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From Practical Knowledge to Forms of Life: Toward an Account of the Unity of Animal Action

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***Abstract*:** This paper explores the idea of animal intentional action. My aim is to advance a thesis about the logical form that our judgment takes when attributing intentionality to animal action, thereby allowing us to distinguish it from human action. To this end, I first criticize the so-called "standard theory of action" —which locates intentionality in mental events separate from the event itself— for its failure to adequately explain how we ascribe intentionality to animals in the first place. I then develop an alternative within theories of practical knowledge, particularly Anscombe's account, which explains in a different way the unity and form of human action. My thesis holds that whereas human action derives its unity from practical knowledge as the agent's self-consciousness of practical means and ends, animal action —lacking such self-consciousness— receives its unity through our judgments that refer to their very "forms of life", a notion I explain by drawing on Michael Thompson's theory.

1. Introduction

Action presents itself as an event in the world that invites us to ask whether it was performed intentionally or not by the agent. In the case of human action, one of the fundamental tools at our disposal for uncovering whether the action was intentional or not is to ask the agent and receive an answer that expresses their desires, beliefs, and so forth. What is particularly intriguing, however, is when an occurrence that exhibits the same form is carried out by agents who do not appear to possess those same capacities, i.e., non-human animals. We cannot ask an animal what it intended to do when it acted as it did, and yet we nevertheless say that it acted as it did. Suppose, for example, that my dog climbs onto the bed and lies down next to me. Intuitively, we recognize this as a kind of action that the dog performs intentionally, especially when compared with actions that my dog does not perform intentionally, such as running and crashing into the wall, or attempting to lie down beside me but moving too close to the edge of the bed, falling off, hitting the floor, and expressing pain.

These questions arise not only when considering animal action itself, but already in the attempt to conceptually clarify the idea of intentionality in humans. Indeed, this is precisely how part of the research problem is introduced in Anscombe's classic *Intention*. Anscombe begins by presenting the problem of intention, showing that the term appears in three distinct, non-univocal ways: the expression of intention, the intention with which something was done, and intentional action (Anscombe, 2000, p. 1). In seeking to explain the first notion, Anscombe distinguishes it from a command, insofar as in the case of a command it makes no sense to speak of the expression of a command —the command is already a speech act. By contrast, in the case

of intention it does make sense to speak of the expression of intention. The consequence of this, therefore, is that in the expression of an intention it is logically possible to separate the expression —as a speech act— from that which is the object of the expression, namely the intention itself. This apparent distinction between *expression of* and intention becomes particularly clear when we consider animal action, as reflected in the following passage from Anscombe:

> "Intention appears to be something that we can express, but which brutes (which e.g. do not give orders) can *have*, though lacking any distinct expression of intention. For a cat's movements in stalking a bird are hardly to be called an expression of intention. One might as well call a car's stalling the *expression* of its being about to stop. Intention is unlike emotion in this respect, that the expression of it is purely conventional; we might say 'linguistic', if we will allow certain bodily movements with a conventional meaning to be included in language. Wittgenstein seems to me to have gone wrong in speaking of 'the natural expression of an intention' (*Philosophical Investigations,* P. 647)." (Anscombe, 200, P. 5)

Although the purpose of the previous passage is to clarify conceptually one of the ways of speaking about intention, it is interesting to note that we can distinguish different situations: (a) the movement of a car coming to a stop; (b) the movement of a cat stalking a bird; (c) the movement of a human stalking a bird. To distinguish them, one might say the following: in both (a) and (b), neither the car nor the animal possesses the capacity to express anything linguistically. However, (b) shares with (c) —and differs from (a)— in that we attribute intention to it. Thus, only the human would be capable of linguistically expressing an intention such as "I am moving stealthily because I am stalking a bird". This shows, therefore, that it is not necessary for the cat to communicate linguistically that it is pursuing the bird in order for us to say that, in that case, the cat has the intention of pursuing the bird. The fundamental question, then, is how it is possible to speak of intention in action, both in animals and in humans, if linguistic expression is not essential to it.

