The Question of Practical Knowledge

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1. Practical reasoning and moral reasoning

Most theories of practical reasoning, Jonathan Dancy tells us in his *Practical Shape*,[1] first explain practical reasoning on a model of theoretical reasoning independently conceived and then proceed to find practical reasoning lacking in comparison with the model. In this rich and tantalizing book Dancy urges us to turn our attention to the way an account of practical reasoning might look if it didn't have to conform to standards derived from an independently conceived picture of theoretical reasoning. If we managed to thus free our thinking we would find, Dancy argues, that practical reasoning issues directly in action, as the Neo-Aristotelians suppose, but that its form is not the form of deductive reasoning.

This move kills two birds with one stone: it helps us into a rich an unprejudiced account of practical reasoning, on the one hand, and it allows us to better understand the nature of all reasoning, on the other. Thus, contrary to what one might expect, an account of practical reasoning is what may illuminate, rather than what may get illuminated by, our view of theoretical reasoning and of reasoning in general. What lies at the heart of all reasoning, Dancy argues, is the tracking of favoring relations: these are the relations in which a set of considerations (considerations giving reality its shape) stand to a kind of response on our part. And what distinguishes practical from theoretical reasoning is the nature of this response. When the response is an action the reasoning leading up to it is practical and when the response is a belief the reasoning leading up to it is theoretical. (PS, 45) Where our response is an action, the considerations that do the favoring favor the action in question by revealing its value. Whereas where the outcome is a belief, the considerations that do the favoring favor the belief in question by raising the probability that the belief is true. Dancy thinks on reflection that truth is itself a value and that once one has sufficiently distinguished practical from theoretical reasoning, one ought to bring them back together and "understand the theoretical side in terms of its

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own, theoretical values". (PS, 101). In which case, I would add, the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning amounts to a distinction between practical and theoretical values; i.e. between the values that lie in acting a certain way and the values that lie in believing in certain propositions. At this point, one could venture the thought that Dancy's philosophy is Neo-Aristotelian in a deeper sense; for his distinction between practical and theoretical values may be seen as mapping onto the distinction between *phronesis* and *episteme* in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*

However, I think that Dancy's insightful account of practical reasoning is in fact not Aristotelian. Notice that in this admittedly sketchy summary of his view I have said nothing about the moral. Now, of course, Dancy dedicates a whole chapter of this book to the nature of *moral reasoning* (chapter 5). But my point in bringing attention to the lacuna in *my* retelling of Dancy's story is to underscore that his account of practical reasoning is most un-Aristotelian in this respect: there is nothing *inherently* moral about practical reasoning, on his view of it. Whereas Aristotle's treatment of the *syllogismos* and of *phronesis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* takes place in the context of an interrogation into the question of how to live and who to be. Of course, Dancy acknowledges the existence of moral practical reasoning, but in his view, it figures as merely a species of practical reasoning, whose treatment requires a whole chapter because it is a mischievous kind: one that on occasion issues in (moral) beliefs and not actions. This peculiarity of moral practical reasoning, Dancy takes it, raises a problem for the view that what really distinguishes practical from theoretical reasoning is that in the former case but not the latter the response on our part is an action. For moral reasoning seems to be a kind of reasoning which is both practical - for it is after all essentially concerned with the question of who to be and how to live - and one that issues in beliefs as much as in actions. And he worries that appreciating this may tempt one to view moral reasoning to belief as theoretical and so to fall back into the old habit of thinking practical reasoning as a semi-degenerate form of theoretical reasoning independently conceived.

But I want to suggest in this paper that seeing what Dancy sees about moral reasoning puts one in the way of another temptation; one that he does not address in this book and one that I would like to invite him to address here. If we start from these phenomena concerning moral reasoning - the appearance that it is practical and the appearance that it may issue in action and belief alike - we may be tempted to take another route: attempt to save both of these appearances and draw the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning *not* at the outcome of the reasoning but somewhere else. And, we may also be tempted to think that instead of trying to defuse the sense in which moral practical reasoning may issue in belief, as Dancy seems to be doing, we should, following Dancy's

own focalist methodology, be *focusing* on moral reasoning to belief in an effort to construct an account of practical reasoning which is faithful to the variety and richness of the practical condition.

