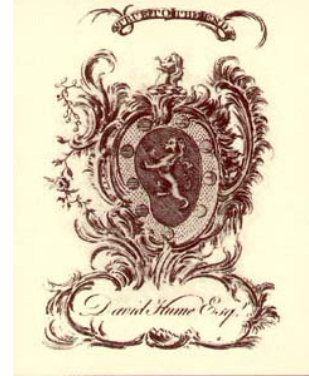


DAVID HUME AND THE CONCEPT OF VOLITION

Introduction

The following two papers, though separately authored, belong together, not only because we, the authors, shared our views during the writing, but also because they are excerpts from a single story we are interested in telling. This is the story of a particular insight into the conceptual structure of human volition -- the will. The insight is that volition -- or, more precisely, intention -- is (or presupposes) a kind of knowledge, practical knowledge. Our larger goal is to show how this insight was developed from the time of Aristotle into the Middle Ages, and then fell into obscurity in modern philosophy until quite recently. This insight became especially clear in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The epistemological development which obscured it was most powerfully furthered by David Hume. The recovery of the insight was initially the work of the later Wittgenstein. The first paper deals with Aquinas; the second with Wittgenstein; and both with Hume.



David Hume and the Concept of Volition: The Will as Impression

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THE WILL AS IMPRESSION

Hume writes, in the Treatise:¹

Let no one, therefore, put an invidious construction on my words, by saying simply, that I assert the necessity of human actions, and place them on the same footing with the operations of senseless matter. I do not ascribe to the will that unintelligible necessity, which is suppos'd to lie in matter. But I ascribe to matter, that intelligible quality, call it necessity or not, which the most rigorous orthodoxy does or must allow to belong to the will. I change, therefore, nothing in the receiv'd systems, with regard to the will, but only with regard to material objects.

It is surely false that Hume changed "nothing in the receiv'd systems, with regard to the will." In one such "receiv'd system," that of Thomas Aquinas, the concept of will or volition is presented as internally related to two further concepts: that of the "final cause" or goal of the action, and that of "practical intellect," a form of cognition which is productive of its object. Will is always the will to something, a goal to be reached or a product to be produced. Thus will and final cause are concepts which presuppose one another. The mark, however, of the fact that someone wills to do something, i.e., that s/he in fact has some goal, is precisely that that agent knows, non-inductively and without observation, what s/he is doing or will do. The basis of this knowledge is neither evidence nor proof, but rather what Aristotle called "the practical syllogism." We will ask below what it means to describe the relationships among will, final cause, and practical knowledge as 'internal.'

The question to be explored here is this: what in fact becomes of the 'receiv'd concept of will' when one contends, in the empiricist spirit common to both Locke and Hume, that all of our knowledge about matters of fact is based on observation and induction? The answer to this question will turn out to be that, in the absence of a notion of "practical knowledge," the concept of final cause becomes unintelligible (since the final cause is precisely the object of practical knowledge); and thus the notion of will must be reconstrued, for Hume as an impression. As an impression it is a brute given, one that is furthermore mute (or lacking in propositional content). Hume views volition as an event, that object of inner experience which is the (Humean) cause of our voluntary actions.

In what follows I shall first of all sketch Thomas Aquinas' view of the will (section I), following this with a discussion of the important hybrid view in Locke's Essay, where older notions of volition are presented within an incompatible epistemological framework. In section III we look at Hume's sharp response to Locke, and in section IV at his own doctrine of the will as impression. In the final section I attempt to distinguish two strands of causality in Hume's philosophy of human action, drawing at the same time a moral for the contemporary dispute about reasons and causes.

I

One of the most fully developed of the "receiv'd systems with regard to the will" was that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who combined Neo-Platonist, Patristic, and Aristotelian sources into an impressive and influential synthesis.² Thomas'

doctrine on the will is guided by a Grand Analogy, one inspired by the Creation story in Genesis. He writes, at the beginning of the second main part of his Summa:³

Man is made to God's image, and since this implies ... that he is intelligent and free to judge and master of himself, so then, now that we have agreed [in part one of the Summa] that God is the exemplar cause of things and that they issue from his power through his will, we go on to look at this image, that is to say, at man as the source of actions which are his own and fall under his responsibility and control.

The analogy is this: God, the Divine Craftsperson, is to the Creation as human agents are to their own actions and works. Thomas had made the striking claim in Part One that "the knowledge of God is the cause of things, for the knowledge of God is to all creatures what the knowledge of the artificer is to the things made by his art." (I, 14, 8, resp.) God's work is the Creation, which is the product of the Divine Intellect and Will. Now, in the prima secundae, Thomas points to the "likeness" we share with God through our "practical intellect, which causes the things it knows." (Ia2ae, 3, 5, obj. 1 and ad 1)

Such knowledge is practical in that its aim is doing or making, "the [conscious] application of form to matter." (I, 14, 16, resp.) We can speak of this kind of knowledge only where there is activity for the sake of an end, a good (real or imagined) aimed at through the activity. Hence the end or goal is the starting point. Between apprehension of the end and the agent's acting for the sake of achieving the end is the home or place of the will:

The will enters between the mind and the external action, for the mind proposes the object to the will, and the will causes the external action. Look for the start of the will's motion in the mind's apprehension of a universal good; look for the finish in the action whereby a man stretches to arrive at a real object other than himself; for the motion of will is from soul to thing. (Ia2ae, 13, 5, ad 1)

Willing for St. Thomas is not a blind drive, an unmediated response to a stimulus. On the contrary, the analogy of the artisan suggests someone whose activities are guided by the more or less methodical pursuit of the pre-selected goal or end, i.e., the finished product. Such pursuit combines elements of reason and desire. Indeed desire is not to be confused with will; Thomas singles will out precisely as "a drive from an inner, knowing principle," whereas "a natural appetite [such as desire] is an inclination from an inner principle but without knowledge." (Ia2ae, 6, 4, resp.)

What is it that is known when we will? The end or final cause, of course: "When a person acts on his own initiative for an end, he knows the end." (Ia2ae, 1, 2, ad 1). But what is the end? It can be looked at in two ways, Thomas tells us:

An end can be treated either as an objective reality or an action (actio) on our part. As an objective reality some human action must intervene in our reaching it, whether because a man makes it - thus a doctor produces health, this being the end for his art and the producing of it his purpose - or whether because he applies himself to it or enjoys it - thus a miser hoards and gloats over money. (Ia2ae, 13, 4, resp.)

This knowledge of the end, understood here as "the action on our part," is practical: it precedes the end and is its cause, in the sense to be explicated below. In this manner Thomas has given us his reading of Aristotle's definition of the voluntary, according to which "the initiative lies with the agent who knows the particular circumstances [which include "what he is doing" and "the result intended"] in which the action is performed."⁴ As "appetite" will is an initiator of action, as "rational" it knows what it is after: it contains a representation of the end, the act willed, and thus has what we would call propositional and epistemic structure. Hence it is not 'mute.'

Nor is it, again contra Hume, a brute given, the sort of thing of which we would say (with Wittgenstein) "It comes when it comes, and I cannot bring it about."⁵ For, according to Thomas, "the will can be poised before various objects because reason can have various conceptions of the good," and it is the intellect, which "by presenting the object, moves the will to its activity." (Ia2ae, 17, 1 ad 2 and Ia2ae, 9, 1, resp.) Will "resides in reason" (Ia2ae, 9, 2, ad 3), and hence has the character of "a free judgment arising from reason." (Ia2ae, 17, 1, ad 2).

