

The Will as Reason

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I hope here to defend an account of the will as practical reason—or, using Kant’s phrase, as “reason in its practical employment”—as against a view according to which practical reason issues in judgments, and the will, as a capacity in addition to reason, executes those judgments in action. The opposing view gains credibility largely because certain commonplaces (such as so-called “Buridan’s ass” cases and certain cases of weakness of the will) show distance between judgment and action; they thus seem to reveal the need for a capacity, in addition to reason, by which we execute judgment in action. However, another ordinary fact pushes in the other direction: the activities of the will are activities for which the person is answerable in a very distinctive sort of way. This answerability is hard to understand unless willing is itself an activity of our capacity for reasoning.

I will suggest that we can accommodate the troublesome commonplaces while understanding willing as an exercise of our capacity to reason if we abandon the assumption that practical reasoning concludes in a judgment.¹ Rather, reasoning which concludes in a judgment—reasoning directed at the question of whether p , where p is a proposition—is theoretical, not practical, reasoning. In its practical employment, our capacity to reason is directed instead at the question of whether to ϕ , where ϕ is an action; it concludes, not in a judgment about ϕ -ing, but rather in an intention to ϕ . This more liberal understanding of practical reasoning can both accommodate the commonplaces and explain our answerability.

¹ Of course, this suggestion is not novel. It does seem to me, however, to bear repeating. Moreover, I believe that the view presented here avoids the problematic assumption in a particularly satisfying way.

THE CASE FOR AN ADDITIONAL CAPACITY: JUDGMENT AND ACTION

It is often assumed that practical reasoning concludes in a judgment, such as “I will ϕ ,” “I ought to ϕ ,” “I have most reason to ϕ ,” “ ϕ -ing is to be done,” or “ ϕ -ing would be best overall” (where “ ϕ ” stands for some ordinary action, such as “leave the party,” “wash the dishes,” or “accept the mission”). Since there is a considerable difference between concluding that you will or ought to do something and doing it, it seems that something is needed to bridge that gap and execute judgment in action: call it the will.²

The will, so understood, is thought to be prominently on display in two commonplaces: in our ability to act even when the reasons seem equally balanced, inconclusive, or incommensurable and in our ability to act against our best judgment.

If, as often happens, the reasons bearing on practical judgment are equally balanced, inconclusive, or incommensurable, one cannot legitimately arrive at a judgment on the basis of them. By hypothesis, in such cases, there is no fact of the matter about what one ought to do, what one will do, what one has most reason to do, what is to be done, or what is best, all things considered. Knowing this, one should suspend all judgment on

² Gary Watson distinguishes between what he calls “internalist” and “externalist” accounts of the will. Internalist accounts link the will with value (one wills what one takes to be good). Externalist accounts do not. This is close to, but not the same as, the distinction I draw here, between accounts of the will as practical reason and as some capacity for choice in addition to our capacity to reason. (Understanding the will as our capacity to reason does not commit one to thinking that a person always does what she judges good, or even that she always has a reason for willing in a particular way.) See Gary Watson, “The Work of the Will,” in *Agency and Answerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

these questions.³ Yet, in such cases, one can legitimately decide to act. So it seems that willing is something other than or in addition to judging. And so it can seem that we must possess some additional capacity, beyond the capacity to reason practically.⁴

This capacity comes into its own in those cases in which we act against our better judgment—what I will call cases of “weakness of will.”⁵ Sometimes, though we judge that, all things considered, we ought to (or have most reason to, or will) do one thing, we do something else, instead. In light of such cases, it seems reasonable to conclude that the soul has its parts: the part that judges and the part that chooses to act. It seems a short step to the conclusion that the will is a capacity for choice, in addition to our capacity to reason.

In addition to these two commonplaces, some believe that we can act without reason—that is, for no reason—and take this to support the claim that our capacity to will is something other than our capacity for reasoning. But this belief is controversial. Joseph Raz, e.g., denies it, claiming that “choice and decision are subject to rules of rational constraint, the most important of which is that one can only choose for a reason, i.e., for

³ I take the *practical judgment* that I will ϕ to be distinct from the *intention* to ϕ , even though the same form of words (“I will ϕ ”) may also express the intention. I will discuss differences later; chief among them is direction of fit. A judgment is correct when true. An intention cannot be assessed as true or false, but as justified or unjustified, or satisfied or unsatisfied. It can hard to know what the practical judgment “I will ϕ ” amounts to, but I take it that it is something like a prediction made on the basis of practical reasons.

J. David Velleman, who believes that intentions just are practical judgments, argues that, when the reasons are equally weighed, one has the freedom to judge any which way, because, by forming the judgment, one will make it the case that the judgment is true. See J. David Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Especially “Introduction,” “Epistemic Freedom,” and “What Happens When Someone Acts.”

⁴ Joseph Raz seems to argue in this direction in Joseph Raz, “Incommensurability and Agency,” in *Engaging Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵ Other kinds of cases are also called weakness of will (see, e.g., note 17). I focus here on those where judgment and action part company.

what one takes to be a good reason for the option chosen.”⁶ Harry Frankfurt disagrees.

He remarks, with his characteristic combination of directness and flair,

This strikes me as quite implausible. I do not see why it should be impossible for a person to make a choice or a decision even when he does not think that he has a good reason, or even when it is clear to him that he has no reason whatever for choosing or deciding as he does. That may not be a sensible way to go about things. Nevertheless, it can be done.⁷

If one agrees with Frankfurt (as I am inclined to), that agreement provides further

pressure towards distinguishing our ability to will and our ability to reason.⁸

THE CASE FOR THE WILL AS REASON: ANSWERABILITY

Although a capacity for choice in addition to reason would account for the commonplaces, another ordinary set of facts suggests that the activity of the will should be understood as an exercise of our capacity for reason: Activities of the will must be activities of the person, for which the person is answerable in a quite particular way. This answerability is easily understood if the will is taken to be the practical employment of our capacity for reason. It is hard to understand otherwise.⁹

⁶ Joseph Raz, "When We Are Ourselves: The Active and the Passive," in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action*, ed. Joseph Raz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8. I should note that Raz advocates what he calls a "classical" rather than a "rationalist" theory of the will. See Raz, "Incommensurability and Agency."