2. A First Approach: Tracing Animal Action in Their Minds

Anscombe suggests that the distinction between the expression of intention and that which is expressed invites us to consider the natural idea that intention is something internal (Anscombe, 2000, p. 5). But how are we to understand this natural invitation? A crucial part of how the problem is presented toward the end of the previous section rests upon a particular conception of the structure of action. The discussion in the philosophy of action has long been shaped by Wittgenstein's classic question: "when 'I raise my arm,' my arm goes up. And the problem arises: What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" (Wittgenstein, 1968, § 621). The relevance of this question lies in the fact that the formulation "my arm rises" is a purely physical description of the world, whereas "I raise my arm" is formulated as an action. In this context, one possible approach is to suggest that the explanation of the nature of action begins with an event that is not intrinsically intentional, to which a further factor is added that renders it intentional (Lavin, 2015, p. 610). The fundamental implication of this is that there would be a psychological or mental factor analytically distinguishable from the elements of movement and causality present in the description of both the event and the intentional action (Lavin, 2015, p. 613). In the case of the human being, the person's own expression of intention would —provided sincerity— indicate precisely those mental states that make the occurrence an intentional one.[1] As we already know, in the case of the animal the problem arises insofar as it would not be capable of expressing such mental states linguistically —or of giving us information that would allow us to imply them— and thus we are faced with the difficulty of how to account for those mental states in order to attribute intentional actions.

One possible approach is to understand that propositional attitudes involved in action can be explained not merely as a relation between language and mental states —as something that expresses and something expressed— but rather as a relation in which language is itself the necessary condition for the existence of such propositional attitudes. This strategy has been principally advanced by Donald Davidson. Davidson poses the question of what makes an

[1] Even when we refer to something other than a desire and a belief, Davidson believes it would still imply the presence of a desire and a belief: "If you tell me you are easing the jib because you think that will stop the main from backing, I don't need to be told that you want to stop the main from backing" (Davidson, 2001, p. 15).

animal rational, that is, to what extent we can say that an animal has propositional attitudes.[2] Davidson's thesis is that an animal cannot have thoughts —that is, propositional attitudes— precisely because it cannot have language, for in order to have thought the animal must be able both to express it and to interpret the thought and speech of others (Davidson, 1982, p. 322; for the idea of interpretation, see also Davidson, 2001b). Thus, we may explain the behavior of animals by attributing propositional attitudes to them, while at the same time recognizing that such creatures do not themselves possess those attitudes (Davidson, 1982, p. 324). The argument proceeds as follows: in order to have a belief, it is necessary to have the concept of belief. This is because to have a belief one must possess the concept of objective truth, and the concept of belief is precisely the concept of a state of an organism that can be true or false (Davidson, 1982 p. 326). Then —and here lies the crucial step— to have the concept of belief it is essential to have language. This is because the objective–subjective contrast depends on linguistic communication, insofar as language implies a shared world where we find alternative interpretations, and those alternative interpretations are precisely what is necessary as a standard of truth. Thus, shared language constitutes the concept of an intersubjective world and, Davidson argues, the idea of an intersubjective world is precisely the idea of an objective world (Davidson, 1982, p. 327).

Now, the fact that the objectivity grounding belief is found in language compels us to ask what makes language, as a shared world, a standard of truth. The idea toward which Davidson seems to be pointing is that the correctness or incorrectness of a belief depends on the fact that it may be identified as true or false in linguistic communication by virtue of an alternative interpretation. Linguistic communication thus appears as the space in which the propositional attitudes of agents are normatively evaluated, and this presents it as the locus where the standard of truth becomes a standard. Yet the mere fact that language is the arena in which

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[2] Although this question is directed toward the possession of propositional attitudes, at least in Davidson's theory its connection with intentional action must be direct, since intentional action is precisely that which can be explained in terms of desires and beliefs whose propositional contents rationalize the action (Davidson, 1982, p. 321). The connection between language and animal action, along a line similar to Davidson's, has been explored by Stoecker, who argues that agency is a skill dependent upon a sophisticated social practice, namely, the practice of public deliberation. This practice, of course, is one that animals cannot possess, even if they employ certain forms of communication. The conclusion, then, is that animals do not act in the strict sense, insofar as acting requires an alignment with reason that is realized within that social practice (See Stoecker, 2009).

such normative evaluations take place does not explain why this is so. Reference to language alone cannot account for the normativity present in these practices unless, once again, we draw a connection between linguistic communication and thought. Accordingly, the normative character of linguistic communication depends on the fact that other speakers possess the same capacities as the speaker subject to critique; that is, the capacity to express beliefs with a claim to truth. Linguistic communication is not a shared world that functions as a normative standard simply because it is the place where such evaluations occur, but because it is the place where speakers express these normative attitudes. If this is so, then Davidson is effectively telling us that the concept of truth underlying belief depends on a structure —linguistic communication— that itself rests upon agents who communicate beliefs linguistically with a claim to truth. Therefore, he is proposing that a belief specified within a properly human practice cannot be applied to a non-human animal. This seems trivially true and leaves open the question of whether we may continue to speak of belief in some different sense in the case of animals, either because the concept is broader, or because it takes a distinct form in the case of animals.