Let us note here that Aquinas' method takes the form of describing how the mind or soul necessarily functions: it is in the nature or essence of the will that it is subject to reason, that it involves knowledge of the goal, and so on. This is classical 'rational psychology,' a description of the nature or essence of the mind. We shall see that Hume, while rejecting the idea that psychology can discover essences in this manner, nonetheless also sees his task as one of describing the (empirically

given) workings of the mind. The later Wittgenstein, by contrast, conceives of the philosophical task as the description of the language-game in which the words 'will,' 'action,' 'intention,' and so on are used. Thus, where Aquinas says that "will resides in reason" and "has the character of a free judgment arising from reason," Wittgenstein might say that we typically speak of volition where the agent is able to give reasons for what s/he does. We shall return to this issue later.

It remains in this brief outline of Aquinas' view of volition to ask whether for him the will can be said to be the cause of action in the same sense as in Hume, who claims that there is no difference at all between the causality of the will and that of natural events: 'causes' means, in both cases, 'is the regular preceding concomitant of.' Thomas does sometimes speak of the will as "the cause of action" (e.g., in Ia2ae, 13, 5, ad 1), but it would be a mistake to think either that he hypostasizes will or that he regards causes as all "of the same kind." On the former point, his characteristic position is that "the person acting is the cause of his action principally in that he is moved by the end." (Ia2ae, 7, 4, ad 3) Again, putting this in the Wittgensteinian mode, we talk of will when a person acts for the sake of some end known and aimed at. For Aquinas will is an "inclination" or "appetite" in virtue of which a person can be a causa movens, thus in this sense willing can be one kind of cause ('efficient'); but it is an efficient cause of an intentional action to the extent that it is a "rational appetite," an "inclination from an inner, knowing principle;" and it is the latter because of its internal relationship to the goal or final cause.⁶

What does 'internal' mean in this context? Following Aristotle⁷ Aquinas thinks quite generally of causal connections as necessary. One thing this might be taken to mean⁸ in the case of volition and final causes is this: if we know the final cause, i.e., what someone's goal is, then we know non-inductively what that person will do (provided s/he is not prevented, etc.). Since Hume understands non-inductive relations among propositions uniformly as logical relations, he regards the Thomistic or traditional position which he finds in Locke's Essay as open to the lethal objection that we can imagine that an agent has a goal to do a at t_1 and yet does not do a at t_1 . The possibility of a non-inductive, non-logical, yet inferential connection between propositions is one that Hume did not suspect.⁹

On Aquinas' view, different questions can be asked about an action, the answers to which point to different explanatory features (or causes) variously involving the will.¹⁰ Thus, he says, the question "Who?" asks for the "efficient cause" (i.e, the volition or the voluntary agent), while "Why?" asks for "the final cause" (the end willed -- Ia2ae, 7, 3, obj. 3). We can also ask "What was done?," a request for the formal cause: "The object [the end intended by the agent] is a principle of motion in that it determines activity in the manner of a formal cause. Every action ... is specified by its form...."¹¹

What emerges, taken as a whole, is a landscape very different from that of Hume's theory of human action. In it we find that in virtue of the will an agent is a causa movens, and this notion is plainly an ancestor of Hume's concept of the will as cause; but for Thomas the voluntary agent is an efficient cause just to the extent that his/her volition is necessarily connected to the final cause

or goal. Indeed, the final cause is paramount in the Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrine of will. The voluntary agent acts for the sake of -- and thus foresees -- the end. Reconstructing that productive fore-knowledge in answer to the question, "Why did s/he do x?" is an important form of action-explanation. Take away the concept of the agent's practical, non-inductive fore-knowledge and you take away the concept of the object of that fore-knowledge, i.e., the final cause or goal foreseen by the agent. And with the disappearance of the concept of final cause, the notion of the internal connection of volition and action becomes obscure (cf. below, part IV). The overall result is that our action-explanatory practice must be reinterpreted (for example, in terms of Humean causes alone).

The story of how such striking changes came about in European philosophy is very involved, and I merely mention it here in passing.¹² I propose now to examine in Locke's Essay a watershed on the route which took English-language philosophy from this kind of "receiv'd system with regard to the will" to the system of the Treatise.

II

John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) contains a melange composed of elements inherited from medieval doctrines of the will side by side with epistemological principles inconsistent with those views. His work thus represents a turning point in the philosophy of human action: those (including Hume) who followed Locke's epistemological lead wound up decisively rejecting his incompatible views on volition.

There is no mention in the Essay of final causality,¹³ while Locke's discussion of the practical is largely confined to the argument in Book I that no practical principles are innate. But for Locke the will is certainly more than an impression. He writes:¹⁴

Volition, 'tis plain, is an Act of the Mind knowingly exerting that Dominion it takes itself to have over any part of the man, by employing it in, or withholding it from any particular Action. And what is the Will, but the Faculty to do this?

The crucial elements here are three: volitions (or willings) a) are acts of the mind, b) in which the mind is knowingly efficacious in c) the production of action.

Further, Locke sharply distinguishes the will from the understanding as two separate "powers" in the mind. Whereas the understanding is described as "the power of Perception,"¹⁵ the power of will is the power

to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our Bodies, barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding the doing or not doing such or such a particular action. (II, xxi, 5, p. 236)

Let us refer to this view as Locke's 'doctrine of the Separation of Powers.'

The power of will plainly includes the mind's pre-knowledge (or at least pre-opinion) about what will happen in execution of the willing, for the mind commands "the doing ... [of] such or such a particular action"; and such knowledge -- proceeding as it does from a different "power" -- is bound, it

would seem, to be different in some epistemic respects from that gained through the passive, perceptual powers of the understanding.

Locke's position on the will thus seems quite similar in a number of respects to that of Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic philosophers. The problem is to see how it can be made consistent with Locke's own version of empiricist epistemology, according to which all knowledge, indeed all belief and all epistemic support are derived from experience, a claim which accords well with the "powers of the Understanding," less well with the "power of Will." Let me briefly describe the epistemology, first as it concerns concepts, and then in its import for propositions.

At the start of Book II Locke claims that the mind has "all the materials of Reason and Knowledge ... from Experience" (II, i, 2, p. 104). Let us call this the 'Concept-Source Principle': all concepts are (directly or indirectly) derived from experience. "Sensation," Locke tells us, is one "great Source" of the ideas we have; the other is introspection, "the Perception of the Operations of our own Minds within us, including such operations as Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing...." (II, i, 4, p. 105)

Concepts (for Locke, 'ideas') are only the material of reason and knowledge. But reason and knowledge themselves require that the mind do something with the raw material, namely weld it into propositions. In Book IV Locke comes to speak of propositions, the sorts of things which are properly said to be true or false. Of the word "truth" Locke asserts that it signifies

nothing but the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with

another. The joining or separating of signs here meant is what by another name, we call Proposition. (IV, v, 2, p. 574)

Some propositions are self-evidently true; the truth of some others can be demonstrated. Together these categories comprise the sum-total of what we can know. But the vast majority of the propositions we accept as true do not belong in either of these two categories, since they are neither self-evidently nor demonstrably true. Locke labels them "probable":

Probability then, being to supply the defect of our Knowledge, and to guide us where that fails, is always conversant about Propositions, whereof we have no certainty, but only some inducements to receive them for true. The grounds of it are, in short, these two following:

First, The conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience.

Secondly, The Testimony of others, vouching their Observation and Experience. (IV, xv, 4, p. 655 f.)

The basic notion is familiar enough: we judge a dubitable proposition to be true if it is supported by experience, our own or that of others whom we trust. Let us dub this the 'Proposition-Assent Principle.' Experience thus plays two quite distinct roles in Locke's epistemology: a) as the source of all concepts; and b) as the court of appeals for the truth or falsity of probable propositions.