⁷ See Harry Frankfurt, "Disengaging Reason," in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, ed. R. Jay Wallace, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 122.

⁸ Sometimes further support for an additional faculty is sought in the fact that not all decisions involve deliberation—we make spontaneous decisions. But the fact of spontaneous decisions, or decisions without prior conscious thought, does not itself tell against the view of the will as practical reason. After all, we also spontaneously form judgments and come to believe things without prior conscious thought.

⁹ There is another difficulty facing any account that separates willing from reasoning, which I will not explore. A capacity for choice in addition to reason will need the ability *employ* reason for the purpose of determining exactly how to successfully execute our sometimes-complex akratic actions. Gavin Lawrence has emphasized this point. See Gavin Lawrence, "Intention, Reason, and Choice," in *Modern Moral Philosophy*, ed. Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Notice, first, the activities of the will are the activities of the person, not the activities of some sub-personal mechanism or psychological subsystem.¹⁰ A person's muscles, e.g., also function to execute thought in action. But the role of the muscles, per se, is not the role of the person. This is particularly clear in cases of failure. If a muscle suddenly fails—seizes or spasms—and action is aborted, we do not charge the person with the failure. Rather, the person's attempt was thwarted by a failure in her muscles. She encountered a bad stroke of luck. Even if the muscle failure could have been anticipated and better managed, even then the person is not criticized for the muscle failure, itself; rather, she is criticized for her failure to better manage her physiology or her situation. In contrast, the role of the will, itself, is the role of the person, and failures of will are failures of the person herself (or as a whole), not merely malfunctions of some cognitive or motivational sub-system. She failed to do what she judged best; she gave into temptation; she lacked the nerve; she couldn't bring herself to do it; she was paralyzed by indecision. If she could have anticipated and better managed her failure of nerve, say, and she failed to do so, then that is an *additional* failure.

Second, the person is answerable for the activities of her will in a quite particular way. As noted by G. E. M. Anscombe, if a person intends to ϕ , or ϕ 's intentionally, he or she can rightly be asked, "Why are you ϕ -ing?" (or, "Why did you ϕ ?", or "Why do you intend to ϕ ?"), where this question looks for a very particular kind of answer: it looks for

¹⁰ Frankfurt claims that the question of when activities are attributable to a creature itself, rather than to things other than it, should not turn on the employment of higher faculties, which presumably only humans possess. He points out that the movements of a spider's legs are only sometimes attributable to the spider. But I will presume that the spider does not will anything, in that the spider is not answerable in the way I am about to explain. See Harry Frankfurt, "The Problem of Action," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

that person's reasons for ϕ -ing. If you have accepted the mission, e.g., you can aptly be asked for your reasons for accepting. Perhaps duty called, or you wanted to see the opposition crushed, or you could use the money. Such answers satisfy the Anscombean why-question by giving, or indicating, what you took to count in favor of accepting the mission.¹¹ In contrast, the same kind of why-question, directed at your muscle spasm or your seeing of spots, would be entirely inapt. The seemingly similar question, "Why are you seeing spots?" is not an Anscombean why-question. It does not look for anything you might have taken to count in favor of seeing spots. Seeing spots is not the kind of thing done for reasons. A why-question directed at your seeing of spots or your muscle spasm simply asks for a medical or biological explanation of the phenomena.¹² You are not answerable for these events.

Anscombe noted two further points about (what I am calling) our answerability.

First, her why-question is apt only when the action is described in a certain way—only

¹¹ I say "or indicating," because when you say that you accepted the mission "because you wanted to see the opposition crushed" you might mean, literally, that you took your own desire to count in favor of accepting—you are accepting in order to satisfy your own vengeful desire—or you might mean, more obliquely, that you took the potential to crush the opposition to count in favor of accepting. In the latter case, your answer, read literally, (that you *wanted* something) is not itself your reason (you might, e.g., think that trying to satisfy your desires would be remarkably self-absorbed, given the monstrosities committed by the opposition). It rather *indicates* what you took to count in favor: the possibility of crushing the opposition.

There is another kind of answer, which Michael Thompson focuses upon: one might say that one is washing the dishes because one is cleaning the kitchen. Here, one answers the why question by locating the particular action as a part of a larger action. This answer could either provide one's reason—if one took the fact that one is cleaning the kitchen to count in favor of washing the dishes—or it might merely indicate one's reasons—which are presumably one's reasons for cleaning the kitchen, whatever those may be. See Michael Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008).

¹² The literature contains many discussions of ways of dividing "kinds" of reasons. I take Anscombe's question to ask for what I have called "*your* reasons," what some call "the agent's reasons" or "the agent's normative reasons," and what Scanlon calls "operative reasons." (T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 19.) These are considerations that the agent took to count in favor of the action, the so taking of which in part explains the action. They contrast, here, with reasons that explain events without being taken to count in favor of the event. I discuss reasons for action in more detail in Pamela Hieronymi, "Reasons for Action," (in progress).

under a description the person intends (or intended). If I am asked, “Why are you using the good china?” and I reply, “I didn’t know that I was,” I have, as Anscombe puts it, “refused application” to her why-question: I have shown the question inapt.¹³ In contrast (and this is the second point), if I instead answer, “For no particular reason,” I do not show the question inapt, anymore, she says, than the answer, “None,” shows inapt the question, “How much money do you have in your pocket?”¹⁴ (I presume that the answer, “I have no pockets” would show that question inapt, just as “I didn’t know I was ϕ -ing” shows inapt the question “Why are you ϕ -ing?”)

