

# Praxeology, imperatives, and shifts of view

Benj Hellie

August 29, 2016

## Abstract

I outline a radically ‘first-personal’ program in *praxeology* (aka ‘philosophy of practical reason’): embrace of nonpropositional imperatival content is what is characteristically practical; this embrace connects to agentive behavior ‘transcendentally’—through a constraint on shifts of view, inaccessible within any single viewpoint.

Road map, section by section. (1) Whatever I may set about doing, it is typically as just the way to go about what else I am doing, in light of how things are. Or so say I, the agent: sometimes, those who come to dispute me on pertinent facts or to exceed my knowhow will say merely that whatever *intentions* I may have formed, I typically formed them because they were the best way I *knew how* to execute other *intentions* I had, in light of how I *believed* things are. But for the praxeologist, such second-guessing is a side issue: only I embark on my actions—and then the embarkation is done. The praxeological viewpoint is *embedded* (qua Anscombe), not *alienated* (qua Davidson). (2) The neo-Anscombean Michael Thompson takes the point, recommending to the linguistically-oriented praxeologist a focus on ‘naive rationalizations’, *I am M-ing because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing*: avoiding a problematic ‘movement from spirit to nature’ he finds in the Davidsonian’s *she was M-ing because she intended to  $\Gamma$* .

(3) Unfortunately, Thompson carries the point only partway: *explanation* is indifferently embedded and alienated, as is the *self-ascription of action*; if general elimination of ‘spirit’ is the point, Thompson’s underlying ‘descriptivist’ outlook is bereft of tools to finish the job. (4) Instead, the essentially embedded praxeological language is the ‘elementary imperative implication’,  $\Gamma$ !—so, M!. (5) Imperatives lack propositional content; avowals of intention repackage this meaning,

thus lacking significant propositional content: no spirit moves nature. (6) But with only *imperativity* in the picture, *nothing* supplies facts that might move nature—so what in practical reason *does* move nature? (7) The question is confused: the embedded perspective embraces a complex of imperativity and propositionality under intricate synchronic and diachronic coherence constraints; these lead eventually to *the given*, at the core of perceptual belief about our surrounds and the doings of our bodies; and the given is a ‘pivot’ between the embedded and alienated viewpoints: unless one is uninterpretable, if it is given that one has just  $\Gamma$ -ed, one indeed has. (8) The ‘mind-body nexus’ is not a constituent of any viewpoint, but a constraint on shifts of view.

## 1 Praxeology from the embedded viewpoint

In Michael Thompson’s ‘Anscombe’s *Intention* and practical knowledge’ (Thompson 2011), the focus is on the fundamentality to the rationalization of action of the *embedded viewpoint*: the viewpoint of the agent, in the thick of the action. This embedded point of view contrasts with a viewpoint that is more *alienated*: external to the action—on the action, as considered by some other agent, or from some other time. Thompson’s canny observation is then that the viewpoints on their *examples* taken by those two paradigm-setting figures in our praxeological tradition, Anscombe (1963) and Davidson (1980), contrast along just this divide, with Anscombe characteristically taking an embedded point of view (I am pumping because I am filling the cistern; I am crossing the road because I am going to look in that shop window), Davidson a viewpoint more alienated (he pressed down hard in order to make ten carbon copies; he flicked the switch in order to illuminate the room).

Contrasting explanatory strategies are available from these contrasting points of view. The efficient-causal explanations of, say, mechanics involve an alienated viewpoint on, say, colliding billiard balls. If we comparably alienate ourselves from the viewpoint of the agent crossing the street, it can be hard to articulate our unease at assimilating rationalizing explanation to efficient-causal explanation—at thinking of his having crossed the street as comparably ‘bumped’ into the flow of history by some prior ‘mental state’: namely, an ‘intention to look in the shop window’, itself a constituent of the flow of history. But when I embed myself

within the viewpoint of the agent, this assimilation is jarringly odd (‘phenomenologically off-key’): I do not find any bump, any mental state available for bumping; I find it not at all plausible to think of ‘my’ ‘present’ crossing the street as in any helpful sense an *efficient-causal offshoot* of some mental state ‘I’ ‘previously’ inhabited. What I instead find is just that ‘my’ ‘present’ crossing of the street *makes sense* as a means to ‘my’ ‘present’ going to look in that shop window.<sup>1</sup>

This sort of making-sense from an embedded viewpoint is, I am inclined to think, exactly what is characteristic of rationalizing explanation (Heal 2003): to rationalize a transition in someone’s view of the world, or in their practice, is just to find that transition to make sense as a reaction to what they find to precede or surround it. Causal explanation, in turn, is just the opposite: it is the sort of explanation we issue when we alienate ourselves from such point of view as the explanandum itself may harbor. Davidson’s epoch-making ‘Actions, reasons, and causes’ (Davidson 1963) challenges the praxeologist who, like the Anscombe of *Intention*, would distinguish rationalizing from causal explanation to state the distinction clearly: Davidson gives the task his best, but cannot meet the challenge; without any distinction to be made, psychology cannot escape the flow of history—thus Davidson’s causalism. Well of course: if we—as Davidson apparently has done prior to setting the stage—commit to maintaining our distance, refuse to embed our viewpoint within that of the agent, we will only ever see causal explanation, will never enter that cast of mind within which the explanations we give are of the rationalizing sort. But as soon as this artificial restriction is lifted, Davidson’s challenge is thereby met.

With the specter of causalism whisked away, the hard work of building a ratio-

---

<sup>1</sup>In Thompson’s view, ‘the ultimate aim of action theory is a philosophical understanding of a particular etiological nexus, or relation of dependence, which joins certain ‘things in the world’[;] [w]hether the intended nexus is *causal* in any particular pre-conceived sense, is of course a separate question[.] I employ the word ‘etiological’ [ ] where I might have said ‘causal’ ’ (Thompson 2008a, 86n3). But to my mind, we should focus first on the discourse of practical rationalization, setting provisionally aside whether ‘things in the world’ are involved, or any ‘etiological nexus’ among them: indeed, the ‘off-key-ness’ is not peculiar to a *bump* conception of this nexus, but undermines also its characterization, as Thompson apparently favors, with ‘the notion, obscurely expressed in naive rationalization, that the part or ‘organ’ is to be explained in terms of the whole, and understood through it’ (Thompson 2008a, 106–7; compare 110n7, 112, 126–7, 132). I fear that the ‘off-key-ness’ therefore resides in the requirement of a *nexus* at all—and therefore the presumption that rationality involves ‘things in the world’.

nalizing praxeology can commence. Thompson’s ‘Naive action theory’ (Thompson 2008a) pulls on a strand running through *Intention*, its investigation of the *language* used in responding to requests for rationalization of action, in answering questions with that ‘certain sense of ‘Why?’’ (Anscombe 1963, sec. 5). With point of view firmly embedded in that of the agent, Thompson locates as what is most basic his *naive rationalizations*: explanations with both explanans and explanandum *action avowals* in the first-person present progressive, like ‘I am M-ing because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing’, with both M and  $\Gamma$  uninflected subjectless verb phrases (Thompson 2008a, 5.1 ff).<sup>2</sup> Against the broadly Davidsonian praxeologist, it is not intention, desire, or attempt which most fundamentally rationalizes action: instead it is further *action*. If so, not just what is rationalized, but what rationalizes, is ‘the progress of the deed itself’ (90).

The Davidsonian is not all wrong. We do of course say ‘I am M-ing because I want/intend/am trying to  $\Gamma$ ’—but we may equally well say ‘I want/intend/am trying to M because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing’, or for that matter ‘I want/intend/am trying to M because I want/intend/am trying to  $\Gamma$ ’: all sixteen options are available (6.1). Intention, desire, attempt—with the Davidsonian, these may explain action; but they also are explained by action, as well as by one another. The fifteen remaining non-naive explanations are ‘sophisticated’: Thompson’s opponent who denies the basicness of naive explanation thereby bulldozes the ‘linguistic appearances’. Indeed, the opponent who accords basic status to ‘I am M-ing because I want/intend/am trying to  $\Gamma$ ’ foregoes the option of analyzing these psychological explanantes in terms of action-avowals, thereby ‘finding in every straightforward rationalization a movement [] from spirit to nature’ (90)—distastefully, it would appear.

The picture that emerges contrasts notably with that of the Davidsonian: instead of the Davidsonian’s complete events of bodily motion causally produced by mental states, Thompson sees actions-in-progress rationalized by actions-in-progress. Perhaps actions-in-progress are *processes*: if so, the picture is of agentive processes rationalized by agentive processes; neither complete events in ‘na-

---

<sup>2</sup>I use Greek letters officially as schematic, though I will often lapse unofficially into their ‘abuse’ as names.

