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ACTION, NORMS, AND PRACTICAL REASONING

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I

In this paper I aim to do three things, corresponding to the three pieces of my title:

- To explain the expressive role that distinguishes specifically *normative* vocabulary. That is, to say what it is the job of such vocabulary to make explicit. Doing this is saying what 'ought' means.
- To introduce a non-Humean way of thinking about *practical reasoning*.
- To offer a broadly Kantian account of the *will* as a rational faculty of practical reasoning.

The idea is to do that by exploiting the structural analogies between discursive exit transitions in action and discursive entry transitions in perception to show how the rational will can be understood as no more philosophically mysterious than our capacity to notice red things.

Practical reasoning often leads to action, so it is clear that there is an intimate connection between these two elements of my title. But one might wonder: why action and *norms*?

Let me start with some background. The beginning of wisdom in thinking about these matters (as for so many others) is to look to Kant: the great, grey mother of us all. For we are in the privileged position of being downstream from the fundamental conceptual sea-change effected by the replacement of concern with Cartesian certainty by concern with Kantian necessity—that is, of concern with our grip on concepts (is it clear? is it distinct?) by concern with their grip on us (is this rule binding on us? is it applicable to this case?). Kant's big idea is that what distinguishes judgment and action from the responses of merely natural creatures is neither their relation to some special stuff nor their peculiar transparency, but rather that they are what we are in a distinctive way *responsible* for. They express *commitments* of ours: commitments that we are answerable for in

the sense that our *entitlement* to them is always potentially at issue, commitments that are *rational* in the sense that vindicating the corresponding entitlements is a matter of offering *reasons* for them.

Another big idea of Kant's—seeing the *judgment* as the smallest unit of experience—is a consequence of the first one. The logic he inherited started with a doctrine of *terms*, divided into the singular and the general, proceeded to a doctrine of *judgment* (understood in terms of the predication of a general term of a singular one), and thence to a doctrine of *consequences* or inferences. Kant starts with judgment because that is the smallest unit for which we can be *responsible*. (This thought is taken over by Frege, who begins with the units to which pragmatic force can attach, and Wittgenstein, who looks at the smallest expressions whose utterance makes a move in the language game.) It is under this rubric that judgment is assimilated to action. A third Kantian idea is then to understand both judgment and action as the application of *concepts*. He does that by understanding concepts as the *rules* that determine what knowers and agents are responsible *for*—what they have committed themselves to.

I am going to discuss the topics of my title—action, norms, and practical reasoning—in the idiom I develop in my book, *Making It Explicit*.[1] To begin with, I will work within the context of what I call there a *normative pragmatics*. Specifically, I think of discursive practice as deontic scorekeeping: the significance of a speech act is how it changes what commitments and entitlements one attributes and acknowledges. I work also within the context of an *inferential semantics*. That is, discursive commitments (to begin with, doxastic ones) are distinguished by their specifically inferential articulation: what counts as evidence for them, what else they commit us to, what other commitments they are incompatible with in the sense of precluding entitlement to. This is a reading of what it is for the norms in question to be specifically *conceptual* norms. The overall idea is that the rationality that qualifies us as *sapients* (and not merely sentients) can be identified with being a player in the social, implicitly normative game of offering and assessing, producing and consuming, reasons.

I further endorse an *expressive* view of *logic*. That is, I see the characteristic role that distinguishes specifically logical vocabulary as being making explicit, in the form of a claim, features of the game of giving and asking for reasons in virtue of which bits of *non*logical vocabulary play the roles that they do. The paradigm is the *conditional*. Before introducing this locution, one can *do* something, namely endorse an inference. After introducing the conditional, one can now *say* that the inference is a good one. The expressive role of the conditional is to make *explicit*, in the form of a claim, what before was *implicit* in our practice of distinguishing some inferences as good.