Finally, your decisions, intentions, and intentional actions open you, as a person, to certain characteristic sorts of evaluations. Your accepting of the mission might show you courageous, clever, malicious, dastardly, or vengeful. Your washing of the dishes might be conscientious or spiteful or obsessive. In contrast, your muscle spasm and your seeing of spots show nothing of the sort. They merely reveal the workings of physiology.

So, your willings are yours, you can be rightly asked for your reasons for so willing, at least under the appropriate descriptions, and your willings open you to a certain characteristic range of evaluations. I will refer to this trio of facts—and, especially, the second of them—as our *answerability* for our willings.

We can readily explain these facts about answerability if we understand willing as the practical exercise of our capacity for reason.

¹³ G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Co., 1957), 11.

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 25.

First, suppose, uncontroversially enough, that to will to ϕ —to make a decision to ϕ or form an intention to ϕ or to ϕ intentionally—is (at least in part, and in some sense) to settle the question of whether to ϕ , where ϕ is the description under which one’s action is intentional (setting the table, washing the dishes, accepting the mission). So, to decide to accept the mission (or to intend to accept the mission or to accept intentionally) is to settle the question of whether to accept the mission.

Notice, next, the kind of “settling a question” that you do, in accepting the mission, differs from the kind of settling of a question accomplished by a rainstorm, when it “settles the question” of whether it will rain today or whether to go to the beach this afternoon. Although the rainstorm has settled those questions *for us*—it has provided conclusive reason to think it will rain and to avoid the beach—the rainstorm has not raised or answered any questions for itself. Though it has provided us with reasons, it has not itself engaged in any activity that was or even might have been done for reasons. In contrast, it seems that when you decide to accept the mission you have engaged in a kind of activity that either was done for reasons or (at least) might have been done for reasons. In fact, it seems that you have engaged your capacity to raise, deliberate about, and answer questions—that is, your capacity for reasoning.

I believe the claim that willing to ϕ is or centrally involves settling the question of whether to ϕ , where that settling is the kind of activity done for reasons, amounts to a liberal interpretation of the claim that willing is an exercise of our capacity for reasoning—our capacity to raise, deliberate about, and answer questions. One might object that this is too liberal an interpretation of our capacity for reasoning. I will consider such

objections after showing how this liberal interpretation, if true, would explain our distinctive answerability for our willings while accommodating the familiar commonplaces.

The liberal interpretation will explain our distinctive answerability for our willings.

First, and quickly, exercises of reason are activities of the whole person, not of some sub-personal or physiological system, and failures of reason are failures of the person, not strokes of bad luck. So, if willing is an exercise of reason, it is an activity of the whole person.

Second, and more extensively, the liberal interpretation can explain the distinctive features of the Anscombean why-question. The distinctive features are these: the Anscombean why-question looks for a very particular range of answers, viz., those that give or indicate the person's reasons for doing something; it is apt even in those cases in which a person had no reasons for doing what she did; but it is not aptly asked of a person's muscle spasm or seeing of spots, nor is it aptly asked of a person's action under a description that the person does not recognize.

First, it seems a general truth that, if one has answered a question for oneself, one can be asked for one's reasons for doing so—even if one answered that question for no particular reason. Thus, if one has answered positively the question of whether to ϕ , one can be asked for the reasons, if any, that one took to bear positively on that question. The Anscombean question, "Why are you ϕ -ing?" looks for answers that give or indicate just such reasons. So, if willing involves settling the question of whether to ϕ , where that is

the sort of activity done for reasons, it is plain why Anscombe's question is appropriately asked of willings, and why looks for the particular range of answers for which it looks.

We can also see why Anscombe's question is aptly asked even when the person had no particular reason for acting, but inaptly asked both of activities that are not done for reasons and of intentional actions under certain descriptions. In general, a question is apt if the assumptions it makes are met. The question "How much money do you have in your pocket?" assumes that you have a pocket, but makes no assumption about how much money you have in it. Rather, it inquires how much. Thus the question is apt even when the answer is "None," but it is not if the answer is "I have no pockets." The Anscombean why-question, I am suggesting, assumes that one has settled for oneself positively the question of whether to ϕ , but makes no assumptions about one's reasons for doing so. Rather, it inquires after those reasons. Thus the question is apt even in those cases in which the person had no particular reason for acting—even so, the person answered the question of whether to ϕ , where this is the kind of activity done for reasons. However, the question is inapt in the case of seeing spots, because the assumption that the person has settled the question of whether to see spots is false. A person does not see spots because she has settled the question of whether to do so. Likewise, if a person decided to use *this* china, without realizing that this is *the good* china, then she did not settle the question of whether to use the good china. The Anscombean question "Why are you using the good china?", which looks for her reasons for settling the question of whether to use the good china, is again inapt.

Thus, if willing to ϕ is or centrally involves settling the question of whether to ϕ , where that settling is the kind of activity done for reasons, we can readily explain why the Anscombean why-question is appropriately asked of willings, why it looks for the very particular range of answers that characterize it, why it is aptly addressed only to actions under certain descriptions, and why it is appropriately addressed to a person's willing even when the person had no reason so to will, though is not appropriately addressed to activities that are not the kind of thing done for reasons, such as seeing spots.¹⁵ The assumption that willing to ϕ involves answering the question of whether to ϕ , thus handily accounts for these central aspects of our answerability.

Finally, this liberal interpretation of the claim that willing is an exercise of our capacity for reasoning can also explain how willing leaves us open to the range of evaluations that it does (e.g., magnanimous, spiteful, courageous, or petty). A person's answer to a question, and his or her reasons for it, will cohere, to a greater or lesser extent, with the person's other beliefs, judgments, intentions, and general temperament. So, once we know a person's answer and, especially, his or her reasons for that answer, these will seem to reveal a stretch of the person's mind, and so open him or her to the relevant range of evaluations.