Typing convention:  $v$  is substitutable with a term;  $\Phi$  or  $\Psi$  with a predicate;  $\mu$ , M, N, or  $\Gamma$  with an uninflected subjectless action-verb phrase;  $\sigma$  or  $\tau$  with a sentence;  $\varphi$  or  $\psi$  with a declarative sentence;  $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  with an imperative sentence.

ture’ nor states of ‘spirit’ are to be seen. For those who are convinced, a familiar spectrum of options now spreads out, regarding how to forge ahead: at an extreme of quietism, we would soon lapse into a numinous silence, the project complete; at an extreme of inflationism—to parody [Williamson \(1995, 558\)](#)—‘at its grandest, the project would be to reduce praxeology to the metaphysics of agentive processes’.

## 2 Naive rationalizations

I am highly sympathetic to the points here that seem to me to be most fundamental.<sup>3</sup> First, that a philosopher with an interest in ‘rational psychology’—the region of psychological phenomena known to the ‘folk’, part of our ordinary/quotidian/commonsensical understanding of things, and of traditional philosophical interest—should theorize from the *embedded viewpoint*: if an epistemologist wants to theorize about belief, or a praxeologist about action, under its rational-psychological aspect, they should do so primarily from within the perspective of the believer, or the agent. Second, that in the philosophical analysis of rational psychology, significant attention should be given to *rationalization*: to the bounding constraints on overall psychological positions of subjects, and the consequent tighter constraints on further specification of total psychological positions once certain aspects of those positions have been fixed—on what we might metaphorically think of as rationalizing *flows* and *pressures*. And third, that whenever it is important for our philosophical theorizing to frame up some aspect of our ordinary understanding of some phenomenon, it is a good idea to involve the analysis of that region of ordinary language which encodes that aspect of our understanding in its meaning, purified as far as possible of the confounding influence of further linguistic adornment.

Assembling these three points, praxeology should pay attention to what is suggested about the embedded viewpoint on rationalization, by an analysis of the phenomenon of ordinary language which, with minimal further linguistic adornment, encodes that viewpoint: in particular, to whichever phenomenon of ordinary language it is that encodes (with minimal adornment)—*minimally encodes*—the

---

<sup>3</sup>Compare [Hellie 2011](#), 1.1; [Hellie 2014](#), sec. 3.

embedded viewpoint on *practical rationalization*.

Thompson's important hypothesis is that this *praxeologically most revelatory* phenomenon of ordinary language is the *naive action explanation*, 'I am M-ing because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing'. This hypothesis breaks out as follows:

1. The phenomenon of ordinary language which minimally encodes our understanding of rationalization is a kind of *sentence*: the *rationalizing explanation*, ' $\varphi$  because  $\psi$ ' (with 'because' understood in a suitably rationalizing key);
2. (a) Among the candidate rationalizing explananda/explanantes, none encodes the embedded viewpoint on a given psychological phenomenon as minimally as an appropriate *self-ascription*, 'I  $\Psi$ ';  
(b) Among the self-ascriptions, none encodes the embedded viewpoint on a given practical-psychological phenomenon as minimally as an appropriate *action-self-ascription*, 'I am  $\Gamma$ -ing'.

After all, granting (1), the philosopher focusing on rationalization should pay attention to rationalizing explanations, of form ' $\varphi$  because  $\psi$ '; then, granting (2a), the philosopher focusing on the embedded viewpoint should focus on self-ascription–self-ascription explanations, of form 'I  $\Phi$  because I  $\Psi$ '; then, granting (2b), the praxeologist should focus on naive action explanations, of form 'I am M-ing because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing'.

There should be little dispute with (2a): surely, no rational explanans could encode the embedded viewpoint on believing that goats eat cans as minimally as the self-ascription 'I believe that goats eat cans'; and surely, among 'I am M-ing' and the various 'sophisticated' practical self-ascriptions, at least one form is unexcelled in the minimality with which it encodes the embedded viewpoint on action. And it is not easy to see how to resist Thompson's contention that the various 'sophisticated' practical self-ascriptions encode the embedded viewpoint on action less minimally than do the action-self-ascriptions: (2b) is quite plausible. And Thompson joins his Davidsonian opponent in accepting (1).

Two arguments (inter alia, perhaps) can be drawn from 'Naive action theory', then, on behalf of the Anscombesque *action-in-progress* rather than the Davidsonian *intention* as of central concern to praxeology: (I) as both bodily and rationalizing, the action-in-progress walks us back from an unappealing dualism of

rationalizing spirit and brute nature; (II) by (1) and (2), the action-in-progress is the subject-matter of the praxeologically most revelatory phenomenon of ordinary language, and thus of our intuitive praxeology.

### 3 Worries and concerns

While these are both strong arguments, they should be resisted.

Against (I): purging rationalizing explanation of psychology is an unattainable goal; nor is it clear that Thompson makes any progress on it. And against (II): if naive rationalization-sentences are the praxeologically most revelatory phenomena of natural language, then natural language will not be of much help to praxeology: against (1), explanatory sentences are not particularly revelatory of the rationalization relation; against (2), nor are action-self-ascriptions particularly revelatory of agency.

#### 3.1 Eliminating psychology

##### 3.1.1 Could psychology be eliminable?

First, while we should perhaps be dismayed to find ‘a movement from spirit to nature’ anywhere, let alone ‘in every straightforward rationalization’, we should not hope to cleanse the praxeologically most revelatory phenomena of language of *all* traces of psychological purport: as I will argue, it cannot be done. Accordingly, it is not easy to see why it would carry much weight *merely* to be able to do this locally.<sup>4</sup>

To begin with the obvious, suppose that at the gelateria, Brent turns up his nose at durian in favor of tripe, while Rance scorns tripe for durian. Why the

---

<sup>4</sup>Thompson is not completely forthcoming about whether or why it would be desirable if the alleged explanatory fundamentality of action-in-progress relative to practical-psychological states (sec. 8) could be extended to cover other psychological states, though he does worry about a picture where ‘states of the soul’ contrast with ‘events ‘in the world’’: ‘[t]hey are absolutely unlike’, which ‘is what we find so hard to fit with the [] appearance, that a single [] nexus of things[] is at issue in every entry on our table’ (Thompson 2008a, 119)—a challenge that might seem to apply roughly as well to integrating psychological states *other than the practical* in with action-explanation.

difference? Brent says ‘I am ordering tripe rather than durian because I like tripe gelato and dislike durian gelato, while Rance says ‘I am ordering durian rather than tripe because I like durian gelato and dislike tripe’. Are likes and dislikes psychological phenomena? Are these appeals to like and dislikes ineliminable in the explanations? In both cases, yes—or so it would seem, ‘naively’. Perhaps likes and dislikes can be rethought as ‘facets of a form of life’;<sup>5</sup> perhaps the like/dislike-laden explanations can be eliminated in favor of sensitivity to aspects of allure and repulsiveness in the flavors, intrinsically<sup>6</sup>—but would either move count as ‘sophistication’? I would not know how to answer.

A second ineliminable psychological phenomenon is *knowhow*. While both Sam and Fred would like to be across the park, Sam crosses the park while Fred just stands around. Why the difference? Sam, but not Fred, knows how to cross the park. The first-person take on Sam’s knowhow is given by a *bare anankastic*: ‘to cross the park when such-and-such, do thus-and-so’. That cannot be a piece of information, in the sense of something that divides possible worlds: instead, it is something like a *constitutive analysis* of the action *crossing the park* relative to the condition *such-and-such*, in terms of the procedure *thus-and-so*; as a constitutive analysis, it would be metaphysically necessary if truth-apt at all.<sup>7</sup> (Were it contingent, *such-and-such* would be further specifiable into subconditions where *thus-and-so* suffices for *crossing the park* and subconditions where it does not. But then following such ‘knowhow’ perfectly while making no relevant mistake could nevertheless make for failure—thereby losing its claim on the label ‘knowhow’.) As such, better to think of the content of one’s knowhow as imposing a sort of ‘frame’ or ‘schematism’ on the world as one finds it, rather than as a chunk of that world; whether one imposes such a frame presumably counts as a psychological matter.

Whether likes and dislikes, frames or schematisms are psychological, *uncertainty* is the psychological phenomenon par excellence; and whether likes and dislikes are ineliminable from rationalizing explanation, uncertainty is surely ineliminable—*hedging* establishes this. As we all know, to manage a portfolio in financial markets, go long when the market is going up, go short when the market

---

<sup>5</sup>Perhaps along lines suggested in [Thompson 2008b](#).

<sup>6</sup>Compare [Johnston 2001](#).