Part of the problem with Davidson's position is clearly expressed in a critique advanced some time ago by Searle. Let us return to the case of the cat pursuing the bird. At first the cat sees and smells the bird, and for that reason pursues it. Suppose that suddenly the bird manages to hide in a tree. Even though the cat can no longer see or smell it, the cat remains in an attack position in case the bird should reappear. Searle argues that such behavior becomes unintelligible without the assumption that, in this case, the animal has desires and beliefs (Searle, 1994, p. 212), namely, the desire to eat the bird and the belief that the bird remains in the treetop. The problem with a theory such as Davidson's, Searle maintains, lies in identifying "truth" or "falsity" as essentially semantic predicates in a metalanguage. More fundamentally, they are meta-intentional predicates —that is, predicates used to evaluate the success or failure of representations in the mind-to-world direction of fit (Searle, 1994, p. 212). The animal does not require language, but simply a mechanism for recognizing the world and for identifying whether it is as the animal desires it to be (Searle, 1994, p. 212). In this sense, and continuing the critique of Davidson, linguistic behavior would be relevant only because certain assumptions have already been made about its structure (Searle, 1994, p. 217). Thus, the correctness or incorrectness of the cat's behavior does not depend on the way in which it understands its own belief —i.e., whether it has a belief about the truth value of its belief— but rather on the success or failure of its action: that is, whether, upon climbing, the bird is in fact in the treetop.

The question, however, remains: how are we to account for the mental states or representations of animals that allow us to speak of intentional animal action if they are incapable of linguistically expressing such mental states? The idea that intentionality is a feature of the mind by which it is directed toward or about objects and states of affairs in the world (Searle, 1994, p. 206) seems to be a stipulation too general to explain how we succeed in attributing intentionality to one or another animal action. Intentionality so described appears rather as the conclusion reached through the identification of a set of behaviors exhibiting that structure. But such identification itself depends on something else. Searle, for example, considers that the identification of mental phenomena in the case of animals depends on a "biological naturalism", that is, on identifying consciousness and mental phenomena as parts of a biological process occurring within the various animal and human brains (Searle, 1994, p. 217). In this sense, the question of intentionality amounts to the assumption of an empirical thesis: namely, that the determination of animal intentionality depends on natural processes that are to be uncovered through empirical investigation.

Although such theories help to clarify the tools by which we identify a given action as one performed by a given animal —and thereby as something the animal desires or believes itself to be doing— the fundamental philosophical question remains unresolved: namely, how to identify animal behavior in the first place as behavior endowed with intentionality. This is reminiscent of the difficulty that Michael Thompson identifies with respect to empiricist propositions about the concept of life and its different forms, which hold that "substantive knowledge of any given individual (…) can only arise from observation"(Thompson, 2004, p. 58). The fundamental problem, Thompson argues, stems from the fact that certain vital phenomena may be observationally identified in different ways, and conversely, observable physical phenomena may be similar while failing to account for the same vital phenomena (Thompson, 2004, p. 64). For example, reproduction may take very different forms in the case of very small vital units —such as viruses— and in animals, and yet the vital phenomenon is the same. Also, the same observable phenomenon —variation in skin color— may correspond to distinct vital phenomena. In the chameleon, it functions as camouflage or social signaling, whereas in certain amphibians it serves primarily for thermoregulation. In this way, conceiving of a process such as reproduction or a variation in skin color as fulfilling a specific function involves a previous judgment about the particular form of life under analysis, which allows these observations to be understood as corresponding to distinct or similar vital phenomena. Basically,

the same happens with intentional animal action as way of being a form of life: it is not that the empirical investigations about mental states enable us to understand the form of animal action —not in that order, at least. Rather, it is our judgment about an animal life as such that allows us to ascribe propositional attitudes to it.