In what follows I focus on the insight that lies at the heart of Dancy's theory of practical reasoning. This is the thought that the subject of practical reasoning is the subject of a certain kind of sensitivity to what he calls *the practical shape of a situation*: the particular configuration of a set of considerations of different sorts, which are the expressions of certain aspects of the situation which, taken together, call for a certain action response on our part. First, I will try to bring forth an ambiguity that I think is present in the way Dancy talks of this sensitivity in the book. Then I will diagnose this ambiguity as the reasonable anxiety one may feel in the presence of a philosophical dilemma between an unthinking dogmatism and a disorienting subjectivism that lurks in the attempt to think of practical reasoning as discerning a bit of reality, as Dancy rightly wants to do. This dilemma, I will then try to show, may come undone if we think of practical reasoning in general through the focal lens of moral practical reasoning to belief. This, I dare add, allows us a view of practical reasoning which is more faithful to the spirit of Dancy's fundamental insight in this book than the account he himself develops. But my aim in trying to show this is not to outdo the author of *Practical Shape*. My aim is to invite him to complete his view of practical reasoning with an account of its epistemology and to convince the reader that the occasion of this book is the occasion of a rich and explosive philosophical insight's rightfully demanding our full attention.

2. The work of practical reasoning and the practical shape of a situation; an ambiguity

In my attempt to give an eagle's view of Jonathan Dancy's account above, I said that he sees reasoning as tracking favoring relations. These are relations in which a set of considerations which shape a bit of reality stand to a certain kind of response on our part. The language of 'tracking' reflects a commitment that Dancy expresses very clearly very early on in the book. This is his commitment to what he calls *normative realism.* On Dancy's picture, the work of practical reasoning is the work of figuring out what he calls *the practical shape* of a situation that confronts us. This, Dancy tells us, is "a shape that the situation has independently of whether we recognise it or not" (PS, 3). This explains why he thinks of his view as a brand of realism (PS, 3). This shape, which is qualified as practical, consists in a certain configuration of what Dancy alternately calls *considerations* or *aspects of the situation* which call for a certain response on our part and which thus make it the case that the response is right. And this explains why he calls his view a brand of *normative* realism. This reasoning - which Dancy will go on in the book to distinguish from theoretical reasoning on the basis of the distinctive

nature of its outcome - is, Dancy suggests, thinking which is sensitive to how things are in the world and in particular to demands for action.

Dancy sets up this view of practical reasoning as discerning or cognitive in opposition to a view of practical reasoning as weighing. On the opposing view, the considerations which figure in practical reasoning are simply reasons for and against an action and the work of practical reasoning consists in weighing the reasons on each side and deciding which ones are weightier. Of course, such a model, can also admit of a realist reading. One could think that in weighing reasons for and against one is measuring the weight of reasons one has previously tracked or that in weighing reasons for and against one is tracking normative relations between the relative weights of action demanding reasons and the action in question. So, the problem with this model is not the potential clash with a brand of normative realism. The problem Dancy traces is revealing of his commitment to do justice to the irreducible variety and richness of practical reasoning. Here is how he himself puts it: "I happily allow that we can make a comparative assessment of the strengths of reasons, and that this can be thought of as weighing, but I want to insist that much of the interesting work is done before we get to that stage. (PS, 3). Let me say this straightaway: This commitment is I think of the first importance. Dancy's conception of the issue of practical reasoning in terms of a certain kind of work and his insistence that much of that work is interesting marks a departure not just from weighing accounts, but from most contemporary accounts of practical reasoning; and it thus opens new ground in contemporary discussions.

The interesting work of practical reasoning is done before we get to the stage of weighing, Dancy thinks, because it is the work of figuring out a situation, of getting it right; of "conceiving the situation as in fact it is, in all its glorious complexity" (PS, 3). But now I want to make some trouble for Dancy's way of doing justice to his own intuition concerning the interesting work that is done before we get to the weighing stage; if in fact we do get to it. Dancy himself is, I suspect, ambivalent about just what the cognitive character or aspect of this interesting work amounts to. The ambivalence shows in an ambiguity that one can find in the locutions he uses to speak of this interesting work. On the one hand, we find locutions such as the following [*my underlying throughout*]:

1. "So there is a shape to the situation and we are trying to <u>get our thought to fit that shape</u>. The shape of the thinking is intended <u>to match the shape of </u>the situation." (PS, 3)
2. "My general picture of reasoning sees it as a process in which we <u>work from a detailed conception of the situation that confronts us to a response </u>that is of the sort most favoured by the relevant considerations, taken as a whole." (PS, 8)

