hence there is more to our agency than the ability to make judgments about reasons to act or about what I should do. According to intellectualists, this something more is our will. I thus can self-consciously act even in Buridan cases because I possess a will in addition to possessing practical reason.

Separating practical reason and the will also seems to explain the possibility of akrasia. Say I judge that I should work on my paper but instead hit the dance floor. How is this conflict possible? Intellectualists think that the answer falls out of a fuller description of the case. Properly speaking, I judge that I should do something but decide to do something else. Because I act from decision, not judgment, I act as I decide, and akrasia is possible.

After reflecting on these kinds of cases, Wallace concludes that we

have the capacity for a sophisticated kind of rational agency, insofar as [we] can reach independent normative conclusions about what [we] have reason to do, and then choose in accordance with such normative conclusions. ... Once we have this power, however, it can be put to use in ways that are at odds with our own practical judgments. (ibid., p. 92)

On the same basis, Parfit says that when ‘we conclude that we ought to do something, we are not deciding to do this thing, but coming to have a normative belief. ... We always have two questions: Q1: What ought I to do?; Q2: What shall I do?’ (Parfit 2011, vol. II p. 386). Intellectualists thus claim that practical thought ‘involves making up my mind twice. Making up my mind about what is the best thing to do is a judgment Making up my mind about what to do is forming an intention’ (Watson 2003, p. 128).

While this type of argument might make intellectualism seem like common sense, to separate practical reason and the will is to decompose practical thought. Such decomposition is

not innocuous, though, but is instead a metaphysical position that takes on explanatory burdens and challenges that it must meet. One way to understand these burdens and challenges is think about what intellectualists mean to deny. Consider, for example, Joseph Raz's claim that 'practical reasoning is ... but reasoning about a particular subject matter ... [;] there is no distinctive form of reasoning called practical reasoning' (Raz 2011, p. 139). He here contrasts intellectualism with a view that distinguishes practical and theoretical reason 'formally'. Let me introduce that contrasting view in order to explain the explanatory burdens of intellectualism at the end of this section.

To deny intellectualism, at least in the way that interests me, is to deny this separation and instead say that 'the will is nothing other than practical reason' (Kant 1785, 4:412). This statement is too stark, though, because animals who lack practical reason have wills and act. Better said, the alternative is that practical reason is our kind of will. It is the self-conscious will. Practical reason and the will are thus the same capacity *in us* even though other animals have other kinds of wills.

One way to get into this alternative to intellectualism is to consider Anscombe's distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge, where they are the perfect exercises of theoretical and practical reason that reveal the natures of the capacities. On this way of thinking, theoretical and practical reason differ in kind because practical reason has the formal features of the will. Let me explain in detail. Theoretical reason first, practical reason after.

When I exercise theoretical reason, I represent objects, facts, or what have you that do not depend on that representation. I represent them as independent of that representation. A tree, say, is what it is regardless of my thought about it. It is an 'independent existence', and this fact about the way that I relate to what I represent also characterizes my representation of it. It characterizes the way that I represent the object, fact, or what have you, and I can articulate it by reflecting on the exercise. Theoretical reason is a capacity to represent independent existences as such. I thereby must represent the world as it is, non-accidentally representing an independent existence accurately, in order to exercise theoretical reason well. Because what I represent is an independent existence, I represent it *accurately* when I represent it as it is independent of my representation of it. I *non-accidentally* represent it accurately when I stand in a proper relationship to it like, say, a perceptual or testimonial relationship. The basic question of

theoretical reason is then, generally, ‘What is the case?’⁵ To answer it is to have ‘speculative knowledge’ that ‘is derived from the objects known’ (Anscombe 1957, §48).⁶

Practical reason differs from theoretical reason in precisely these respects. When I exercise it, I represent something that depends on my representation of it. I represent it as depending on that representation. For example, I represent cooking with my partner in order to spend time with him, and I thereby spend time with him by cooking with him. What I represent—the action—by nature depends on my representation of it in that way. That is why I am not acting if I sleepwalk through similar bodily movements. What I represent is a ‘dependent existence’, and this aspect of my relationship to it characterizes my representation of it. It characterizes the way that I represent what I represent, and I can articulate it by reflecting on the exercise. Unlike in a theoretical representation, though, this fact is also part of the content of a practical representation. That content consists of a dependent existence, which is something that depends on that very representation of it. I thereby must realize what I represent, non-accidentally representing a dependent existence accurately, in order to exercise practical reason well. I *non-accidentally* represent it when I act in some way because doing so realizes this representation. I non-accidentally represent it *accurately* when the true description of my action as an intentional action is a determinate version of the content of my representation. The basic question of practical reason is then, generally, ‘How am I to act?’ To answer it is to have ‘practical knowledge’ that is ‘the cause of what it understands’ or ‘of objects that derive from this knowledge’ (ibid.).⁷

5. ‘Whether *P?*’ ‘Whence *P?*’, ‘Whither *P?*’, ‘In what way *P?*’, and others pick out more determinate forms of questions about what is the case.

6. The role of the first person in these accounts of theoretical and practical reason is important. Although theoretical knowledge is knowledge of something as independent of *my* representation of it, it is not thereby knowledge of something as independent of *any* representation of it. If George Berkeley is right, every object depends on God’s representation of it. Still, he need not reject my account of theoretical and practical reason. He need only claim that God’s (primary) relationship to an object is not theoretical, which is what the devout should say about a being who is in no way passive or receptive. More terrestrially, although Kant thinks that all possible objects of theoretical knowledge for human beings in some sense depend on the sensible and intellectual aspects of our capacity to know them, he does not think that a tree depends on *my* theoretical representation of it. After all, you can know the same tree as independent of my representation of it or, for that matter, of your representation of it. Finally, I can have theoretical knowledge of your action or, for that matter, my action. Although the action is independent of that theoretical representation of it, it is not thereby independent of the practical representation of the agent in question.

