

Attention and Practical Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Practical knowledge, in the sense made famous by G. E. M. Anscombe, is “the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions”. This knowledge is very ordinary, but philosophically it is not easy to understand. One illuminating approach is to see practical knowledge as a kind of self-knowledge or self-consciousness. I offer an enrichment of this approach, by (1) exploiting Gilbert Ryle’s discussion of heeding (that is, paying attention), in particular paying attention to one’s own intentional action, and (2) constructing and applying a practical analogue of Kant’s apperceptive “I think”. Combining (1) and (2), I offer an argument for my main claim—paying attention to what one is doing is an exercise of practical self-consciousness – it is how practical self-consciousness gets “schematized”.

KEYWORDS

Philosophy of Mind; Action; Epistemology; Intention; Heeding; Anscombe

Let me begin with some preliminaries. First of all, this is work in progress, which is why I’m presenting it here and seeking comment. My conclusions are going to be only tentative. What do I try to do in this talk? I try to throw some light on the challenging topic of practical knowledge, in the sense made famous by Anscombe. I’ll say what that sense is in a moment. And I’ll try to throw light on this topic by drawing on two philosophers. One is Gilbert Ryle, in particular what he says about heeding or paying attention. That’s where the word attention in the title comes from. But I’ll mostly be using the verb “heed”, just for convenience. Secondly, I’ll also be drawing on Kant, in particular something he’s famous for, namely his notion of apperception or self-consciousness. So that’s the aim and, so to speak, the means to achieving that aim. The talk falls into four steps. First, I will discuss Anscombe’s notion of practical knowledge briefly and rather dogmatically. And then I’ll connect this notion to self-knowledge or self-consciousness. The point will be that practical knowledge is a form of self-knowledge or self-consciousness. Then comes the Ryle part. And I’ll spend some time talking about his notion of heeding, which is equivalent to paying attention. And the fourth and last step is where I try to do something on my own. Which is to connect, with some Kantian inspiration, the notion of heeding to the notion of self-consciousness, in particular *practical* self-consciousness, because this is basically a paper in the philosophy of action. So that’s the plan.

Let me begin by introducing the topic, practical knowledge. The phrase itself, “practical knowledge”, is used in two, three, maybe four senses. My focus here is only on the sense that’s made famous by Anscombe. So here’s a quote from her. She says, practical knowledge is “the knowledge that a man has of his intentional actions” (*Intention*, §28). So, for example, knowledge

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that I am opening the window, that I am holding this bottle of water, or I'm writing something on the blackboard. As you can see from these examples, this kind of knowledge is very ordinary. But once we start asking in philosophy what kind of knowledge this is, it turns out this is a very difficult question. It's much more difficult than one might think. Some of you will know that there's this claim, famous by Anscombe, which says that practical knowledge is *not* by observation. There's a lot of puzzles about that claim, which I will not go into. I'm going to start with some basic and fairly easy-to-understand points.

First, practical knowledge, in the sense just introduced, is not knowing how, even though these two notions are very intimately connected. So what's the difference between them and what's the connection? Knowing how is a capacity, an ability to do things. But practical knowledge, in the sense introduced, is not. Rather, practical knowledge, in this sense, is the *exercise* of such a capacity. So there you have it, both the difference and the connection. To illustrate, I am now not riding a bike. But still, I know how to ride a bike. I have the know-how. I have the capacity. But if I'm not riding a bike now, then I do not have practical knowledge, in the Anscombean sense, that I am riding a bike. So that's the sense of practical knowledge I want to focus on. It's knowledge of something that's on-going. I have the know-how, even while I'm sleeping. I won't have practical knowledge in the relevant sense if I'm sleeping.

Second point. As I just said, practical knowledge is the exercise of a know-how or capacity. But it's not just any kind of capacity or know-how, but rather a distinctive kind. Namely, know-how that essentially involves the intellect. In other words, the relevant kind of capacities are what Ryle calls intelligent capacities. To contrast this kind of capacity with others: it is not the know-how of a mere animal, but rather of "a man" (Anscombe). When she says "a man", she means what Aristotle would call a rational animal. You can also say an animal with understanding or with an intellect. Just to drive the point home, I give you a famous quote from Anscombe. She is quoting Aquinas as a way to sum up her view of what practical knowledge is. What is that? She says "Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands'" (*Intention*, §48, quoting Aquinas). The point I want to focus on is the word "understands". The point is that the agent, in order to have practical knowledge, in the relevant sense, must have the capacity to understand things. That is to say, he must have an intellect. This is why I say this is a distinctive kind of know-how or capacity.