3. "Practical reasoning takes us from the situation as we see it to acting in the way that is most favoured by that situation." (PS, 42)

And, on the other hand, we find locutions of the following sort:

4. "Deliberation is our way of shaping up the situation that confronts us so as to reveal the course of action most favoured by the relevant considerations, taken together." (PS, 30)
5. "We want to work out how to respond to the situation that confronts us, and to do that we have to build up a practical shape for the situation;" (PS, 58)
6. "The overall message here is that deliberation is given a shape by the operation of the various distinctions I introduced earlier in this chapter. And that shape is not just a shape in deliberation; our deliberation reveals (we hope) a shape that really belongs to the situation that confronts us." (PS, 61)
7. "Reasoning is a process in which we try to work out how to respond to the situation which confronts us. The reasoning is intended to determine the shape of that situation, in doing which we determine what sort of response is most appropriate." (PS, 97).
8. "…by the situation as the reasoning has shaped it." (PS, 131)

The first group of locutions make it seem as if the work of practical reasoning takes place in two stages: 1) the stage of getting our thought to *fit* or *match* the thought (the set of considerations) that shapes the situation, and 2) the stage of figuring out the appropriate response on our part given the results of the work at the first stage. I take it, although I'm not sure, that on this conception, the interesting work of practical reasoning is the work of the first stage. But in the second group of locutions Dancy uses different language. Here, the interesting work of practical reasoning is not a matter of *fitting* or *matching* a shape the situation has anyway but a matter of *shaping up*, *building up* and *determining* the shape of the situation, or even a matter of *shaping* the situation.

The ambiguity is to be expected; as is the ambivalence that I suspect lies behind it. If we conceive of practical reasoning as a kind of sensitivity and we think of this sensitivity as the sensitivity to the thought-ish shape of a situation (for this shape is indeed no less than a certain configuration of *considerations*), then the following two views may appear attractive: 1) One may be tempted to interpret this sensitivity as the thought's susceptibility to what is intelligible as being what it is independently of what anyone may come to think of it, and 2) One may be tempted to interpret this sensitivity as an exercise of our ability to find in the reality that confronts us what we have put into it. But neither of the two views is ideal. If we opt for the second view, we risk losing the benefits of

normative realism; for we compromise the sense in which our practical response to the situation that confronts us is our rightful response to a bit of reality and not just the product of our own conception of it.

The first view may seem more promising, but it is not. If we opt for it, we risk bringing in the primacy of the theoretical from the back door. If we take the work of practical reasoning to consist in a susceptibility to what is intelligible as being what it is independently of what anyone may come to think of it, then we risk losing the benefits of suggesting that the practical shape of a situation is of a thought-ish sort. For, now, it doesn't matter what material the practical shape of a situation is made of (whether thought-ish or otherwise). The only thing that matters is that the sensitivity which is supposed to be (at least part of) our response to this shape is conceived of as entirely passive with regard to what it responds to. And so the criteria for judging whether this sensitivity works as it should will simply be the criteria for judging whether our capacity for theoretical (that is, receptive) knowledge works as it should. Of course, someone may here insist that the outcome of the sensitivity in question is an action. But this insistence does not salvage the practical character of the work of this sensitivity. It merely makes us revert to the old, unacceptable thought: that some theoretical (*ditto*) knowledge is knowledge of what is the case and some theoretical (*ditto*) knowledge is knowledge of what one ought to do. And so, respectively, that some theoretical reasoning (reasoning which amounts to theoretical knowledge when things go well) is reasoning whose aim is to figure out what is the case and some theoretical reasoning (*ditto*) is reasoning whose aim is to figure out what one ought to do.[2]

But if we do not want to give in to these two tempting views, we face a question: how to understand the work of the sensitivity that practical reasoning consists in without a) compromising the sense in which when things go well what we are sensitive to is a bit of reality, and without b) conceiving the knowledge that this sensitivity amounts to when things go well as a species of theoretical (that is, receptive) knowledge.

3. The Work of Moral Reasoning to Belief

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[2] The reader of Anscombe's *Intention* will recognize here traces of her opposition to an *incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge*. See Anscombe, G. E. M., *Intention, second edition, Oxford: Blackwell,* 1963, § 32, p. 57.