Giving and asking for reasons for *actions* is possible only in the context of practices of giving and asking for reasons generally—that is, of practices of making and defending *claims* or *judgments*. For giving a reason is always expressing a judgment: making a claim. That is, practical reasoning requires the availability of beliefs (doxastic commitments) as premises. On the side of the *consequences* of acquisition of practical deontic statuses, it appears in the essential role that

propositional, that is, assertible, contents play in specifying conditions of *success*: that is, what would count as fulfilling a commitment to act. Forming an intention (undertaking a commitment) to put a ball through a hoop requires knowing what it is to put a ball through a hoop—what must be *true* for that intention to *succeed*. (This is a point about explanatory *autonomy*: I claim that one can explain the role of beliefs in theoretical reasoning (leading from claims to claims) first, without needing to appeal to practical reasoning, while I do not believe one can do things in the opposite order.)

II

The treatment of action I am sketching is motivated by a three truisms, and two more interesting ideas. First, beliefs make a difference both to what we *say*, and to what we *do*. We license others to infer our beliefs (or, as I will say, our doxastic commitments) both from our explicit claims and from our overt intentional actions. Next is a (by now familiar) lesson we have been taught by Anscombe and Davidson.[2] Actions are performances that are intentional under some specification.[3] Such performances can genuinely be things *done* even though they have many specifications under which they are *not* intentional. A third, companion idea is that at least one way a specification of a performance can be privileged as one under which it is intentional is by figuring as the conclusion of a piece of practical reasoning that exhibits the agent's reasons for producing that performance.

Davidson's original idea was to eliminate *intentions* in favor of primary *reasons*, understood in terms of *beliefs* and *pro-attitudes* (paradigmatically, *desires*). My first idea is to start instead with normative statuses and attitudes corresponding to *beliefs* and *intentions*. I'll try to explain *desires*, and more generally, the pro-attitudes expressed by *normative* vocabulary, in terms of those beliefs and intentions. The thought is that there are two species of discursive commitment: the cognitive (or doxastic), and the practical. The latter are commitments to *act*. Acknowledgments of the first sort of commitment correspond to *beliefs*; acknowledgments of the second sort of commitment correspond to *intentions*. The first are takings-true, the second makings-true. Practical commitments are like doxastic commitments in being essentially inferentially articulated. They stand in inferential relations both among themselves (both means-end and incompatibility) and to doxastic commitments.

The second basic idea motivating the present account is that the noninferential relations between acknowledgments of practical commitments and states of affairs brought about by intentional *action* can be understood by analogy to the noninferential relations between acknowledgments of doxastic commitments and the states of affairs they are brought about by through conceptually contentful *perception*.

a) Observation (a discursive *entry* transition) depends on reliable dispositions to respond differentially to states of affairs of various kinds by ac-

knowledging certain sorts of commitments, that is, by adopting deontic attitudes and so changing the score.

b) Action (a discursive *exit* transition) depends on reliable dispositions to respond differentially to the acknowledging of certain sorts of commitments, the adoption of deontic attitudes and consequent change of score, by bringing about various kinds of states of affairs.

Elaborating the first idea (modeling intention on belief as corresponding to inferentially articulated commitments) involves examining the sense in which practical reasons are *reasons*; elaborating the second idea (modeling action on perception, discursive exits on discursive entries) involves examining the sense in which practical reasons are *causes*. It is this latter idea that makes sense of the distinction, so crucial to Davidson, between acting *for* a reason, and merely acting *with* a reason.

Put in terms of the deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice, the idea is that *intentions* are to *reasons* as *commitments* are to *entitlements*. It follows that on this model, Davidson would be wrong to say that "someone who acts with a certain intention acts for a reason." For just as one can undertake doxastic or theoretical commitments to which one is not entitled by reasons, so one can undertake practical commitments to which one is not entitled by reasons. What makes a performance an *action* is that it is, or is produced by the exercise of a reliable differential disposition to respond to, the acknowledgment of a practical commitment. That acknowledgment need not itself have been produced as a response to the acknowledgment of other commitments inferentially related to it as entitlement-conferring reasons. (Though that it *could* be so elicited *is* essential to its being the acknowledgment of a practical commitment.)

