

The Conclusion of Practical Reasoning is the State that an Agent Has or Is in when she Is Effectively Motivated to Act Deliberately

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There has been a debate in action theory and metaethics over the conclusion of practical reasoning, where practical reasoning has often been characterized as the process of reasoning that an agent undertakes in order to answer the question of what to do (Audi 1982 p. 25). Alternatively, it is the process of reasoning required for deliberate action. Different answers to the question of how practical reasoning concludes also suggest different accounts of what the process of practical reasoning consists in. Most often, theorists have held that the conclusion of practical reasoning amounts to an action, an intention, or a mental attitude whose content is a practical judgment.

This paper gives an account of practical reasoning that supports the claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a motivational state. The first section provides more background on the standing debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning and what is at stake philosophically in taking up a position in this debate. The second section sketches some preliminary considerations in favor of identifying the conclusion of practical reasoning with a motivational state. The third section gives a positive account of what is involved in an exercise of practical reason. The rest of the paper shows that this plausible account of what the mental process of practical reasoning consists in supports the thesis that its conclusion is a mental attitude which we might call a motivational state. A motivational state is the mental state an agent has or is in when she is occurrently motivated, which is also supposed to in some way explain or account for her motivation.

I.

This section explores the significance of the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning, the positions that writers have historically taken on this issue, and the considerations that have motivated people to endorse certain positions. As Audi 1982 has pointed out, it can be useful to distinguish ‘practical reasoning’ as it is used to designate a mental process from ‘practical reasoning’ as it is used to designate a “structure of propositions,” though the same term is frequently used to pick out both of these items.

Like “argument,” “reasoning” may designate either a process or the corresponding structure, to which we directly apply such terms as “valid.” Hence we must distinguish between a practical argument as a structure of propositions (or other bearers of truth value), and

the process of passing from the premises of such a structure to its conclusion. Similarly, “S’s practical reasoning” might designate the process of his reasoning from appropriate premises to a practical conclusion, or the corresponding structure of propositions.
(Audi 1982 p. 27)

In the contemporary literature, it usually seems as though those involved in the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning are concerned with the conclusion of practical reasoning conceived as a mental process rather than the conclusion of practical reasoning conceived as a structure of propositions. This is evidenced by the usual claims that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action (one of the major constituents of which is typically a bodily movement), an intention (usually thought to be a complex of mental attitudes), or a particular kind of mental attitude (e.g. the kind of attitude involved in affirming a practical judgment *qua* proposition). As none of these entities (an action, mental attitude, or complex of mental attitudes) are candidates for being propositions, none of them would be the kind of thing appropriate to conclude a structure of propositions.

The propositions involved in the structure that might also be called ‘practical reasoning’ would nonetheless bear some relation to the states involved in the mental process that goes by the same name, the conclusion of which is the topic of the contemporary philosophical debate under discussion. In particular, we would expect the contents of at least some of those states involved in the mental process called ‘practical reasoning’ to represent in some form the propositions that comprise the structure called ‘practical reasoning.’

It seems reasonable to think, however (contra Audi), that it may be possible for the mental process called ‘practical reasoning’ to amount to more than some agent’s representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical argument. This is the case, for example, if it is true or even plausible that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action. According to this view, the event that concludes the mental process of practical reasoning is the agent’s doing of an action rather than her possession of a mental state that represents whatever would commonly be taken as the conclusion of a practical argument.

There is a further question about what exactly is at stake in the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning if the conclusion with which the debate is concerned is the conclusion of a mental process that need not be identical to the process of

representing a practical argument. If the mental process called ‘practical reasoning’ need not end with an agent’s representation of the conclusion of a practical argument, we can ask if there is some way to characterize the process itself that does not beg the question with respect to the issue of how it concludes.

There may not be a non-question begging way to characterize the point at which the process that most theorists are talking about under the heading of ‘practical reasoning’ ends if what is actually at stake in the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning is giving a positive account of the extent of a faculty of reason’s involvement in deliberate action. Many theorists have referred to the kind of faculty of reason that would be involved in the process of acting deliberately as ‘practical reason’ or ‘the will.’

The familiar characterization of practical reasoning given in the introduction as the process of reasoning that an agent undertakes in order to answer the question of what to do (Audi 1982 p. 25) supports the claim that theorists are really asking for a positive account of the extent of a faculty of reason’s involvement in deliberate action when they ask about the conclusion of practical reasoning. It does so by implying that the conclusion of practical reasoning is the point at which a conclusion with respect to the question of what to do has been reached. If a faculty of reasoning’s involvement in deliberate action just amounts to its role in answering the question of what to do, then the point at which a conclusion with respect to the question of what to do has been reached is identical to the point at which the involvement of a faculty of reasoning in the process of acting deliberately ends.