The question right above amounts to what I take to be *the* problem of practical knowledge:[3] How to conceive of a cognitive response to the world which is both a) a response to a bit of reality, and so to what may transcend our attempt to grasp it, and b) a response to a reality with a thought-ish shape; i.e. a bit of reality which is not intelligible as being what it is except in terms of the particular way in which it can be known. I myself find this question troubling and I suspect that the ambiguity in Dancy's locutions above may be due to his ambivalence with regard to it. But I also think that the question is pressing; more pressing than Dancy allows it to be. Until we have an answer to *the* problem of practical knowledge we do not have a full view of what the interesting work of practical reasoning consists in; of what the work of getting the practical shape of a situation right consists in. But reading Dancy's book I found myself wondering: why not take our cue for how to treat the problem of practical knowledge in this context from Dancy's own focalist methodology and ask ourselves whether there is a kind of reasoning which we may readily recognize as both practical and as identifiable in its aspect as discerning a bit of reality? If there is such a reasoning, it may be something we could focus on in order to give an account of practical reasoning which addresses the question of practical knowledge that Dancy's account faces, as I tried to show in the previous section. So, is there such a reasoning? Yes! This is in fact *moral reasoning to belief.*

When discussing moral reasoning, Dancy makes a distinction between reasoning in which we employ explicitly moral concepts and reasoning in which we employ ordinary concepts but which is nevertheless identifiable as moral (reasoning). Here is how Dancy speaks of reasoning of the first sort:

"This is practical reasoning where one of the considerations adduced is explicitly moral. So one might reason, this would be wrong; still it would be funny and nobody will notice, so here goes." (PS, 81)

And here's how he speaks of reasoning of the second sort:

"For someone who reasons as a good person would reason may not be thinking in terms of the right and the wrong at all (…), but simply be responding to the needs of others (say) as good people do." (PS, 82)

In treating moral reasoning in the book, Dancy seems to assume that the above distinction between explicitly and implicitly moral reasoning is a distinction within *reasoning to action*. And he also

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[3] For more on this see my "Practical Knowledge and Perception" in *Action and Morality,* Mark Alznauer and Josse Torralba (ed.), Olms Verlag, Germany, 2016.

seems to think that there is *besides*, moral reasoning which issues in belief about what one ought to do; for which Dancy gives the following example:

"I might reason: he really would not like me to do this, and has always treated me with kindness; so I ought not to do it. (…) They [the considerations adduced in favour of believing] make it the case that doing that would be wrong." (PS, 84)

Drawing the distinction between kinds of moral reasoning in this way enables Dancy to bypass moral reasoning to belief as a covert form of moral reasoning to action and so as practical in his sense of the practical; as that reasoning which issues in action immediately. But I believe that Dancy's distinction above is misplaced. Reasoning which is both explicitly and implicitly moral may equally un-mysteriously issue in action and in belief. If there is room in our thinking for *non explicitly moral reasoning to action*, there is no reason to expect that there may not also be *non explicitly moral reasoning to belief*; except to fit our theoretical need to explain moral reasoning to belief as a covert form of moral reasoning to action. For if we think that moral reasoning to belief may only be explicitly moral - reasoning in which we employ the concepts of 'what we ought to do' or 'what is right to do' - then it is a short step from there to explaining it as a covert form of moral reasoning to action. But if we allow the existence of implicitly moral reasoning to belief - reasoning which is a matter of responding to a bit of reality in the way that good people do - then we have at our disposal a theoretical treasure: a kind of reasoning which can serve as our focal case for an account of practical reasoning which addresses the question of practical knowledge. For this kind of practical reasoning can at least on first appearance *readily* seem as both practical (it is moral, after all) and as identifiable in its function as discerning a bit of reality (it is reasoning to belief, after all). In what follows I present by means of an example the sort of reasoning I have in mind and I offer a very brief sketch how this sort of reasoning could serve as our guide.

Consider the judgment expressed in the following locution: "Look, that mother too is letting her toddler use the tablet". Now one may think that no matter what reasoning I may manage to reconstruct here, this reasoning cannot be moral. The reason, one may think, is *not* that it is not moral reasoning to belief in the narrow sense; i.e. reasoning to belief about what one ought to do. The reason, one may think, is that it cannot not be reasoning about what to do in the wide sense: the sense in which it addresses the question of how to live and who to be. For if we know that a toddler is using a tablet and that the adult who is around is a mother and that the mother is aware of what the toddler is doing, then there are no two ways about it: we *ipso facto* know that the mother is letting her toddler use the

tablet. We might express the same thought by saying that *anyone* in possession of the premises will draw the conclusion.