<sup>7</sup>In this (perhaps fundamental) sense, knowhow is not ‘propositional’, contra [Stanley and Williamson 2001](#); see also [Hellie 2015](#), 2.1.3.



is going down—and if you are uncertain, hedge. Suppose we observe Speculating Sue hedging and Gambling Greta going long. Why the difference? Greta says ‘I am going long because I am managing a portfolio and the market is going up’, while Sue says ‘I am hedging because I am managing a portfolio and I am uncertain where the market is going’. Making sense of Greta and Sue from the third person involves appeal to Greta’s belief and Sue’s uncertainty. Perhaps from the first person, Greta’s belief can be recast ‘transparently’ so as to eliminate psychology, as the (purported) fact that the market is going up. But Sue’s uncertainty cannot be so recast: the triviality that either the market is going up or going down is believed by Greta as well; and postulating a sort of externalized ‘unclarity’, a ‘hole in the world’ would misrepresent Sue as taking herself to be omniscient, her learning as a change of mind.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1.2 Do naive rationalizations eliminate psychology?

Practical rationalization exists alongside (perhaps, indeed, intertwined with) epistemic rationalization: rationalizing explanation of why we believe as we do. The language of epistemic rationalization, the *belief explanation*, comes in ‘naive’ and ‘sophisticated’ forms (those which lack and those which contain explicit psychological terminology). But as I will argue, the naive forms are quite evidently nevertheless burdened with psychological meaning. I contend that the same thing may well be going on with Thompson’s naive action explanations.

Consider this case of belief-formation by *inference to the best explanation*. Wondering whether Fred was at the party, I learn that the party was dull. Fred, sadly, is known for making parties dull. If Fred *was* there, this would have made it dull. And I can’t see why else it would have been dull: the remainder of the guest list sparkled. I conjecture, then, that if the party was dull, Fred’s having been there would be why. As the party was dull, I infer to the best explanation: Fred was at the party. Question answered.

In this case, the explanatory trail commences in Fred’s presence at the party, runs to the party’s dullness, thence to my belief in the party’s dullness, thence to my belief in Fred’s presence at the party. There is no sense in which the dullness

---

<sup>8</sup>Compare Yalcin 2007, Kolodny and MacFarlane 2010.

of the party is responsible for Fred's having been there: Fred attended because he hoped to have fun, after all—sadly, it was not to be.

The explanations we should accept include: the *causal explanation* 'because Fred was there, the party was dull'; and the *sophisticated belief explanation* 'because I believe the party was dull, I believe Fred was there'. They do not include the false causal claim 'because the party was dull, Fred was there'. (Nor do they include the false belief explanation 'because I believe Fred was there, I believe the party was dull'.)

But we must also acknowledge *some* legitimate reading of 'because the party was dull, Fred was there'. After all, people say this sort of thing all the time. When they do so, philosophers accuse them of conflating cause and effect—unimpeachable credentials as naive, I note—but a more charitable examination reveals these to be *naive belief explanations*. Consider the following series of dialogues. A1: 'Fred was there'; B1: 'Why do you believe that?'; A1: 'Because I believe it was dull'. A2: 'Fred was there'; B2: 'Why do you believe that?'; A2: 'Because it was dull'. A3: 'Fred was there'; B3: 'Why?'; A3: 'Because it was dull'. Each successive dialogue preserves the meaning of the previous one, I daresay. The two speeches by A3 can be compressed into a single explanatory sentence: 'Because the party was dull, Fred was there'—again preserving meaning.

Now, the true naive belief explanation is the very same sentence as the false causal claim. Because the one is true and the other false, the two occurrences must differ in meaning. Presumably the difference consists, to speak very roughly, in the intended 'explanatory force' of *because*: in the naive belief explanation, 'because' bundles in that *belief in what the explanans says* is responsible for *belief in what the explanandum says*, while in the false causal claim, 'because' bundles in that 'what the explanans says' is responsible for 'what the explanandum says'. If so, the 'sophistication' of 'because I believe the party was dull, I believe Fred was there' has not vanished from the allegedly 'naive' 'because the party was dull, Fred was there': it has just been smuggled into the connective.

Returning to Thompson, his naive action explanations are suspiciously similar to these naive belief explanations. Consider the true causal claim 'because that cistern was filled, that water supply was poisoned'. It can be reframed as 'because I filled that cistern, I poisoned that water supply'. It is possible to shift perspective

to the time of the on-going deed, and truly say ‘because I am filling that cistern, I am poisoning that water supply’. Reverse explanandum and explanans, and the result is the false causal claim ‘because I am poisoning that water supply, I am filling that cistern’.

Consider the allegedly sophisticated ‘because I intend to poison that water supply, I intend to fill that cistern’. A comparable series of dialogues suggests an equivalence in meaning to the allegedly naive ‘because I am poisoning that water supply, I am filling that cistern’: C1: ‘I am filling that cistern’; D1: ‘Why do you intend to do that?’; C1: ‘Because I intend to poison that water supply’. C2: ‘I am filling that cistern’; D2: ‘Why do you intend to do that?’; C2: ‘Because I am poisoning that water supply’. C3: ‘I am filling that cistern’; D3: ‘Why?’; C3: ‘Because I am poisoning that water supply’. The speeches in C3 then compress to the ‘naive’ explanation; the contrast in meaning with the false causal claim being that the material made explicit in the C1/D1 dialogue has been bundled into the *because*.<sup>9</sup>

Thompson offers a theory of sorts to explain the sense in which intention-*ascriptions* are more sophisticated than action-*ascriptions* (Thompson 2008a, 8.5). But that is orthogonal to whether rationalizing ‘because’ has the sophistication of intention-*ascriptions*: whether, even when both explanans and explanandum are naive, the *explanation* may be sophisticated. If so, action-*explanations* may be just as sophisticated as intention-*explanations*. Even if gathering in only naive sentences, action *theory* would then remain sophisticated.

---

<sup>9</sup>The editor suggests the reply that, in the initial *belief* case, the naive explanation ‘expresses my sensitivity’ to the inference from explanandum to explanans, so that beliefs are not in fact smuggled in; if so, Thompson’s naive action explanations ‘express my sensitivity’ to the practical inference from governing action to means, and there is no smuggling in of intentions. Perhaps, but whether it is so must be resolved to assess whether intention is involved: Thompson’s hypothesis that it is not is no longer a point of *bare data*. But I don’t see that this helps Thompson, anyway: ‘sensitivity to an inference’ in the belief case would appear to involve *belief in the conclusion* under *belief in the premiss*: let the parentheses in the description fall where they may, the naive explanation turns out to involve *my mind*.

## 3.2 Revealing praxeology in language

### 3.2.1 Does explanation avow rationalization?

In general, where  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  are psychological predicates, endorsing ‘I  $\Phi$  because I  $\Psi$ ’ does not suffice for the presence of a rationalizing connection between being  $\Phi$  and being  $\Psi$ : the explanatory trail from being  $\Psi$  to being  $\Phi$  may run through a segment of purely causal, nonrationalizing explanation.

This is particularly clear when  $\Phi$  and  $\Psi$  are action-predicates. Suppose Fred is breaking in his new gelato maker. None too surprisingly, he finds himself getting fat. He responds to this unfortunate situation by commencing an exercise regime. We encounter Fred performing a set on the elliptical trainer, and ask what has led him to this situation. His answer: ‘I am performing this set on the elliptical trainer because I am breaking in my new gelato maker’. This is surely intended sincerely, and we have no trouble understanding what Fred means by it. But this is not a rationalization: the explanandum is explained by the explanans, but not rationalized by it (not in the sense of Thompson’s ‘naive rationalizations’). Performing a set on the elliptical trainer makes no contribution to breaking in the gelato maker. Instead, the explanatory trail makes a detour through causal explanation: the ongoing action of breaking in the gelato maker causes Fred to get fat; the set on the elliptical trainer is rationalized as part of an effort toward ameliorating this regrettable side-effect of that ongoing action.

The detour through causal explanation is not limited to action–action explanations: action can also causally explain belief. Why did Fred come to believe that he is getting fat? Because he had to let his belt out a notch. That, in turn, was a causal offshoot of his getting fat—a causal offshoot of the ongoing action of breaking in the gelato maker. So, Fred, how did you come to believe you are getting fat? ‘I came to believe I was getting fat because I have been trying out my new gelato maker’. Presumably Fred still believes what he came to believe, and does so because he came to believe it. So, Fred, why do you believe you had been getting fat? ‘I believe I had been getting fat because I have been trying out my new gelato maker’. This may be somewhat stilted, but we arguably nevertheless understand what is meant; and if we do, we surely do not think of the belief as (entirely) rationalized by the action, but instead as (at least partly) causally-explained by it.

Explanation bundles together causation and rationalization under a single linguistic form. We can surely discern which explanations are intended as rationalizing and which as causal. But this understanding requires more than just a grasp of the linguistic form of explanation, because the understanding makes a distinction where the form does not. If explanation exhausts the capacity of language to express rationalization, then if our aim is to understand rationalization, we will have to look beyond the investigation of language. If thesis (1)—recall, that ‘ $\varphi$  because  $\psi$ ’ minimally encodes our understanding of rationalization—is true, this should discourage the linguistic approach to praxeology.