Other writers’ remarks on the issue bolster the claim that the issue of the conclusion of practical reasoning is closely related to the issue of the extent of a faculty of reason’s involvement in deliberate action. For example, Paul writes:

[I]ntellect must ultimately link up to reality: particular actions are realized out of material events such as bodily movements interacting with specific objects and environments. The question therefore arises of precisely how these particular material processes are related to the practical reasoning on which their status as intentional actions depends ...One guise in which this question presents itself takes the form of a debate over what constitutes the conclusion of practical reasoning.
(Paul 2013 p. 287)

In these lines, Paul portrays the debate about the conclusion of practical reasoning as fundamentally being about accounting for the way that intentional action is dependent on practical thought. Elsewhere, she indicates that the crux of the disagreement between Enc, a proponent of the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an attitude, and others is how much of the process of acting deliberately is subject to cognitive control (Paul 2013 p. 291). That Enc and others would be driven to different views about the conclusion of practical reasoning by different views about the scope of the exercise of cognitive control in the process of acting deliberately suggests that certain views about the scope of the exercise of cognitive control in the process of acting deliberately are incompatible with certain views about the conclusion of practical reasoning.

Conversely, it seems like certain views about the conclusion of practical reasoning are incompatible with certain views about the scope of the exercise of cognitive control in the process of acting deliberately. Tenenbaum makes this point where he writes that “The Aristotelian Thesis,” which is the thesis that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action, “is a thesis about proper *termini* of practical reasoning” (Tenenbaum 2007 p. 332). That Tenenbaum means something like ‘where the input of a faculty of reasoning ends’ when he talks about a ‘terminus of practical reasoning’ is supported by his defense of the Aristotelian view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action. This defense centers around the comparative ability of the Aristotelian view to accommodate cases in which acting rationally seems to demand input from an agent’s faculty of reasoning after she has already formed an intention. The contribution of a faculty of reasoning to the process of acting deliberately, Tenenbaum seems to say, is not actually over until an action has been performed and completed. This is the sense in which the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action.

Thus, just as Paul makes the point that Enc’s favored view about the extent of a faculty of reasoning’s role in acting deliberately is incompatible with the view on which the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action, Tenenbaum makes the point that his favored view about the extent of the input of a faculty of reasoning to the process of acting is incompatible with the view that says the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention. Together, these considerations suggest that there is some kind of logical relationship between the set of views about what practical reasoning consists in and the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning.

In particular, there is a non-injective function from the set of views about what practical reasoning consists in to the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning. To say that there is a function from the set of views of what practical reasoning

consists in to the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning is to say that it is not the case that any view about what practical reasoning consists in maps to multiple views about what the conclusion of practical reasoning is. Because a view of the conclusion of practical reasoning can be such that multiple views about what practical reasoning consists in map to it, however, the function from the set of views of what practical reasoning consists in to the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning is not injective.

It is plausible that the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning consists of some small number of views. The introduction cited three that commonly appear in the contemporary literature: the view that practical reasoning concludes with an action (often called the Aristotelian thesis), the view that it concludes with an intention, and the view that it concludes with a mental attitude whose content is a practical judgment. Even if there are more than three logically possible views about where practical reasoning concludes, it seems plausible that there are a great many more logically possible views of what practical reasoning consists in. Because every logically possible view about where practical reasoning concludes, however, would seem to have to be compatible with at least one possible account of what practical reasoning is, the function from the set of views of what practical reasoning consists in to the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning must be surjective. That is to say, there is some view in the set of views about what practical reasoning consists in that maps to each of the views in the set of views about the conclusion of practical reasoning.

Based on these considerations, it seems like one way to defend a particular view about the conclusion of practical reasoning would be to defend an account of practical reasoning that implies a particular view about where practical reasoning concludes, or to defend the comparative plausibility of a group of accounts of practical reasoning that imply the same view about where practical reasoning concludes. Negatively, one could also defend a particular view about the conclusion of practical reasoning by attacking as implausible those accounts of practical reasoning that are associated with rival views about where practical reasoning concludes. After outlining some preliminary considerations in favor of thinking that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a motivational state in the next section, my strategy for the rest of this paper will be to defend an account of practical reasoning that I consider plausible, which implies that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a motivational state.