¹⁵ I believe the assumption that, in willing, one settles a question that represents one's action under some description also explains why we can be assumed to know "without observation" what we are intentionally doing: if we are doing it intentionally, we are doing it in virtue of having settled a question which contains in it a representation of the action, under the relevant description. The question of why Anscombe's two marks of intentional action should occur together is nicely raised in Kieran Setiya, "Explaining Action," *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 3 (2003). Assuming that intentionally ϕ -ing involves settling the question of whether to ϕ should, it seems, answer this elegant question.

Thus, by understanding willing as, or as centrally involving, the settling of a question, where that settling is the kind of activity done for reasons, we can readily make sense of the particular sort of answerability that comes with it.

ACCOMMODATING THE COMMONPLACES

However, for an account of the will as practical reason to be viable, we also need a way of understanding the commonplaces that seemed to count against it: how is it that we manage to act against our better judgment and to act when reasons are inconclusive? We might also want to understand how we can act for no reason at all. Fortunately, these commonplaces seem difficult only on the assumption that practical reasoning concludes in a judgment. That assumption can be abandoned.¹⁶

It is quite tempting to think that practical reasoning concludes in judgment, because it is tempting to think its conclusion is an ordinary proposition, such as “I ought to ϕ ,” or “I have most reason to ϕ .” When one concludes a piece of reasoning directed at the question of whether p , where p is a proposition, it seems one therein judges or believes that p (assuming one answered that question positively). But we need not think that *practical* reasoning is directed at the question of whether one ought to do something, or whether one has most reason to do it. Rather, practical reasoning is directed at the question of whether to do something—whether to ϕ . It thus concludes, not in a judgment that p (where p is some proposition about an action, such as, “I ought to ϕ ”) but rather in

¹⁶ It should again be obvious that each of the points in this section have been made elsewhere, by others—indeed, by many others. But since there is as yet no general consensus on the topic, I hope it of some use to gather these points together and address them using the formulations developed in the previous section.

an intention to act. Yet it is recognizably reasoning, just as reasoning about whether p is recognizably reasoning.

If practical reasoning concludes directly in an intention, there is no need to bridge any gap between judgment and action. Intention results in action, so long as all goes well.¹⁷ Moreover, we can readily accommodate cases of (what we are calling) weakness of will—cases in which one’s judgment and will part company. Importantly, we accommodate these cases while plainly preserving a person’s answerability for his or her weak-willed action. Judging that you have most reason to ϕ , e.g., is a piece of theoretical reasoning, about the reasons for acting one has. It is theoretical reasoning about a practical subject matter. It results in a belief or judgment about one’s reasons for action. But *practical* reasoning is not reasoning about one’s reasons for action. It is reasoning about whether to act. We certainly expect a person to be guided, in answering the question of whether to act, by the reasons she acknowledges, when reasoning about her reasons for action. But this expectation may not be met. It is quite possible (though no doubt irrational) to conclude that you have reason to ϕ without also deciding to ϕ , or to decide to ϕ while acknowledging that you have most reason not to ϕ . This happens when the reasons one acknowledges, when reasoning theoretically, are not reasons that one employs, when reasoning practically.

¹⁷ The action is the execution of the intention, and, so long as the intention is complete (so long as it does not require further specification, for its execution), one executes it in action so long as nothing interferes—so long as the agent is able-bodied, not prevented, does not forget, and does not change her mind. If nothing of the sort happens, and one fails to act, it seems one did not really intend. (There is, of course, a variety of “weakness of will” that consists, not simply in failing to do what one judges best, but rather in constantly revising one’s intentions in the face of predictable temptation. The trouble in such cases is not that one lacks the ability to bridge some gap between judgment or reason and action. Rather, the trouble in such cases lies precisely in the inconstancy of practical reason. One might think of the constant revising of intention in the face of predictable temptation as weakness of will, proper—inconstancy of reason in its practical employment.)

And, of course, by accommodating such cases of weakness of will in this way—by distinguishing between practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning about practical matters—we preserve a person’s answerability for her weak-willed action. Because she has answered for herself positively the question of whether to ϕ (even though she also judged that she had most reason not to ϕ), she can be asked why she decided to ϕ . Her answer may correctly appeal to the reasons that she also judges insufficient, when employing her capacity for theoretical reason to reflect upon her reasons for action.¹⁸

(Note, too, that if we accommodate these cases by distinguishing practical reasoning from theoretical reasoning on a practical subject matter, the latter sort of activity will seem more sophisticated and expensive than is sometimes thought. Forming a judgment about your reasons or about what you ought to do is not a necessary, nor even an ordinary, step in everyday willing, but rather a reflective activity called for when things are unclear or difficult. In the usual case, one can simply reason about whether to act, thereby employing certain considerations as reasons. Coming to such a decision may somehow commit one to certain claims about what someone in your situation has reason to do or ought to do. But one need not have formed any judgment about these matters in the process of coming to a decision.)

Distinguishing practical from theoretical reasoning also allows us to account for the other commonplace: the fact that we can decide what to do when the reasons are inconclusive, equally weighed, or incommensurable. Such cases do not show that willing is something other than practical reasoning; they instead show that practical reasoning is

¹⁸ This account bears some similarity to Davidson’s well-known position. See Donald Davidson, "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Again, I believe there are other forms of weakness of will. See the previous note.

not governed by the same principles as theoretical reasoning. If, when trying to determine whether p , one finds the reasons for and against equally weighed, one cannot rationally draw a conclusion. One should rather suspend judgment. But if the reasons for ϕ -ing and not ϕ -ing are equally weighed, or are incommensurable, then it one can rationally decide *either* to ϕ or not to ϕ . Doing so does not violate any principle of practical reason. Thus, such cases simply show that different standards apply to practical reasoning than to theoretical reasoning.¹⁹

Finally, the account on hand can also accommodate the possibility that we can act for no reason at all. If one thinks that we can act for no reason at all, one should, it seems, also allow that we could answer questions for no reason at all. Sometimes (such as in “Buridan’s ass” cases) it will be appropriate to do so, other times not. Of course, even if we act for no reason at all, a request for our reasons is still in place—because even so we have engaged in the kind of activity that might have been done for reasons.

OBJECTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

The forgoing is offered as support for the claim that the will is reason in its practical employment, where that claim is understood liberally: willing is, or centrally involves, answering the question of whether to ϕ , where that answering is the kind of activity done for reasons.

Some may object that this is too liberal an interpretation of our capacity for reasoning, because they identify reasoning very narrowly, with deliberation. In response,

¹⁹ Gilbert Harman has advocated the view that the standards of practical reasoning differ from the standards of theoretical reason. See Gilbert Harman, *Reasoning, Meaning and Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

notice that, on such a narrow notion of reasoning, judging is also not an exercise of our capacity for reasoning: one may settle a question about what is the case, and so make a judgment, absent deliberation. One may simply answer such a question for oneself, without deliberating upon it.²⁰ So, on this narrow view, exercises of judgment must be exercises of some other capacity, a capacity, say, to arrive at conclusions, even absent deliberation. It seems that judging, then, will sometimes be an exercise of our capacity for deliberation together with this other capacity, but sometimes an exercise of this other capacity alone.

I mean to argue, most centrally, that willing is (or centrally involves) the practical exercise of the same general capacities of which judging is an exercise; willing is the practical correlate of judging. I group together our capacity to raise, to deliberate about, and to answer questions, and I call these our capacity for reason. I am suggesting that these same general capacities have two employments, practical and theoretical.

One could, of course, divide the terrain differently, and identify our capacity to reason narrowly, with our capacity for deliberation. One would then need to allow that we have another capacity, a capacity to arrive at conclusions, even absent deliberation. Perhaps one will call this a capacity for judgment, in the theoretical case, while calling it a capacity for willing or deciding, in the practical case. So long as one understands both the capacity to judge and the capacity to will as capacities to answer a question, where that answering is the kind of activity (often) done for reasons, one will have agreed with

²⁰ A recent on-line poll asked whether Michael Vick deserves to play football again. I can answer immediately, without deliberation. I believe I can also provide reasons, and I believe the reasons I provide may in fact be the reasons for my judgment (and not merely a “post-hoc” rationalization). But my judgment followed no deliberation upon those reasons. (I think this a deep point: reasons can explain judgments even when they do not precede them in occurrent thought.)

my central claim and, I think, will be advocating a kind of notational variant of the view on offer.²¹

Alternatively, one could divide the terrain by identifying our capacity for reasoning, not with our capacity for deliberation, but instead with our capacity for (what I am calling) *theoretical* reason—our capacity to raise, deliberate upon, and answer questions about *what is the case*, about whether *p*, where *p* is some proposition. Of course, if our capacity to reason is simply identified with this narrower capacity, to the exclusion of our ability to raise, deliberate about, and answer questions about whether to act, then willing must be identified as the exercise of an additional capacity—a capacity for what I would call practical reasoning.²²

Again, this may be merely verbal disagreement. In claiming that our general capacities for reasoning have two employments, practical and theoretical, I agree that our capacity for practical reasoning can be distinguished from our capacity for theoretical reasoning. As we have seen, these two employments differ in very important ways, and these differences are not simply a matter of the content or subject matter about which one is reasoning. Practical reasoning is not simply theoretical reasoning about action or

²¹ One might read the present paper either as claiming that willing is very much like theoretical reasoning or, instead, as suggesting that theoretical reasoning involves an activity very much like willing. Though I am no historian, I suspect that Descartes had something similar in mind, in saying that judgment requires an assent of the will.

Even Frankfurt, who is at pains to point out the freedom from the constraints of reason enjoyed by our volitional capacities, sees rationality and volition as “confusingly intermingled.” While others think of the will as presupposing a capacity to reason, he suggests that “the relationship goes the other way,” that reason presupposes the will. See Frankfurt, “Disengaging Reason.” note 2.

²² Raz, e.g., argues that the will is, to a degree, autonomous from reason in Raz, “Incommensurability and Agency.” But he might well accept the claim that willing involves settling a question, and so it is not obvious whether he means to separate the will from our capacity to reason, in general, or just from (what I call) theoretical reason—our capacity to form judgments about what is the case.

reasons for it.²³ Rather, the two employments differ in what some would call “form.”²⁴ It will be worthwhile to note the differences, to see that they do not undermine the claim that these are different employments of a more general capacity.

The differences, I take it, are these: Practical and theoretical reasoning are directed at are different kinds of questions, the answering of these questions is subject to different standards, and answering them results in a different kind of state of mind, with different “directions of fit,” only one of which has a very tight connection to action.

More slowly: In its theoretical employment, our general capacity for reason is directed at the question of whether p , where p is a proposition—something that can be true or false. Settling the question of whether p amounts to forming a belief or judgment that p . The standards for settling that question are concerned with accuracy.

In contrast, the question to which our capacity to reason is directed, in its practical employment, is not a question about what it is the case. Rather, in willing, our capacity to reason is directed at the question of whether to ϕ . Settling this question results, not in a belief or judgment that p , but rather in an intention to ϕ . The standards for settling this question are not concerned with accurately tracking what is already the case, but with what is sensible, worthwhile, reasonable, desirable, or permissible to make the case.

Further, intending, but not believing or judging, bears a very tight connection to action. If one intends to ϕ , then, if all goes well (if one is able-bodied, not prevented,

²³Anscombe made this point adeptly, by noting that, if the difference between practical and theoretical reasoning were simply a difference in subject matter, then we should expect to find, in parallel with discussion of the “practical syllogism,” a discussion of the “mince pie syllogism”—a discussion of reasoning about mince pies. She concludes, “there is a difference in form between reasoning leading to action and reasoning for the truth of a conclusion.” See Anscombe, *Intention*, 60.