7. ‘What is the case?’ and ‘How am I to act?’ are the *basic* questions of theoretical and practical reason, not the *only* questions that I can address in exercises of these capacities. I can ask not only ‘What is the case?’ but ‘What would have been the case?’ I can ask not only ‘How am I to act?’ but also ‘How would I have to act?’ Still, an account of these capacities focuses on the basic questions in order to understand their functions. Such an account must not stick to what the factual and counterfactual, actual and hypothetical, share because then practical reason lacks an intrinsic

As we might put the basic idea, a theoretical representation *describes* what it represents while a practical representation *produces* what it represents.⁸ A theoretical representation answers to what it represents in the sense that the tree, say, is as it is and my job is to represent it as such. What I represent in a practical representation answers to that representation in the sense that my decision to walk to the store, say, determines whether my subsequent movements are proper partial realizations of that representation. My job in a theoretical representation is thus to represent something that is actual, my job in a practical representation to make actual something that I represent. If this difference between representations maps onto the difference between theoretical and practical reason, practical reason is our kind of will. It is our capacity to act.

Since intellectualists think that practical reason is not the will, they need a different account of it. The arguments from akrasia and Buridan cases do not on their own provide that account since to say that practical reason *is not* the will is not to say what it *is*. Still, intellectualism in some sense flows out of them. Since intellectualists think that the will accounts for how we act from practical thought, they do not think that practical reason is itself tied to action. They thus must think that practical reason has some other function in our agency, presumably one that explains the standard of correctness of practical thought. Think about how it can do that and it might seem like there must be objects to which my judgment answers.

Here is how these types of thoughts can lead to intellectualism. Think back to the claim that my job in a practical representation is to make actual an object that I represent. Because the will has this function, I must be able to do what I decide to do, which conditions possible objects of my decision.⁹ This restriction establishes a standard of correctness for practical thought—I err

relationship to acting and theoretical reason lacks such a relationship to knowing the world. So, at any rate, I would argue.

8. This way of talking resembles the view that differentiates theoretical and practical reason in terms of propositional attitudes with different directions of fit. In fact, many philosophers think that Anscombe's discussion of the different ways that a list can relate to the items in a shopping cart is the source of the direction-of-fit view (Anscombe 1957, §32). Although I think that this reading reveals more about contemporary philosophical preconceptions than it does about her thought, I cannot defend her honor here. I can, though, briefly explain the difference between the direction of fit view and what I have here said.

According to the direction-of-fit view, a theoretical representation consists of a mental state with mind-to-world direction of fit like a belief, and a practical representation consists of a mental state with world-to-mind direction of fit like a desire. The view says that these states share a single kind of relationship to an object, though the direction of the relationship flips. As I formulate things above, though, a theoretical representation instead lacks a relationship to what it represents that a practical representation possesses with respect to what it represents. To lack a relationship is not to possess it 'the other way around'. I hope to show in future work that this subtle difference is philosophically significant.

9. I show in the next section that intellectualists accept this condition. I argue in other work that it does not imply an

if I decide to do something impossible. It does not seem to establish everything proper to the complete standard of correctness for practical thought, though, since vice does not become virtue if I can pull it off. Whence this robust standard of correctness?

There are at least three ways to go here. You might deny that practical thought has a robust standard of correctness. You might instead say that it has such a standard in virtue of its form, as do practical cognitivists. (This view must show that the idea of making actual something that I represent precludes more than it at first seems to rule out). Or you might go intellectualist and separate practical thought into components. One component, the decision, follows the model of a practical representation, and what it represents answers to it. The other, the judgment, follows the model of a theoretical representation and answers to what it represents. Practical thought has a robust standard of correctness because one component has such a standard in the way that any theoretical representation does. Yet I can act from it because of its other component.

Intellectualists thus take cases of *akrasia* and *buridan* cases to show that practical reason is not the will. They then exploit this separation of these capacities in order to explain how practical thought can have a standard of correctness. Intellectualism thereby seems to account for many of the aspects of our practical life in one fell swoop.

3. To act from judgment

Intellectualists think that to act from practical thought is to exercise one capacity, the will, in a way that is informed by the exercise of another capacity, practical reason. Call the exercise of the will ‘decision’ and the exercise of practical reason ‘judgment’. In this section, I shall argue that intellectualists need to allow that I can act ‘from’ judgment in a particular sense of ‘from’ because such an ability is a condition on the possibility of reasons for me to act. I will later argue that they cannot meet this explanatory burden—for the exercise of practical reason to inform the will is not enough for me to act from judgment.

Consider Kant’s ‘favored creature’, a kind of being whose members instinctively behave in ways that make them happy. Kant claims that

if reason should have been given ... to this favored creature, it must have served them

untoward version of internalism or even a version of internalism than any externalist rejects.

only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of their nature ... but not to submit their faculty of desire to that weak and deceptive guidance [N]ature would have taken care that reason should not break forth into *practical use*. (Kant [1785] 4:395)¹⁰

These beings can judge that something would make them happy, but they cannot decide and act on the basis of this thought. They instead act from a distinct non-self-conscious capacity—their kind of will. Their judgments are just theoretical judgments with normative content. They cannot act from judgment in the way that distinguishes rational agents like us from the other animals.¹¹ They thus lack practical reason.

We differ from such favored creatures in that the relationship between our practical thought and action is at once normative and metaphysical. I exercise my capacity to act well only when I act from practical thought. I fail to exercise it well if I think that I am to ϕ but do not or if I ϕ without thinking that I am to ϕ . In order to exercise it well, though, I must do more than act in a way that is accurately described by the words in the content of my practical thought. I must act *from* my practical thought, not merely *in accord with* it. After all, favored creatures act in ways that accord with their judgments, and they lack practical reason.

Although the details of the distinction between acting from something and merely acting in accord with it are difficult to articulate, this distinction is familiar. Kant uses it in order to distinguish acting from duty and merely acting in accord with it. Someone who saves me in order to achieve praise acts differently from someone who saves me because I need help. Only the second acts *from* duty. Wittgenstein likewise uses this distinction in order to distinguish following a rule and merely acting in accord with one. Someone who opens with D4 as part of a Colle opening acts differently from someone unfamiliar with chess who moves the pieces the same way because that arrangement is lovely. Only the first *follows* the rules of chess. And this distinction in fact structures much action theory. Just think about how ‘the same thing’ can happen when I act and when something happens to me. I might raise my hand in order to get your attention. I also might have a mind to get your attention, my hand might rise at the same speed to the same spot because of a spasm, and you might attend to me in response to my hand

10. In order to avoid pronoun ambiguity, I replace ‘it’ with ‘them’ and ‘their’ in this translation when the pronoun refers to the being and leave ‘it’ when the pronoun refers to reason.