We get this impression if we restrict the context in which we look at reasoning to the immediate environment of the particular belief each time. However, if we place the locution above in the wider context of a particular individual's history with certain ways of conceiving of certain things, we can come to appreciate the moral character of the reasoning which leads up to it. A good way to do this is to consider the reasoning of the agent as she is reflectively changing her settled ways of conceiving of things.[4] Say that on occasion I have been inclined to take notice of mothers in this sort of way: the way which might lead into saying "Look, that mother too is letting her toddler use the tablet". But now say that lately there is something bothering me every time I take similar notice and that in general I am a sufficiently reflective and critical individual. In this context, it is not inconceivable that I may come to think to myself thus: "Wait a minute, perhaps I'm not just making a simple observation every time I take notice of mothers in this way; perhaps what seems to be a mere observation is really a judgment on my part; a judgment on a mother who may have spent an entire day of an entire week or an entire month of an entire year with a toddler. Let me look again; this mother could be tired. Could she be? Could it be that other mothers I noticed on similar occasions were tired too? Why didn't this possibility cross my mind till now? What is wrong with me? Could it be that I too was assuming all along that it is a woman's job and so a woman's duty to raise children? Perhaps if this was a man with a child on the tablet I might not have noticed it to begin with; perhaps I too have been assuming that a man's world has priorities which may outweigh the demands of parenting whereas a woman's world is the world of the household." and so on and so forth.

When we ourselves pause to consider successful cases in which agents are self-reflectively engaging with their previous patterns of reasoning as they attempt to figure out the shape of a situation that confronts them, we may be surprised. For we may find that a lot of what they and we may take to be theoretical reasoning to belief was all along *moral*. Reasoning, we might venture to say, which involves the working of as well as the working on substantial ethical conceptions -conceptions of how one ought to be and live. The point is too large to argue for here but I think that the possibility of such critical reflection and change of mind as the above reveals two things: 1) It shows that even something as simple as noticing what a mother does may be a matter of a substantial ethical

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[4] I believe that this is the right way to read Iris Murdoch's famous example of M and D in Murdoch, I., *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge, 1970. I also believe that the sketch of the account that follows is in accord with Murdoch's view of the nature of moral activity in the *Sovereignty* but also with her view of consciousness in Murdoch, I., *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals,* London: Chatto & Windus, 1992. But I won't pursue the point here.

conception's being at work in our reasoning. In my construal of the example above, I can later come to recognize my initial, unreflective noticing of what the mother does as the inconspicuous work of established conceptions concerning claims to rights and duties on the basis of gender. For I can later come to recognize that in noticing the mother thus I was operating under these conceptions, and I was thereby pulling my part in the collective labor of showing that it is reality itself which can be revealed through the use of these established categories and so that it is reality itself which dictates them. And, 2) It shows that the work of discerning the true shape of a situation -the work which puts one in a position to tell what merely *appears* to be the case from what really *is* the case- may on occasion involve the following work: the work of self-reflectively engaging with one's patterns of reasoning in a way that allows one to see what substantial albeit often unspoken ethical conceptions may have been at work in one's reasoning previously, blocking one's view of what really is the case.

I believe that in this way we can both show how reasoning to belief may qualify as implicitly moral and we can cover some ground with regard to the problem of practical knowledge. Let us go back to the example as I constructed it above. I can say now: "In noticing the mother before I was in effect judging her to be careless.[5] But I was wrong to do so, I know this now." And if someone asks me how I know I can say: "I know I was wrong before because I realize now that in looking at the mother I was not really paying attention to her and her reality so much as using her to play my part in the collective labor of further establishing deeply entrenched conceptions of how to live and who to be that are dubious at best." But now notice that on this way of conceiving of things, I answer the question of the credentials of my claim to knowledge by referring to the kind of work I think it takes to know the reality of an other individual *as such*.[6] This, in the example, is the work of engaging with my own patterns of reasoning in a way that brings to the surface the particular ways in which dubious shared conceptions of how to live and who to be prevent me from engaging with the reality of other women. In other cases, it could be the work of checking one's egoism (and the fantastical conceptions of how to live and who to be that this carries with it), of checking one's needs (and the fantastical conceptions of others as being there to serve those needs), of controlling one's tendency to over think (and the fantastical conception of oneself as the center of the world), of resisting obvious images of others which offer themselves to consciousness with suspicious ease, etc. In all such cases, the work involved is *the work of* but also *the work on* conceptions of how to live and who to be. I want to say somewhat schematically now that the question of whether a particular bit of reasoning can amount to

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[5] One may suggest here that the implicit judgment to the effect that the mother is *careless* is a judgment which can be reduced to a judgment concerning what one ought to do. But one can judge someone careless without thinking of them as negligible, and without thinking that carelessness ought to be avoided at all cost.