That's a very quick and dirty introduction to the topic, practical knowledge.

Let me move on to the second step. The point I've just made can be put in plain language as follows: the agent must understand what he's doing. But now let me reformulate this point in philosophical language echoing Kant: the agent must be able to accompany what he is doing with "I understand". For example, "I understand that I am writing", or "I think I'm writing", or "I understand I'm giving a talk now". Notice the requirement is that the agent must *be able to* accompany.... He does not have to *actually* accompany his action with those words. So that's a reformulation of a plain point in Kantian terms.

Obviously, this "I understand" or "I think" is very close to Kant's famous "I think". Now, Kant's point in the first *Critique* is that theoretical knowledge requires what he calls "apperception" or what we call self-consciousness. My point here, which is analogous to his, is that practical knowledge also requires self-consciousness or self-knowledge. Now, I'm going to be in this talk using the notions of self-consciousness and self-knowledge interchangeably, even though they are distinct notions and can come apart in different contexts.

I've just said that practical knowledge requires self-consciousness or self-knowledge. I want to make a further point. Practical knowledge does not just require, but *is*, a form of self-consciousness or self-knowledge. This is because practical knowledge in the sense introduced satisfies two conditions for self-knowledge. First, the *object* of this knowledge, namely what is known in this type of knowledge, is oneself. So, for example, it is I myself who am known by myself to be, say, opening

the window, giving a talk, painting a wall yellow, and any example you care to mention. A minimum requirement for self-knowledge is that what is known has to be oneself. This is the first requirement.

But the crucial requirement is the second one. The *mode* of this knowledge, that is to say *how* it is known, must be “from within” or, as philosophers say, “from the first-person angle”. I believe many of you are familiar with these locutions. They are opposed to, for example, “from without” or “from a third-person angle”, for example by observation. Consider this example. If I roll up my sleeve and see there’s a dark spot on my arm, that’s knowledge about myself, right? But it’s not self-knowledge in the relevant sense, because you can know that in the same way as I do, namely by observation. Genuine self-knowledge has to be knowledge “from within”, like how you know what you’re thinking, your emotions, intentions, that sort of thing. This is distinctive of self-knowledge in the proper or demanding sense that interests philosophers. I will be operating exclusively with this notion of self-knowledge from this point on.

Let me now move to the third step and start talking about Ryle, his discussion of heeding or paying attention. He gives a really wonderful discussion of the phenomenon of heeding and the logic of heed concepts. Here I can only give you a dry summary of some of the points he makes. But first of all, some preliminaries. Heeding is very close to attention, but these two are not the same thing. The difference is that attention can be either active or passive. When it’s active, you’re *paying* attention to something or someone. But your attention can also be wrung from you, involuntarily, in which case it’s passive. But heeding can only be active. That’s just the grammar of “heed”. So there is a slight restriction on the topic. When I speak of heeding, I mean paying active attention. Passive attention is not part of my topic.

Now, this thing called heeding or paying active attention is a very general, in fact, a pervasive kind of mental phenomenon. Just to give you an initial feel for this phenomenon, I will quickly go over some of the heed concepts that Ryle lists: “noticing, taking care, attending, applying one’s mind, concentrating, putting one’s heart into something, thinking what one’s doing, alertness, interest, intentness, studying and trying”, “‘ready’, ‘on guard’, ‘careful’, ‘on the lookout’ and ‘resolute’”. It’s a pretty long and rich list of concepts. To sum this up, for the benefit of those speaking Chinese, we can say heeding means 中文说的专注、专心或者用心,你也可以说“心在焉”。我知道“心在焉”不是中文,我是有意这样说的。因为有一个反义词叫做“心不在焉”,我接下来要用到这个短语,你可以说指的是不专心。In English we say the contrary is absent-minded. For those of you who do not understand Chinese, what I have just said in Chinese doesn’t matter.