11. See the passages cited in the first footnote for some intellectualist invocations of these ideas.

rising. I act only in the first case because only then does my movement ‘come from’ my practical thought even though both movements accord with it.¹² And, trivially, I act well only when I act.

Intellectualists do not disagree. Although they think that the will explains the way that I act, they do not think that practical reason has *nothing* to do with action. Judging and deciding jointly constitute practical thought. In order to act well, I must judge correctly and move from judging to deciding to acting. I must act *from* what explains the standard of correctness of practical thought *through* what explains how I can act from practical thought—*from* the exercise of practical reason *through* the exercise of the will.

Intellectualism must work this way because a reason for me to act exists only if I can act from my representation of it. In order to see this point, consider T.M. Scanlon’s claim that “‘is a reason for’” is a four-place relation, $R(p, x, c, a)$, ... that holds just in case p is a reason for a person x in situation c to do or hold a ’ (Scanlon 2014, p. 31). For example, your illness (p) is a reason for me, nurse JDF (x), on my shift in the hospital (c), to give you medicine (a). There I am, person x , a relatum in the ‘is a reason for’ relation that I grasp in practical judgment. And I appear as a relatum in this relation under the guise of my agency. To see why, pretend I were a penguin or a doorknob. No such reason would exist. Only a rational agent, then, can fill the ‘ x ’ place in this ‘is a reason for’ relation, and I can fill it because I am a human being. The rational agent in question, though, partly determines which reasons exist. That is why I cannot have a reason to fly to Jupiter without mechanical aid even if a differently constituted rational agent could. My agential capacities thus condition possible reasons for me to act. It is under the guise of them, as it were, that I feature as a relatum in an instantiation of the ‘is a reason for’ relation.¹³ Only then do reasons link up with my ability to act from my cognition of them in a way that explains why they are reason for *me* to *act*.

Since intellectualists treat practical reason as a species of theoretical reason that represents reasons to act, they must show that I can act from judgment. After all, since the will accounts for how we act from practical thought, action can realize a decision. As characterized, though, the will has nothing to do with reasons. Any link between the will and reasons for me to

12. Davidson and his devotees treat ‘come from’ as an efficient causal relationship that links metaphysically independent parts, one mental and one not, of an accidental whole. Anscombe and her acolytes treat it as a formal causal relationship that shows that a material process can be per se part of an exercise of a rational capacity.

13. Dividing up views according to whether they think that reasons for me to act are mind-dependent is thus unhelpful. The issue is not *whether* reasons for me to act depend on my mind but *how* they depend on it.

act must be mediated by practical reason. Otherwise, there would be no independent role for practical reason to play in an account of practical thought. It would be our will, and intellectualism would be false. Likewise, practical reason, as characterized, has nothing to do with action. Any link between practical reason and action must be mediated by the will. Otherwise, there would be no independent role for the will to play in an account of practical thought. Practical reason would be our kind of will, and intellectualism would be false. If intellectualism is true, then, I must be able to act from my judgment through my decision. Only then can there be reasons to act, and only then can I possess a species of theoretical reason distinguished from others because its exercises are about reasons to act.

4. The role of reasons

The intellectualist view of practical reason is compatible with many views of the will. Problems with a particular compositional account might then be due to its view of the will rather than to the view of practical reason. I shall argue, though, that the view of practical reason itself is incompatible with the possibility of acting from judgment. I start in this section with a simple compositional account and argue that it cannot show that I can act from judgment. In the next section, I will consider responses that use more sophisticated views of the will to try to solve the problem, one of which may seem to be the fix. In §6, though, I shall argue that this response addresses only the letter of my criticism, not its spirit, and I will show that the view of practical reason is the source of the problem.

One way to think about whether on the intellectualist view I can act from judgment is to think about whether intellectualists can show that akrasia is a kind of failure in the exercise of rational agency. If they cannot, then according to intellectualism I am not in error when I judge that I should act one way but decide to act another way. After all, when I am akratic, my judgment that I should ϕ might be non-accidentally accurate. Likewise, when I am akratic, I might successfully act from my decision to ψ . If there is nothing else to say about the relationship between these capacities and their exercises, my decision does not answer to my judgment, and akrasia is not a kind of failure. Moreover, I act from my decision, not from my judgment. My action merely accords or discords with judgment. There then cannot be reasons for me to act.

No intellectualist thinks that the relationship between judgment and decision does not partly determine whether I decide well. They must explain why this claim is true and show that it allows me to act from judgment. Might they invoke a reason in order to explain why?¹⁴ If I act well only if I act from my judgment, maybe I base my decision on my judgment because I have reason to decide in that way. This response treats the question about the relationship between practical reason and the will as a normative question, not a metaphysical question. It is as if I ask ‘Should I base my decision on my judgment?’, and the answer is ‘Yes, because I have reason to decide in that way’.

This response might seem obvious. After all, what determines whether a practical judgment is correct is a reason for me to act. If to act is to realize the object of a decision, a reason for me to act is a reason for me to realize the object of a particular decision. I can do that only if I make that decision. To represent such a reason and still ask about how to decide might then seem to be asking for ‘a reason to ... do ... what [I judge that I have] reason to ... do’ (Parfit 2011, vol. II p. 420). This is close to a ‘nonsensical’ question that ‘ask[s] for a reason’ to do as my reasons say (Scanlon 2014, p. 62).

A reason, though, cannot play this explanatory role. According to intellectualism, to recognize a reason is to represent it in an exercise of practical reason. It thus determines whether a particular practical judgment is correct. In this way, there cannot be *reasons to decide* in the sense of reasons that are the grounds for my decision. If there were, the will would play both its role in rational agency and the role of practical reason as intellectualists think of it. In other words, practical reason would be our kind of will. The separation of practical reason and the will thus precludes the possibility of reasons to decide. However, if nothing shows that I decide well only if I base my decision on my judgment, invoking a reason that determines that a particular practical judgment is correct does not help. In order for this reason to matter for my decision, my will must answer to the judgment that represents that reason. My will only answers to that judgment, though, if it answers to practical reason in general. Since my will as yet answers to nothing, this reason and my judgment about it are irrelevant to my decision.