II.

En route to providing a plausible, positive account of the mental process called practical reasoning, this section outlines some preliminary considerations that suggest an alternative to the existing views about the conclusion of practical reasoning; namely, the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an effective motivational state. An effective (alternatively, occurrent) motivational state is roughly the brain state an agent has or is in when she is actually moved to take a particular course of action.

Again, I take an account of the mental process called practical reasoning to be an account of the mental process required for deliberate action, insofar as that process involves a faculty of reasoning. This process may amount to something different than the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism, as this has typically been conceived, and in fact it does on my account.

As it has been standardly conceived, the practical syllogism has been supposed to have a major premise that specifies some goal of an agent's, a minor premise that specifies an action as being necessary, sufficient, both necessary and sufficient, or fitting in a rule-guided way to the agent's accomplishment of the goal indicated in the major premise, and a conclusion that says one should or shall undertake the action indicated in the minor premise (Audi 1982 p. 25-26, Paul 2013 p. 297, Streumer 2010 p. 246, Tenenbaum 2007 p. 324-326).

There is a question of whether by saying that the process called practical reasoning may involve more than the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism, as it has been standardly conceived, I am taking the position that the process called practical reasoning may be partly non-inferential. This seems accurate. Streumer uses language about practical reasoning being non-inferential where he says this locution expresses the view that "practical reasoning is not a response to reasons that are given by facts about relations of entailment between propositions" (Streumer 2010 p. 247).

If I hold that the process called practical reasoning may involve more than the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism, and also that the further stages it may include need not involve the representation of any logical entailments, then I hold that the process called practical reasoning may be partly non-inferential. The view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an occurrent motivational state, however, does not rule out the possibility that the process called practical reasoning is wholly inferential. If the effective motivational state that motivates an instance of deliberate action is identical to the representation of the conclusion of a practical inference, then the process called practical reasoning may be wholly inferential.

Identifying the conclusion of practical reasoning with a mental state that effectively motivates deliberate behavior rather than with a motivational state whose content is explicitly a practical judgment allows me to avoid commitments to both motivational judgment internalism and cognitivism about practical motivation. Motivational judgment internalism is the view that affirming a practical judgment necessarily involves having some degree of occurrent motivation to act in accordance with what the judgment recommends. Holding that the conclusion of practical reasoning is identical to both an effective motivational state and a state that constitutes the affirmation of a practical judgment would seem to imply that in at least some instances, affirming a practical judgment is sufficient for having effective motivation to act as the judgment recommends. This could be equivalent to a limited form of motivational judgment internalism.

Unless one adopted an unorthodox view about the contents of practical judgments, moreover, the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a motivational state whose content is a practical judgment would also imply that the state one is in or possesses when one is effectively motivated has a cognitive content. This is the same view I am calling cognitivism about practical motivation. There seem to be few benefits to both avoiding a commitment to cognitivism about practical motivation and retaining the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is a motivational state whose content is a practical judgment by adopting the view that practical judgment contents are noncognitive, as this would not preserve the inferential character of practical reasoning as a process. To conclude this discussion, I want to say that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an effective motivational state without taking a stand on whether effective motivational states have cognitive contents or on whether it is ever the case that the states agents have or are in when they affirm practical judgment contents are identical to the states they have or are in when they are effectively motivated.

Holding that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an effective motivational state allows me to avoid both the standard objections to the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action and the standard objections to the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention.

A major objection to what has been called the ‘Aristotelian thesis’ about the conclusion of practical reasoning, namely, the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action, is that the Aristotelian thesis does not “preserve...an intuitive symmetry...[between practical reasoning and] theoretical reasoning” (Paul 2013 p. 288, Streumer 2010 p. 246). To preserve this symmetry would be to allow that the conclusion of

practical reasoning is a representation of the conclusion of an argument expressed by a practical syllogism. Because actions do not have propositional contents, holding that the conclusion of practical reasoning must represent the conclusion of a practical argument *qua* structure of propositions implies that it is not the case that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an action.

At this stage, my view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an occurrent motivational state avoids the objection to the Aristotelian thesis that it fails to preserve the symmetry between practical and theoretical reasoning by remaining compatible with the logical possibility that the conclusion of the mental process of practical reasoning is just the representation of the conclusion of a practical argument. The general view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an occurrent motivational state is compatible with the content of this state representing the conclusion of a practical argument, just as the conclusion of the mental process of theoretical reasoning is a mental state that represents the conclusion of a theoretical argument.