[6] For more on this account see my "The Individual in Pursuit of the Individual; a Murdochian Account of Moral Perception", *Journal of Value Inquiry* 53 (4): 579-603, 2019.

knowing may on occasion be settled by settling the question of whether in thus reasoning one in engaged in something like the above work; the work that a certain kind of person is engaged in. Let me now go ahead and call this person *good* or *morally virtuous*.

One may notice that this starts to look like the Aristotelian conception of *phronesis* as it was laid out in the work of John McDowell. Except that McDowell too, like Dancy, seems to think[7] that it is not enough to leave things there and that to really ground the sense in which moral reasoning in general (and so even moral reasoning to belief) constitutes knowledge which is genuinely practical we ought to conceive of it as knowledge that pertains to one's possibilities for action. But McDowell's motivation is different than Dancy's. McDowell is anxious to show that the metaphysical peculiarity of the object of practical wisdom (both independent of my thought each time and of a thought-ish shape) is not just owing to the nature of the practical. For he wants to forestall an objection he himself charges classical intuitionism with: the objection that positing a peculiar reality (moral reality) to explain a peculiar knowledge (moral knowledge) is *ad hoc*. Thus, he is anxious to show that other (non-moral) bits of reality are, metaphysically speaking, similar: they are both independent from and shaped by the way they are received. He thinks that second order properties are of this not so peculiar after all metaphysical nature because they are essentially relational; their being what they are is not intelligible except as being what they are *for someone; for the perceiver*. And so McDowell thinks that in the case of moral knowledge too, we should conceive of moral reality as relational; i.e. that we should conceive of moral reality too as not intelligible except as being what it is *for someone; for the perceiver*. And he also thinks that a bit of moral reality *is for the perceiver* if its shape is the shape of the perceiver's reasons for acting.

But I believe that McDowell, like Dancy, is *too* anxious. Once we have in view a picture of the distinctive credentials of moral knowledge, we may in fact leave things there. We do not need to be mesmerized by the charge of the metaphysical peculiarity of the object of moral knowledge and we do not need to be mesmerized by the need to distinguish practical from theoretical reasoning (more on this in the final section). Whether *any* bit of reasoning amounts to knowledge is a matter of whether one is in a position to do the work that a certain kind of person can do; let us call this person *virtuous in the unqualified sense*. I can say now that the answers to the question of knowledge (whether one is in a position to do the work of the *virtuous in the unqualified sense* does) may vary from ascertaining that one is in *good* viewing conditions and one's sight is in *good* working condition, etc. to

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[7] This anxiety shows in McDowell, J., "Values and Secondary Qualities," in Ted Honderich (ed.) *Morality and Objectivity*, London: Routledge, pp. 110-129, 1985.

ascertaining that one is sufficiently self-reflective and critical of oneself or sufficiently attentive to others, etc.. There is nothing metaphysically suspicious about the former (the non-moral) case, and so there need be nothing metaphysically suspicious about the latter (the moral) case either. In my example above, moral prejudice blocked my view of the mother's reality in a way analogous to the way in which lack of proper light may block one's view of the dimensions of objects when one is little. In the former case, it is likely that the force of prejudice may persist even after I've realized my mistake; perhaps for an indefinite amount of time after I first notice, I may need to be correcting my darkened conception of women. Every time I see a mother-child interaction I may need to remind myself that I am not in an ideal moral 'viewing' condition, as there is so much gender prejudice at work in my thinking that all this may make things appear other than they are. And this, is analogous to what we may imagine a young child experiencing when she tells herself: "This looks two-dimensional but I know I'm in the dark and that darkness makes it seem as if three-dimensional objects are two-dimensional." Bringing in the analogy with ordinary perception of first order properties suffices to help us notice the implicit reference to the regulative ideal of "being in a position to know" which may be spelled out as the regulative ideal of being a certain kind of person and this in turn as the regulative ideal of engaging in a certain kind of work. We do not need to make metaphysical amends for features of moral knowledge if they are no different than features of other forms of knowledge.