Try this analogy. Say you tell me to ϕ , I ask why I should listen to you, and you reply

14. Or, what might be the same thing, a brute normative fact that I should decide to act as I judge that I should act. Depending on how you interpret it, this response is materially equivalent to either the response currently under discussion or the view in the next section about the principle of the will.

‘you should do as I tell you’, not as a joke or a threat but as an explanation of your authority over me. The problem is obvious. Declaring your authority does not establish it. The authority of that declaration is in question because whether you are boss is in question. That declaration has authority over me only if you in general have authority over me. In the same way, intellectualists cannot show that my decision answers to my judgment by invoking a reason to decide on the basis of my judgment. The reason determines which practical judgment is correct. My judgment has authority over my decision, though, only if practical reason has authority over the will. That is what is in question. The will does not answer to practical reason if it is one capacity whose objects answer to it, practical reason is another that answers to what it represents, and they have nothing to do with each other. A reason and a judgment that my exercises of these capacities should have something to do with each other cannot solve this problem.

This fact also shows a deeper problem with invoking a reason here. Reasons for me to act exist only if I can act from judgment. Practical reason cannot explain this ability since it is a species of theoretical reason that answers to what it represents. Without an explanation, though, no reasons for me to act exist, including a reason to make and realize a particular decision. Since intellectualists separate practical reason from the will, they need to show that these capacities relate to each other such that whether I exercise my will well at least partially depends on whether my decision answers to my judgment. Otherwise, I cannot act from my judgment, and I cannot have any reasons to act. To invoke a reason in response to my criticism is thus a ‘nonsensical answer’ because it invokes a particular reason in order to explain a condition on the possibility of reasons as such.

5. The principle of the will

The separateness of capacities threatens to make acting from judgment impossible. However, this problem might seem to be a quirk of the previous compositional account of practical thought. In particular, it might seem like a consequence of an optional view of the will. Mere separateness of capacities says that practical reason answers to what it represents and the objects of the will answer to it. This stark view isolates practical reason and the will in the sense that they function independently of each other. Why not alter the views of these capacities, though, so that the function of one depends on the other? In particular, why not change the view of the will? After

all, to say that the objects of the will answer to it is not to say that the will answers to nothing. It is only to say that it does not answer to its objects.

Intellectualists might first try to get the will to answer to practical reason by letting reasons once again play the crucial explanatory role. Instead of invoking a reason to decide to act as I judge that I should act, though, what if reasons to act determine the standard of correctness of both the judgment and decision? Say that the principle of practical reason is to judge that I should do what I in fact should do and the principle of the will is to decide to do what I in fact should do. This account might seem to explain the irrationality in akrasia. If reasons to act determine both which judgment is correct and which decision is correct, I must be either judging incorrectly, deciding incorrectly, or both anytime that I judge that I should do something but decide to do something else.

How, though, does this account show that I can act from my exercise of practical reason through my exercise of the will? The reasons to act determine which decision is correct independent of any exercise of practical reason. That is why I should not decide to act as I judge that I should act when my judgment is incorrect. Hence, on this view, the problem with akrasia is not that my judgment conflicts with my decision. That conflict is just evidence that there is a problem with the judgment or decision themselves, not in relation to each other. On the same grounds, although I should decide to act as I judge that I should act when I judge correctly, it is not the case that I should decide to act in that way *because* I so judge. I should instead decide to act in that way because of the reasons regardless of how I judge. This compositional account thus implies that my exercise of practical reason is irrelevant to my exercise of the will. In fact, the will is now a capacity to recognize reasons to act and act in ways that realize its representation of those reasons. It thereby plays both the role of practical reason and the role of the will in an account of practical thought. Instead of being two capacities, this view of the will makes practical reason our kind of will and thus contradicts the intellectualist view of practical reason.

Intellectualists might try to block this argument by saying that although reasons to act determine both which judgment is correct and which decision is correct, I can appreciate reasons to act only in an exercise of practical reason. Perhaps then responding to my judgment is the only way for my decision to track the reasons to act. Yet this limitation of the will is unmotivated. After all, if I can recognize and respond to the verdict of practical reason in an exercise of my

will, why can I not recognize and respond to the reasons in that exercise? What distinguishes those reasons from my judgment? Intellectualists face a dilemma here. On the one hand, say that I can recognize and respond to reasons to act in an exercise of the will. Practical reason then has no independent role to play in an account of practical thought. On the other hand, say that I cannot recognize and respond to reasons to act in my exercise of the will. Why? I can recognize *something* in that exercise since intellectualists think that I can recognize my judgments about what I should do. Why can I recognize them but not reasons to act? It must be something special about reasons to act that distinguishes them from judgments. But what? Whatever intellectualists say here will also apply to practical reason. After all, if the principle of both capacities say that I am to exercise them in a way guided by reasons to act, their principles and thus their natures cannot explain why I can recognize reasons to act in the exercise of one but not the other. Whatever might explain why I could recognize them in an exercise of practical reason would also say that I could recognize them in an exercise of the will. Whatever might explain why I could not recognize them in an exercise of the will would also say that I could not recognize them in an exercise of practical reason. If intellectualists go with this view of the will, then, they must either say that practical reason is our kind of the will or say that human beings lack a capacity to represent reasons to act and thus that we lack practical reason.

Intellectualists should instead say that although practical reason answers to what it represents and the objects of the will answer to it, the will also answers to practical reason because its principle is ‘decide to act and act as I judge that I should act’. On this account, the ‘will is the [capacity] to choose and perform intentional actions. We exercise our will when we endorse the verdict of reason that we must perform an action’ (Raz 1998, p. 48). In other words, ‘the function of [practical] reason ... is to assess various reasons for action and arrive at conclusions about which actions there is sufficient reason to perform. The function of the will is then to determine which of these eligible actions we will in fact do’ (Scanlon 2004, p. 231-2).¹⁵ As we might put the idea, the principle of my will is to decide to do a determinate version of what I judge that I should do or, in Buridan cases, a determinate version of one of the act-types that I judge are on a par. Hence, my ‘actions ... are guided by and responsive to’ my judgments because of something that is not a ‘merely classificatory norm’ but is instead ‘grasped and

15. Scanlon is describing Raz’s view, not his own.

applied in a way that directly gives rise to action’ (Wallace 1999, p. 44). And when the will ‘fails to be guided by judgement, it fails to operate in its executive capacity—it fails to operate *as a will*’ (Watson 2003, p. 136). Akrasia is then a breakdown in our agency because in it I exercise my will in a way that conflicts with its principle.¹⁶

I shall argue in the next section that this response only addresses the letter of my criticism, not its spirit. It does not allow that I can act *from* judgment in the sense needed in order to act for a reason. It in fact reveals that focusing on views of the will distracts from the real issue. Let me first, though, explain the conclusion for which I shall eventually argue.