So that’s introducing the topic of heeding.

Let me now say a bit more about it, or rather report some of the things Ryle says about it. He discusses heeding primarily in the context of action, though he also does that in other contexts, for example, perception. I will focus on the context of action. In particular, the kind of action that he concentrates on is intelligent conduct or intelligent action. That is to say, conduct with an intellectual component. Earlier I said that practical knowledge involves the exercise of a special kind of capacity. Now, in this context, when someone is heeding something, what he is heeding, or you might call it the object of heeding, is an action. It’s the agent’s own intentional action. In Chinese, 我们说心在焉的那个“焉”是主体自己的一个有意行动。This point makes it clear that the topic here is exactly practical knowledge, in the sense introduced from Anscombe. So we have a good point of contact between Ryle and Anscombe here.

But before I try to properly connect heeding to practical knowledge, in my fourth step, we need to get clear about the logic of these heed concepts. And again, Ryle is very helpful here. He says that the logic of heed concepts is a “mongrel logic”. Or sometimes he says the logic is “semi-hypothetical” or “mongrel categorical”. If you don’t know or remember Ryle, this is going to seem somewhat mystifying. And to properly appreciate this point, we would have to discuss in detail Ryle’s distinction between two large logical categories, dispositions on the one hand and

occurrences on the other. He also calls occurrences episodes. I'll use those two words ("occurrence" and "episode") interchangeably. Ryle marks this distinction logically in terms of the distinction between two types of statements, namely hypothetical statements and categorical ones. That is the basic picture in Ryle, but I don't have time to go into details.

I will simply state the results or some of the results of his discussion, which is this. Heed concepts have a mongrel logic, in that heeding is both dispositional and episodic. This point is best appreciated by examples. So here's one. Consider this specific heed concept, *taking care*, and the activity or action of driving a car. The example is this: "Tom is taking care as he is driving". Or we could say alternatively, "Tom is driving carefully". Now that statement, Ryle says, is both dispositional and episodic. It is episodic because Tom is now taking care or paying heed at a particular moment of time. He's doing that *now*. Something is *now* happening. But his heeding is also dispositional. This is a point that's slightly harder to appreciate. Why is it dispositional? Because Tom is ready for a range of contingencies. To say he's driving carefully or he's paying attention is to say, in part, that he's ready for contingencies. For example, if the light turns red, he'll stop. If a child suddenly runs into the street, he will swerve. And there's a list of such if-then's you can fill in. But part of the point is that this list is open or indefinite. You can never really complete it. And that's because this disposition is a general tendency in Tom. This is a point I will invoke later.

In sum, Tom, when he's paying heed to his driving, is in a general state of alertness. He's on guard, he's alert. But at a particular time. Look at Tom: he is paying attention *now*. That's the episodic sense of heeding. So that's the first point from Ryle I want to talk about. It says that heeding has a special logic, a mongrel logic. It's both episodic and dispositional, both particular and general.

Here's the second point, related to the first but fairly distinct. It is this: heeding is a special kind of action. This includes two sub-points. The first sub-point is this: heeding is a kind of action. It is like acting, ordinary acting, in two respects. First, both are occurrences. Heeding is episodic or occurrent, just like particular actions. Second, both can be commanded. You can tell someone: "Drive the car". Or you can tell him: "Pay attention to your driving". It's a command. And that's a pretty good criterion for saying it's an action. So heeding is an action.

But (and this is the second sub-point) there is also an important difference between heeding and ordinary action, in that heeding is a special kind of action. To bring out what's special about it, let's contrast heeding with multitasking. So here's a pair of examples. Suppose someone, say Harry, is doing two things. He's both driving (H1) and heeding his driving (H2). There's another guy, Mark, who is multitasking. He's both walking (M1) and whistling (M2). Now, these two cases are superficially similar because both Harry and Mark are doing two things at the same time, right? H1 and H2 and M1 and M2. But that's only surface phenomenon. Deeper down, they are quite different. Here's the difference. H1 and H2 are asymmetrically dependent. That's just a bit of logical jargon. The point is very simple. Someone can be driving without driving carefully, right? Nobody can be driving carefully without driving, right? So H2 depends on H1, but H1 does not depend on H2. It's asymmetric dependence. In contrast, M1 and M2, walking and whistling, are obviously mutually independent. You can do one without doing the other. This contrast also shows up in the following manner. Heeding can be captured by an adverb. To say Tom is heeding his driving is to say he's driving carefully. You can turn the heed concept into an adverb, "carefully". But multitasking cannot be recaptured adverbially. We cannot really say that someone is walking whistling-ly or he's whistling walking-ly. So heeding is unlike multitasking.