### 3.2.2 Do action-self-ascriptions avow agency?

In general, where  $\Gamma$  is a bare verb phrase fit to characterize an action (namely, by whether being either of ‘accomplishment’ type, like *bake a cake* or *run around the block*, or of ‘activity’ type, like *bake cakes* or *run*), endorsing an *action-self-ascription* like ‘I am  $\Gamma$ -ing’ does not suffice for  $\Gamma$ -ing to occupy any role in practical rationalization, either as rationalizer or as rationalized.

According to Anscombe, the distinctive ‘sense of the question ‘Why?’’, the ‘application’ of which to intentional actions is their distinctive characteristic, and which is answered by rationalizing explanations, ‘is refused application by the answer: ‘I was not aware I was doing that’ ’ (Anscombe 1963, sec. 3). And sometimes, application *is* refused: ‘e.g. if you ask someone why he is standing on a hose-pipe and he says ‘I didn’t know I was’’. Of course, there are cases in which the attempt at refusal would seem bizarre: ‘for example, if you saw a man sawing a plank and asked ‘why are you sawing that plank?’’, and he replied ‘I didn’t know I was sawing a plank’, you would have to cast about for what he might mean’. But it is not the *linguistic expression* that suffices for this oddity: if I see Fred manipulating one end of a Rube Goldberg rowing machine, at the other end of which a plank is being sawed, this same question and answer would leave it clear enough what Fred meant.

This should be no surprise. An action-self-ascription, in its conventional meaning, *just describes what the speaker is doing*: in this respect, it is continuous with ‘I was  $\Gamma$ -ing’, ‘Fred is/was  $\Gamma$ -ing’, ‘the snowmobile is/was  $\Gamma$ -ing’, and so on. No doubt we can avow agency by saying ‘I am  $\Gamma$ -ing’. But it would be implausi-

ble to postulate a lexical ambiguity. And if intended any other way, the contention that there is somehow a ‘sense’ of an action-self-ascription which avows agency and a ‘sense’ that does not just restates the evident phenomenon that action-self-ascriptions can be used to avow agency, and can also be used for reasons other than to avow agency. Again, our understanding of this distinction outstrips the grain in the linguistic form, which runs together what our understanding discriminates. If action-self-ascription exhausts the capacity of language to express agency, then if our aim is to understand agency, we will have to look beyond the investigation of language.<sup>10</sup> If (2) is true, this too should discourage the linguistic approach to praxeology.

## 4 Praxeologically revelatory phenomena of language

The root of these difficulties is that Thompson’s approach is insufficiently enthusiastic in its pursuit of the embedded viewpoint. The language of ascription and explanation is viewpoint-neutral: embedded, Fred can say at the time ‘I am performing this set on the elliptical trainer because I am getting fat, because I am breaking in my new gelato maker’; alienated, I can say later ‘Fred performed that

---

<sup>10</sup>The literature displays an undercurrent of opinion that the *progressive aspect* can bear the load of revealing agency, perhaps because of a conjectured association with ‘essential incompleteness’ inherent in agency and somehow encoded in the progressive aspect, in contrast with the ‘completeness’ encoded in the perfective aspect (compare [Thompson 2008a](#), 8.2). But what then does the perfective progressive (*Fred has been baking a cake*) mean? The progressive should make for incompleteness, the perfective for completeness—perhaps engendering an uninterpretable meaning, like a ‘past present’? We need a better theory.

According to my *RSTU theory* of English inflectional structure ([Hellie 2015](#), 3.1), the role of inflection is to compare a *Reference moment* (as a default, the *Speech moment*) to a *Topic interval* (initialized to an *Underlying interval*, determined by the bare verb phrase, and then perhaps further transformed). *Past* and *present* tense contrast in that *past* locates the R-moment after the T-interval, while *present* locates the R-moment in the T-interval. *Progressive* and *perfective* are somewhat analogous: if *progressive* is in a sentence, it yields a posterior T-interval strictly within the prior T-interval; if *perfective* is in a sentence, it yields a posterior T-interval adjacent on the right to the prior T-interval.

The RSTU theory strips aspect of any association with completedness-status. It also is formalized and compositional, readily handles an array of delicate phenomena, and is cognitively and metaphysically light; and by these customary standards of empirical research in natural language semantics, is superior to other going formal approaches. Philosophers who wish to preserve the association of the progressive with completedness-status owe us a theory that is yet superior.

set on the elliptical trainer because he had been getting fat, because he had been breaking in his new gelato maker'. While the use of the first-person present progressive is only available from the embedded viewpoint, it cannot bear the load of revealing the perspective on agency and rationalization found within that viewpoint, but is instead at best only a symptom of that perspective. What we need is not an embedment-suggesting parametrization within a form of language which is neutrally available from either the embedded or the alienated viewpoint, but rather a form of language which is *unavailable* from the alienated viewpoint. Once we have pinned down the language we need to investigate practical agency, we will observe soothing follow-on effect, the neutralization of the irritating 'movement from spirit to nature'.

My proposal is that the linguistic phenomenon revelatory of rationalization is a relation I will call *implication*, while that revelatory of agency is a sentence-type I will call the *elementary imperative* (both to be explained shortly). As substitutes for (1) and (2), I instead propose the following:

- 1\*. The phenomenon of ordinary language which minimally encodes our understanding of rationalization is a kind of *relation* between sentences: the *implication*,  $\tau \Rightarrow \sigma$ .
- 2\*. (i) Among the candidate implicanda/implicantes, none encodes the embedded viewpoint on a state of belief as minimally as an appropriate *declarative* sentence,  $\varphi$ ;
- (ii) Among the candidate implicanda/implicantes, none encodes the embedded viewpoint on a state of intention as minimally as an appropriate *elementary imperative* sentence, M.

Assembling (1\*) and (2\*), I then maintain that the praxeologically most revelatory phenomenon of ordinary language is the *implication relation* between *elementary imperatives*,  $\Gamma \Rightarrow M$ .<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Compare Hellie 2011, 114.

## 4.1 Agency and the elementary imperative

I begin by elucidating my notion of the ‘elementary imperative’. I argue that an imperative sentence *spoken* in the giving of a command has a subject-term (perhaps a ‘null’ or ‘phonologically unrealized’ subject); and then that, to explain the contrast between the perspectives on the content of the command of the speaker and of the agent, we should say that, in the linguistic form under which the agent *acts*, this subject-term is stripped out—leaving an uninflected subjectless verb phrase.

Imperative sentences are familiar: canonically used in commands, they are uninflected clauses with action-verbs, sometimes with phonologically realized subjects, sometimes without.

For a first example, ‘Pay the rent!’, when used in a social speech act, the first of these arguably contains a ‘null’ subject expression *you*.<sup>12</sup>

Second, in ‘Fred open the door!’, the imperative subject is shown phonologically realized.

Third, ‘Bill and Ted, the last one out turn out the lights!’ (McCawley 1998) illustrates the need for further complexity: the subject-term is used *attributively*, in such a way that whoever obeys the command must just be *among* the addressees.

Fourth, ‘Someone seat these guests!’ illustrates that the imperative subject need not even refer: instead, the *domain* of the imperative subject is set by the *domain* of addressees.

Fifth, ‘Maître d’, someone seat these guests!’ (Portner 2004) illustrates that the domain of the imperative subject is set by the domain of *subordinates* to addressees (where each of us is improperly self-subordinate).

I argue elsewhere (Hellie 2016, sec. 7) that the aim of a conversation in which commands are issued and accepted is to *parcel out the general will* of the participants to the conversation, among those participants. If Rance and Brent are planning the day’s errands, Brent may command Rance with ‘Rance pay the rent!’, while Rance commands Brent with ‘Brent go buy groceries!’. What each does

---

<sup>12</sup>According to the pragmatics of command in Hellie 2016, sec. 7, a *relevance* requirement on command mandates that the referent of the subject-term of the sentence used in a command be the addressee of the command. The discussion there prescind from the question here, whether the sentence *endorsed* by the agent also has a subject-term.



in his speech act is put on display the endorsement by the general will (as he conceives of it) of the imperative sentence he uses. At the outset of the conversation, then, the general will endorses ‘Rance pay the rent!’ and ‘Brent take out the trash!’, while at its conclusion, this endorsement is commonly recognized; in having agreed to join in the conversation, each commits to acting in accord with what is commonly recognized about the general will; accordingly, by the conclusion of the conversation, Rance commits to paying the rent, while Brent commits to taking out the trash: and it is in that sense that the general will is ‘parceled out’.

Now, the way the command ‘looks’ differs between its speaker and its agent.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly clear when the subject is attributive or quantified: the speaker does not know who will turn out the lights or seat the guests, but whoever that agent is must recognize him or herself as such, if the command is to be obeyed (whichever of Bill and Ted is last out must recognize himself as committed to extinguish the lights; whomever the maître d’ delegates must recognize him or herself as committed to seat the guests).