III

The strategy of trying to understand desires, and the pro-attitudes expressed by normative vocabulary more generally, in terms of their relation to beliefs and intentions—instead of the more orthodox Humean and Davidsonian strategy of starting with beliefs and desires—requires thinking about practical reasoning somewhat differently. Consider the following three bits of practical reasoning:

α) Only opening my umbrella will keep me dry, so
I shall open my umbrella.

β) I am a bank employee going to work, so
I shall wear a necktie.

γ) Repeating the gossip would harm someone, to no purpose, so
I shall not repeat the gossip.

'Shall' is used here to express the significance of the conclusion as the acknowledging of a practical commitment. ('Will' would be used correspondingly to express a doxastic commitment to a prediction.)

The Davidsonian approach treats these as enthymemes, whose missing premises might be filled in by something like:

a) I want (desire, prefer) to stay dry.
b) Bank employees are obliged (required) to wear neckties.
c) It is wrong (one ought not) to harm anyone to no purpose.

(Orthodox contemporary humeans would insist that something is missing in the second two cases, even when (b) and (c) are supplied. More on that thought later.) This enthymematic thesis is parallel on the side of practical reasoning to the insistence that theoretical reasoning be ˢcompletedˢ by the addition of conditionals, which assert the propriety of the material inferences involved, and transform the move into something that is *formally* valid. Sellars teaches us that that move is optional. We need not treat all correct inferences as correct in virtue of their form, supplying implicit or suppressed premises involving logical vocabulary as needed. Instead, we can treat inferences such as that from "Pittsburgh is to the West of Philadelphia," to "Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburgh," or from "It is raining," to "The streets will be wet," as *materially* good inferences—that is inferences that are good because of the content of their *non*logical vocabulary.[4] I propose to adopt this nonformalist strategy in thinking about practical inferences.

One reason to do so is that the notion of *formally valid* inferences is definable in a natural way from the notion of *materially correct* inferences, while there is no converse route. For given a subset of vocabulary that is privileged or distinguished somehow, an inference can be treated as good in virtue of its form, with respect to that vocabulary, just in case it is a materially good inference and it cannot be turned into a materially bad one by substituting *non*-privileged for *non*-privileged vocabulary, in its premises and conclusions. this substitutional notion of formally good inferences need have nothing special to do with *logic*. If it is specifically *logical* form that is of interest, then one must antecedently be able to distinguish some vocabulary as peculiarly logical. Once that is done, it can be treated as the vocabulary that is privileged in the sense that motivates us to look for proprieties of inference that are invariant under substitutions for all but that logical vocabulary. But if one were instead to pick out *theo*logical (or aesthetic) vocabulary as privileged, then looking at which substitutions of non-theological (or non-aesthetic) vocabulary for non-theological (non-aesthetic) vocabulary preserve material goodness of inference will pick out inferences good in virtue of their theological (or aesthetic) form. According to this way of thinking, the formal goodness of inferences derives from and is explained in terms of the material goodness of inferences, and so ought not to be appealed to in explaining it.

This account contrasts with the standard order of explanation, which treats all inferences as good or bad solely in virtue of their form, with the contents of the claims they involve mattering only for the truth of the (implicit) premises. According to this way of setting things out, there is no such thing as material inference. This view, which understands "good inference" to mean "formally valid

inference", postulating implicit premises as needed, might be called a *formalist* approach to inference. It trades primitive goodnesses of inference for the truth of conditionals. I am not claiming that one *cannot* decide to talk this way. The point is just that one *need* not.

If one rejects the formalist order of explanation, what should one say about the role of conditional claims, such as "*If* Pittsburgh is to the West of Philadelphia, *then* Philadelphia is to the East of Pittsburgh"? The claim is that although such conditionals need not be added as explicit premises in order to license the inference from their antecedents to their consequents, they nonetheless serve to make explicit—in the form of a claim—the otherwise merely implicit endorsement of a material propriety of inference. Before we have conditionals on board, we can *do* something, namely treat certain material inferences as correct. Once we have the expressive power of those logical locutions, we come to be able to *say that* they are good. The expressivist line about logic sees conditionals as making implicit material inferential commitments explicit, in the form of claims—but as *not* required to make the inferences they explicitate *good* inferences. Indeed, on this view, playing such an explicitating expressive role is precisely what distinguishes some vocabulary as distinctively *logical*.