4. Back to the idea of the practical shape of a situation

I return now to the issue I tried to raise in section 2 above. The brief account of the moral reasoning to belief of section 3 above may help us out of the ambivalence that I suspected in Dancy's book without abandoning his fundamental insight that the interesting work of practical reasoning is the work of figuring out the practical shape of a situation. On that account, the work of moral reasoning is conceived neither as a matter of discerning a bit of reality with respect to which one is entirely passive, nor as a matter of discerning in a bit of reality what one has put into it. In fact, on that view, it is when one is merely finding in a certain reality what one has put into it that one is prevented from encountering the other's reality as it is. In the example above, it is when one keeps reading into the situations with which one is confronted the (dubious) conceptions one is (together with others) laboring to place in the social reality of women that one can be said to be missing the reality of the mother.

Moreover, I suggested above that a bit of reasoning to belief may amount to *moral* knowledge if the question of its status as knowledge is settled by settling the question of whether in thus reasoning one is engaged in the work of the morally virtuous. But the work that thus befalls us as common folk is not the work of the "spectators of virtue"[8]; the work of discerning a conception of the end of reasoning which is fixed ahead of time as what the reasoning of an ideal reasoner would amount to in our situation; whether this be the uninteresting work of applying or bringing in to bear in a particular situation "the right ethical conception" or the admittedly more interesting but still quite limited work of specifying what "the right ethical conception" amounts to in the circumstances. If our work was the work of the "spectator of virtue", the end of our reasoning would be quite distinct from ourselves and our activity, and so in this sense it would be something with respect to which we would once more be entirely passive. However, on the way I conceived of my focus case in section 4 above, the work of the morally virtuous is *our* work as we strive to keep ourselves open to how things are in a certain regard: we strive to not lose track of the fact that what we are trying to grasp is the reality of an other individual; a reality which is separate from ours and thus in principle always such as to surprise us by *jarring* our conceptions of how to live and who to be. This work, we could say somewhat schematically, is *our* work as we constantly try to put ourselves back into the position of being able to tell what merely looks to be the case from what really is the case. And this can be a matter of noticing and taking into account points at which our typical patterns of reasoning and conceptions of how to live and who to be are *jarring*, a matter of overcoming impediments to our openness to the historical reality of the other, but also a matter of learning how to turn our attention to the other, etc.

On this way of looking at things, what we are sensitive to when engaging in the work of the virtuous is a *reality* which is taken to be precisely *that*: what in principle transcends our attempt to grasp it in the way pointed out above. However, this reality is one with a moral thought-ish shape. It transpires that it is the reality of an other individual, when it transpires that the kind of work it takes for it to be known is the work of the morally virtuous. In the example above, it transpires that the reality of the mother is the reality of an individual when it transpires that the kind of work it takes for it to be known is the work of the individual who can engage in the work of ethical self-reflection and critique. This reality is not intelligible as being what it is except in terms of the particular (moral) way in which it can be known.

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[8] The fortunate phrase was suggested to me by Kim Frost; one can find it in Plutarch's *Moralia*.

Let me now switch back to the consideration of practical reasoning *as such*. I can't even begin to make a case for this here but I believe that it is possible to give an account of the fundamental kinds of practical reasoning on the lines of the above account of moral reasoning. In this vein, we could say that in the case of practical reasoning concerning making, to settle the question of whether a bit of reasoning amounts to knowing we would need to figure out whether one's reasoning involves the kind of work that the master craftsman is capable of. Similarly, in the case of practical reasoning concerning one's future, we could say that to settle the question whether a bit of reasoning amounts to knowing we would need to settle the question whether one's reasoning involves the kind of work that the prudent is capable of. And in the case of practical reasoning concerning the achievement of one's goals, we could say that to settle the question whether a bit of reasoning amounts to knowing we would need to settle the question whether one's reasoning involves the kind of work that the instrumentally rational is capable of. And we could conceive of the relevant work in all these cases as the work of both noticing and taking into account points at which one's conceptions of how to live and who to be are *jarring* and of overcoming impediments to being open to the reality of one's object as the reality which in principle transcends our grasp. If we managed to show this we would have an account of practical reasoning which, when things go well, amounts to a kind of knowledge that is both 1) of a bit of reality; for it is knowledge which conceives of what it knows as transcending our grasp, and 2) of a bit of reality with a thought-ish shape; for its being the reality that it is each time is not intelligible except in terms of the particular ways in which it can figure in the thinking of the virtuous in each case; the morally virtuous, the master craftsman, the prudent and the instrumentally rational.