Now propositions which express volitions ("I shall do x," et al.) clearly belong in the category of 'probable propositions,' since they concern future contingencies, and though they are generally true, they sometimes turn out false.¹⁶ The agent's precognition of what will happen as a result of the willing, whether considered to be 'knowledge' or

'belief,' would seemingly have to consist, in Locke's terminology, of assent to a proposition (i.e., the joining or separating of signs), but where the grounds of the assent are neither the "Testimony of others" (of course), nor one's own "Knowledge, Observation, and Experience," for the assertion of the volition is not founded on perception or on reflection, its source is not the understanding at all, but rather the will, as we saw above. Locke apparently has made no room in his epistemology for the sort of proposition which his philosophy of action requires. Let us examine this matter more closely.

Both Locke's Concept-Source and his Proposition-Assent Principles allow for people to have knowledge or belief about future events: the Principles require only that "true" (or adequate) concepts, but not propositions, be copies of what is happening or has already happened. A proposition can of course be false, and it can also deal, as a prediction, with what has not yet (and may perhaps never) come to pass. Speaking of the "Probability" which we perceive in things, Locke writes:

Tell a Country Gentlewoman, that the Wind is South-West, and the Weather louring, and like to rain, and she will easily understand, 'tis not safe for her to go abroad thin clad, in such a day, after a Fever: she clearly sees the probable Connexion of all these, viz. South-West-Wind, and Clouds, Rain, wetting, taking Cold, Relapse, and danger of Death.... (IV, xvii, 4, p. 672)

Through the power of understanding we can come to know what (probably) will or would happen. Such knowledge is plainly based on experience, in two senses: a) its 'elements,' the concepts used in formulating it (in the present case: southwest wind,

rain, chill, fever, et al.), are empirical; and b) the grounds for asserting the proposition are inductive. If asked to justify her inference, the "Country Gentlewoman" might respond that it is well-known that such weather brings a chill rain, that a person recuperating from a feverish illness should not get chilled, etc.

But now this same woman, having made up her mind to remain indoors, knows that she will not, ceteris paribus, venture forth on this particular day. Her volition to stay indoors can be expressed in a proposition ('I shall stay indoors') made up of concepts all of which are arguably empirical.¹⁷ But are her grounds for asserting it inductive, as they were in the case of the proposition, 'Going out in a rain-bringing southwest wind is dangerous for someone recuperating from a fever'? Plainly not. As the case has been presented here, the woman does not reflect, 'Let me see, what do I usually do in such cases?' Her reasoning has that quite different form called by Aristotle the 'practical syllogism,' which begins with 'something wanted' (here: to remain healthy), and the conclusion of which is an action. To the difference between the two forms corresponds the applicability in the one case, but not in the other, of the question, 'How (i.e., on the basis of what evidence) do you know?':

Case I: C.G.: Dangerous weather for me to be out in!

We: How do you know?

C.G.: Well, the wind is from the southwest, you see and with these clouds that means a chill rain, and etc....

Case II: C.G.: It's warm grog by the hearth for me today!

We: How do you know?

How does the Country Gentlewoman know in case II, where she expresses her volition to remain indoors? If the question means, 'What is her evidence for saying she will stay put this afternoon?,' then the answer I would like to give is that she has none; the interlocutor has mistaken her declaration of intention for a prediction based on some sort of induction. Quite generally, an intention cannot be the sort of thing which one discovers one has. This is one of those cases in which nothing shows the speaker the truth of the first-person future-tense proposition.¹⁸

Nonetheless it is striking that such propositions are in fact often used to communicate to others what is going to happen. We can hardly imagine what our world would be like without the information garnered from such declarations of intention. Through them we learn what people are going to do intentionally. Yet what we thus learn is not "based on experience" in that it does not conform to the Proposition-Assent Principle. The point is this: that Principle must (and does) incline Locke to deny what the doctrine of the Separation of Powers should lead him to affirm: that through volition agents know (or have beliefs about) what is going to take place, and this knowledge or belief is, in an important sense, not derived from experience.¹⁹

That Locke is at least partly aware of the anomalous character of the will within the empiricist epistemological framework is shown directly by his assigning to volition the unique status of being the 'original' of our idea of 'active power,' the capacity to make changes in 'the simple ideas' of anything. He writes:

The idea of the beginning of motion we have only from reflection on what passes in ourselves; where we find by Experience, that, barely by willing it, barely by a thought of the Mind, we can move the parts of our Bodies, which were before at rest. (II, xxi, 4, p. 235)

Locke implicitly compares this 'active power' of the will to that of God, suggesting, by way of contrast, that matter is "wholly destitute of active power." (II, xxi, 2, p. 234) Hume saw the threat which this claim of an active source of knowledge separate from inner or outer sensation posed for a thoroughgoing empiricism. He attacked it, as we shall see below, for implying a 'discoverable' (i.e., a priori) connection between volition and action.

Locke is apparently committed by the various things he says about the will to the existence of an active internal power which is a source of knowledge or belief, one different from either of the two sources of (inductive) support -- our own experience and that of others -- which he canonically allows. But he pays not one whit of attention to the inconsistency. Why not? Here one can only speculate, but I submit that a likely ingredient in the oversight is the fact that Locke, while holding on to the notion that the will is an "active power" conscious of itself, no longer connects volition with the final cause. The absence of this connection in turn makes it almost inevitable that one will overlook the special sort of knowledge which agents have of their own present and future intentional deeds. For the goal or final cause is just the object of this knowledge. Without the related notions of the final cause and practical knowledge the will becomes a wraith-like concept, an anomaly in the empiricist scheme of things.

Were Locke forced to consider the inconsistency between his epistemology and his doctrine of will, he would presumably have had either a) to expand, with unforeseeable consequences, his empiricist idea of knowledge to include something like the medieval notion of 'practical knowledge,' the cause of what it knows; or else b) to resort to claiming: i) that volition itself is, after all, only an internal experience (an 'idea of reflection' and not 'an act of the mind') following upon a desire for some good; while ii) the associated belief about what will happen (as a result of the volition) is based on the agent's experience of the repeated conjunction of such (or similar) volitions and that kind of subsequent happening. This is basically Hume's position, as we shall see in a moment.

The untenable middle ground on which Locke has positioned himself represents the disputed frontier between two very different pictures of human action and knowledge: as the chasm opened more clearly under that ground, philosophers saw themselves forced to come down on one side or the other, a choice prejudiced for many by the apparent connection between the New Way of Ideas, especially in its empiricist form, and the New Science: to follow the New Science meant, apparently, surrendering final causes altogether and thus the notion of willing as an active power; conversely, holding on to that notion seemed to require rejection, in whole or part, of the New Science.²⁰

III

Hume's response to the challenge posed by Locke's "compromise" doctrine of will was sharp and decisive.²¹ Both in an appendix to the Treatise and

in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Section VII, part I) he explicitly rejects Locke's use (in the Essay, II, xxi) of the older notion of willing as itself an active power and the source of our idea of the necessary relationship between cause and effect:

Some have asserted, that we feel an energy, or power, in our mind; and that having in this manner acquir'd the idea of power, we transfer that quality to matter, where we are not able immediately to discover it.... But to convince us how fallacious this [Locke's] reasoning is, we need only consider, that the will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect. ...[t]he actions of the mind are, in this respect, the same with those of matter. We perceive only their constant conjunction; nor can we ever reason beyond it. No internal impression has an apparent energy, more than external objects have. (T 632-3)

Why does Hume accuse Locke of claiming that the will has a 'discoverable connexion' with its effects? This is, after all, nothing which Locke had asserted explicitly. To say that A has a 'discoverable' connection with B is presumably to claim that, given the existence of A, you can infer that of B and vice-versa: there is a real, and not simply psychological, necessity connecting A and B. This is of course utterly repugnant to Hume, but why should Locke be supposed to have made the claim?