IV

I want to treat

A) $\dfrac{\text{It is raining}}{\therefore \text{ I shall open my umbrella.}}$

like

B) $\dfrac{\text{It is raining}}{\therefore \text{ The streets will be wet.}}$

and say that *neither* one is an enthymeme.

The Davidsonian will respond that we can see that the reason offered in the first case is incomplete, because the inference would not go through if I did not want to stay dry. But I think that what we really know is rather that the inference would not go through if I had a *contrary* desire: say, the Gene Kelly desire to sing and dance in the rain, and so to get wet. But the fact that conjoining a premise incompatible with the desire to stay dry would infirm the inference (turn it into a bad one) does not show that the desire was all along already functioning as an implicit premise. There would be a case for that conclusion only if the reasoning involved were *monotonic*—that is, if the fact that the inference from p to q is a good one meant that the inference from $p\&r$ to q must be a good one. (So that the fact that the latter is *not* a good argument settled it that the former isn't either.)

But material inference is not in general monotonic—even on the theoretical side. It can be in special cases, say in mathematics and fundamental physics. But

it never is in ordinary reasoning, and almost never in the special sciences. (Reasoning in clinical medicine, for instance, is resolutely nonmonotonic.) Consider the arguments that are codified in the following conditionals:

i) If I strike this dry, well-made match, then it will light. [$p \rightarrow q$]
ii) If p and the match is in a very strong electromagnetic field, then it will *not* light. [$p \& r \rightarrow \sim q$]
iii) If p and r and the match is in a Faraday cage, then it will light. [$p \& r \& s \rightarrow q$]
iv) If p and r and s and the room is evacuated of oxygen, then it will *not* light. [$p \& r \& s \& t \rightarrow \sim q$]
...

The reasoning we actually engage in always permits the construction of inferential hierarchies with oscillating conclusions like this. A certain kind of formalist about logic will want to insist, for reasons of high theory, that material inference *must* be like formal inference in being monotonic. And at this point in the dialectic, such a *monotonous formalist* will invoke *ceteris paribus* clauses. I do not want to claim that invoking such clauses ("all other things being equal") is incoherent or silly. But we must be careful how we understand the expressive role they play. For they cannot (I want to say, in principle) be cashed out; their content cannot be made explicit in the form of a series of additional premises. They are not shorthand for something we *could* say if we took the time or the trouble. The problem is not just that we would need an *infinite* list of the conditions being ruled out—though that is true. It is that the membership of such a list would be *indefinite*: we don't know how to specify in advance what belongs on the list. If we try to solve this problem by a *general* characterization, we get something equivalent to: "*ceteris paribus*, q follows from p" means that "q follows from p unless there is some *infirming* or *interfering* condition." But this is just to say that q follows from p except in the cases where for some reason it doesn't.

I would contend that *ceteris paribus* clauses should be understood as explicitly marking the nonmonotonicity of an inference, rather than as a *deus ex machina* that magically *removes* its nonmonotonicity. The material inference (i) above is just fine as it stands. But if one wants explicitly to acknowledge that, even so, it can form the base of an oscillating hierarchy of inferences of the form of (ii), (iii), (iv), and so on, then one can do so by reformulating it as:

i′) If I strike this dry, well-made match, then *ceteris paribus*, it will light.

Like their theoretical brethren, material proprieties of *practical* reasoning are nonmonotonic. So the fact that if I add "I want to get wet," as a second premise to inference (A) above the resulting inference no longer goes through does *not* show that the *denial* of that premise was already implicit. That would be the case only if material practical inferences were monotonic. In any case, as we will see, there is another way to go. We could think of the expressive role of avowals of desire

as being analogous, on the practical side, to that of the conditional, on the theoretical side: as functioning not as a *premise*, but as making explicit the *inferential* commitment that permits the transition.