On the other hand, Tenenbaum makes the best case against the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention by making the point that the content of an intention is too unspecific for the input of a faculty of reasoning to the process of acting deliberately to end at the point when an intention has been formed (Tenenbaum 2007 p. 335). First, the content of an intention need not even specify an act type, as in the case where a tennis player has a general intention to ‘win a game’ (Tenenbaum 2007 p. 338). Even an intention whose content does specify an act type, moreover, does not have a content that specifies which means of carrying out the intention are appropriate. Here, Tenenbaum uses the example of someone who has an intention to flip a light switch (Tenenbaum 2007 p. 333).

According to Tenenbaum, the input of a faculty of reasoning is still needed once one forms an intention to win a tennis game or flip a light switch in order to select an appropriate means of carrying out the intention in question. In the former case, the continued input of a faculty of reasoning is needed to select act types that are strategically appropriate for reaching the goal specified by the content of the intention to win the game. In the latter case of one with an intention to flip a light switch, the continued input of a faculty of reasoning is needed to select a means of carrying out the intention that is rational in light of the set of one’s other values and aims. Tenenbaum’s point is that it seems like a failure of practical reasoning for one to carry out an intention to do some act type in a way that contravenes the set of one’s other values and aims, for example, in the

case where one carries out the intention to flip a light switch via a means that involves breaking an expensive computer in the process.

The view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an occurrent motivational state also avoids these issues that Tenenbaum raises with the view that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention. An agent's possession of the kind of occurrent motivational state that I am arguing is the conclusion of practical reasoning involves her being occurrently motivated to do a particular act type via a particular means, and therefore has a specific enough content once it has been formed to make unnecessary further input from a faculty of reasoning in her doing of the action it motivates. The occurrent motivational state in question, however, nonetheless has a content that may be apt to serve as the conclusion of a practical argument.

III.

This section seeks to give a plausible account of what the mental process of practical reasoning consists in, that, if correct, supports a view with respect to where we should think that this process concludes. The view about the conclusion of practical reasoning that the account of practical reasoning given in this section supports is the view that practical reasoning concludes with an occurrent or effective motivational state, which is roughly the brain state an agent has or is in when she is actually moved to take a particular course of action.

The sketch of how practical reasoning proceeds that is given in this section is compatible with several contemporary accounts of how practical reasoning takes place via the consideration and weighing of practical reasons, including those proposed by Berker 2018 and Schroeder 2007. The account is also compatible with W. D. Ross's view of how a faculty of reasoning prefigures deliberate moral behavior, as this view is outlined in *The Right and the Good*. The view of practical reasoning dealt with here contravenes, however, standard views on which practical reasoning is thought to amount to the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism, as the practical syllogism has been standardly conceived.

It may be helpful to recall the basis for the need to give a full account of the mental process called practical reasoning in a paper on the issue of how practical reasoning concludes. The problem identified earlier was with the difficulty of defending a position in the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning without appealing to commitments about the extent of the role of a faculty of reasoning in deliberate action if we let go of the

presupposition many have made that the mental process called 'practical reasoning' is identical to the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism. Independently of this presupposition, the most uncontroversial way to characterize the process of practical reasoning is as the process that underwrites deliberate action insofar as or to the extent that a faculty of reasoning is involved. Justifying any commitments about the extent of a faculty of reasoning's role in deliberate action that are brought to bear on the issue of how practical reasoning concludes would thus seem to demand a defense of some kind of sketch of at least certain elements of a positive account of practical reasoning.

If practical reasoning as a mental process can be pretheoretically characterized as the process that underwrites deliberate action insofar as a faculty of reasoning is involved, it may be helpful to say, first, what deliberate action is. I consider deliberate action, or, equivalently, deliberate behavior, to be action or behavior done after and as a result of a process of deliberation, where the kind of process of deliberation in question may or may not be identical to the process of practical reasoning of which this section gives an account.

For the purposes of giving a preanalytic characterization of practical reasoning as a kind of process that underwrites deliberate behavior, it is unimportant whether or not the characterization of deliberate behavior as behavior done on the basis of deliberation is circularly understood to be behavior done on the basis of practical reasoning. This is because there is another way to identify which behavior counts as deliberate that is independent of the relation of deliberate behavior to a process of deliberation.