I surmise that Hume sees in Locke's position the last vestige of the 'necessary connexion' view of causality, to whose eradication much of Book I of the Treatise was devoted. Part of that older view was the notion of a cause in the full sense as a substance or active power foreseeing the end or goal:

the activity and the foresight were two sides of the one coin. As St. Thomas put it: "Every agent [i.e., every proper cause] acts for an end, or otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent, unless it were by chance." (Ia, 44, 4, resp., emphasis added) Here, if we know the final cause or end, we can infer "what will follow ... from the action of the agent," for this follows necessarily (i.e., not "by chance"). Now the cause par excellence in this sense is the Divine Craftsperson. Hence, in the medieval view we have been examining, these notions went together: Divine Creator, substance, active power, foreknowledge of the end or effect, necessary connection of cause and effect. Given Hume's epistemology, the whole lot had to go, and all causal connections have to be seen as contingent.

In his attack on Locke's 'active power'-view Hume makes the interesting point that, where the will is the cause of an action, "The effect is ... distinguishable and separable from the cause, and cou'd not be foreseen without the experience of their constant conjunction." (T 632) What Hume here implies is that his opponents supposed the kind of foreseeing in question to be non-empirical and thus to have the character of logical inference. His counter is that in the case of volition the "effect is ... distinguishable from the cause," i.e., we can imagine the one without the other. I might will to raise the cup to my lips, but paralysis, clumsiness, or some other interruption could come between volition and its realization in action. Volition is one thing, action another, and

There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we

form of them. Such an inference wou'd amount to knowledge, and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving any thing different. (T 86-87)

Hume acknowledges only logical (or necessary) connection, on the one hand, and empirical (contingent) connection on the other: what possible third alternative could there be, given his epistemology and theory of meaning?²² And hence his position on the will (namely that it is itself an impression causally, i.e., empirically, connected with action) is seen to be not only consistent with, but also a consequence of, his views on knowledge and meaning. Let us now look more closely at the central tenets of that position.

IV

At the beginning of Part III of Book II Hume gives something like a definition of will, calling it "nothing but the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind." (T 399) Hume's intent seems clear enough here: the will is an impression, something we experience, are aware of. It is, he tells us, the most remarkable of "all the immediate effects of pain and pleasure." (T 399) The will is not "properly speaking, ... comprehended among the passions" (perhaps because Hume recognized, as Bricke suggests, that desire and volition play very different roles in practical reasoning, namely the roles of major premise and conclusion, respectively²³). Nonetheless, the will is closely related to them. (T 399)

Certain elements of the traditional Aristotelian-Scholastic picture of volition are preserved in Hume's account. For instance he says, "The mind by an original instinct tends to unite itself with the good, and to avoid the evil." (T 438) For Hume, as in the older tradition, desire arises from the perception of something good. The realization that the desirable object is within one's reach gives rise to the will to attain it:

DESIRE arises from good consider'd simply.... The WILL exerts itself, when ... the good ... may be attain'd by any action of the mind or body. (T 439)

So much might be considered tame and traditional enough, evidence even for Hume's claim, quoted at the start, to "change nothing in the receiv'd systems, with regard to the will." But though the framework looks similar, it is in reality very different. For Hume has radically changed three of the traditional elements. For him:

1) the will, as an impression, is a brute given; we speak of will in virtue of something we as agents experience in certain circumstances rather than in virtue of our non-inductive or practical knowledge of the goal in acting;

2) a volition is "an original existence," not susceptible of "agreement or disagreement ... to real existence and matter of fact" (T 458); it thus contains no "representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification." (T 415) Volition, we would say today, has no propositional content. A fortiori it is not internally connected with the goal (or final cause). The will is not only brute, it is also mute;

3) closely connected to this, the relation between what Hume might call 'the event of willing' and the resultant action can only be one of 'ordinary' (i.e., Humean) causation; given the bruteness and muteness of the will, the notion of 'final causality' makes no sense at all. For according to that notion volition requires that the agent have a conception or representation of the action to be performed; it is necessarily the volition to do such-and-such. Furthermore, our ultimate criterion for speaking of volition is the agent's doing, or attempting to do, the appropriate action. Hence will, on the traditional account, is non-contingently related to the action which is its carrier.

The logic of Hume's epistemology implies that there is and can be no such internal connection between volition and action. On the other hand, it is scarcely possible to speak of volitions and actions without saying things that plainly presuppose the existence of such connections. Thus Hume regularly speaks of actions as "the intended results" of our volitions, plans and designs,²⁴ implying that a volition and an action are, at least in the normal course of events, supposed to be associated with the same description (as in the case of the volition to raise my arm and the action of raising my arm). Officially, however, a volition is an impression, a separate existence, internally related to nothing whatsoever, capable of occurring even in the absence of any thought specifying a content for the volition.²⁵

The gist of Hume's revolutionary views on volition could be labeled 'the doctrine of will without final causality.' It is a direct consequence of his epistemological principles. If every simple

concept (idea) has its origin in some impression, then willing must be an impression, something experienced. But every impression is both brute and mute. Therefore there cannot be any such thing as a final cause or goal-state, the agent's non-observational knowledge of which is, to Anscombe, the mark of volition.²⁶ The same conclusion follows from Hume's closely connected and influential arguments against classical and medieval views of causation, for these arguments are meant to establish Humean causation as the only apparent candidate for the role of connector between will and action. Having helped free modern thought from the fetish of final causes and logical connections in nature by means of arguments about what we can know, Hume left himself no alternative but to banish such causes from the field of human action as well. In their absence, the phenomena of volition must be reconceptualized, or else they would provide grounds for objection to Hume's claim in Book I that "all causes are of the same kind," (T 171) and -- ultimately -- to the epistemological foundations of empiricism. Contemporary action theory bears witness to the difficulty of this task of reconceptualization.²⁷

V

The organic connection of Hume's doctrine of the will to the central epistemological principle of empiricism is no doubt one main source of that doctrine's continued attractiveness to many. But the doctrine also draws support from a tacit analogy in Book II of the Treatise, an analogy that genuinely illuminates the concept of human action in a manner

unaffected by any negative judgment on Hume's theory of knowledge or even, for that matter, his teaching on the will.

Hume's thinking on action and the will is plainly guided by the paradigm of natural events as conceived in the new physics. Immediately following his definition of will (quoted above), Hume launches into a discussion of "that long disputed question concerning liberty and necessity." (T 399) Necessity he describes in terms drawn from the account of causation in Book I, i.e., it is the psychological necessity of moving from an impression of A to an idea of B based on repeated exposure to A's being followed by B's. He then moves directly to apply the lesson to the case of the connection of will and action: it is

the observation of the union [of will and action], which produces the inference [e.g., from the experience of the event A to the expectation of B]; for which reason it might be thought sufficient, if we prove a constant union in the actions of the mind, in order to establish the inference, along with the [casual] necessity of these actions.

The first step is to "prove from experience, that our actions have a constant union with our motives, tempers, and circumstances...." (T 400-401)

There follow several pages of brilliant and -- among major philosophers -- very nearly unprecedented²⁸ observations on the social forces which shape the context in which actions are performed, e.g.:

The skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day-labourer are different from those of a man of quality: So are his sentiments, actions and manners. The different stations of life influence the whole fabric, external and internal.... (T 402)

The conclusions Hume draws could serve as a motto of positivistic approaches to human action in social science, literary studies, history and philosophy:

There is a general course of nature in human actions, as well as in the operations of the sun and the climate.... [I]n judging of the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects. ... The same experienc'd union has the same effect on the mind, whether the united objects be motives, volitions and actions; or figure and motion. (T 402-407)

Thomas Aquinas' analogy invited us to view the Agent as resembling the Divine Craftsperson. Hume's analogy is that of the Agent as Product of Social and Natural Forces, an analogy which has borne fruit in sociology, psychology, economics, et al.