Let me just quickly say, as a side note, what heeding *is* like. It is like enjoying. In both cases, in both heeding and enjoying, there is an asymmetric dependence. You can be driving without heeding your driving or enjoying your driving. A lot of people hate driving. But you cannot be heeding or enjoying your driving without driving. The same kind of asymmetric dependence. There

is actually more similarity. We can put this further similarity as follows. Heeding *supervenes* on the activity one is heeding, just as pleasure or enjoyment supervenes on the activity one is enjoying. (Notice this notion of supervenience comes from Aristotle or rather from the English translation of Aristotle. It should not be confused with the notion of supervenience that's common in contemporary philosophy of mind, which comes from Davidson.)

One more point about heeding and then we'll move to step four. Let me sum up things so far in a pair of points, one negative and one positive. First, what heeding is not. It's not a *separate* act in addition to whatever you are heeding, in addition to whatever you're doing. So driving carefully is not a distinct act from driving itself. That would be multitasking. Rather, heeding is a *way* or *manner* in which one is doing something. And that's why it admits of adverbial formulation, for example, driving *carefully*.

I come to the last step. I will try now to connect heeding with self-consciousness. But first, let me review things. What have I done? I have first introduced the notion of practical knowledge, rather dogmatically. And I've determined it to be a form of self-consciousness, again rather dogmatically. And third, I've introduced the phenomenon of heeding and spent some time clarifying its mongrel logic. The fourth and last step of the plan is to connect heeding to self-consciousness in order to elucidate this challenging notion of practical knowledge. Let me just say upfront what I want to argue for. My main claim is this: heeding is an exercise of practical self-consciousness; it is a way in which practical self-consciousness is at work. I actually think this is not a piece of philosophical news. I think it's actually a truism. But as Wittgenstein says, truisms can be useful.

I'll give my argument for that main claim a bit later. First, I want to set the stage for the argument by making a series of Kant-inspired points. Consider a simple example. Tom, he is tidying up his room. Now, this activity encompasses a variety of simpler activities. So Tom is putting his books in order. He is wiping his desk clean. He is emptying the trash bin. And so on. Again, the list is indefinite or open, within a certain range. And now several points can be made on the basis of this example. We're shifting into Kantian gears now. First point, the concept of "tidy up" or "tidy up a room" *unifies* these diverse, simpler actions that I've just mentioned into a single coherent whole. It's a *single* instance of *tidying up a room*. Second, this unification of simpler things under a more general concept is a manifestation of intelligence. Tom is acting with intelligence. For example, he thinks about the order in which he does these things. Let's say he empties the trash bin last. That requires intelligence. Not a lot of intelligence, but some intelligence. The key point here is that this is the kind of intelligence that persons, by which I mean rational animals, have, but dumb animals do not have. This point can be brought out as follows.

Let's contrast Tom, a person, with a bird, which is a dumb or non-rational animal. We, people in this room, can say "Tom is tidying up his room". And we can also say "That bird is tidying up its nest". These two cases superficially look similar, but there's a profound difference. It is this. Tom can say, "I am tidying up my room", but that bird cannot say "I am tidying up my nest". A bird is simply too stupid for that. The general point is this. A person, when doing something that requires intelligence, let's say X, must be able to accompany his diverse simpler activities with "I am X-ing" or "I am trying to X". This point, a Kant-inspired point, is of fundamental importance. So let me elaborate on it a little bit. The point has two aspects, which I'm going to call the "X-aspect" and the "I-aspect". The X here is just a placeholder for concepts like tidying up a room, driving a car, things like that. Things requiring some intelligence. And then there's the I-aspect.