Consider the following claim by Kieran Setiya. He agrees that ‘it would be absurd to regard the connection between these two kinds of commitment as wholly contingent: while it is possible to decide against one’s better judgement in a given case, one cannot do so all the time’ (Setiya 2005, p. 787). Most intellectualists try to explain why the link between exercises of practical reason and exercises of the will is not ‘wholly contingent’ with an account of the will that shows that its exercise is *per se* such as to respond to the exercise of practical reason. Setiya suggests that they should instead approach things the other way around and say that ‘nothing could count as practical judgement if it had no tendency to issue in choice’ (ibid.). Talk of a ‘tendency’ for an exercise of practical reason to issue in an exercise of the will is vague, but he must mean that an account of practical reason should show that it is *per se* such as to determine the will. After all, if the will is *per se* such as to respond to exercises of practical reason, an exercise of practical reason tends to issue in an exercise of the will. This tendency, though, is an *external* tendency of practical reason—a tendency that exists not because of the nature of

16. Let me discharge a debt. Christine Korsgaard criticizes *dogmatic rationalism*, which says that all normativity is the normativity of substantive reasons, or at least is based on it (Korsgaard 1997, p. 52-4; 2003, p. 315-7; 2008, p. 24-30; 2009, p. 64-7). Her arguments are complicated, but she concludes that the normativity of substantive reasons depends on a kind of functional normativity wherein, in the terminology that I favor, a capacity establishes a normative standard for its exercises. I agree with this conclusion, but it does not contradict intellectualism. After all, theoretical reason is a capacity. Intellectualists can say that judgments answer to what they represent because of the function of theoretical reason, and practical reason is a species of theoretical reason distinguished by what it represents. This seems to let them capture everything that should matter to dogmatic rationalists. Korsgaard and I disagree with this view, but nothing about the functional normativity of capacities refutes it.

Korsgaard recognizes this possibility when she claims that dogmatic rationalists must think of practical judgments as knowledge that leaves open the question about what to do with it. However, she does not consider whether they might agree with this claim because they think that the will is a separate capacity with its own function by which an agent can close this question. Again, while she and I disagree with this view, the functional normativity of capacities cannot undermine it. The intellectualist view that I develop in this section thus avoids the letter of her objection. It does not avoid its spirit, though, which I hope my criticism embodies and emboldens.

practical reason but because of the nature of the will. Setiya instead thinks that intellectualists should posit an *internal* tendency of practical reason—a tendency that exists because of the nature of practical reason. In my terminology, he thinks that they should claim that the principle of practical reason links its exercise with the exercise of the will rather than or at least in addition to saying that the principle of the will links its exercise with the exercise of practical reason.

I will argue in the next section that intellectualists need to take up this suggestion because otherwise they commit themselves to the possibility of a kind of being who possesses and exercises practical reason perfectly while by nature lacking a will and an ability to act. Such a kind of being is metaphysically impossible, though, and whatever capacity they might have is not practical reason, even as intellectualists understand it. However, I shall argue that intellectualists cannot explain the impossibility of this kind of being because practical reason as intellectualists understand it has the formal features of any species of theoretical reason and its exercise is thus not *per se* such as to determine the will. Moreover, practical reason as we possess it on the intellectualist account would be the very same capacity as this impossible being would possess it if it were possible. Yet we can then no more act from the exercise of practical reason in the relevant sense than they could, and they could not act at all. Hence, the condition on the possibility of reasons to act is not met, and intellectualism is self-undermining.

6. The isolation of practical reason

6.1 The unfavored creature

Start with this analogy. I live in the United States and am subject to its laws. Now imagine that its only law is ‘follow the laws of Luxembourg’. To commit a crime in America, then, is to act in a way that discords with the laws of Luxembourg. I am subject to the laws of America, though, not of Luxembourg. Although their laws determine the content of ours, they lack authority over me. They merely inform something else that has authority over me, and even then only because that something else says so. In the same way, on the account of practical thought that says that the principle of the will is ‘decide to act as I judge that I should act’, my decision is subject to the principle of the will. Although that principle gets determinate content in particular situations from my judgment, practical reason lacks authority over the will. My judgment is relevant to my decision only because it informs something else that has authority over my decision, and even

then only because that something else says so. When the principle of my will is ‘decide to act as I judge that I should’, I err by deciding in a way that discords with my judgment. I err with respect to the principle of my will, though, not my judgment, just as I violate our law, not Luxembourg’s. Practical reason is still isolated from the will and action in the way that matters because it by nature has nothing to do with the will and action. I still cannot act from judgment.

Although intellectualists need my judgment to determine the way for me to will well, then, not everything that might meet that description lets me act from judgment. To get a sense of the issue, think about relationships in which one person has authority over another. My boss has authority over me with respect to the tasks of my job. I am subordinate to her with respect to them. Our roles are essentially interdependent, and each is intelligible only in relation to the other.

Now say that we do not stand in a relationship of this kind, but I set out to decide on the basis of your thoughts. No authority relationship holds. A sycophant is no subordinate. That is why criticism that is appropriate in those relationships is inappropriate in this case. If you are my boss and my job requirements are unclear, I can criticize you for it. If I am not fulfilling my tasks, you can criticize me for it. This criticism is appropriate because we embody roles defined by the relationship between them. If I am a sycophant, I cannot criticize you because your thoughts are too unclear for me to base my decisions on them. Nor can you criticize me if I fail to act on the basis of your thoughts. That kind of answerability does not hold because the roles are not essentially interdependent. Even though we cannot understand my role in this relationship without relating me to you, we can understand yours without relating you to me.