Nonetheless, taken as a doctrine of the will, Hume's position -- for all its originality and influence, as well as its consistency with his theory of knowledge and his view of natural causality -- is a curious one: does it make sense to speak of the will as something which the agent experiences inside him- or herself?²⁹ Hume himself seems uncomfortable with this aspect of his view, for he characterizes the impression in question as the one we "feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body" (emphasis added). If we were to replace the underlined words with the neutral 'there is,' we would plainly no longer be talking about will, for many bodily movements of which we are aware are involuntary. Nor, though here the proof is more complicated, does it do to say, 'when there is any new motion of our body caused by internal states such as desire and belief.'³⁰

The phrasing Hume uses reveals an instinctive realization that, if the bodily motions in question are to be regarded as actions, they have not only to be motions we are aware of, but also ones we initiate. But how can Hume's epistemology make room for such a notion as 'I knowingly initiate motion,' a notion which apparently connects volition with the non-inductive foreknowledge of the agent? How indeed does it differ from Locke's "the mind knowingly exerts its dominion," i.e., the very notion which Hume has been at such pains to exorcise? Hume does not pause to confront these issues.

Hume's shortcomings on this question stem, I believe, ultimately from his insistence, forced by empiricist epistemology, that "all causes are of the same kind." He thus assumes that social determinants of action -- e.g., one's class, gender, nationality -- are causes of action in just the same way as the will. But this is a mistake: the concept of will, unlike the other factors, requires that the agent act consciously for the sake of the end, the final cause.

Without the notion of a final cause there is no place for the idea of the agent's non-inductive (or practical) knowledge of what s/he is doing, or will do, intentionally. Hence we are left with the anomaly that as Humean agent I am supposed to know inductively what sort of action I will perform when I will (or decide, choose, form the intention, etc.) to do x. This position implies that, since the connection between volition and action is empirical, it would make sense to say, for example, that my present volition to do x, heretofore the sort of thing regularly followed by my doing x, might suddenly and henceforth regularly precede my doing y instead. According to Hume's principles we should go on saying that I will x, but we should add that in my

case willing x causes me to do y. But in fact in such cases we say no such thing. Anyone who regularly expresses the volition to do x and goes on to do y is regarded either as a liar or a joker or ignorant of the meaning of 'shall do.'

Hume has misdescribed how we in fact use the words 'will,' 'decide,' 'choose,' 'intend' and so on. Hence he has not given us an analysis of our actual concept of will, but in effect has proposed a new concept. It could be shown to be part of the pathos of contemporary theory of action that Hume's positivistically oriented successors have, in the search for a satisfactory causal analysis of volition and intention, retraced the great empiricist's route into the same cul de sac. Both they and he pay the price of ignoring Francis Bacon's dictum: "The final cause rather corrupts than advances the sciences, except such as have to do with human action."³¹

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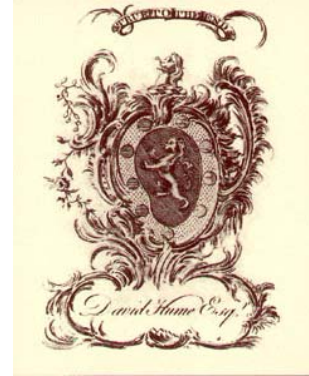
1. A Treatise of Human Nature, eds. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, second edition, Oxford 1978, Book II, Part III, Section II, p. 410, emphasis added. Further references will be cited as 'T' followed by the relevant page number(s). I am indebted to Thomas Keutner (Hagen, FRG) for innumerable discussions of volition and practical reason, begun during my tenure of a Humboldt Fellowship in Bonn. Hence my thanks are also due to the Humboldt Foundation, as well as to Vere Chappell and my colleague Murray Kiteley, who criticized early drafts, and to John Bricke, Mikael Karlsson and other participants in the 1986 Hume Society Meeting in Edinburgh, where sections of this paper were read.

2. Thomas devotes two questions (82-83) of the prima and 21 questions (ca. 200 pages) of the prima secundae of his Summa Theologiae to a sustained treatment of the will and human action. There are, in addition, scores of other references to these topics in the Summa, not to mention his other works. An alternative, 'voluntarist' position on the will was developed in the Middle Ages by the Franciscans Duns Scotus and William of Ockham.
3. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, in 61 volumes, Blackfriars 1964-81, Foreword (to Ia2ae), Vol. 16, emphasis added. Further references will be given in parentheses in the standard manner. I have occasionally altered the translation in the direction of literalness.
4. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, tr. M. Ostwald, Indianapolis 1962, III, 1, 1111a21-23, emphasis added.
5. L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford 1953, Part I, sect. 611.
6. By the same token this internal relationship of will to action determines which action takes place; hence the will is also the causa formalis of the action.
7. Cf. for example Metaphysics IX, V.
8. Hume so takes (and argues against) it in the Appendix to the Treatise, pp. 632-33.
9. This theme is discussed in detail in Thomas Keutner, "The Will as Wish," in this issue of Hume Studies.
10. Compare, on the variety of causal questions about human action, G.E.M. Anscombe, "The Causation of Action," in C. Ginet (ed.), Knowledge and Mind: Philosophical Essays, N.Y. and Oxford 1983.
11. Ia2ae, 9, 1, resp. Thomas is talking in the final quoted sentence about natural processes ("actions of nature"), but in the sequel he applies the point equally (and characteristically) to human actions.

12. An interesting history of the abandonment of the concept of final causes and the effects thereof, particularly in ethics, is contained in A. MacIntyre, After Virtue, Notre Dame 1981.
13. Locke nonetheless does not appear to be a monist on the question of causality. Cf. John Yolton's contention that Locke's notion of 'active power' is the same as what has recently (and in the Middle Ages) been called 'agent causality'; in Yolton, Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding, Cambridge (G.B.) 1970, p. 158.
14. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. P.H. Nidditch, Oxford 1975, Book II, chap. xxi, sect. 15 (p. 241). Further references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.
15. The word 'perception' is used by Locke very broadly to include introspection of ideas, the grasp of the meaning of words, and the awareness of the "Connexion or Repugnancy, Agreement or Disagreement, that there is between any of our Ideas," i.e., judgment. (II, xxi, 5, p. 236)
16. I here take exception to the claim made by John Bricke (in his very helpful "Locke, Hume and the Nature of Volitions," Hume Studies 1985 Supplement, p. 18) that since Locke often speaks of volitions as (self-) commands, "he has a straightforward way to articulate the idea that volitions do not take truth values." I assume that one kind of verbal expression of a volition is the first-person future tense proposition exemplified by the likes of 'I shall be home at 3:30,' which certainly have truth-values in their ordinary use. Perhaps Bricke takes the verbal expression of a volition to be something like the (self-addressed) 'Be home at 3:30!' But is the first-person proposition then to be understood as a report of what went on 'inside'? Could one in that case sincerely misreport one's present volitions?
17. The hesitation here concerns the concept of self expressed by 'I'. For well-known Humean and Kantian reasons one may doubt that it is derived from experience.
18. Cf. G.E.M. Anscombe, Intention, Oxford 1957/1963, sections 8-16.

19. This does not amount to the claim (as Locke might have assumed) that such knowledge is innate, but rather that some of what we know is not "drawn from things" (accipitur a rebus), but is instead "the cause of what is known" (causa rerum intellectarum). (Summa Theologiae, IaIIae, 3, 5, obj. 1.) This kind of knowledge is discussed at length in Anscombe, Intention, sections 33-42.
20. One contemporary of Locke who resisted this bifurcation was Leibniz; another, though earlier resister, was Bacon (cf. the final footnote of this essay). The dispute over whether there are alternatives to this bifurcation has been a significant theme in contemporary philosophy. The present essay is part of a larger, long-term investigation of this topic.
21. As will emerge presently, I again find myself in disagreement with Bricke (in his "Locke, Hume and the Nature of Volitions," p. 34), who claims that Locke and Hume "appear ... to agree in the main on their general characterizations of the relationship between a volition and its effects."
22. Cf. Keutner.
23. Cf. his "Locke, Hume and the Nature of Volitions," p. 24. I do not, however, mean to subscribe to the view that volition as something distinct from action is the conclusion of practical reasoning.
24. For example, in the Treatise, pp. 414, 417, and 475.
25. Compare John Bricke, "Hume's Volitions," in V. Hope, ed., Philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, Edinburgh 1984. Bricke picks out the inconsistency noted here, but thinks that Hume's basic approach can be saved by amending his view so as to regard volitions as 'conative thoughts.' Whether thus turning Hume into an 18th century Davidson saves his approach is of course an open question. Cf. my "Whither Action Theory?" (mimeographed).
26. Cf. her Intention for the details. Actually her claim concerns the intentional, a narrower notion than the voluntary, and crucially involves the agent's answer to the question, 'Why (did you do x)?'