First, the X-aspect. The point is that the agent must have mastery of the concept X if he is to count as *really* doing X. What do I mean by really doing X? Doing it *intentionally*. That is, he must be able to unify his diverse simpler activities into a single coherent whole under that concept X. So if he does not have the concept, he wouldn't be able to do this unification. Mastery of the concept is required. Now I turn to the other aspect of the point, the I-aspect. This mastery of the relevant

concept requires the capacity for apperceptive accompaniments. That's a phrase derived from Kant. The mastery of X requires the capacity for accompanying your actions with things like "I am X-ing", "I am trying to X". And these things, "I am X-ing" and "I'm trying to X", are the practical analogues of Kant's famous "I think", which operates in the theoretical case. So in other words, intelligent conduct or intelligent action requires practical self-consciousness.

That's stage-setting. Everything I've said so far is preparation and actually has been said better by other people. What I want to do now is to use what I've said so far to argue for my main claim: heeding is an exercise of practical self-consciousness.

The argument goes like this. It has two steps, or three. The first step is to re-approach the topic of heeding from a different angle, from an angle somewhat different from Ryle's, by raising the following question. What is the *function* of heed concepts? Or you might say, what are they used for? I take these to be equivalent questions. Here I'm inspired by a remark by Wittgenstein. He says: "In philosophy the question 'what do we actually use this word or this proposition for' repeatedly leads to valuable insights." (*Tractatus*, 6.22).

So we want to know what the function, or the main function, of heed concepts is. Actually, that's not easy to answer, because heed concepts are used in many ways and their use is very hard to survey. But fortunately, the function of heeding is particularly clear and prominent in the phenomenon of teaching. So that's a good point of entry into its main function.

So let's start by looking at teaching. It seems to me that the main function of heed concepts in teaching is to help ensure that the one who's being taught, the pupil or someone who's being trained by a coach, performs the action *well*. This is the main purpose, I think, when the teacher or coach tells the pupil or trainee to pay attention to what he's doing. For example, he says "No, no, no, that's wrong! Pay attention to what you're doing!" That's what teachers say. Teachers and coaches do that a lot. The aim of saying "Pay attention to what you're doing" is to help make sure that the action is done well. By "well" here I don't mean "excellent". I just mean "well, or at least not badly", the minimum basic competence. It's not a demanding concept.

Now, that's teaching. The same point, I think, is also true in many non-teaching contexts. So for example, you're driving and a passenger in your car tells you, "Hey, pay attention to your driving. Drive carefully." What is she doing? She's asking you to drive *well*. Don't crash. Don't hit pedestrians. Things of that nature.

To sum up: the main function of heeding an action (I don't claim the *only* function) seems to be to perform it *well*. So that's my first point: there's a connection between heeding and doing things *well*.

Now, I turn to the second point. Intelligent conduct has a certain kind of complexity. Let me explain. The agent must perform a variety of tasks and be ready to deal with an open range of contingencies. So take my driving example again. A driver must operate the steering wheel, watch the surrounding traffic, maybe step on the brake if needed. He must also look out for possible emergencies, such as running children, and be ready to react. That's dispositional. So it's fairly complex. Both episodic things and dispositional things. The point here is that to really perform an intelligent action, such as driving, *well*, the agent must *unify* the diverse, simpler actions into a coherent whole. These simpler activities can be divided into two categories. First, things he's doing right now, episodic things, such as steering the wheel, stepping on the gas, things like that. Secondly, he must be ready, e.g., to swerve if a child suddenly runs into the street. That's the dispositional part. So you can see there's a connection with Ryle. I'll return to this connection later.

I've made two points. First, heeding is connected to doing things well. Second, doing things well is connected to a certain kind of unification of the diverse, simpler activities. Let's put these two points together. First, the main function of heeding an action is to perform it well. Second, to perform it well is to achieve unity of a multiplicity of simpler actions under the concept X. (That's

deliberately Kantian language. Those of you familiar with Kant will know that this is a practical analogue of Kant's talk about the synthesis of a manifold of intuition under a concept in the context of theoretical knowledge.) So the result of combining the two points is this. The main function of heeding is to achieve this kind of unity. Now, here comes the third, fundamentally Kantian point. To achieve this kind of unity, just as in the theoretical case, in the practical case the agent must be able to accompany his acting with "I am X-ing" or "I am trying to X". If someone who is supposedly tidying up a room is unable to accompany his action with one of these two things, he isn't really tidying up a room. His simpler, diverse actions would lack the necessary unity. As I said earlier, these things, "I'm X-ing" and "I'm trying to X", are the practical analogues of Kant's "I think".