The problem with the current compositional account is that it models the will as a sycophant. Just as your role in our sycophantic relationship is fully described without mentioning me, so practical reason is fully described without mentioning the will. It does not by nature have a relationship to the will because it only answers to what it represents. The only relationship that it has to the will and action is then accidental to its nature. It only has an external tendency to determine the will, not an internal one. Yet then just as the celebrity can exist as a celebrity without the sycophant, so a being can by nature possess practical reason as intellectualists think of it while by nature lacking a will. A being without a will, though, cannot act, and a being who cannot act cannot possess practical reason. The intellectualist account of practical reason thus

implies that a metaphysically impossible being is possible. Yet members of this kind of being would possess the same capacity of practical reason as we possess, and we thus can no more act from the exercise of practical reason than they can. I then cannot act from judgment even if I base my decision on my judgment and even if to decide well is to decide on the basis of my judgment. The source of the issue is not the nature of the will. It is the nature of practical reason.

Thus far, my argument in this section is analogical. Here is a metaphysical argument to the same conclusion for which the analogies have prepared the way. In order for me to be able to act from judgment, practical reason must be per se such as to determine the will. If it is a species of theoretical reason, either it is the only species of theoretical reason to have this internal tendency or all species of theoretical reason do. If the former, then one of its unique features must explain why it but not the other species has this tendency. If the latter, then the formal features of theoretical reason as such must explain why all species have this tendency. However, neither option works.

Start with the first. Species of theoretical reason differ from each other because of what they represent and the corresponding content of those representations. Can one of these features show that only practical reason of all such species is per se such as to determine the will? What it represents cannot. Since exercises of theoretical reason answer to what they represent, those objects, facts, or what have you just determine which judgments are correct. They do not determine whether I must do something else after I judge. The content of practical judgments is then the only thing that might explain this internal tendency of practical reason if that tendency is unique among species of theoretical reason. That distinctness, though, just reflects the fact that species of theoretical reason differ because of what they represent. It does not distinguish the way that I relate to reasons to act and practical judgments from the way that I relate to what I represent in exercises of other species of theoretical reason and my representations of them. It thereby does not show that I must do something else after I judge when my judgment is practical. The nature of theoretical reason determines those things. Practical reason then is per se such as to determine the will only if theoretical reason in general has this internal tendency.

But theoretical reason has no such internal tendency. Take my judgment that a ball is in the room. This judgment licenses different inferences than does the judgment that a cow is in the closet. I can infer that members of a ball-making species or someone who came into contact with

them was in these parts. (Probably it was humans.) I can infer that there is at least one object in the room. The first judgment licenses the others because its content, or what it represents, constitutes grounds for them according to the principle of the capacity that I exercise in those other judgments. Any exercise of theoretical reason answers to what it represents, an independent existence that I represent as such. And that is it. That exercise of theoretical reason is done and dusted. Anything else I do is a discrete exercise of one of my capacities that answers to the principle of that capacity, not to the previous judgment, though it may be informed by that judgment if the principle says so. If practical reason is a species of theoretical reason, then, to exercise it is to represent an independent existence as such. And that is it. Anything else I do is a discrete exercise of one of my capacities that answers to the principle of that capacity, not to the previous judgment, though it may be informed by that judgment if the principle says so. Practical reason as intellectualists construe it thus lacks an internal tendency to determine the will. The nature of theoretical reason precludes it.

The account under discussion posits an asymmetric metaphysical dependence between practical reason and the will. According to it, any being who by nature possesses this kind of will by nature possesses practical reason. Fine and to the good. According to the intellectualist view of practical reason, though, a being who by nature possesses it need not possess a will at all, let alone a particular kind of will. After all, if one capacity has an accidental relationship to another, a kind of being can by nature possess the first while by nature lacking the second. On this account, then, a being can possess the same capacity of practical reason that we possess while by nature lacking a will and the ability to act.

Call this kind of being the ‘unfavored creature’. They are like a bit of water who tells of all she would do if she were to ‘decide’ to no longer willingly sit idle in this puddle, some leaves who narrate their descent through the air, or a piece of paper that ‘decides’ to go as the wind blows (Schopenhauer 1839, p. 42; Anscombe 1957, §3; Wittgenstein 1939, p. 434). They cannot act from judgment since they cannot act at all. According to intellectualism, we possess the same capacity of practical reason that these kinds of beings would possess. After all, practical reason only has an accidental relationship to the will and action. Nothing, then, differentiates their judgments *as such* from our judgments *as such*. They can make the same judgments as us with the same correctness conditions and the same intrinsic features. Hence, we cannot act from our

judgment any more than any of them could act from theirs even if those judgments inform our decisions. Informing decisions is an accidental property of those judgments that has no place in an account of their nature. Practical reason is thus isolated from the will and action if it is a species of theoretical reason no matter what view of the will a particular compositional account of practical thought posits.

Hence, the intellectualist view of practical reason has two related problems. Because on this view practical reason has no essential relationship to the will, this view implies that a being with practical reason but not a will is metaphysically possible. However, such a being would be a rational agent who by nature cannot act, which is metaphysically impossible. On the same grounds, this view implies that our exercises of practical reason would be intrinsically identical to the exercises of practical reason in such beings without a will. However, we thus cannot act from judgment in the relevant sense but only in accord with it. Hence, intellectualism is incompatible with the possibility of reasons for me to act and is thereby self-undermining.

B. The first-person

The best way for intellectualists to respond to this consequence is to try to link practical reason to the will through reasons to act like so. Start with the idea that practical reason is about reasons to act. To act is to realize a decision, and hence the will has an essential connection to action. A reason to act is then a reason to realize a decision, and it can exist only if the being who is to act can decide and hence has a will.¹⁷ Hence, practical reason might seem to have an essential connection to the will through reasons to act, not because these reasons determine which judgment and decision are correct as in the earlier view but instead because reasons for me to act imply that I can act and thus have a will.¹⁸

17. This response recapitulates the response in §4. I have not abandoned my criticism in that section. I instead consider the response again because it lets me highlight the central problem with intellectualism at this point.