²⁴ For a recent discussion of the “form” of practical thought, see Thompson, *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*.

does not forget, and does not change one's mind) one will execute that intention in ϕ -ing. If one were able-bodied, not prevented, did not forget and did not change one's mind, but simply failed to ϕ , then it would seem one did not really intend to ϕ . In contrast, there would be no need to withdraw the claim that one judged that one ought to ϕ or had most reason to ϕ . Perhaps one did, but never intended to ϕ .

These very important differences between the theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning must be respected. One might well think of each of these employments as a distinct capacity. However, doing so does not undermine the claim that willing is an exercise of the same general capacities of which judging is an exercise: our general capacities to raise, deliberate about, and answer questions. Reasons bear on questions about whether to act, just as readily as on questions about what is the case. Answering either kind of question can be, but need not be, the outcome of an explicit process of deliberation. Whether or not it is the product of an explicit process of deliberation, any particular judgment or intention can be assessed as irrational or unreasonable. So, in distinguishing between practical and theoretical reasoning, one need not deny that willing is an exercise of our general capacities for reasoning.

THE CASE AGAINST THE OPPOSITION

I hope have provided a case for thinking that willing is the practical exercise of our general capacities for reasoning. I will now suggest that, if we adopt a view that denies that willing to ϕ itself involves the kind of answering of a question done for reasons, it will be very unclear why we are answerable for the activities of our wills.

Recall, first, that a person's answerability for her willing differs starkly from her accountability for other events, such as her muscle spasm, her seeing of spots, the behavior of her dog, or the functioning of her automobile.²⁵ This becomes especially clear in cases of failure. A person may, no doubt, be accountable for the failure of her physiology, the misbehavior of her dog, or the malfunction of her worn-out brakes, but her accountability for such untoward events is the accountability of an overseer, and her failure in these cases is one of negligence. The person has not cared for, looked after, trained, or developed something in her jurisdiction of care, training, or development. Her dog, her brakes, and even her muscles and vision are features of her world with respect to which she has obligations. She is expected to know certain things about them and take steps to ensure that they perform well. If she does not, she is guilty of negligence. But, as we have noted, she cannot rightly be asked for her reasons for her dog's misbehavior, her muscle spasm, or her seeing of spots. She is not answerable to an Anscombean why-question directed at these events.²⁶ In contrast, if a person's will misbehaves, if it parts company with her better judgment, she *is* answerable for this misbehavior. She is not simply accountable for her will as something that she might have better trained, developed, or maintained (though she is *also* accountable in that way). She is answerable to the question of why she so willed, where that question looks for her reasons for so willing.

²⁵ I develop this point at greater length in "Responsibility and Mental Agency" (in progress).

²⁶ She is, of course, vulnerable to such questions directed at the distinct activities (or lack of activity) involved in the training, upkeep, and management of either her dog or her muscles.

As we have seen, this contrast can be readily explained on the assumption that willing involves answering for oneself the question of whether to ϕ : since answering a question generally leaves one answerable for the reasons, if any, for which one answered it, willing to ϕ leaves one answerable for the reasons, if any, that one took to bear positively on the question of whether to ϕ . In contrast, misbehavior of a person's dog or visual system is not (in the usual cases) plausibly something that occurred because that person settled the question of whether to do it or bring it about. Thus it makes no sense to ask for a person's reasons for these events.

If one instead denies that willing involves answering the question of whether to ϕ , it remains unclear why we should be answerable in this way for our willing, itself. It seems we should rather be accountable for the behavior or misbehavior of our will the way we are accountable for the well functioning or malfunction of our muscles—accountable for the upkeep and well-functioning of a capacity that executes action.

To consider this, it will be helpful to have a better sense of the opposition. The opposing position will, presumably, understand willing as an activity of the whole person, and one which, in some sense, settles the question of what to do, but will deny that it is the kind of settling that is done for reasons. Willing is not the practical correlate of judging. Such a position could take a number of forms; I will consider two.

One might simply think that we enjoy a kind of executive power or capacity, a capacity to cause or bring about that which we represent as to be done. One might think this capacity ought to, and typically does, follow the dictates of practical judgment, though it need not. Notice that this description is, so far, compatible with the view on

offer: If one thinks that we ought to, and typically do, reason theoretically before we reason practically, that is, if one thinks we ought to, and typically do, first arrive at a judgment before we arrive at an intention,²⁷ then one might think that our practical reason is an executive power or capacity that causes that which it represents, one which ought to, typically does, but might not follow the dictates of practical reason. To count as a genuinely opposing position, one must insist that this executive capacity is not *also* a capacity to come to conclusions about what to do, where reaching such a conclusion is the kind of activity done for reasons.

Alternatively, or in addition, one might provide a model or account of the psychology underlying action and decision-making. This is a popular endeavor.²⁸ The psychology underlying action is often modeled as a structure, organization, hierarchy, or interaction of desires, values, and beliefs. Again, such a model might be compatible with the liberal interpretation of the will as reason: it could be offered as a model of the psychology underlying or constituting practical reasoning—as what happens when someone answers the question of whether to ϕ . To count as a genuinely opposing position, one must deny that one is modeling or explaining the kind of answering done for reasons.

²⁷ I think this mistaken and under-motivated, but it is a possible position.

²⁸ Harry Frankfurt, Gary Watson, and J. David Velleman each give an account of the psychology leading to action in which the person is, for some or another reason, essentially or inalienably identified with some particular item or set of items which leads to action. See the papers collected in Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason*, and Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). I would maintain that, unless we understand these accounts as, in effect, descriptions of what I am calling reason in its practical employment then, absent some other story, we will have difficulty providing for the right kind of answerability—especially for cases of weakness of will. In short, the fact that something is identified with or belongs to me, even essentially or inalienably, does not yet illuminate why I can be asked for my reasons for it.

The trouble is that, once one denies that willing involves answering a question, where this is the kind of activity done for reasons, it is very hard to see why the Anscombean question is apt—why we can aptly be asked for our reasons for willing, where this question could not also be asked of our muscle spasm or seeing of spots. Why can we rightly be asked for our reasons for engaging in an activity that is not an activity engaged in for reasons?