V

With this background, I can state my fundamental thesis: **normative vocabulary** (including expressions of preference) **makes explicit the endorsement (attributed or acknowledged) of *material* proprieties of *practical* reasoning**. Normative vocabulary plays the same expressive role on the *practical* side that *conditionals* do on the *theoretical* side.

The idea is that the broadly normative or evaluative vocabulary used in (a), (b), and (c) ('prefer', 'obliged', and 'ought')—which Davidson understands as expressing the pro attitudes needed to turn the incomplete reasons offered as premises in (α), (β), and (γ) into complete reasons—is used to make explicit in assertible, propositional form the endorsement of a *pattern* of material practical inferences. Different patterns of inference should be understood as corresponding to different sorts of norms or pro attitudes.

For instance, an attributor who takes (α) to be entitlement preserving will also take

(α') Only standing under the awning will keep me dry, so
I shall stand under the awning.
(α'') Only remaining in the car will keep me dry, so
I shall remain in the car.

and a host of similar inferences to have that status. Doing so is implicitly attributing a preference for staying dry. (Notice that because desires can compete, they provide only *prima facie* reasons for acting. Acknowledging the nonmonotonicity of practical reasoning, however, already provides for the features of reasoning that are normally dealt with by introducing such a notion.)

The norm, rule, or requirement that bank employees wear neckties is what makes going to work into a reason for wearing a necktie, for bank employees. Taking it that there is such a norm or requirement also just is endorsing a pattern of practical reasoning: taking (β) to be a good inference for anyone who is a bank employee. This inferential pattern is different from that exhibited by (α) in two ways. First, there need not be for each interlocutor for whom (β) is taken to be a good inference a set of other inferences corresponding to (α),(α'),(α''). Instead, there will be related inferences such as:

(β') I am a bank employee going to work, so
I shall not wear a clown costume.
(β'') I am a bank employee going to work, so
I shall comb my hair.

But these are not licensed by the norm made explicit in (b), but only by others associated with the same social institutional status (being a bank employee).

Second, the scorekeeper will take (β) to be a good inference for any interlocutor *A* such that the scorekeeper *undertakes* doxastic commitment to the claim that *A* is a bank employee—as opposed to *attributing* a desire or acknowledgment of a commitment. Here the norm implicitly underwriting the inference is associated with having a certain status, as employee of a bank, rather than with exhibiting a certain desire or preference. Whether one has a good reason to wear a necktie just depends on whether or not one has occupies the status in question. This pattern, where what matters is the scorekeeper's undertaking of a commitment to *A*'s occupying the status, rather than *A*'s acknowledgment of that commitment, corresponds to an *objective* sense of 'good reason for action' (according to the scorekeeper). In this sense, that *A* is preparing to go to work can be a good reason for *A* to wear a necktie, even though *A* is not in a position to appreciate it as such. [Compare the sense in which one's reliability as a reporter can entitle one to a claim (in the eyes of a scorekeeper), even if one is not aware that one is reliable, and so not aware of one's entitlement.]

Endorsement of practical reasoning of the sort of which (γ) is representative, codified in the form of a normative principle by (c), corresponds to an inferential commitment exhibiting a pattern different from those involved in either (α) or (β). For a scorekeeper who takes (γ) to be entitlement-preserving for *A* takes it to be entitlement-preserving for *anyone*, regardless of desires or preferences, and regardless of social status.

These *prudential* (or instrumental), *institutional*, and *unconditional* norms (made explicit by corresponding 'ought's) are meant only as three representative varieties, not as an exhaustive list. But they show how different sorts of norms correspond to different patterns of practical reasoning. The idea is that normative vocabulary is a kind of *logical* vocabulary, in my expressive sense: its expressive function is to make explicit commitments to inferences.