So *that*, namely going through points one, two, and three, is how heeding is connected to practical self-consciousness. That's the core of my argument today.

The central point, in the way I just made it, is perhaps easy to miss. So let me repeat the central point in a slightly different formulation. This might be helpful. Heeding aims at a certain kind of unity (which I've just spelled out) that is essential to intelligent conduct. Heeding is the *unifying* activity. I said earlier that heeding is a special kind of activity. What kind of activity is it? It's the unifying activity of practical self-consciousness.

To sum things up: heeding *brings* unity; it is an exercise of practical self-consciousness. I don't mean that heeding always produces or achieves such unity. Of course we are fallible agents and we often fail. But we do sometimes succeed. And when we do succeed, heeding completes or perfects the action. Just like "pleasure completes or perfects the action" that you enjoy, as Aristotle says somewhere.

I'm done with the bulk of my talk. Let me conclude on a Rylean-Kantian note. In Rylean language, heeding is half-dispositional, half-episodic. It carries something general in it. That's why it's dispositional. It's also something occurrent, episodic, something particular happening right now. To heed one's acting is to bring something general, your various conceptual powers or capacities, to bear upon your acting here and now. That is, to bring something general to bear upon something concrete. So we could say, now switching to Kantian language, that heeding one's acting is the concretization of practical intelligence. And I mean this to be analogous to the concretization of theoretical intelligence in Kant, which he calls "schematization".

Thank you for heeding my talk!

Discussion

Audience: It seems to me that it's right that one function of heeding is to get us into the kind of mode that is going to help us do well at whatever it is that we're doing. But what do you make of the fact that sometimes we also need to get people to stop paying so much attention to what they're doing? We are talking about practical things and there's the phenomenon of overthinking. So sometimes we could say, 'Stop thinking so much.' And it seems this is a way of saying, 'Don't pay too much attention to what you're doing.' Perhaps it might be suggested that really what this is saying is, 'You're paying attention, which is good—I've always been telling you to pay attention to what you're doing—but now you're paying attention to the wrong things,' or something like that. The main problem I see here is it is well known that there is also the exact opposite effect, which paying attention sometimes seems to have.

Hao Tang: The honest answer is I don't know what to make of it, other than to acknowledge the fact that of course, sometimes heeding produces the opposite of the desired effect. But there may be deeper points here. That is, the reason why certain forms of heeding actually impede the action is

that you're paying attention to the wrong things. That may be part of it. This is something I didn't have time to expand on. The kind of heeding I'm talking about is very special. It must be sharply distinguished from the heeding in perception. Suppose you go to the art gallery, you look very carefully at a painting, right? You are paying attention to the painting, not to your observational activity. That's not the kind of heeding I want to talk about here. Here, the object of heeding is *your own action*. And I think Anscombe is right here: you don't watch yourself doing it. Knowledge of your own intentional action is not observational knowledge. So this is a special kind of paying attention. Sometimes, maybe not in all the cases, the reason why heeding impedes action is precisely because your attention is locked onto some physical object, rather than to the activity itself. But the activity itself is something unlike an empirical object. There is work to be done here. So far, I just acknowledge that point. But I don't have much more to offer.

Audience: You mentioned that heeding is active. So it's kind of actively paying attention. But there is also passive attention. How do you distinguish between activeness and passiveness?

Hao Tang: One way is of course just by intuitive judgment. I take it to be obvious that if there's a sudden clap of thunder and everyone's attention is *grabbed* by it, then it is passive attention. Your attention is clearly passively drawn toward the object. That's using intuitive judgment. But we can also use a logical criterion (I'm using the word "logical" in a broad sense here), namely the following test: "Can you command it?" If you can command someone to heed something or pay attention to something then it's active attention. But you cannot command someone to have his attention drawn to a sudden clap of thunder. I don't think that can be commanded. Whether the attention can be commanded, I think that's a pretty good criterion.