27. For a commentary on some of these efforts see my "Whither Action Theory?" (mimeographed).
28. One exception is Spinoza, who argued that freedom of will is an illusion and that human actions are completely determined by forces outside of ourselves. Such views were not uncommon in the ancient world, and Hume (as well as his compatriot and friend, Adam Smith, who was of one mind with Hume on the importance of the social determinants of human action) would have been familiar with the predestination controversy within Calvinism. But, to my knowledge, no one prior to Hume put quite such a pronounced emphasis on social forces as determinants of action, an emphasis without which modern social science is unthinkable.
29. Peter Geach has argued that it does not make sense, in G.E.M. Anscombe and P.T. Geach, Three Philosophers, Oxford (Blackwell's) 1963, pp. 107-109.
30. Cf. Donald Davidson, "Freedom to Act," in his Essays on Actions and Events, Oxford 1980, especially pp. 79-81.
31. Francis Bacon, The New Organon, ed. F.H. Anderson, Indianapolis 1960, Aphorisms Book II, p. 121, emphasis added.



David Hume and the Concept of Volition: The Will as Wish

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THE WILL AS WISH^{*}

Hume's theory of action -- that the will is the cause of voluntary action -- is still one of the main accounts about the relationship of will and action in current discussion.

In the following I will first show that Wittgenstein revived Hume's theory in his early philosophy. I will argue that wishing is taken as a model for willing in both Hume's and the early Wittgenstein's theories. I am therefore speaking of a 'wish-theory of will'.

In his middle and later philosophy, however, Wittgenstein presents a completely different point of view. He acknowledges the deep difference between wishing and willing. In willing, but not in wishing, we do have knowledge, namely we can predict our future voluntary actions. This knowledge is to be distinguished from our knowledge of future events in nature. I believe that the wish-model of willing can be regarded as 'philosophically confused' in Wittgenstein's sense: he who says that we cannot know what our future voluntary actions will be, is in fact only attacking our linguistic conventions regarding the meaning of 'will' or 'intention,' though he thinks he is defending an empirical claim.

In conclusion it is claimed that the adherents of Hume's theory of action and also most of Wittgenstein's followers have not been aware of the consequences of Wittgenstein's conceptual criticism. So the discussion turns still (once again) around Hume's question: whether the relationship of willing and acting is a causal one or one "of logical compulsion."¹

1. David Hume's Theory of Action

In An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Sect. VII, Part I, Hume gives several arguments in favour of the thesis that, "like all other natural events," the influence of volition over the organs of the body can only be known by experience. His second argument here is from the comparison of voluntary with involuntary movements. He is arguing against the thesis that the relationship between the will and voluntary movement might be that of logical necessity. If that were the case, then by inspecting the cause we would be aware of a certain power producing the effect. But we are not conscious of such a power in distinguishing this relationship from the one between will and involuntary movements. So we can only conclude that in most cases, when we have willed certain (namely voluntary) movements, the movement has followed upon our will, and that we must infer the necessity of this relationship.²

His first argument backs up the second: the relationship between will and voluntary movement, between soul and body, is a completely mysterious one: "Were we empowered, by a secret wish, to remove mountains, or control the planets in their orbit: this extensive authority would not be more extraordinary, nor more beyond our comprehension." (E 65)

Now, without wanting to milk too much out of this remark, I take it in fact to give Hume's model for his account of willing: If the influence of volition over the organs of the body in voluntary movement is known only by experience, volition is nothing but a wish. We normally would distinguish between wishing and willing in using 'wishing' where we at least believe that the wish will not come true. And this is just what follows from Hume's description

of the will: that we don't know and cannot know if the execution of the will will come true. An example is his distinction of voluntary and involuntary movement: if we don't know that our volition (of a voluntary movement) will come true, then will is perfectly equal in this respect to our wish (of an involuntary movement, or some other event).

So Hume points to a man, suddenly struck with palsy in a leg, who wills to move his leg: Hume's volition is logically independent of its execution. But his denial of knowledge in will blurs the distinction between willing and wishing. I will argue that there is an epistemic difference between willing and wishing, in spite of the logical independence of both from what is going to happen.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Wish-theory of Will

Wittgenstein develops his account of willing in an entry in his Notebooks, 1914-1916 (5.7.1916), which is taken over to the Tractatus logico-philosophicus, 6.373, 6.374:

The world is independent of my will.
 Even if everything that we wish ('wuenschen') were to happen, this would still only be, so to speak, a grace of fate, for what would guarantee it is not any logical connexion between will and world, and we could not in turn will the supposed physical connexion.

Here also willing, or intending, is regarded as idle wishing. Idle wishing is itself characterized by the facts that 1) everything could be the object of that wish -- that the past be different from what it was, that a certain mathematical proof would not hold, etc.; and 2) the wishing person does not do anything for the idle wish to come true.³ Regarding willing as a kind of idle wishing means the transference of

these conditions from wishing to willing. Willing is then regarded as something a willing person does not (and cannot) make true. That is why Wittgenstein in the quoted remark says of the fulfillment of a wish (and indeed of the execution of the will) that what is going to happen would be just "a grace of fate." And another remark goes: "I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will: I am completely powerless." (Notebooks 1914-1916, 11.6.16)

The tertium comparationis justifying this transference from wish to will is thought to be the logical independence of both willing and wishing from what is going to happen. This is shown by a further remark in the Tractatus logico-philosophicus, 5.135-5.1362:

There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation. There is no causal nexus to justify such an inference. We cannot infer the events of the future from those of the present. Belief in the causal nexus is superstition. The freedom of the will consists in the impossibility of knowing actions that still lie in the future. We could know them only if causality were an inner necessity like that of logical inference. - The connexion between knowledge and what is known is that of logical necessity.

Like Hume, Wittgenstein is here rejecting two possible candidates for the explanation of the relationship between willing and execution: this relationship is not a logical connexion following the principle of contradiction -- it is not like the relationship of knowledge to the known, where, if 'I know that p' is true, 'p' is also true. (It is not a relationship between ideas.) Nor is it a causal relationship in the naturalistic sense; there simply

isn't such a thing as the prediction of an effect from the inspection of the cause in general. So this denial also holds for the prediction of the execution from the inspection of the will. The belief in this causal nexus is sheer superstition.⁴ Unlike Hume, Wittgenstein is not considering the possibility of another type of psychologically necessary causality.

As Wittgenstein in his early philosophy knows just these two relationships, logical necessity and logical independence, logic and contingency, only the second one remains. He cannot but treat willing and executing analogously to wish and fulfillment, underlining logical independence and thereby our ignorance about the future, about the execution of our will.

3. The Dissolution of the Wish-theory

Wittgenstein's main interest regarding the concept of willing or of intention during the period of his middle and later philosophy lies in the criticism of his own former theory as psychologistic.