To endorse a practical inference as entitlement preserving is to take the doxastic premises as providing reasons for the practical conclusion. To exhibit a piece of good practical reasoning whose conclusion is a certain intention is to exhibit that intention, and the action (if any) that it elicits, as *rational*, as reasonable in the light of the commitments exhibited in the premises. Thus *all* of the 'ought's that make explicit species of practical reasoning taken as examples here, the prudential 'ought', the institutional 'ought', and the unconditional 'ought', are different kinds of *rational* 'ought'. There is no *a priori* reason to assimilate all such 'ought's to any one form—for instance the prudential (Humean totalitarianism), as rationality-as-maximizing theorists (such as Gauthier) do. Recall also that the entitlement provided by prudential or institutional reasons need *not* be endorsed by the attributor; as Davidson points out, we need not take the agent's reasons to be *good* reasons.

From the point of view of this botanization of patterns of practical reasoning (which I do not pretend is complete) the humean and the kantian each have too

restricted a notion of reasons for action. Each pursues a Procrustean order of explanation:

- The humean assimilates all reasons for action to the *first* pattern. (Thus the humean will see the inferences like (β) and (γ) as incomplete, even with the addition of premises (b) and (c).)
- The kantian assimilates all reasons for action to the *third* pattern.

The humean denies that a mere obligation or commitment could provide a reason for action, unless accompanied by some desire to fulfill it. And the kantian denies that a mere desire (sinnlich Neigung) could provide a reason for action, unless accompanied by the acknowledgment of some corresponding obligation or commitment.

VI

A picture of the rational will emerges if we combine these three ideas:

- the belief model of intending—the idea of modeling practical commitments on doxastic ones,
- the picture of practical reasoning as relating beliefs as premises to intentions as conclusions, and
- the modeling of actions as discursive exit transitions on perceptions as discursive entry transitions.

It is important to remember to begin with that acknowledging a practical commitment is *not* understood on the model of *promising*, but of *claiming*.[5] In particular, the commitment is not *to* anyone in particular, and one can change one's mind anytime, essentially without penalty. In both these respects, the practical commitments that correspond to intentions are like doxastic commitments, rather than like promises. But while a commitment *is* in force, it has consequences: for other practical commitments (and hence entitlements to practical commitments), via means-end reasoning and consideration of practical incompatibilities, and for doxastic commitments (and hence entitlement to doxastic commitments). Scorekeepers are licensed to infer our beliefs from our intentional actions (in context of course), as well as from our speech acts.

Acting with reasons is being *entitled* to one's practical commitments. Having this status is being intelligible to oneself and to others. This status can be vindicated by offering a suitable sample piece of practical reasoning (which need not actually have preceded the acknowledgment or performance in question). That piece of practical reasoning explains *why* one did as one did: what *reasons* one had. This means that in particular cases, one can act intentionally but without reasons. But the capacity to acknowledge propositionally contentful practical

commitments will be attributed only to those whose performances are largely intelligible.

The modeling of action on perception registers the crucial fact that acknowledgments of commitments can cause and be caused. Kant defines the rational will as the capacity to derive performances from conceptions of laws.[6] I am suggesting that we can replace "conception of a law," in this formulation by "acknowledgment of a commitment." 'Law' is Kant's term for a binding rule—a norm. One's conception of a law is what one takes oneself to be obliged to do. Having a rational will, then, can be understood as having the capacity to respond reliably to one's acknowledgment of a commitment (of a norm as binding on one) by differentially producing performances corresponding to the content of the commitment acknowledged. But perception is strictly analogous, on the input side. It is a capacity to respond differentially to the presence of, say, red things, by acknowledging a commitment with a corresponding content. The one capacity should in principle appear as no more mysterious than the other. According to this picture, we are rational creatures exactly insofar as our acknowledgment of discursive commitments (both doxastic and practical) makes a difference to what we go on to *do*.