On the view envisioned here, we do not need to do an injustice to moral reasoning to belief in order to distinguish between practical and theoretical reasoning. An attentive view of moral reasoning to belief is very promising in the way I have tried to point out above. We do not need to be mesmerized by the need to distinguish practical from theoretical reasoning and thus effect a very sharp divide between reasoning to action and reasoning to belief. We can draw the distinction between practical and theoretical reasoning not at the outcome of the reasoning but at the kind of knowledge that each reasoning amounts to when things go well. But until I've said what unifies all cases of practical reasoning above, I have not given substance to this way of drawing the distinction. I will close this brief sketch with what I take to be a hint in the right direction: what gives unity to the cases I considered above -the practical reasoning of the morally virtuous, of the master craftsman, of the prudent and of the instrumentally rational- is the primacy of the ethical. It is legitimate to say that the craftsman who takes forever to finish her work and charges an inordinate amount of money for the products is a not a master craftsman. One could be wrong in this particular judgment, but what matters

here is that this kind of judgment is possible because the kind of work in which the master craftsman is engaged is not separate from the kind of work that the morally virtuous is engaged; the work involved in being appropriately sensitive to the reality of the others. Similarly, we could say that the agent who takes the means to satisfying all of her appetites is not the instrumentally rational agent (for she is not engaged in the (virtuous') work of not losing track of the kinds of demands that the reality of the others pose on our active powers). And we could say that the person who acts *only* as a result of the calculation of the long terms effects of her actions is not the prudent person either (for she is not engaged in the (virtuous') work of not losing track of the extent to which human affairs are subject to unknowingness, dependent on the reality of the others as they are). In these cases too, it is possible to think thus because the kind of work in which the instrumentally rational and the prudent are engaged is not separate from the kind of work that the morally virtuous is engaged. This is not to say, of course, that there is no way of distinguishing between the *ergon*, the work of each of the above master reasoners (the craftsman, the prudent, the rational). It is to say, though, that this distinction may only be drawn within a wider conception of the work of the arch-reasoner: the morally virtuous. Another way to put this is to say that the master craftsman is *qua* craftsman morally virtuous; that the prudent is *qua* thinker of the future morally virtuous; and that the instrumentally rational is *qua* achiever morally virtuous. It is, I think, this primacy of moral knowledge that unifies the many varieties of reasoning under a common heading; what one may call a practical as opposed to a theoretical heading.

Focusing on practical reasoning as is here conceived, we may now say, following Dancy's Copernican turn in discussions of reasoning, that this conception can shed light on theoretical reasoning. On the suggested picture, the distinguishing feature of theoretical reasoning is not the metaphysical nature of its outcome (say that it constitutes a belief) but the nature of the credentials of the knowledge it amounts to when things go well. Thus, one could venture the suggestion that a bit of reasoning counts as theoretical if and only if, in order to answer the question of whether it amounts to knowledge we should address questions having to do with the qualities of one's observational, experimental, inferential, etc. skills; that is, questions having to do with whether one is in a position to be appropriately receptive to a bit of reality as the reality of an object (one of many, a-historical, etc.) and not an individual (one of a kind, historical, etc.).

Let me now close this paper. Obviously, much more needs to be said to support these massive claims but part of the point here was to sketch an alternative account in an attempt to convince the reader of this: that we have in Dancy's fundamental insight the beginning of not merely a new view but of new ground in discussions of practical reasoning. I think that Dancy's fundamental insight is deeply right:

the interesting work of practical reasoning is the work of figuring out the practical shape of a situation. But I also think that if we want to stay clear of the philosophical ambivalence between two ways of explaining the practical-cognitive character of this figuring this out, then we must, or so I have tried to suggest in this paper, draw the line between practical and theoretical reasoning somewhere else: not in the distinct metaphysical nature of the outcome of the reasoning, but in the distinct nature of the credentials of the knowledge that the reasoning amounts to when things go well. But this seems like a tall order even to me. Perhaps all I managed to do in this paper is to make some noise for the suggestion that if Jonathan Dancy is to do justice to his own deeply right insight concerning practical reasoning he must give us an account of its epistemology which avoids the ambivalence between dogmatism and subjectivism.[9]