But the now criticized psychologistic account of intention is intimately connected with the wish-theory of willing: if willing or intending is just a kind of mental state, if it is independent of what is going to happen, then its study must indeed be by introspection as is suggested by the psychologistic account.⁵

It is exactly this presupposition of psychologism, which Wittgenstein is now rejecting: There is a relation of dependence between will and its execution. But this is not a logical dependence. Willing and execution, as wishing and fulfillment, are still to be regarded as logically independent of one another. The dependence is a grammatical one. And in respect to this dependence there is a

remarkable difference between willing and wishing. I will now try to show that it is possible to reject the wish-theory as what Wittgenstein called a "philosophical confusion." In the sense of his later philosophy this means the confusion of an implicit grammatical claim, regarding our conventions of the meaning of an expression, with an empirical claim concerning a certain state of affairs. A philosophical confusion in this sense is not falsifiable. All we can do is to try to show that the proponent of that claim follows a certain model. And of course we can refrain from following what (after the analysis) turns out to be just a proposal to reform the way we talk. As in the crucial entry to his Notebooks Wittgenstein is now aware of the essential difference between willing and wishing. He says in the Yellow Book, p. 55:

We must note that willing and wishing are entirely different. When I say I willed to raise my arm, I do not mean that I merely wished it very strongly and then the arm rose. Willing is not a thing which happens to me; it is a thing I do, the word 'wish' has a much wider use than 'will.'

And in Eine philosophische Betrachtung, p. 235:

(In the case of raising my arm) it is dangerous to confuse willing and wishing. - Because when I raise my arm, it is not so that I first wish it may rise, and then it actually does. (Though this too might happen in particular cases.)

And, in the Philosophical Investigations, Par. 616:

When I raise my arm, I have not wished it might go up. The voluntary action excludes this wish.

Now, I take it that knowledge is the important distinguishing feature between willing and wishing that Wittgenstein is here hinting at. Whereas in the Tractatus the knowledge of what will happen is denied

to willing and wishing alike, because of the logical independence between willing and wishing on the one hand and what is going to happen on the other, knowledge is now ascribed to willing but not to wishing -- because of the particular grammatical link between willing and execution. Therefore Wittgenstein remarks:

When people talk about the possibility of foreknowledge of the future they always forget the fact of the prediction of one's own voluntary movements. (Philosophical Investigations, Par. 629)

Wittgenstein immediately goes on to emphasize that there is a fundamental difference between this foreknowledge (and the prediction based on it) and that of natural events (e.g., the prediction of a chemical reaction). But knowledge it is nevertheless. (Cf. Philosophical Investigations, Par. 630)

I think that only G.E.M. Anscombe in Intention has fully worked out the difference between these two kinds of knowledge.⁶ Let us suppose that a chemist goes astray with his prediction 'p' of a certain chemical reaction. In this case we would say that his prediction 'p' was wrong. We would say that he did not have that foreknowledge claimed by 'p.' Let us now suppose that somebody driving in his car expresses his intention to take the road to Deerfield (next left): 'I am going to take the road to Deerfield.' And let us assume that he is not lying to us, or forgetting his intention, or changing his mind, or prevented by some obstacle. But as we approach the branch to Deerfield, he goes straight on. We would then probably, as in the case of the chemist, say that he's made a mistake. But now there's a difference: while in both cases a correction of the mistake would consist in a correction of

the prediction, this correction could not be regarded as sufficient in the second case. We would in both cases say that the person in question did not know what would happen; but in the second case the person would have also to correct the action. It would be rather a kind of joke, if, under the given premises, the driver would say: 'Oh yes, I see, what I said was wrong' -- and continue to drive along.

Another way to put this would be: taken as an expression of intention, the prediction of the driver would not be affected by his mistake. Though we would say that he did know what would happen, we would not say that he didn't have that intention, and we would not deny his knowledge of how to execute it. We would therefore not deny his right to declare that same intention with those very same words again; so we would not deny that his claim to know was justified -- we would otherwise deny his capacity to correct his mistake.

Now, it might be that the driver would again fail to execute his declared intention. Our confidence would then be shaken. And if this were to happen several times, there would come the point at which we would say that his claim was unjustified too. But this would not leave our judgement about his intention untouched either: it would amount to denying his right to declare that intention.

The relationship described thus far between willing, knowledge and execution is not a logical one. It is not true that always when there is an intention it is also true that there is an execution. This is not only clear from the above-mentioned cases of forgetting one's intention, changing one's mind or being prevented. It is also shown exactly by the possibility of being practically mistaken, as we might call it, where there also is an intention but

no execution corresponding to it. This last possibility is of a different order from the previous ones. Not forgetting, not changing one's mind, and not being prevented are what Hempel would call 'antecedent conditions' of the agent's acting on the intention in question; whereas in the case of the practical error the execution must be attempted before the error can take place. Thus the non-occurrence of practical error is not one of the antecedent conditions of the agent's acting; it is instead the other way around: acting is an antecedent condition of the non-occurrence or occurrence of practical error.

But neither is it a relationship of contingency: given that the person is not lying to us, forgetting his (her) intention etc., then that person will execute his (her) intention. And he or she will normally be successful in this execution and sometimes fail, committing a practical mistake.

So (1) to say that this is not a logical relationship means that not always when it is true that somebody has an intention, is it also true that the execution will follow.

(2) To say that the relationship is not contingent either is to say that always when somebody intends to do x he will do so (if he is not forgetting etc.) or practically fail to do so, and that if he succeeds, this is not by grace of fate but

(3) rather because there is a grammatical relationship, as we might say according to Wittgenstein, between intention and execution: if somebody declares an intention, and does not lie to us etc. but then does nothing to make his declaration true, we would then say that he does not understand what it means to say 'I am going to....'

That he will execute his intention upon his declaration does not amount to saying that his intention is one of the premises from which a conclusion could be inferred saying that he will act. So the knowledge expressed in his prediction 'I am going to...' is not knowledge by proof. Rather somebody who expresses his intention that way declares that he will do something, namely to make that prediction true, to execute that intention. So he knows what will happen because he will do it.

It can now be made clear what the philosophical confusion of the wish-theorist consists. From the logical independence of willing on the one hand and the will's execution on the other, or from the possibility of failure in executing one's own intentions, the wish-theorist argues what he mistakenly thinks to be an empirical thesis: we have found in the past that we sometimes fail in executing our intentions; as this might always happen, we cannot claim practical knowledge, namely, that our intentions will be executed.

Of course it is conceivable that this might always happen. But then the possibility of speaking of intentions would be lost.

In this respect willing is similar to wishing. Therefore the second thesis of the wish-theorist might be formulated as a definitional one: 'willing' means 'a particular kind of overwhelming strong wish.'

But these facts, namely the logical independence of willing and execution, and that sometimes our intentions are not executed, are not at issue. The point is rather a grammatical one: by ascribing an intention to somebody (and by expressing an intention of our own) we ascribe (or declare) a certain knowledge. This is how we use 'intention';

this is what the expression means. The same is not the case with 'wish.' We use 'wish' to mean that we at least believe we do not know if the fulfillment will come true. Therefore willing is not a particular kind of wishing.

So the wish-theorist argues from logical independence to the likeness of willing and wishing with regard to knowledge. But he can do so only because in the case of wishing, as opposed to the case of willing, the particular grammatical link to knowledge is absent.⁷

Now the proponent of the wish-theory, confronted with this grammatical analysis, might nevertheless stick to his thesis that we cannot know. But in this case the thesis would have changed its status. If we don't follow him in his proposal, we are not committing ourselves, as the wish-theorist might have originally thought, to the view that there is a logical dependence between willing and execution. Practical error shows just this relationship to be one of logical independence. We only insist on a grammatical rule, namely that 'intending such-and-such' means 'knowing that such-and-such will happen.' So if the wish-theorist sticks to his proposal all he insists on is to change that grammatical rule. And there is no reason to follow him in this proposal.