Prior intentions are acknowledgments of practical commitments that are distinct from and antecedent to the responsive performances they are reliably differentially disposed to elicit. In other cases (intentions-in-action) the production of the performance may *be* the acknowledgment of the practical commitment. Prior intentions involve practical commitments to produce performances meeting *general* descriptions. Intentions-in-action are acknowledgments of practical commitments consisting of performances that are intentional under *demonstrative* specifications (e.g. "I shall jump *now*."). (These are Sellars' 'volitions'– "prior intentions whose time has come"[7], a category rescued from the mistake of conceiving '*tryings*' as minimal *actions* that are safe in that they preclude the possibility of *failure*, just as, and for the same reasons, '*seemings*' are conceived as minimal *knowings* that are safe in that they preclude the possibility of *error*.[8]) One is a reliable agent (compare: reliable perceiver) with respect to a range of circumstances and a range of contents of practical commitments when one is so disposed that under those circumstances one's prior intentions with those contents conditionally *mature* into corresponding intentions-in-action.

One nice feature of this story is that what is expressed by the normative 'should' is related to what is expressed by the intentional 'shall' as third-person usage to first-person usage—that is, as attributing practical commitments (to others) is related to acknowledging practical commitments (oneself). The use of normative vocabulary such as 'should' expresses the attribution to an agent of commitment to a pattern of practical reasoning, while the use of 'shall' expresses acknowledgment by the agent of the sort of practical commitment that can appear as the conclusion of such practical reasoning. It is those acknowledgments that in competent agents are keyed to the production of the corresponding performances under favorable conditions. This relationship provides a way to make sense of

weakness of the will (*akrasia*). For that phenomenon arises when self-*attributions* of practical commitments (which would be made explicit by statements of the form "I *should*...") do not have the causal significance of *acknowledgments* of practical commitments (which would be made explicit by statements of the form "I *shall*..."). In this form, the possibility of incompatible intentions is no more mysterious than that of incompatible claims (or for that matter, promises).

Notice that Davidson started off only with intentions-in-action—the case, on the present account, where the performance *is* the acknowledgment of a practical commitment. He later introduces intendings, but he construes them as judgments that some performance is "desirable, good, or what ought to be done". Since he does not tell us what these normative terms mean, this is objectionably circular. By starting elsewhere, we have seen how to make independent sense of the expressive role of normative vocabulary.

Finally, notice that this account distinguishes:

a) acting intentionally, which is acknowledging a practical commitment, either in, or by producing, a corresponding performance.
b) acting with reasons, which is being entitled to such a commitment.
c) acting for reasons, which is the case where reasons are causes, when acknowledgment of practical commitment is elicited by proper reasoning.

VII

I said at the outset that in this paper I aimed to do three things:

- Explain the expressive role that distinguishes specifically *normative* vocabulary. That is, to say what it is the job of such vocabulary to make explicit.
- To introduce a non-Humean way of thinking about *practical reasoning*.
- To offer a broadly Kantian account of the *will* as a rational faculty of practical reasoning,

by exploiting the structural analogies between discursive exit transitions in action and discursive entry transition in perception to show how the rational will can be understood as no more philosophically mysterious than our capacity to notice red things. Although the account I have offered has of necessity been telegraphic, its goal has been to fulfill that discursive practical commitment.

Notes

1. Harvard University Press, 1994. The ideas presented here are discussed there in more detail in the second half of Chapter 4.

2. G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Blackwell, 1959), and Donald Davidson, originally in "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", reprinted in *Actions and Events* (Oxford University Press, 1984).
3. Not necessarily a *description*, at least if that category is conceived narrowly. For, as will emerge below (in section V), it is important that the specifications in question can include *demonstrative* and indexical elements.
4. Wilfrid Sellars, "Inference and Meaning", reprinted in J. Sicha (ed.) *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars* (Ridgeview Publishing, Reseda CA, 1980).
5. In particular, the notion of the sort of commitment undertaking by making a claim that is elaborated in Chapter Three of *Making It Explicit*.
6. *Critique of Practical Judgment*, section 7.
7. "Thought and Action", p. 110 in Keith Lehrer (ed.) *Freedom and Determinism* (Random House, 1966).
8. I discuss Sellars on 'seems' in my Study Guide, included in Wilfrid Sellars' *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Harvard University Press, 1997), in the commentary to section 16, pp.139-144. I discuss the parallel with 'try' in *Making It Explicit*, pp. 294-295.