I propose to handle this difference as involving a difference in content between the general-will attitude licensing the command and the agent’s attitude in obeying the command. The subject-argument of the general-will content is *saturated*: a command with a referential subject is saturated de re with the agent; a command with an attributive or quantified subject is saturated by binding. By contrast, the agent’s content is *unsaturated* in its subject-argument: it is *de se* (Lewis 1979a), merely predicative. When the general will devolves its agency, this involves isolating some class of participants in the general will as those to whom it is devolved. But when agency devolves to its final ‘sink’, the individual ‘natural person’ whose body manipulates things in accord with that agency, it cannot be further delegated, there is no further question of whose body will be pulling the levers. To act under a command is to take on a nontransferrable commitment to execute it: de se content represents this nontransferrability; by contrast, self-directed de re content would represent the prospect of action under a command through a subject distinct from oneself, thereby overgenerating.

If there is a phenomenon of natural language fit to reveal this structure, it should generate not de re content, but only de se content, on pain of overgeneration. An elementary imperative lacks the syntactic complexity required to gener-

---

<sup>13</sup>This contrast is a major point of emphasis in Charlow 2009.

ate de re content: when there is literally *no subject term* in the sentence (not even a ‘null’ or unpronounced subject), there is no expression that could contribute an appropriate subject entity to the content. In regard to its subject, the content would simply be underdetermined—exactly as appropriate to de se content.

Accordingly, at the conclusion of Brent and Rance’s conversation, the general will commits de re to Rance paying the rent and Brent taking out the trash, endorsing the sentences ‘Rance pay the rent!’ and ‘Brent take out the trash!’; as this is commonly recognized, Rance thereby commits de se to paying the rent, endorsing the elementary imperative ‘Pay the rent!’, and Brent thereby commits de se to taking out the trash, endorsing the elementary imperative ‘Take out the trash!’. So in this sense, when a command is accepted, the subject term of the imperative sentence used in the command is stripped out, the agent endorsing only the elementary imperative sentence.

Agency set in motion through obedience to a command does not differ in itself from agency more generally: to take out the trash because commanded is to do the same thing as to take out the trash as a means to some end of one’s own (otherwise command could not, at the end, engage practical rationality). Accordingly, I propose that the characteristic commitment of agency has content that is de se; and, in consequence, the phenomenon of language that reveals agency is the elementary imperative sentence. To go about under a commitment to take out the trash, that is, is to comport oneself aptly to endorsement of ‘Take out the trash!’.

## 4.2 Rationalization and implication

Now to my notion of ‘implication’. In general terms, implication is the implicitly recognized relation of the subjective conferral of rational support *on* endorsed implicanda *by* endorsed implicantes. We explicitly recognize implications when we draw inferences: if Rance reasons ‘it is the first of the month; *so*, pay the rent!’, he recognizes the support conferred by ‘it is the first of the month’ on ‘pay the rent!’—accordingly, he recognizes the implication of ‘pay the rent!’ by ‘it is the first of the month’. Implication can be in place even when not explicitly recognized to be in place: it is *implicit* recognition that matters. And implication is not absolute, but subject-relative: Rance pays the rent, so the implication is not in place for Brent; and after they buy a house, it will not be in place for Rance,

either.

If my notion of implication can be made sense of, the linguistic phenomenon of implication would then reveal the psychological phenomenon of rationalization. Like explanation, implication requires endorsement of both ends of the relation, and so too is in a position to reveal *actual* rather than merely *hypothetical* rationalization. But unlike explanation, implication is a *subjective* relation, and so its appreciation requires the embedded viewpoint. And unlike explanation, implication is a relation of conferral of *rational* support, and so is apt to the ‘space of reasons’. And also unlike explanation, implication is promiscuous in the types of sentence it brings in, and so is in a position to treat imperative as well as declarative sentences.

Phenomena in the ballpark of implication are: *explanation; entailment; conditionality*. Like entailment, implication is a relation between sentences; like explanation, implication is weaker than entailment. Like explanation but unlike conditionality, implication is ‘presuppositional’: an explanation  $\varphi$  *because*  $\psi$  is acceptable only if  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$  are both endorsed—in contrast with conditionality, where if  $\psi$ ,  $\varphi$  is acceptable even if neither  $\varphi$  nor  $\psi$  is endorsed. Unlike explanation but (I maintain) like entailment and conditionality, implication is not tied to declarative sentences:  $\sigma$  *because*  $\tau$  is grammatical only if  $\sigma$  and  $\tau$  are declarative sentences  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$ —in contrast with entailment, which admits imperative and interrogative sentences to its candidate relata ( $\alpha \wedge \beta \vdash \alpha$ ;  $?\varphi \vdash ?\neg\varphi$ ), and with conditionality, which at very least admits imperatives and interrogatives as consequents (and to my mind admits imperatives as antecedents).

Now a bit more explicitly. I contend that a conditional  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$  is endorsed by a subject at a time just if, minimally adjusting the subject’s point of view then so that  $\tau$  is endorsed,  $\sigma$  is endorsed (otherwise, the conditional is antiendorsed).<sup>14</sup>

Some conditionals are (purely) declarative, of form  $\psi \rightarrow \varphi$  (*if goats eat cans, they have tough stomachs*); some conditionals (‘conditional imperatives’) have imperative consequents, are of form  $\psi \rightarrow \alpha$  (*if it is the first of the month, pay the rent!*); and some conditionals (‘bare anankastics’) have also imperative antecedents, are of form  $\beta \rightarrow \alpha$  (*to get to Harlem, take the A Train!*). These conditionals are associated with different sorts of attitude. Endorsement of a declarative

---

<sup>14</sup>This contention is developed in detail as a chapter of a book MS currently under review.

conditional reveals the subject's epistemic position. But endorsement of a conditional imperative reveals *conditional commitment to act*, while endorsement of a bare anankastic reveals *knowhow*.

Say that a conditional  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$  is *substantively* endorsed by a subject at a time just if, upon hypothetically suspending judgement on both  $\tau$  and  $\sigma$ , the subject continues to endorse  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$ . Substantive endorsement is far more interesting than mere endorsement: in particular, mere endorsement of  $\sigma$  or antiendorsement of  $\tau$  does not suffice for *substantive* endorsement of  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$ , though it does typically suffice for *mere* endorsement. (The 'paradoxes of the material conditional' generally boil down to the contrast between substantive and mere endorsement.)

Explanation is substantive endorsement of a *declarative* conditional, backed up by presupposition: an explanatory sentence  $\varphi$  *because*  $\psi$  is endorsed just if (i)  $\psi \rightarrow \varphi$  is substantively endorsed and (ii) both  $\varphi$  and  $\psi$  are endorsed.

Finally, implication is substantive endorsement of *any* conditional, backed up by presupposition:  $\tau$  implies  $\sigma$  ( $\tau \Rightarrow \sigma$ ) for a subject at a time just if (i) the conditional  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$  is substantively endorsed by the subject then, and (ii) both  $\sigma$  and  $\tau$  are endorsed by the subject then.

When this relation is in place for a subject at a time—in *State I*—this means the subject then (i) substantively endorses the conditional  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$ , and (ii) endorses both  $\sigma$  and  $\tau$ . Unpacking (i), the subject then continues to endorse  $\tau \rightarrow \sigma$  upon hypothetically suspending judgement on both  $\tau$  and  $\sigma$ —in *State II*. Unpacking further, hypothetically reintroducing endorsement of  $\tau$  to the State II subject—in *State III*—re-establishes endorsement of  $\sigma$ .

Note that if State III turns out the same as State I, this is non-trivial: getting to State II involves a certain minimal adjustment to State I, while getting to State III involves a certain distinct minimal adjustment to State II. Not only are distinct adjustments made at the two transitions, but familiarly  $B$  can be the closest  $X$  to  $A$  and  $C$  the closest  $X$  to  $B$  while  $C$  is closer to  $B$  than—and therefore distinct from— $A$ . So the State III endorsement of  $\sigma$  gives the sense of 'explanatory dependence' of the endorsement of  $\sigma$  on the endorsement of  $\tau$ : take  $\tau$  and  $\sigma$  both out, then put  $\tau$  back in; if this gets  $\sigma$  back, there is some 'robust' structure independent of the endorsement of  $\sigma$  and  $\tau$  such that endorsement of  $\sigma$  *follows on* endorsement of  $\tau$ . Because all there is to go on in establishing this 'following' is the subject's general take on things, the explanatory dependence is underlain by this take: accordingly,

we can say that in this case, sense is made of endorsement of  $\sigma$  by endorsement of  $\tau$ , so the latter *rationalizes* the former.