His empirical claim turned out to be just a grammatical proposal. Unlike an empirical claim, the proposal of a rule cannot be disproved. But it might be rejected, if it is not backed by arguments. His argument was the argument of failure. But the consideration of practical error shows that this argument does not touch our practical knowledge.

4. Hume's Theory of Action in Contemporary Discussion

I will compare two accounts of the topic of willing and execution taken from current discussion, namely D. Davidson's causal theory of action and G.H. von Wright's theory of the logical dependence between the verification of the intention and the execution. I will argue that the confrontation between the two theories is about Hume's thesis of the logical independence between willing and executing. Depending on the respective assertion or negation of logical independence each of them draws his conclusion concerning our knowledge of what will happen.

In "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" Davidson argues that a "primary reason," composed of a desire and a belief about how to fulfill that desire, is the cause of the action which the belief is about.⁸ I have argued throughout this paper (and hence will not argue once again), that this description is not correct, not because the desire (plus the belief) and the execution are logically dependent on one another, but because they are grammatically dependent.

G.H. von Wright argues in his Explanation and Understanding that there is in a sense a logical independence between willing and executing; but this means only that we might change our mind or might be prevented. In another sense there is a 'logical or conceptual' connection between the two. For von Wright this is shown by the fact that we cannot verify the existence of an intention without relying on the existence of the respective execution, and vice versa. Now this result alone would suffice to disprove the causal theory. But von Wright not only endeavours to prove his result, he also tries to show how there might be a logical necessity in the relationship between intention and execution. This

necessity, he finally argues, exists only post hoc: given all the premises of a practical syllogism before the action, he who deliberates that way does not have to act, even if he does not change his mind and is not prevented.⁹

Davidson, following the modern interpretation of causality, sticks to the Humean and Tractatus-epistemology: as the proposal of a causal law is to be understood simply as the bringing forward of a hypothesis, we cannot in the end really know if the execution will follow upon our volition.

It is the conclusion of von Wright's analysis that the relationship in question is not necessary if inspected ante actum. So again it looks as if we would not know if the execution would follow upon our will. But von Wright interprets this use of the relationship -- of a "practical syllogism" -- as being that of a commitment.¹⁰ Here he seems to be as near as possible to the insight that the relationship is something completely different from that of a logical necessity. But since his use of "knowledge" is already determined by the paradigm that we know if we can give a proof, he doesn't make much out of this term, which he mentions by the way. He might otherwise have recognised that -- as with intention -- we can say that somebody commits himself to an action (and that we ourselves can do that) only if we can also say that he (we) know(s) how to carry it out.

Unlike Davidson, von Wright draws a distinction between willing and wishing.¹¹ But he conceives of this distinction in terms of logical independence: desires, he says, could have a causal influence on behaviour. So I take both of them to be wish-theorists of a sort: by seeing in logical independence the essential feature for the description of

the relationship between willing and execution, whether that feature might be present (Davidson) or not (von Wright).

The main thesis of this paper is that grammatical, and not logical, features make the correct description of that relationship possible, and that the investigation of these features -- forgotten by the empiricists -- have again been neglected in current discussion. This might be a symptom of the enormous fascination of the theoretical way of looking at the world.

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- 1. See G.H. von Wright, "On So-called Practical Inference," in Practical Reason, Philosophical Papers, vol. I, (New York: 1983), p. 19.
- 2. D. Hume, An Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), Sect. VII, Part I. Further references will be cited as 'E' followed by the relevant page number(s).
- 3. See G.E.M. Anscombe, Intention, (Oxford: 1957), Par. 36.
- 4. Wittgenstein possibly developed this view of causality in his complex dialogue with Bertrand Russell, who wrote at that time:

Historically, the notion of cause has been bound up with that of human volition. The typical cause would be the fiat of a king. The cause is supposed to be 'active,' the effect 'passive.' From this it is easy to pass on to the suggestion that a 'true' cause must contain some prevision of the effect; hence the effect becomes the 'end'

at which the cause aims, and teleology replaces causation in the explanation of nature. But all such ideas, as applied to physics, are mere anthropomorphic superstitions. (Our Knowledge of the External World, Cambridge 1914, p. 173)

It is interesting that Russell immediately goes on to define intentional action as caused by desire:

Consider such a statement as 'Brutus killed Caesar'.... We may say that to kill a person is to cause his death intentionally. This means that desire for a person's death causes a certain act, because it is believed that that act will cause the person's death; or more accurately, the desire and the belief jointly cause the act. (L.c., p. 174)

We may say that if this is the accurate reconstruction of intentional action, then the model of human volition for causality in nature would have caused no trouble.

5. This is shown by William James' philosophy of action, which is often serving as a kind of target for Wittgenstein's later criticism of psychologism. In The Principles of Psychology, after having established the prevalence of an idea as the terminus of the psychology of volition, James gives the following commentary:

I will to write, and the act follows. I will to sneeze, and it does not. I will that the distant table slide over the floor towards me; it also does not. My willing representation can no more instigate my sneezing-centre than it can instigate the table to activity. But in both cases it is as true and good willing as it was when I willed to write.

He adds this footnote:

Many persons say that when they disbelieve in the effects ensuing, as in the case of the table, they cannot will it. They 'cannot exert a volition that a table should move.' This personal difference may be partly verbal. Different people may attach different connotations to the word 'will.' I incline to think that we

differ psychologically as well. When one knows that he has no power, one's desire of a thing is called a wish and not a will. The sense of impotence inhibits the volition. Only by abstracting from the thought of the impossibility am I able energetically to imagine strongly the table sliding over the floor, to make the bodily 'effort' which I do, and to will it to come towards me. It may be that some people are unable to perform this abstraction, and that the image of the table stationary on the floor inhibits the contradictory image of its moving, which is the object to be willed. (L.C., Vol. II, p. 560)

Here James states in the text, that willing is independent of what happens, like the idle wish. (Certainly it is an idle wish if "I will the distant table to slide..." under these circumstances.)

He is then aware that there is a difference between the two, reflected by the linguistic fact that we have these two expressions, wishing and willing. But he can conceive of this difference only as given a psychological one, that certain people are unable, under certain conditions, to perform a certain psychological act.

6. See her beautiful example, Intention, Par. 32.
7. Which is not to say that there isn't any grammatical link between "wishing" and fulfilment: we would not say that somebody wished such-and-such if, given the opportunity to get such-and-such when no other, contradictory wishes interfere, he does not turn his wish into an intention and try to get it.
8. D. Davidson, Actions and Events, (Oxford: 1980), pp. 3-19.
9. G.H. von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, (New York: 1971), pp. 115-117.
10. von Wright, p. 117, note 33; and "On So-Called Practical Inference," Sect. 10, in Practical Reason, (New York: 1983).
11. von Wright, Explanation and Understanding, p. 95.

Conclusion

We have argued in these two papers that the Aristotelian tradition conceived of volition, especially intention, as a particular form of knowledge, practical knowledge, which Aquinas distinguished from theoretical knowledge as the cause of its own object, i.e., of the agent's final cause or goal. This insight, which goes back to Aristotle's notion of the autonomy of the practical syllogism, was obscured by the hostility of empiricism, especially in Hume's radical version, towards the concept of final causation. That hostility has since hardened into prejudice, but the insight itself has also suffered from its formulation in the unfashionable terminology of Thomist rational psychology.

In recent philosophy Wittgenstein rediscovered the epistemic aspect of volition, which he thought of as a criterion in the language-game in which intentions are attributed: we speak of intentions precisely where the agent knows, without observation or induction, what s/he is doing or shall do because the deed or its result is his or her goal. In working out the details of this insight Anscombe has shown its fundamental identity, in spite of different starting points and methods, with the positions of Aristotle and St. Thomas. One important upshot of her work has been three decades of fascinating and lively debate in contemporary philosophy of human action.