Audience: You mentioned that heeding is occurrent. But you also mentioned that heeding is a disposition. So is it a little contradictory? And I'm very happy to see that you argue that practical knowledge is different from knowing-how. And the reason I agree with you is that practical knowledge is occurrent but knowing-how is dispositional. But if you argue that heeding is occurrent and at the same time heeding is dispositional, there might be a contradiction.

Hao Tang: Well I don't think it's contradictory for something to be both occurrent and dispositional at the same time, because there are many actual examples of this phenomenon. Ryle at one place actually says, without argument, that most statements are semi-hypothetical or mongrel categorical. That is to say, there are only very few pure cases where a statement reports either a pure disposition or a pure occurrence. He thinks that most such cases are mixtures. He doesn't offer any argument for that. This is a claim that's difficult to argue for. I tend to think he's right about this. That is to say, pure dispositions and pure occurrences are the abstractions. The real phenomena are the mixtures of these two. If you find the mixture puzzling let me invite you to think of the following fact and see if you find it puzzling. The projector here is turned on. There is electrical current flowing through that wire. In English we say the wire is *live*. What does that mean? Well there's something occurrent: the electrons are flowing through the wire. That's episodic. But part of what it means to say it's live is that if you touch it (if the wire were naked) you would get electrocuted. Or if you put a magnet around it the wire might move (or whatever the physicists say it would do). There's always a dispositional aspect to a wire's being live. I know this is only a single example, but I think if you look around you'll find a multitude of such examples. They may actually even be the norm. That is, mixtures are everywhere and purities are rare.

Audience: My question is related to the view that heeding is both dispositional and episodic. I

can think of a counter-example to this view. Say a careless driver is driving carefully now, and we're taking this person as a careless driver. And by a careless driver, I mean he is disposed to drive badly or carelessly. My point is that in some cases, heeding can only be episodic without being dispositional.

Hao Tang: I guess your point is that, for example, a pathological liar sometimes tells the truth. A careless driver sometimes drives carefully. He is generally a careless driver, but now he is driving carefully.

Audience: Yes, but this moment now does not necessarily indicate that heeding. Because he is driving carefully now, he is actually paying attention to driving. And this heeding is only episodic without being dispositional.

Hao Tang: No, it is also dispositional. What do you mean by saying he is driving carefully now? That means that he is now ready to react to possible contingencies, right?

Audience: Yes, but this is episodic.

Hao Tang: This is dispositional.

Audience: Or this is probably a different understanding of disposition.

Hao Tang: Being a careless driver is certainly a disposition. But it is different from the kind of dispositional character I am ascribing to heeding here. I don't think there is a conflict here. We do seem to have some different understandings about what "dispositional" means. Maybe this is because I cut a part of the talk that contains details about what exactly Ryle means by saying that heed concepts have a mongrel logic, both dispositional and episodic. Here "dispositional" means the carefulness, the care with which you do something. It includes, as part of its meaning, readiness to react to a range of possible contingencies. It's dispositional because it has the if-then structure. If a child runs into the street, you stop the car. That's part of what we mean by saying someone is driving carefully. Yes, he may be a careless driver in general, but *today* he's a good driver, he's driving carefully. And in this care or carefulness, there is a dispositional structure.

Audience: How do you explain the way that the person who is a careless driver is driving carefully in a dispositional way and in another dispositional way being a careless driver?

Hao Tang: Why do you want to explain that?

Audience: Might this be a person who is both dispositionally a good driver and dispositionally a bad driver?

Hao Tang: No, it's two things. It's one thing to say a person is a good driver or bad driver. It's another thing to say a person is now driving carefully or not driving carefully. These are two different kinds of contrasts. They both involve dispositions. But the first is more like hexis (I mean "state of character"). It's a general characteristic. But the second is something that's going on now, where the going-on involves a mode of action that includes responsiveness to possible contingencies. That's different. So you can have four combinations, right? Two by two. You can have many combinations here. All you have to do is to introduce some terminology to say there are different

kinds of dispositions. That's easy to do, I think.