### 4.3 Implication between elementary imperatives

I contend that the praxeologically most revelatory phenomenon of language is the implication relation between elementary imperatives,  $\Gamma \Rightarrow M$ . Collecting together the remarks of the previous subsections, I will illustrate why I say this.

When such a relation is in place for a subject at a time, the subject endorses both ‘ $\Gamma$ ’ and ‘ $M$ ’, and, as argued above, the endorsement of ‘ $M$ ’ is rationalized by the endorsement of ‘ $\Gamma$ ’. Such endorsement can only make sense if it goes with apt comportment; so the subject’s comportment apt to endorsement of ‘ $M$ ’ is rationalized by the subject’s comportment apt to endorsement of ‘ $\Gamma$ ’. But then, as argued, the subject’s going about under a commitment to  $M$  is rationalized by the subject’s going about under a commitment to  $\Gamma$ .

The path back and forth between implication between elementary imperatives and practical rationalization is, I hope to have made clear, a frictionless one. Most crucially, there is no side road leading from the linguistic phenomenon to anything other than practical rationalization. This contrasts with Thompson’s naive rationalization-sentences, explanations by and of self-ascription of action. Explanation is essentially tied to description; and description, even if it is self-ascription of action, is essentially non-practical and essentially saturated. For these reasons, there is a side road leading from naive rationalization-sentences off to mere causal explanation of non-agentive processes one undergoes, and so naive rationalization-sentences can reveal neither the *practical* nor the *rationalizing* in practical rationalization.

## 5 Psychology without spirit

In at least a ‘deflationary’ sense (and with appropriate adjustments to context-sensitive expressions between the quoted and disquoted sentences), a declarative sentence ‘ $\varphi$ ’ is true just when it is a fact that  $\varphi$ , and endorsement of a declarative sentence ‘ $\varphi$ ’ is belief that  $\varphi$ ; accordingly, ‘ $\varphi$  because  $\psi$ ’ is true just when  $\varphi$  because  $\psi$ , just when the fact that  $\psi$  explains the fact that  $\varphi$ .

All of the following are declarative sentences: action self-ascriptions; avowals of intention; naive and sophisticated rationalizations. Accordingly, for example, an avowal ‘I intend to  $\Gamma$ ’ is endorsed (by one) just when one believes that one intends to  $\Gamma$ . Also, a sophisticated rationalization ‘I am M-ing because I intend to  $\Gamma$ ’ is true (of one) just if it is a fact that one is M-ing because one intends to  $\Gamma$ ; and in that case, the fact that one is M-ing is explained by the fact that one intends to  $\Gamma$ . This is all guaranteed only in a ‘deflationary’ sense, of course; but without further illumination of what difference that might make, we cannot specially plead for distinguishing these cases from garden variety mechanistic explanation. And then, because the latter involves a ‘movement from cause to effect’, we cannot specially plead for distinguishing sophisticated rationalization from a ‘movement from spirit to nature’. Even if that is all only in a ‘deflationary’ sense, what of it?

But, granting my contention that the fundamental praxeological language is implication between elementary imperatives, our theory can distinguish sophisticated rationalization from ‘movement from cause to effect’, and so as to disengage the former from the rhetoric of ‘movement from spirit to nature’.

Imperatives, including of course elementary imperatives, are not declarative sentences. It makes no sense to speak of an imperative ‘ $\alpha$ ’ as true or false (though it is, of course, *not true* and *not false*); nor, therefore, to say ‘it is a fact that  $\alpha$ ’. And endorsement of an imperative sentence is not belief; nor, therefore, does it make sense to say ‘one believes that  $\alpha$ ’.

Implication relations, moreover—and in contrast with explanations—are essentially ‘metalinguistic’. It makes sense to say ‘‘ $\tau$ ’ implies ‘ $\sigma$ ’’, but none to disquote, saying ‘ $\tau$  implies  $\sigma$ ’. (Entailment is comparable: ‘goats eat cans’ entails ‘goats eat cans or hay’, but ‘goats eat cans entails goats eat cans or hay’ makes no sense).

So the most fundamental praxeological language does not admit of assessment for truth-value, or of disquotation across *epistemic* linguistic environments—within the scope of belief or explanatory operators. Presumably, and as I will argue, what this relative fundamentality consists in is that nonfundamental praxeological language—most significantly, avowals of practical attitudes—acquires its meaning via ‘repackaging’ in other linguistic forms of the meaning of the fundamental language.<sup>15</sup> But in that case, the nonfundamental language acquires its mean-

---

<sup>15</sup>The thesis that ‘obligative modal’ sentences (*Fred must open the door*; or perhaps *Fred is to*

ing from language that is neither truth-evaluable nor disquotable across epistemic contexts. But the language of garden variety mechanistic explanation is fundamentally truth-evaluable and disquotable across epistemic contexts. If this sharp contrast can be established, the rhetoric of ‘movement from spirit to nature’ will cease to seem appropriate as a charge against sophisticated rationalization.

So, in what sense does declarative practical language *repackage* the meaning of language that is fundamentally non-declarative? ‘Frege-Geach’ type difficulties encountered by traditional ‘expressivist’ approaches, characterized by the assignment of nonpropositional contents to declarative sentences, suggest that all declarative sentences must have propositional contents. But content is only one component of meaning: another is the pattern in which context influences content. The relative import of content and context can be varied, even so as to render propositional content *nugatory* as a component of meaning, except insofar as it manifests aspects of context.<sup>16</sup> A declarative sentence  $\rho$  can be designed, that is, which has *trivial* propositional content in a context just if the context has a certain feature  $F$ , and *absurd* content otherwise. Endorsement of  $\rho$  in a certain context then encodes that the context has the feature  $F$ : for if the context *is*  $F$ ,  $\rho$  has trivial content, and is endorsed automatically; and if not,  $\rho$  has absurd content, and is antiendorsed automatically.

Now suppose that among the features of context are facts about practical commitments:<sup>17</sup> if Rance goes about under a commitment to pay the rent, this is a feature of the context associated with Rance; if Brent does not, the context associated with him lacks that feature. We could allow that this is the feature to which the content of our sentence  $\rho$  is sensitive. In that case, Rance endorses  $\rho$ , while Brent antiendorses  $\rho$ ; more generally, one endorses  $\rho$  just if one goes about under a commitment to pay the rent. But one also endorses the elementary imperative ‘Pay the rent!’ just if one goes about under a commitment to pay the rent—and in that case, one endorses  $\rho$  just if one endorses ‘Pay the rent!’. So in that sense,  $\rho$  repackages the meaning of ‘Pay the rent!’ in a declarative form.

Avowals of intention may have a good deal in common with  $\rho$ . Perhaps there

---

*open the door*) similarly repackage the content of associated imperatives (*Fred open the door!*) is a central hypothesis of Hellie 2015, 2016; the view that psychological avowals repackage the contents of their operands is lightly formalized in Hellie 2014, appendix.

<sup>16</sup>Compare Kaplan 1977 on ‘actually’; more narrowly germanely, compare Yalcin 2007.

<sup>17</sup>Loci classici: Lewis 1979b and Portner 2004; see also Hellie 2016, sec. 7.

is a way to hear ‘I intend to pay the rent’ (or ‘I intend to be paying the rent’) such that one endorses it under that interpretation just if one goes about under a commitment to pay the rent: this would involve hearing the sentence as avowing one’s *intention in action*, in the familiar jargon, rather than one’s *prospective intention*. If so, this sort of reading of ‘I intend to pay the rent’ inherits its meaning from ‘Pay the rent!’. If we then reserve *intention* for the sort of practical commitment behind endorsement of elementary imperatives, we might say then that an avowal of intention *expresses one’s intention*. Moreover, with propositional content a nugatory component of meaning, it cannot be said to also *describe one as beset by an intention*. If so, sophisticated rationalization involves nothing so gratuitous as a ‘movement from spirit to nature’.

## 6 Nature moving unmoved?

But have we gone from the frying pan into the fire? Perhaps we have got rid of *spirit*, as a mover of nature. Of course nature still moves: when Brent takes out the trash, the trash starts *in*, and ends *out*; and he endorses ‘I am taking out the trash’ all the while as a description of how a chunk of nature, Brent, the human being, is moving. But nature is now pictured as not being moved *by* anything. The only thing in the picture fit to supply ‘motive force’ is Brent’s endorsement of ‘Take out the trash!’—or finding, having embedded ourselves in Brent’s viewpoint, *take out the trash!*. Unfortunately, *take out the trash!*, unlike *I am taking out the trash*, is not anything at all. So motive force is supplied by *nothing*.