An alternative is to understand deliberate behavior as behavior that is voluntary and reflective, where some behavior of an agent's is voluntary iff the agent's motivational state in doing it is not the kind of mental state that is involuntary, and where some behavior of an agent's is reflective iff the agent does the behavior after conscious reflection on what is done. These points and the earlier characterization of practical reasoning as the process that underwrites deliberate action insofar as a faculty of reasoning is involved make it possible to preanalytically characterize practical reasoning as the process that underwrites behavior that is voluntary and reflective, insofar as a faculty of reasoning is involved.

There may be a further, preliminary question of why the pretheoretic characterization of the mental process called practical reasoning that we have settled upon even takes it to be a process that must be carried out by way of a faculty of reasoning.

That a faculty of reasoning would be essential to the process called practical reasoning, as this process has been discussed in the philosophical literature, seems like a fair assumption based on its name. Even if the kind of ‘reasoning’ that practical reasoning involves need not be identical to the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of any argument, that the process as a whole apparently merits being called a form of ‘reasoning’ suggests that it centrally involves a rational faculty as opposed to a nonrational one. According to one influential way of distinguishing rational and nonrational faculties proposed by Hume, rational faculties are distinctively concerned with discovering the truth values of propositions.

A starting point in giving an account of practical reasoning as a mental process that underwrites deliberate action insofar as a faculty of reasoning is involved is to note that practical reasoning always involves an agent’s representation of some finite number of possible courses of action that are available to her with respect to a particular instance of answering the question of what to do. Recall the preanalytic characterization of practical reasoning introduced earlier by multiple authors as the process of answering the question of what to do. In order to attempt to answer this question, an agent must have conscious awareness of some finite number of alternative options regarding what she could do that she considers, and from which she ultimately chooses one.

A pertinent question in considering why it is plausible that a faculty of reasoning is involved from the beginning of the process of practical reasoning, as I have just characterized it, is the question of what occasions an instance of practical reasoning in the first place. My proposal is that what occasions an instance of practical reasoning is called a **choice situation**: a situation in which an agent becomes occurrently aware (i.e. aware now) that she could do something in the future to satisfy one or more desires she has to bring about one or more specific states of affairs (or kinds of states of affairs) that she considers desirable.

Most accounts of practical reasoning, including the one that takes practical reasoning to be identical to the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism, give the same answer as I do to the question of the circumstances that occasion an instance of practical reasoning. For convenience, call the model that takes practical reasoning to be identical to the sequential representation of the premises and conclusion of a practical syllogism the **representation of a practical syllogism model**.

By making the major premise that the agent entertains at the beginning of practical reasoning a desire or aim of hers, the representation of a practical syllogism model of practical reasoning assumes, like me, that what occasions an instance of practical reasoning is an agent's occurrent awareness that she could do something in the future to satisfy one or more desires she has to bring about one or more specific states of affairs that she considers desirable. I am, however, departing from the representation of a practical syllogism model of practical reasoning by suggesting that practical reasoning begins with an agent's representation of a finite number of actions as possible in response to a choice situation rather than with the representation of the major premise of a practical syllogism.

A rational faculty must be involved in the agent's representation of a *finite* number of courses of action as possible responses to a choice situation because her representation of only a finite number of possibilities, in response to her occurrent awareness that she could do something in the future to satisfy a specific desire of hers, requires her to constrict the possibility space she represents from a variety of angles. On one hand, it makes sense for the agent in a choice situation to represent as possible only, first, actions from among those that would satisfy the desire of which she is made occurrently aware (i.e. the one that occasions the choice situation), and, second, actions from among those that are mutually impossible with it, which the agent also considers rationally supported.

Additionally, to represent a finite number of particular courses of action as possible responses to a choice situation, either because the actions represented would plausibly lead to states of affairs that would satisfy the desire(s) that triggered the choice situation or because they would plausibly lead to states of affairs that would satisfy other rationally supported desires the agent has that make competing demands on her time, requires an agent to constrict the possibility space of actions she considers based on other information she has, including information about what she has the ability to do given what she knows about herself, the world, and her plans for the future.

This starting point raises a number of additional questions. First, there is the question of why we should think that the possibilities considered by an agent during an exercise of practical reasoning must be finite in number and consciously represented. One reason to think so is that game theory and decision theory model behavioral choices as being made from a fixed, finite set of possible alternative courses of action. This suggests that it is not a totally foreign way to think about how agents reason about what to do to think that the process of their doing so involves consciously representing some number of

possible alternatives. That the number of possibilities that are consciously entertained during an exercise of practical reasoning must be finite can be introspectively ascertained by realizing that no instance of our conscious decision-making involves considering an infinite number of possibilities with respect to what could be done.