18. J. David Velleman defends a version of this view embedded in a Humean metaphysical reduction of agency in which desires provide the ‘motive force’ for action and beliefs constituting the work of reason in our action. According to him, practical reason is a species of theoretical reason that makes ‘self-verifying predictions’, which are beliefs that (1) play a role in the causal chain that produce the facts that make them true and (2) include in their intentional content the role they play in that causal chain. The model is something like the following: my desire for self-knowledge stops any of my ordinary desires from efficiently causing behavior until I form a self-verifying belief to behave in the way that corresponds with my means-end beliefs about how to satisfy at least one of my ordinary desires. Once formed, I can satisfy my desire for self-knowledge by behaving in that way. If all goes well, the combination of that ordinary desire, my desire for self-knowledge, those means-end beliefs, and the self-verifying belief efficiently cause me to behave in that way. The belief thereby is true (and whatever else is needed in

However, this argument is specious. It at most establishes that I cannot have practical reason as intellectualists think of it unless *someone* has a will, but it does not show that I cannot have practical reason unless *I* have a will. Again, the source of the problem is the view that practical reason is a species of theoretical reason distinguished from others by what it represents. Theoretical reason does not restrict the possible contents of the judgments that I can make to ones that can truly apply to myself. Just as I cannot make theoretical judgments about gills unless some beings can have gills, I cannot make theoretical judgments about reasons to act unless some beings can have some and hence have wills.¹⁹ Just as I can make theoretical judgments about gills without having some myself, though, I can make theoretical judgments about reasons to act without having some myself. So intellectualists must say. Hence, a being can have practical reason as intellectualists think of it while by nature lacking a will and thus lacking reasons to act. They cannot act from their judgments since they cannot act at all. Since their judgments are intrinsically identical to our judgments, we cannot either.

One way to understand this idea is to think about the content of a practical judgment. I keep saying that I judge that ‘I should ϕ ’. However, intellectualists tend to say that I judge that ‘ p is a reason for X to A in circumstances C ’ or that ‘ X has most/sufficient/decisive reason to A in circumstances C ’. If we call any judgment about reasons to act a ‘normative judgment’ and call only a (present tense) judgment about *my* reasons to act a ‘practical judgment’, intellectualists think that practical reason is a capacity for normative judgment. Practical judgments are just normative judgments that happen to be about me—that have a particular value for X . According to intellectualism, they are unique among normative judgments in the same way that normative judgments are unique among descriptive judgments—because of their content, not because of the

order for it to constitute a bit of knowledge) and the desire for self-knowledge is thus satisfied.

As far as I can tell, the argument that I give in this section applies to Velleman’s view. Because the details of his view are complicated and because my criticism in part turns on issues about the explanatory burdens of metaphysical reductions in action theory that are beyond the scope of this essay, though, I shall confine my comments on his view to footnotes as I proceed. I thank two anonymous referees for pressing me to discuss Velleman, and I apologize that space constraints do not let me do full justice to their challenge.

19. I here restrict attention to ‘positive’ judgments that say that someone has a reason to act in some way or that someone should act in some way. I make no claims about whether intellectualism implies that a being can have practical reason while no being has a will because she can judge that no one has any reason to act. Intellectualists can deny such possibility if they can deny that such a being could possess the concept of a reason to act. While I doubt that this denial actually fits with intellectualism, I need not press that issue here. Since intellectualists treat practical reason as a species of theoretical reason, the concept of a reason to act must be within our reach in the same way that the concept of a gill is within our reach. That is all that I need for my argument.

way that I relate to what I represent or my representation of it.

It might seem like a virtue that intellectualism can explain the unity of normative judgments. What seems like virtue, though, is vice. I do not relate to my representations of yellow objects differently than I relate to my representations of blue objects. According to intellectualism, I likewise do not relate to my representations of reasons *for me* to act differently than I relate to my representations of reasons *for you* to act. Whether any of my normative judgments refer to me is an accident just like it is an accident whether any of my judgments about spatial relations refer to me. It is not that it is unlikely that many of these judgments will refer to me. Given my finitude, it would be shocking were it otherwise. It is not part of the nature of reason, though, that any of my normative judgments or judgments about spatial relations refer to me. When one does, it refers to me in the way that another refers to you. I understand in a thought about a spatial relationship involving me that you can represent what I represent and that our thoughts relate to it in the same way. According to intellectualism, I likewise understand in a thought about a reason for me, for you, or for someone else to act that you can represent what I represent and that our thoughts relate to it.

The only judgments that have authority over action, though, unite a first-person representation with an action I take to be open to me. Although judgments about what I should have done in the past, what you should do, what I should do in counterfactual circumstances, and so on might be criticizable in various ways, I am not irrational in not acting on them. How could I act from my sense of why I act when I take my representation to be irrelevant to what I actually should do? In this way, only practical judgments—first-person judgments about actions I take to be open to me—have authority over action.

However, intellectualists cannot explain this unique feature of practical judgments. They must say that I relate to every reason to act and my representation of it in the same way no matter if it is about you or me, the past or the present, a merely possible world or the actual world, or any other difference that distinguishes one from another. I relate to reasons to act and my representations of them just as I relate to what I represent in any exercise of theoretical reason and my representation of it. They are all independent existences that I represent as such, and you relate to them in the same way. That is what it is for practical reason to be a species of theoretical reason. To say otherwise is like saying that my judgment that the ball is yellow is subject to

different rules of inference, different rules for evidence collection, and all that jazz than my judgment that the ball is blue. Yet then my representations of reasons for me to act lack authority over my will just as all theoretical judgments do. The source of the problem is the form of representation. Nothing about the content or, for that matter, the details of the nature of another capacity can change it. Non-accidentally representing an independent existence accurately by nature has nothing to do with deciding and acting. Hence, a kind of being can by nature possess this capacity even if she by nature cannot act because she can make judgments about the reasons to act of other beings who in fact have wills.²⁰

In effect, then, intellectualism faces the following problem. Since any being with practical reason is a rational agent and since intellectualism implies that a being can have practical reason without having a will and hence without being able to act, intellectualism implies that there can be rational agents who by nature cannot act. That is to miss the *agency* in rational agency. Moreover, since the intrinsic properties of the exercise of practical reason in these beings are the same as the intrinsic properties of practical judgments that we who have wills make, I cannot act from judgment any more than these beings can. Practical reason is isolated from the will and action in us in a way that undermines intellectualism.²¹

20. Velleman might seem like he gets out of this challenge because of the way that he specifies the nature of self-predictive beliefs. However, that appearance is misleading. For one thing, his Humeanism requires that the capacity for self-verifying beliefs and the desire for self-knowledge are independent existences, each of which can be properly described without reference to the other. Such independence means that an agent can possess the capacity for the former—what he calls practical reason—without the latter or, for that matter, without any form of desire. For another thing, he needs a generic notion of causation and a generic notion of behavior to feature in his account in order to accomplish his reductive ambitions. However, there are no a priori restrictions on what can stand in efficient causal relations to what. Hence, nothing rules out my predicting all sorts of behavior, mine or others, that stand in all sorts of efficient causal relationships to these beliefs but are not actions. Such predictions are exercises of practical reason on this view, and yet a being who cannot act can make them. Both of these features of his view suffice to show that he cannot explain the metaphysical impossibility of this kind of being.