Less metaphorically, the theorist now needs to underwrite the implication by ‘Take out the trash!’ of ‘I am taking out the trash’. For if generally elementary imperatives imply self-ascribed actions-in-progress—if  $\Gamma! \Rightarrow I$  (myself) am  $\Gamma$ -ing—then, by the equivalence of  $\Gamma!$  with  $I$  intend to  $\Gamma$ , also  $I$  intend to  $\Gamma \Rightarrow I$  (myself) am  $\Gamma$ -ing; and by the equivalence of  $\varphi$  with  $I$  believe that  $\varphi$ , also  $I$  intend to  $\Gamma \Rightarrow I$  believe that  $I$  (myself) am  $\Gamma$ -ing. Presumably any implication between psychological avowals is preserved when the point of view shifts from avowal to ascription; if so, also  $\nu$  intends to  $\Gamma \Rightarrow \nu$  believes that  $\nu$  (herself) is  $\Gamma$ -ing. Typically, we take the beliefs of others at face value: unless—atypically—I think Sam might be mistaken about or unaware of something relevant, learning that Sam believes that  $p$  is enough for me to believe that  $p$ . If so, we typically recognize the implication  $\nu$  intends to  $\Gamma \Rightarrow \nu$  is  $\Gamma$ -ing.



That suffices for ascribed intentions-in-action to *explain* ascribed actions-in-progress, even if the explanation is not *causal*—saving us from the fire.

(If  $\Gamma! \Rightarrow$  I am  $\Gamma$ -ing, and for characteristically ‘agentive’  $\Gamma$ , like *saw a plank*, I am  $\Gamma$ -ing  $\Rightarrow \Gamma!$ , the two are ‘co-implying’—a status short of equivalence, but perhaps enough for intersubstitution much of the time. In that case, whenever  $\Gamma! \Rightarrow M!$ , we will also have I am  $\Gamma$ -ing  $\Rightarrow$  I am  $M$ -ing; and in light of the implication/explanation link, also *I am  $M$ -ing because I am  $\Gamma$ -ing*. ‘Naive rationalization’, that is, piggybacks on implication between elementary imperatives.)

## 7 How intentions explain actions

Why then do elementary imperatives imply self-ascriptions of action-in-progress? My answer brings together three elements: (A) a ‘direct realist’ approach in the philosophy of perception;<sup>18</sup> (B) a hypothesis about the ‘dynamism’ of agency; and (C) a story about the ‘decompositional’ structure of pure practical reasoning.<sup>19</sup> Component (C) devolves long-term, ambitious intentions down to the successive ‘microintentions’ for very short-term bodily motion by which they are implemented. Component (B) transitions from practical to epistemic rationality, with a link between microintentions and perceptual beliefs about microactions. And component (A) establishes a ‘pivot’ between perceptual belief and the world. After expanding on each of these, I return to how they all fit together.

### 7.1 The given

According to component (A), perceptual belief is *interpretation of the given*. The given is an article of informational content regarding the sensorily present features of things in the perceptual surround of anyone who is awake, including one’s body. Because what is ‘given’ must be genuine, the given is *true*: ‘at  $t$ , it is given to Fred that  $\varphi$ ’ entails ‘ $\varphi$ ’. Because what is ‘given’ is also ‘taken’, the given is *believed*: ‘at  $t$ , it is given to Fred that  $\varphi$ ’ entails ‘at  $t$ , Fred believes under the mode

---

<sup>18</sup>Compare Hellie 2011, 3.3 ff; Hellie 2014, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Loci classici: the ‘ABCD’ form of Anscombe 1963 and the ‘naive rationalizations’ of Thompson 2008a; compare Hellie 2015, 2.1.

of presentation of givenness that  $\varphi$ '. There is a component of perceptual belief, therefore, that is *infallible* and *irrefragable*.

But of course we are sometimes taken in by dreams, oddball lighting, and such. Suppose Fred sees a white card spotlighted in blue, believing the light to be normal. Then Fred's perceptual belief—what he *treats as* given—is that he sees a blue card under normal lighting: the given is treated as something it is not. Still, if Sam sees the same scene knowing of the odd light, what she will treat as given is that she sees a white card spotlighted in blue: the given is treated as what it is. And if Brent sees the same scene uncertain whether the light is odd or not, what he will treat as given is compatible with either seeing a blue card under normal lighting or seeing a white card spotlighted in blue: the given is treated as less than it is. Perceptual belief includes an *interpretation* of the given, that is sensitive to 'background' belief.

Fred, who is taken in, believes (under the mode of presentation of givenness) that he sees a white card spotlighted in blue; and he also believes (under the mode of presentation of interpretation of the given) that he sees a blue card under normal light. Both can't be true, so Fred's perceptual belief, and therefore his total view of the world, is inconsistent. I cannot grasp an inconsistent story, so if I am to make sense of Fred, I must either do so only *partially* (ignoring one or the other of the mutually inconsistent aspects); or *nontransparently* (by speaking of a 'compartmentalization' or 'fragmentation' of Fred's view that Fred does not find in himself); or *in bad faith* (by temporarily setting aside my opinion that the lighting is weird, and acceding in Fred's opinion that it is normal). So I cannot in good faith make total sense of Fred as he is for himself: I find Fred to be at best *imperfectly intelligible*.

More generally, then, if  $s$  is perfectly intelligible, it is given to  $s$  that  $\varphi$  just if  $s$  believes under the mode of presentation of the interpreted given that  $\varphi$ —in which case, moreover,  $\varphi$ .

## 7.2 Dynamism

Component (B) has it that microintention is *dynamic*. If I at some point set about under an intention to  $\mu$  (example, perhaps: to *raise my left pinky by 0.1 mm*), this is dynamic both (B1) *genuinely* and (B2) as a matter of *phenomenology*.

For (B1): if a microintention could coherently vanish hard upon its formation but prior to its conclusion, there could be no anticipation of continuity in agency: practical reason might just as well be ‘Brownian’, continuously shifting direction at random. More sharply: a micro-intention is *irrevocable*, in the sense that if acts of  $\mu$ -ing have characteristic duration  $\varepsilon$ , diachronic coherence requires retaining any intention to  $\mu$  throughout an interval of duration  $\varepsilon$ . (This may contrast with longer term intentions, if there is no *incoherence* in any strong sense when they vanish uncompleted: if Fred’s intention to dine at Bar Isabel presupposes they will have a free table, and the latter is a mere expectation, then it would be a surprise if the intention vanishes to just the extent as learning they are fully booked—but perhaps surprise falls short of incoherence.)

For (B2): perhaps one’s experience of objects external to one can be *as static*, such that one’s beliefs about how those objects have been are *given* but one’s beliefs about how those objects will be are *mere expectations*. By contrast, one’s experience of one’s body is always at least in part *as dynamic*: it is *as given* not merely that one is  $\Phi$  and was  $\Psi$  and has  $\Gamma$ -ed, but moreover that one is  $M$ -ing—that one is in the midst of an interval throughout which *is M-ing* applies to one, and therefore at the end of which *has just M-ed* will apply to one. (This may contrast with longer term intentions, if one’s sense of their progression is more intellectualized.)

Granting both, diachronic coherence requires one who forms an intention to  $\mu$  to have, over the following interval of duration  $\varepsilon$ , the perceptual belief that one is  $\mu$ -ing.

Together with (A), diachronic and synchronic coherence require one who forms an intention to  $\mu$  *not* to be given, at any point in the following interval of duration  $\varepsilon$ , that one is *not*  $\mu$ -ing. If what one is given over this interval is at all times compatible with that one is  $\mu$ -ing, then at the end of the interval, either one has just  $\mu$ -ed or what has been given is neutral on whether one has just  $\mu$ -ed. But that latter would seem to require some period of inattentiveness within the interval to whether one has recently failed to be  $\mu$ -ing. And such inattentiveness would seem to be incompatible with perceptual belief throughout that one is  $\mu$ -ing.

Accordingly, diachronic and synchronic coherence require of one who forms an intention to  $\mu$ , that they in fact successfully  $\mu$  over an appropriate interval fol-

lowing.<sup>20</sup>

### 7.3 Practical rationality

Component (C) is more intricate. In outline, the view is that to go forward under an intention to  $\Gamma$ , with certain beliefs, is to exercise knowledge how to  $\Gamma$  that is apt to those beliefs: to take the steps in a complex procedure for  $\Gamma$ -ing that one grasps, and that will succeed if those beliefs are true. This exercise, therefore, decomposes  $\Gamma$ -ing into a number of steps. But to take such a step is to go forward under a certain intention: an intention to  $M$ , say. In that case, taking that step is *also* the exercise of belief-apt knowledge how, in its turn: to take the steps in a complex procedure for  $M$ -ing that one grasps, and that will succeed if one's beliefs are relevantly true. That exercise in its turn decomposes  $M$ -ing into a number of steps. As this iterates, the intentions formed at each level of detail are decomposed further and further, eventually reaching the level of microintentions; perhaps this iteration goes on without limit, or perhaps it reaches a level of 'basic actions' somewhere below the microintentional level.