Another reason to think that agents consciously consider a finite number of possible courses of action in reasoning practically is that the ‘reasons,’ or considerations that agents subjectively take to count in favor of particular courses of action, are always reasons that favor particular, possible courses of action. In making a choice about whether to go to her friend’s party, for example, Susan might consider the likelihood that her crush will be at the party a consideration that counts in favor of her attendance. Susan’s conscious consideration of this subjective reason during an exercise of practical reasoning implies that she consciously represents attending the party as a course of action that is possible for her.

Along similar lines, if Susan considers that she should study for a test in school next week a reason that counts against her attending the party, this implies that she consciously represents studying for the test a course of action that is possible for her as an alternative to attending the party. That Susan does not take into account any considerations that favor her taking a trip to the Bahamas during the same exercise of practical reasoning indicates that ‘going on vacation to the Bahamas’ is not among the courses of action she consciously represents as being a possible alternative to attending the party during that exercise of practical reasoning. I want to remain neutral for now on whether the reasons an agent considers during an exercise of practical reasoning are what actually carve out the space of possible alternatives that she consciously represents in reasoning practically, but this seems like a possible view.

Another issue is that it seems like many writers have come up with examples of instances of intentional behavior that are not preceded by an agent’s conscious representation and consideration of possible alternative courses of action. To use a new example, Mark intentionally gets dressed in a black hoodie without considering any possible alternative choices of clothing for the day, as he only owns black hooded sweatshirts. This kind of scenario raises the question of whether there are a lot of intentional actions that are not done on the basis of or as a result of instances of practical reasoning, as practical reasoning is described here.

This case raises a number of things to consider. One is that it seems like behavior based on a process of practical reasoning can occur even when the agent who reasons

practically represents only one course of action as possible in doing so. Even when one thinks that one has no choice but to act in a particular way—by wearing a black hoodie, for example—due to the constraints imposed by one’s environment or because all of one’s reasons in an instance of answering the question of what to do favor only one particular course of action, it is possible for one to reflectively and voluntarily undertake the course of action in question in a way that essentially involves the faculty of reasoning that is the mechanism for the mental process that we are discussing under the banner of ‘practical reasoning.’

Another point is related to actions done as a matter of instinct or habit, or that are motivated by emotional states (if it is possible for emotional states to be identical to motivational states). There is a question of whether one’s action counts as being based on practical reasoning if one acts automatically but intentionally in getting dressed in a certain outfit, for example, and does so seemingly without any conscious reflection on or consideration of possible alternative courses of action. It does seem like in many cases of getting dressed in a uniform or otherwise implementing a longstanding habit one has that the state that one has or is in when one is motivated to act is not preceded by any process in which a faculty of reasoning plays an active role. In many of these cases, it may be fair to say that habitual actions done by agents are not based on practical reasoning.

It may nonetheless be fair to say, however, that in most if not all cases of actions done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally, a faculty of reasoning plays a passive or monitoring role that may become active under the right circumstances. Under the kinds of circumstances in question, i.e. those in which a faculty of reasoning does play an active role, it seems reasonable to say that these actions done from habit, instinct, or emotion are based on practical reasoning.

The circumstances under which a faculty of reasoning plays an active role in preceding an action done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally seem like those in which reasons favoring a different course of action arise and are consciously considered by the agent. Under these circumstances, an agent represents the course of action done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally as one among multiple alternative possible courses of action prior to acting, and, in a way that involves a faculty of reasoning, selects the action done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally from among the possible courses of action she considers. Although the agent in such cases may be motivated by the same kind of state she would have been motivated by had she not consciously considered any alternatives to the action done, her action is based on practical reasoning in virtue of the

role played by a faculty of reasoning in allowing the state that motivated her to become effective.

The cases of actions motivated habitually, instinctively, or emotionally in which I am holding that a process of practical reasoning does occur may all be said to involve what Tamar Schapiro has called the “moment of drama.” The “moment of drama” is defined as “when you are inclined, but not thereby determined to act” (Schapiro 2021 p. 10).

In Schapiro’s terminology, the states that motivate agents to act in the set of cases under discussion are called “inclinations,” which she defines as “feeling[s] that motivate...you while leaving you free to act on [them]...or not” (Schapiro 2021 p. 10). Before they become effective motivational states, the intuitively noncognitive states that agents have or are in when they are effectively motivated to act from habit, instinct, or emotion in cases in which they do so consciously and after taking into account rational pressures that favor alternative courses of action fit this description. The states that motivate actions done from habit, instinct, or emotion in cases in which rational conflicts are considered, that is, initially only motivationally incline agents toward particular courses of action, which those agents then consciously select in a way that involves a faculty of reasoning.