21. Can intellectualists grant that a being who can represent reasons while lacking a will can exist but deny that such a being possesses practical reason? Perhaps they can say that practical reason is a species of theoretical reason distinguished from others by what it represents and also by the fact that the being in question has a will that answers to those representations. The unfavored creature thus lacks practical reason even if she can form theoretical representations of reasons to act.

However, this response is a mere verbal trick. What differentiates one capacity from another is what it is a potentiality to do, and what it is a potentiality to do determines what counts as a complete exercise of it. The exercise of a capacity to represent reasons thus completes when I form such a representation. A being can possess such a capacity without possessing a will. It is no use to withhold the name ‘practical reason’ from such a capacity and use it only when a being also possesses another specific capacity. This second capacity does nothing to change the nature of the first or its exercises. Such a response is thus like claiming that hydrogen is water and then defending yourself by saying that although hydrogen is the element with one proton, such atoms are not hydrogen unless bound with another atom of hydrogen and an atom of oxygen.

7. REJECTING THE LEGEND

Intellectualism separates and isolates practical reason from the will. To deny it is to say that practical reason is our kind of will. This view might seem hard to maintain, at least in part because intellectualism seems to fall out of the description of Buridan cases and akrasia. Intellectualism might then seem compulsory, my criticism be damned. While I cannot explain and develop the practical cognitive alternative to intellectualism in this essay, let me say something about the arguments from these cases to intellectualism that clears this hurdle to even considering the view.

Start with akrasia. Intellectualists infer from the possibility of a breakdown in rational agency to the conclusion that practical reason and the will are separate capacities. While this inference might seem trivial, it is not. There are at least two ways to think about things coming apart. On one view, breakdown shows that a whole is an accidental unity of distinct things that do not by nature belong together. It shows things as they are, which we might miss when we look at the composites that they can form. On the other view, the fact that things can come apart does not always show that they are distinct things that just happen to come together. Some wholes are prior to their parts, and the parts are per se parts of the whole even if they come apart in pathological cases. Although I might lose an arm, say, I do not consist of at least two independent parts, that arm and the rest of my body, that do not by nature belong together, though none of us, especially not me, might notice it until things break down. The way to think about akrasia is on this model.

A capacity is a potentiality to *do* something, and to develop it is to come to become skilled at doing that thing in all of its aspects. If practical reason is our kind of will, then I know how, when, why, and in what way to act if I fully develop this capacity. These aspects of the developed capacity are not a host of intrinsically distinct abilities that just happen to come together. Each aspect depends on the others in various ways. The how and the why, say, inform the when and the in what way, which in turn inform the how, and so on. A skill is in this sense a principle of unity of its parts. Still, nothing stops me from exercising this capacity in a way that realizes only some aspects of it, though such exercises are incomplete and imperfect exercises.

More must said, but this view has an obvious advantage over the other. Akrasia, if it is

anything, is a failure in the exercise of human agency. It is our agency *breaking down*. Separate practical reason from the will and you have a hard time explaining this fact. What is wrong when two things that do not by nature go together do not go together in a particular case? On this model, finding a judgment without a decision should be on a par with finding an atom of oxygen without two atoms of hydrogen. The view that unites practical reason with the will does not have this problem. If judging, deciding, and doing are instead aspects of one activity, a situation where they come apart is a per se defective exercise of our agency. It is like finding a human arm without the rest of a human body—disturbing, unnatural, something gone wrong.

Uniting these aspects of practical thought also solves the issue with Buridan cases. If you think that practical reason is a species of theoretical reason, these cases are pressing because practical reason cannot distinguish between actions that are normatively on a par. An abyss opens up between reason and action that reason cannot cross. If practical reason is our kind of will, it differs from theoretical reason on formal grounds. It is in part a capacity to realize the object of its representations. In practical thought, I move from a general representation of what to do and why to do it through more determinate representations of how to do it given my circumstances and skills. At some point in this thought, the normative differences between different ways to realize this action run out. Still, the work of practical reason is not just to represent an action, or even to represent the best available action in my circumstances. The work is in part to act—to realize a representation. So long as a way to act realizes the object of my representation, it meets this part of its principle even if other ways also meet it. Hence, acting in a way that I recognize is normatively on a par with other ways of acting open to me can be an act of reason or part of an exercise of practical reason. There is no need to posit a distinct capacity.

These reflections are but a start to an account of practical reason as a capacity of distinctively practical cognition wherein acting itself is an act of reason or a material process that is part of an exercise of a cognitive power. It is but a start to rejecting a wholly ‘contemplative model of knowledge’ on which ‘the facts, reality, are prior and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge’ and explaining a kind of knowledge that is ‘the cause of what it understands’ rather than being ‘derived from the objects known’ (Anscombe 1957, p. 32; p. 53). A full account must show that practical knowledge unifies knowledge of what is good for me to do with knowledge of what I am doing such that a robust standard of correctness governs our exercises of this

capacity. It must respond to a variety of objections to the particular view of practical reason as our kind of will and the general constitutivist view of capacities in terms of which I explain practical reason. The need for this account is clear, though, only when we understand and reject intellectualism. We must reject this intellectualist legend, for it is a myth unfit to account for the capacity that it is invented to explain. Practical reason is not a species of theoretical reason. It is instead our kind of will. The function of theoretical reason is to know the world. The function of practical reason, however, is to change it.²²

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