The problem is sometimes overlooked because of a certain unclarity about reasons for action. When asked why you are washing the dishes, you might well reply, “because I want to” or “because I think it is important to keep the things clean.” And now it might seem that you *have* provided a satisfying answer to Anscombe’s question—that you have provided *your reason* for washing—simply by providing a desire or value, perhaps in combination with a belief. So it might seem that Anscombe’s question can, after all, be satisfyingly answered without either providing or indicating anything that you took to bear positively on the question of whether to wash. And so it might seem that Anscombe’s question does not, after all, assume that you engaged in the kind of answering of a question that is done for reasons. And so it might seem that answerability does not require that willing involve the answering of a question.

But these cases can be misleading. Your answer, “because I want to” or “because I think it is important to keep things clean,” might satisfy because it does, after all, provide or indicate what you took to answer the question of whether to wash, where that answering is the kind of activity done for reasons. Most straightforwardly, in saying, “I think it is important to keep things clean” you might be indicating that you take the

importance of cleanliness to settle the question of whether to wash the dishes. Likewise, you could take the fact that you *want* to wash, or that you have an inclination to wash just now, to count in favor of washing, and so to answer the question of whether to wash. Alternatively, in saying that you are washing because you want to wash, you might be indicating that you had no particular reason for settling the question of whether to wash—though you have settled it.²⁹ If we understand your answer in one of these ways, we are still understanding your answer as giving or indicating what you took to settle the question of whether to wash, and so understanding you as having engaged in some (perhaps very limited) practical reasoning.

On a genuinely opposing position, the appeal to desire or value cannot be understood as giving or indicating what, if anything, you took to settle the question of whether to wash. Rather, it must be understood simply as explaining which desires or values are at work, in producing your action. But now it seems that you are giving “your reasons” for the action—reasons that are yours—only in the sense that you are providing an explanation that appeals to facts about *your* psychology. But now it is unclear why you could not, in just the same way, give your reasons for seeing spots, or your reasons for the song running through your head—your reasons for events for which you are clearly not answerable. That is to say, this sense of “your reasons” does not secure our distinctive answerability.

²⁹ Sometimes we appeal to our desires simply as a way deflecting the question (in effect, simply refusing to answer)—which is, of course, a possible conversational move. If asked by an unwelcome salesperson why you chose a certain product, you might answer, “Because I preferred it.” You are not answering the question that was asked; rather, you are rather avoiding the question (and so curtailing the conversation) by treating it as a mere request for explanation. Sometimes the answer, “because I want to” does the same.

At this point one might try to secure our answerability for the operations of our wills by appeal to the fact that our wills (unlike our visual system) ought to, often do, but might not, follow our practical judgment. The conclusions of our practical judgment and the operation of our will ought to co-vary. Since practical judgments are arrived at for reasons, one might think that a person's willing inherits its answerability from practical judgment, so to speak.

The trouble is that just the same could be said for the operations of our musculature and our motor system: their operations are supposed to, typically do, but might not, follow the deliverances of practical reason. So it seems that, by parity of reasoning, they should inherit answerability in the same way. Yet, as we have seen, we are not answerable for the operation of our musculature. Rather, the operation of our musculature simply supplies *good evidence* of the activities of our will, and so good evidence that we are answerable, when all goes well. But, in cases of failure, when a muscle seizes or spasms, one is answerable only for one's intentions, not for one's motions. On the opposing picture, it seems that just the same should be said of the operation of the will, itself: because it ought to, and often does, follow the deliverances of practical judgment, it provides good evidence of the operation of practical judgment, and so good evidence of our answerability. But in cases of weakness of will, cases in which the will parts company with practical judgment, it seems that the person should be answerable *only* for her judgments, not for either her intentions or her motions. After all, by hypothesis, willing is not the kind of activity done for reasons. Thus, if we know, in a

given case, that the will has ignored judgment and gone its own way, it seems simply confused to ask for the person's reasons for so willing.³⁰

So, if willing is not itself the answering of a question, where that answering is the kind of activity done for reasons—if willing is not the practical correlate of judging—it seems hard to see why we are answerable for our willing, itself, in the way we take ourselves to be. It seems we would rather be accountable for the behavior or misbehavior of our will in just the way we are accountable for the well-functioning or malfunction of our muscles—accountable, that is, for the upkeep and well-functioning of an important capacity that translates practical conclusions into action. Short of another explanation, it seems best to understand willing as an exercise of our capacity for reasoning.

TWO UPSHOTS

Two points are worth noting, in conclusion. First, this picture of the will suggests an interesting view of the role of “ought” in practical reasoning. “Ought” is at least sometimes used to mark the practical conclusions we recommend, when we are, for one reason or another, not currently in the business of drawing them. For example, I cannot make your decisions for you. My practical conclusions, about whether to ϕ , will result in *my* intending to ϕ . I can, however, think about whether to ϕ from your point of view. If I think certain reasons tell decisively in favor of your ϕ -ing, I will express this thought in

³⁰ One might point out that willing, unlike the operation of our motor systems, is not only statistically and normatively tied to the operations of practical judgment, but is also an activity of the whole person. One might point to this fact to distinguish willing from the operations of motor systems, while pointing to the statistical or normative connection to practical judgment to secure answerability.

Although one could take this position, it seems both opaque and ad hoc, and therefore unsatisfying. Why should the fact that an activity is attributable to the whole creature, together with the fact that it bears both statistical and normative relations to practical judgment, leave that creature rightly vulnerable to requests for its reasons for an activity that, admittedly, was not done for reasons? This seems to me to stipulate, rather than explain, our answerability for the activity of our wills.

the judgment “you ought to ϕ .” This claim expresses a recommendation to your will. I can, of course, do the same for myself: I can recommend an action for myself, without actually deciding to act—without forming an intention—by forming a judgment about what I ought to do. An ought claim, then, may be understood as a recommendation to practical reasoning, rather than a step in it.