Schapiro’s account of what occurs in these cases supports my claim that whatever process results in the initial inclination’s becoming an effective motivational state in the face of apparently opposing rational pressures both involves a faculty of reasoning and counts as an instance of the mental process called practical reasoning. Schapiro might further hold that all actions that are done intentionally and are motivated by inclinations are done on the basis of practical reasoning (Schapiro 2021 p. 102), although that is not my view.

So far, we have only just established that practical reasoning as a mental process always begins with the representation of a finite number of possible courses of action. To continue the positive account of practical reasoning, what happens next in practical reasoning is that the agent selects from among the courses of action she represents as possible. She does this by using a faculty of reasoning to determine which course of action among the possible alternatives she represents is optimal from her perspective, relative to certain subjective parameters.

The relevant parameters with respect to which an agent chooses a course of action that she considers ‘most optimal’ in a given instance of practical reasoning plausibly

include the values, desires, and aims of the agent that she takes into account during that instance of practical reasoning. An agent may carry out the process of deciding which course of action is subjectively optimal in a given instance of practical reasoning by comparing the relative weights of her subjective reasons for and against the courses of action she represents as possible. How weighty an agent considers a consideration favoring a possible course of action (i.e. subjective reason) to be depends on her sense of its relation to her construal of the hierarchy of her values, desires, and aims.

What I have just called the ‘optimal’ action selected by the agent in giving a sketch of an account of practical reasoning is what others might call an action that an agent determines is subjectively instrumentally rational relative to her conception of the complete set of her values, desires, and aims. Using the language of instrumental rationality might help to clarify how exactly a faculty of reasoning is involved in practical reasoning by my account.

According to a widely accepted component of the influential Hume-Ramsey theory of rationality, instrumental rationality consists in “a formal coherence among preferences and actions...[i.e.,] that one always does what one most prefers in the ordering formed by one’s preferences” (Gibbard 1990 p. 10). In its concern with the truth of a proposition about the relative coherence of one possible course of action with one’s preferences (in comparison to the coherence of other possible courses of action with one’s preferences), the activity of determining which action represented as possible is most instrumentally rational in these terms is a rational activity.

We have thus seen that practical reasoning, as a process, begins with an agent’s representation of a finite number of mutually impossible courses of action as possible responses to a choice situation. During the next stage of the process, the agent determines that one of the courses of action she represents as possible is, from her perspective, the most instrumentally rational thing for her to do in the relevant choice situation. It comes with the territory, due to the nature of the comparative judgments about the subjective instrumental rationality of actions that are involved in making this determination, that one’s making it requires the input of a rational faculty.

Admittedly, this sketch of the initial stages of the process called practical reasoning may seem hand wavy. Much of the plausibility of my account so far relies on the assumption that different people will agree about what happens mentally when each introspects on her mental activity during instances of answering the question of what to do (or trying to) by a process of deliberation. It remains to be proposed in a way that respects

shared intuitions that the process of practical reasoning plausibly concludes with the mental state an agent has or is in when she is effectively motivated to undertake a course of action she has selected as a rational response to a choice situation.

The sorts of cases discussed earlier of actions done on the basis of practical reasoning that are motivated by habit, instinct, or emotion are those in which it is most apparent that the process of practical reasoning ends with an effective motivational state. To see this, consider that in a case of the relevant kind, the agent's awareness of an inclination she has is what occasions the choice situation that triggers a process of practical reasoning. In particular, in the case of an action done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally that is based on practical reasoning, the inclination of which the agent is occurrently aware that occasions her process of practical reasoning is a noncognitive state that initially motivates her, to some degree, to act habitually, instinctively, or emotionally. Initially, however, it is not an effective motivational state.

Because the inclination that triggers the process of practical reasoning in these cases is a state that motivates a particular action to some degree, the agent represents whatever action would be motivated by her inclination without the intervention of reason as a possible course of action in the first stage of her practical reasoning, as well as some finite number of mutually impossible actions that she subjectively takes to have some amount of rational support. It is clear that the role of a faculty of reasoning as a predecessor to deliberate action ends at the point in time when the inclination that occasions the choice situation becomes effective in these cases because to choose the representation of the action that the inclination motivates is just to allow the inclination to become an effective motivational state.