To illustrate, suppose Sam intends to walk down to the beach. Why think Sam *will* walk down to the beach? Well, she knows how to do that, given her beliefs: start by walking to a point where shortcuts  $A$  and  $B$  fork off from the main trail; then, if the park rangers have posted that the trail for shortcut  $A$  is open, take it; if that shortcut  $B$  is open, take it; and otherwise, take the main path. Granting her beliefs (for instance, that the park rangers are honest), walking halfway then (if it is open) taking  $A$  will constitute going down to the beach; same for taking  $B$ ; same for taking the main path. So if Sam's beliefs are relevantly true throughout, if she does what the procedure calls for, she will successfully walk down to the beach.

But why expect Sam will do what the procedure calls for? Well, in having formed the governing intention to walk down to the beach, Sam also commits to forming implementing intentions in the way called for in the procedure. If she

---

<sup>20</sup>Example: some years ago, walking along the sidewalk while reading a sign across the street, I collided with a pole—microaction suddenly coming to a halt. Reflecting on the period surrounding the collision, I sensed the 'uncanny': the forward motion so evident from the embedded view then was, from the alienated view, not genuine—as in starting awake from a dream.

does not, she falls short of perfect diachronic intelligibility. So if she remains perfectly intelligible, she will *form the implementing intentions* in the way called for in the procedure. But what we need is that she will *carry out* those intentions, will *perform* the implementing *acts*: for example, upon learning that shortcut *A* is open and forming the intention to take it, why expect she *will* take shortcut *A*?

The answer here reiterates the same form, while altering the details: in having formed the governing intention to take shortcut *A*, she calls on her knowhow, thereby committing to forming implementing intentions in a way apt to her evolving beliefs. Each of those implementing intentions, if she forms it, she will carry it out, will take the implementing act. Why expect that? Same answer.

If we had to go on like this indefinitely, the answer to the question would be indefinitely deferred: in forming the governing intention, she commits to forming the implementing intentions as called on by her knowhow; granting her relevant beliefs, performing the implementing acts will constitute performing the governing act. Why expect implementing acts given implementing intentions? Well, refocusing to treat each implementing intention now as a governing intention: in forming it, she commits to . . . .

Fortunately, once we get to microintentions, we can hop out of the cycle. Why expect implementing microaction given implementing microintention? As argued, microintention without microaction undermines perfect intelligibility, but perfect intelligibility is expected—in which case so too is microaction given microintention.

## **7.4 How elementary imperatives imply self-ascriptions of action-in-progress**

Gathering the components, (C) disassembles elementary imperatives in general into microaction elementary imperatives; (B) moves from those to perceptual belief about microaction; then (A) moves to microaction itself; and finally (C), run in reverse, reassembles microaction into action in general: in toto, the result is a path from elementary imperatives to self-ascription of action-in-progress. Components (A) and (C) make room for intention which falls short of its goal, but only on pain of unintelligibility or false belief; and so, because unintelligibility and false belief are invisible from the embedded viewpoint, so too is intention which falls short of

its goal. And that is what it is for elementary imperatives to imply self-ascriptions of action-in-progress.

## 8 The extrusion of the deed

Think of action as being *extruded* by practical psychology: raw material (the unspecified future course of Sam's bodily motions) is fed through a die with an odd sort of continuously adjusted cross-section (its cross-section at a given instant specified by Sam's microintentions at that instant), extruding a cylinder with an undulating contour (the four-dimensional 'worm' reflecting Sam's history of movement through the environment). Short segments of the extruded cylinder display great detail, none particularly legible: wriggling, finger-twitches, muscular contractions. But in examining longer segments, the welter of detail vanishes into a patina, and more legible patterns 'scale up': Sam fetches groceries, cycles to work, writes an article. This is no coincidence: the moment-to-moment adjustment of the cross-section of the die is instrumental to the carving of such patterns.

In this metaphor, the extruded cylinder is a real material entity, but the die is not: instead, our access to what its cross-section is at any time, and to how this cross-section responds to the patterns it aims at carving, is our taking the embedded viewpoint on Sam.

With no 'die', there can be no literal 'extrusion', either. Instead, the 'contact' between the raw material and the die consists just in the 'pivot' we establish between psychology and the world in thinking of some proposition as *given*. At each instant, the cross-section of the psychological 'die' is identical to the cross-section of the physical 'cylinder'; but that is just to say that the given is both irrefragably believed and infallibly true. That, in turn, is not some big shocker, in need of justification: instead, it is a ground rule we cannot help but abide, from the moment we start playing the game of interpreting the minds of others.

Our bodies move, when we act. But we do not move them—not in the way our bodies move our tools, anyway, which is something we can fully grasp from the *alienated* viewpoint. What *we* do—what happens 'internally to psychology'—is not even a kind of moving at all: it is instead only a kind of bookkeeping,

where Sam's intentions, knowhow, and beliefs preserve her own diachronic self-intelligibility as well as possible despite being tugged along by the given. Following all this requires adopting the *embedded* viewpoint on Sam. The 'mind-body nexus', then, is a constraint on *my shifts in viewpoint*: whatever I may think about Sam the human animal from the alienated viewpoint, and whatever I may think about Sam the psychological person in the course of embedding myself in her viewpoint, some proposition—the given—must appear in both, around which I pivot between them.

*Rationalizing explanation of action*, on my story, is internally heterogeneous in its 'logic', bolting together bookkeeping within the embedded view with givenness-enabled pivot between the embedded and alienated viewpoints. Without this heterogeneity, we either have only rationalizing bookkeeping or causal arationality: the mind-body nexus will appear nowhere. Unfortunately, the literature presupposes homogeneity, and is consequently drawn through contortions in reconstructing the mind-body nexus without stooping to Cartesian dualism: Davidson-type causalism by misrepresenting the purely rational notion of an *intention* as of an internal cause of bodily motion; Thompstonesque process theory by misrepresenting the purely causal notion of a *bodily process* as of something, though bodily and processive, yet somehow also laden with rationalizing power.

Fortunately, all this stooping and contorting is needless. The mind-body nexus is not to be found in the world, not from any viewpoint: instead, it consists in a constraint on shifts between viewpoint embedded in groundrules for what it is to engage in psychological characterization. If we are surprised at this sort of thing, it is only because our philosophical era takes pride (rather oddly) in its neglect of Kant's Copernican Revolution.

## References

- Anscombe, Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret, 1963. *Intention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Charlow, Nate, 2009. ‘Imperative statics and dynamics’. MS, University of Michigan.
- Davidson, Donald, 1963. ‘Actions, reasons, and causes’. *Journal of Philosophy*, 60:685–700.
- Davidson, Donald, 1980. *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heal, Jane, 2003. *Mind, Reason, and Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hellie, Benj, 2011. ‘There it is’. *Philosophical Issues*, 21:110–164.
- Hellie, Benj, 2014. ‘Love in the time of cholera’. In Berit Brogaard, editor, *Does Perception Have Content?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hellie, Benj, 2015. ‘Obligation and aspect’. *Inquiry*, 58:td.
- Hellie, Benj, 2016. ‘Rationalization and the Ross Paradox’. In Nate Charlow and Matthew Chrisman, editors, *Deontic Modals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johnston, Mark, 2001. ‘The authority of affect’. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 63:181–214.
- Kaplan, David, 1977. ‘Demonstratives’. In Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein, editors, *Themes From Kaplan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Published 1989.
- Kolodny, Niko and John MacFarlane, 2010. ‘Ifs and oughts’. *Journal of Philosophy*, 107:115–143.
- Lewis, David, 1979a. ‘Attitudes *de dicto* and *de se*’. *The Philosophical Review*, 88:513–43. Reprinted in [Lewis 1983](#).
- Lewis, David, 1979b. ‘A problem about permission’. In *Essays in Honour of Jaakko Hintikka on the Occasion of His Fiftieth Birthday on January 12, 1979*, 163–175. Reidel. Reprinted in [Lewis 2000](#).



- Lewis, David, 1983. *Philosophical Papers*, volume I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David, 2000. *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCawley, James, 1998. *The Syntactic Phenomena of English*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition.
- Portner, Paul, 2004. 'The semantics of imperatives within a theory of clause types'. *Proceedings of SALT*, 14.
- Stanley, Jason C. and Timothy Williamson, 2001. 'Knowing how'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 98:411–44.
- Thompson, Michael, 2008a. 'Naive action theory'. In *Life and Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, Michael, 2008b. 'The representation of life'. In *Life and Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, Michael, 2011. 'Anscombe's *Intention* and practical knowledge'. In Anton Ford, Jennifer Hornsby, and Frederick Stoutland, editors, *Essays on Anscombe's Intention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Williamson, Timothy, 1995. 'Is knowing a state of mind?' *Mind*, 104:533–65.
- Yalcin, Seth, 2007. 'Epistemic modals'. *Mind*, 116:983–1026.