Second, the considerations here employed against alternative accounts of the will also reveal a shortfall in T. M. Scanlon’s extremely useful account of what he calls “judgment-sensitive attitudes.”³¹

A judgment-sensitive attitude is an attitude that ought to be sensitive to one’s judgments about the reasons that support it. Both belief and intention are judgment-sensitive: a belief that p ought to be sensitive to the judgment that you have most reason to believe p , an intention to ϕ ought to be sensitive to the judgment that you have most reason to intend to ϕ .

It is certainly true that belief and intention ought to co-vary with these judgments. But notice, if we understand belief and intention *simply* as mental states that ought to respond to one’s judgments about the reasons that support them, these attitudes will stand at an odd distance from our reasoning. Thus characterized, they are aspects of our minds that ought to co-vary with our reasoning, but which might not. In this respect, they would be like the activity of an independent will, which ought to reflect our practical judgment, but might not. We have seen the difficulty of understanding our answerability for the activity of a will, so construed. It is likewise difficult to understand our

³¹ See Scanlon, *What We Owe*, 18ff.

answerability for attitudes that simply ought to co-vary with our judgments, but might not.

Again, this is clearest in the case of failure. Suppose that one of your intentions does not co-vary with your judgment about the reasons that support it. You intend to ϕ even though you judge you have most reason not to (intend to) ϕ . What has gone wrong? If an intention is simply a mental state that ought to be sensitive to one's judgments about the reasons for it, it seems we are confronting some kind of psychological failure—your mind is not functioning as it ought. We cannot yet distinguish such failures from failures of memory or visual processing: your memory ought to be sensitive to certain promptings; your visual system ought to be sensitive to certain stimuli. If they are not, something has gone wrong. Likewise, it seems, your intentions ought to be sensitive to your judgments about reasons. If they are not, something has gone wrong. But surely we want to say something stronger in cases in which your intentions fail to co-vary with your judgments about the reasons for them—not just that some process in your mind is malfunctioning, but that you are being irrational.³² In fact, we want to be able to ask the Anscombean question, 'Why did you intend to ϕ ?' where that question looks for reasons you take to bear positively on whether to ϕ . But, if the link between reasoning and intention is simply judgment-sensitivity—the attitude ought co-vary with one's judgments about the reasons, but might not—then it is hard to see how we can ask this question.

³² One might try to account for the irrationality by appeal to the fact that the *contents* of the judgment and the attitude will be in some sort of tension. But I suspect this will not distinguish failures of judgment-sensitive from other sorts of psychological failures. We can recreate a similar conflict of content for failures of memory or vision.

To put the point another way, on Scanlon's account there are two items on stage: a judgment and an intention.³³ It is clear enough that, if you judge that you have most reason to ϕ , a query after those reasons is in place. And on this account, an intention to ϕ betrays such a judgment about reasons, so long as all goes well. So it looks as if we can query after reasons, on the basis of the intention, so long as all goes well. But it is not at all clear why we can query for reasons on the basis of the intention *itself*. In cases of failure, the intention itself may not indicate anything about your take on reasons.

We will be able to accommodate our peculiar answerability for judgment-sensitive attitudes by understanding them, not merely as attitudes that ought to co-vary with our judgments about reasons for them, but as themselves embodying our answers to certain questions. Elsewhere I call belief and intention "commitment-constituted attitudes," claiming that one believes p or intends to ϕ insofar as one is committed to a positive answer to the question of whether p or whether to ϕ .³⁴ By claiming, further, that these attitudes embody our answers to questions, where that answering is the sort of activity that might have been done for reasons, we can understand the peculiar answerability they bring: they leave one open to requests for the reasons that would settle the relevant

³³ The intention is a set of dispositions that ought to co-vary with the judgment. See Scanlon, *What We Owe*, 21.

³⁴ See Pamela Hieronymi, "Controlling Attitudes," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (2006). This account could perhaps be extended. I have elsewhere suggested, e.g., that one resents S for ϕ -ing insofar as one has settled for oneself some complex set of questions regarding S 's ϕ -ing. (See ———, "The Force and Fairness of Blame," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004), ———, "Articulating an Uncompromising Forgiveness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62, no. 3 (2001).) Of course, there will be many difficulties and complications, once we leave the central cases of belief and intention. I am emboldened to think the difficulties can be overcome by the fact that we are answerable for these attitudes. I present a slight argument to this effect in ———, "The Wrong Kind of Reason," *The Journal of Philosophy* 102, no. 9 (2005).

question.³⁵ Of course, we can also understand why they ought to co-vary with one's judgments about the adequacy of the reasons for them: they embody an answer to the question on which those reasons bear. It is expected that one's answer to the relevant question (whether p or whether to ϕ) will match one's answer to the distinct, more reflective question of whether one has most reason to believe or intend. But it might not. One might be irrational.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to defend an account the will as reason in its practical employment by showing how it can accommodate the difficulties thought to exclude it. I find this account of the will worth defending because it allows us to understand the activities of the will, even in its misbehavior, as activities of the person, for which the person is distinctively answerable.³⁶

³⁵ I defend this stronger claim in Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility and Mental Agency," (in progress). Making it plausible requires avoiding the claim that the activity is prior to and productive of the attitude.

³⁶ This paper has benefited from the comments of many, including Jason Baehr, Tyler Burge, John Martin Fischer, Mark Greenberg, Paul Guyer, Barbara Herman, Paul Hoffman, Andrew Hsu, Sean Kelsey, Niko Kolodny, Richard Moran, T. M. Scanlon, Nishi Shah, Gary Watson, two anonymous reviewers, members of the Riverside Autonomy Workshop, and audience members at the Northwest Philosophy Conference, California State University, Los Angeles, and the Eastern Division Meeting of the APA.

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