At any point in time prior to the point in time at which the inclination that occasions the choice situation that calls for a process of practical reasoning in these cases becomes effective, that is, it might still be possible for the agent to judge that one of the actions she represents as possible that is not the action that the initial inclination motivates her to some degree to do is more subjectively instrumentally rational than the one supported by the initial inclination. In that case, her motivational state would not be the initial inclination state that occasioned her practical reasoning, but rather an alternative motivational state that would either be caused by or identical to a state of judging that some other action than the one she would do from inclination is more subjectively instrumentally rational.

Because an alternative motivational state's becoming effective would require the involvement of a rational faculty, it seems like the point in time at which the role of a

faculty of reasoning in the leadup to deliberate action decisively ends in cases involving actions from inclination that are based on practical reasoning is identical to the point in time when it is no longer possible for a motivational state associated with a judgment state that some alternative course of action would be better to become effective (rather than the inclination that motivates the action done habitually, instinctively, or emotionally). This coincides with the point in time at which the initial inclination becomes an effective motivational state. This much shows that in cases of actions done from inclination on the basis of practical reasoning, practical reasoning concludes with an effective motivational state.

As an objection to the preceding argument, one might question the assumption that, in a case of an action done from inclination on the basis of practical reasoning, there is any continuity of identity between the inclination state that occasions the choice situation and the state that ultimately motivates the agent who acts. If there is not, then it is not as obvious that the time when an agent who appears to allow herself to be motivated by an inclination enters the state that motivates her is identical to the time when the role of a faculty of reasoning in preceding her deliberate action must end. One answer to the objection is that many accepted accounts of what happens when agents act from inclination do just take for granted that the inclination states agents have or are in before they are effectively motivated are identical to the states agents have or are in when they are effectively motivated.

The other way to address this objection would just be to show that practical reasoning generally concludes with a motivational state, even when one chooses to act independently of any existing inclination one has that could later become identical to a state that one has or is in when one is effectively motivated to act. The argument that practical reasoning, again understood as the part of the process that underwrites acting deliberately that is carried out by a faculty of reasoning, generally concludes with a motivational state takes a similar shape to the last argument that practical reasoning concludes with a motivational state in the case where the motivational state in question is identical to an inclination state of the agent's that she had or was in before any process of practical reasoning took place.

In particular, a motivational state must mark the end of the process of practical reasoning regardless of whether it is identical to an inclination state because the point in time at which an agent forms or enters the mental state that she has or is in when she is effectively motivated to act is the first point in time at which it is no longer possible for her to revise her judgment that the course of action she undertakes is the most subjectively

instrumentally rational of the options that she represents as possible in the first stage of practical reasoning. Because at any earlier point in time than this, it *is* possible for her to revise her judgment about which course of action she represents as possible is the most subjectively instrumentally rational for her to undertake, and because her doing so would necessarily require the involvement of a faculty of reasoning in some way, the conclusion of the process carried out by a faculty of reasoning that underwrites deliberate action cannot occur at any point in time earlier than that at which the acting agent forms or enters the state that she has or is in when she is effectively motivated. It is also clear that at any point after an agent has left or no longer has the state she is in when she is effectively motivated to act in some instance, she cannot continue to reason practically with respect to the choice situation in response to which she acted in that instance.

IV.

In conclusion, this paper argued for a distinctive position in the debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning: the claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is the mental state that an agent has or is in when she is effectively motivated to act deliberately. Early on, it drew on insights from the existing literature to establish that the contemporary debate over the conclusion of practical reasoning centers around what concludes practical reasoning construed as a mental process as opposed to practical reasoning construed as a structure of propositions. Then, it highlighted reasons for thinking that this mental process need not end, as many have thought, with the representation of the conclusion of a practical argument. Instead, the paper offered evidence for the claim that the debate over where practical reasoning concludes really turns on the issue of the point in time at which the involvement of a faculty of reasoning in the process that underwrites deliberate action ends.

Later, the paper showed that taking a position on where the mental process called practical reasoning does end involves making substantive assumptions about the nature of the process called ‘practical reasoning’ itself. With this in the background, the paper gave an incomplete sketch of a plausible positive account of practical reasoning and argued that if it is correct, the sketch supports the position that practical reasoning concludes with the state an agent has or is in when she is effectively motivated to act deliberately. Beyond being distinctive in the sense of relatively novel, the position espoused in this paper is appealing because it avoids the common objections to all of the more commonly defended positions in the debate over where practical reasoning concludes.

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