Audience: You said that heeding has the function to make us do something. Why? Is this like a universal claim?

Hao Tang: If it is a universal claim, it's an Aristotelian universal. He says something like the function of man is to exercise your reason actively, in the so-called Function Argument. Which is not to say that every man does that. There are plenty of human beings who have no reason. Or if they have reason, they don't make any active use of it. The point is general. It is also Michael Thompson's point. A horse has four legs, right? It's a true statement. He calls it an Aristotelian categorical. But you can have a horse that has only three legs. One leg has been amputated, but it's still a horse. The existence of three-legged horses does not falsify the general statement, "A horse has four legs". So it's not a Fregean universal. You can call it a universal or general, but it's Aristotelian generality. It sets up a natural norm. If a horse has five legs, it's an abnormal horse, we'd say. A horse with three legs, similar.

Audience: I have a little question. Do you think that heeding is itself an action or just a necessary condition for an action?

Hao Tang: It is itself an action. It is not a necessary condition for other actions. You can drive carelessly, for example. It's still driving. Very bad driving.

Audience: You mentioned Aristotle talking about rational animals. I want to ask you about that particular comparison between what I suppose you would describe as a contrast between rational and non-rational animals. You were joking around a little when you described the bird...

Hao Tang: I was joking, but there was a very serious point when I said it was stupid.

Audience: The example of the bird tidying up the nest is a great one because, anyone who's observed birds' nest behavior, whether they're building it or tidying it up, it's really quite impressive. We want to say, they pay a lot of attention there, being very careful. So that's the kind of example we want to take. I think the way in which you drew the contrast was something like this. There's an important difference you said, and I think you wanted to say that it concerns this conceptual aspect of it all. And the way you proved your point was by saying that the bird cannot say, 'I am tidying up my nest'. Can you expand a little on just how you distinguish the two cases? Not everyone will agree with what you seem to be suggesting, your reasons for thinking that the bird doesn't have the requisite concept. Some people are mute, or maybe for other reasons, uncommunicative. And so they can't say some of these things, like 'I am tidying up my nest', yet we would not draw the same conclusions.

Hao Tang: When I say the bird cannot say that, I really mean it in a very strong sense. Your example is a good one to bring out the point. Deaf people, especially people who have acquired full rationality and for unfortunate reasons become deaf and mute. Let's say they can still write. Maybe they're paralyzed. They cannot even write out their thoughts either.

But as long as there is good reason for believing that a means of communication can be devised and taught to such a person, and he can make use of it, then we have a right to say that he could say, in whatever means of communication (writing or a special code or whatever), "I am tidying up my room [or doing something else]". In the case of a bird, I think the case is much different. Maybe

I'm just too deep in this way of looking at things that I find it just impossible to imagine how a bird might speak. Let me just throw this out for vividness. It might be helpful. John Locke has a famous example of a report, reputable report, about a talking parrot somewhere in Brazil. And this bird has acquired a reputation for being able to talk and people were curious. And then someone went up and started to talk to the parrot. "What do you do?" The bird says, "I look after the chickens."

Now question: Is the bird saying something false or unintelligible? The parrot says "I look after the chickens." It "says", in a scare-quoted sense. Should we say he's uttering a falsehood or should we say he's just uttering a piece of nonsense, something devoid of meaning? He does not, the bird does not understand what it "says". How can a parrot look after chickens? Can you begin to understand that?

My use of a bird as an example here is deliberate. Because, you know, parrots are a kind of bird. Some parrots can say a lot of things. Perhaps you can train a parrot to say, "I am tidying up my nest" or "I'm cleaning my cage". But does he really understand what he's saying? I would say no. Let's introduce what Evans calls the Generality Constraint. If you are able to really say, with understanding, "I am doing X", you must also be able to say, with understanding, "He is doing X", "I am doing Y", "I was doing Y". So all those permutations of person and verb and tense and all that. You have to have command of those things (other predicates of the same kind and other personal pronouns) and know how to combine them in intelligible speech. Otherwise, I think we don't have a right to say that the bird knows what he's saying. He's merely producing noises.

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