This observation points to a general problem in philosophical explanation. Anscombe notes that in order to identify an intentional action we cannot simply say that it is such because one can give a reason for it, since we can also give a reason for a non-intentional action, such as a spasm or an involuntary movement of the heart. If the reply is, "ah, but in the latter case it is not a reason *for acting*, but a physical cause," then we are moving in circles, for we are saying that an action is intentional in virtue of a reason for the action (Anscombe, 2000, p. 10). Similarly, with respect to the question of what life is, Thompson argues that to distinguish a tarantula from a taxi we cannot appeal merely to the fact that one has parts, for the taxi also has parts. And if we then say "yes, but in the case of the tarantula the parts are in a vital organization", we are again moving in circles, for we are saying that life is a mode of organization of parts that is vital (Thompson, 2009, p. 48). The same occurs in our problem, namely, to assert that certain biological processes or mental representations explain animal intentional actions requires, first and foremost, explaining why the explanandum is already understood, at least, as an action. The answer cannot be: "because we notice that it is what the animal does", for that would lead us in a circular argument, for we are saying that an animal action is intentional in virtue of biological processes or mental representations in the context of an action. This does not mean that the problem is unanswerable, but rather that the mode of explanation appeals to make explicit the logical form of judgment when we consider animal action. In a certain sense, an investigation of this kind refers to what, in Fregean terms, we would understand as the form of predication, i.e. an action is not an object, but a way in which objects are related. In the next section, I will seek to outline an approach to understanding action from this point of view.

3. The Unity and Form of the Action

Towards the end of *Intention*, Anscombe presents one of the fundamental aspects of her theory of action, namely, that intentional action refers to a form of description of events (Anscombe, 2000, p. 84). By this route, Anscombe seeks to deny the idea that the intentionality of an action

depends on what she calls an "extra feature" that would make an event into an intentional action. That would be the natural way of understanding intentionality if we assumed that there are actions that can be performed both intentionally and unintentionally (Anscombe, 2000, p. 84). To better grasp the difference between a "standard theory" — as described at the beginning of the previous section and which is characterized precisely by its appeal to an "extra feature"— and a theory such as Anscombe's, it is useful to attend to the way Anton Ford has marked the distinction, namely, as a way of understanding the relation between an event and an action (Ford, 2011). There seems to be no doubt that action is a kind of event, but the question is: what kind of genus–species relation connects the two? To explain this, Ford turns to the three Aristotelian kinds of genus–species relations: accidental, categorial, and essential. The accidental genus–species relation is one in which the genus is not only logically more abstract but also metaphysically more fundamental, such that each species can be explained independently of the components of the other species (Ford, 2011, p. 83). Take the example of a coffee with milk. A coffee with milk is a species of the genus coffee, to which milk has been added. It can thus be represented arithmetically as the sum of coffee plus milk. The crucial point is that one can understand coffee and milk separately and then as a species of coffee when they are brought together, with milk functioning as the accidental element. This, Ford suggests, is the way in which the "standard theory", regardless of its particular variations, would be characterized: as the presence of an accidental extra feature —a mental factor, as Lavin would say— that added to the event results in the action. What is significant here is that both the mental event and the mere happening can be understood independently, since they are taken to be metaphysically more fundamental.

Ford's point is that Anscombe's claim —that action is a form of description of events— is best explained by noting that the genus–species relation at work here is categorial. In this kind of genus–species relation, there is no element distinct from the genus that explains the species; rather, the species is the determinate form of the genus. While the genus is logically more abstract —hence the genus— the species is metaphysically more fundamental or prior (Ford, 2011, p. 87). Ford illustrates this with the case of the circle or the horse —as species— in relation to the geometric figure or the animal —as genus. The question is: what elements are to be "added up" in order for an animal to be a horse, or for a geometric figure to be a circle? Unlike the case of coffee plus milk, here no further element can be added to the animal or the geometric figure to make them into a horse or a circle. Rather, the horse and the circle are simply the way in which

the genus —animal or geometrical figure— is determined. One cannot say, for instance, that a horse is the sum of "animal" plus a certain kind of foot, an average height, and specific facial features, since all of these already are the animal. In this sense, Ford claims, one cannot give a real definition of "horse" or "circle," because any attempt to do so will inevitably appeal to the very form being defined (Ford, 2011, p. 90). We cannot explain the horse without invoking the form of horse, just as we cannot explain the circle without saying that it is a circumference or an arrangement of points that already presupposes the form of the circle. The crucial point, Ford argues, is that this is the type of genus–species relation that applies to the relation between event and action: an action is metaphysically prior to the event, although logically less abstract (Ford, 2011, p. 99). This makes it possible to understand action not as an event plus some additional feature that turns it into an action, but rather as a determinate form of the event. And for this reason, just as no real definition of "horse" or "circle" can be given —at least not in terms of conditions external to explanandum— no such definition can be given of "action". Any feature appealed to in order to explain action will already presuppose that it belongs within the context of an action.[3]

Under this framework, what must be accounted for is, then, what would be the form of description of an event that makes it an action. What is relevant about intentional action in Anscombe is the fact that it is that with respect to which the question "why?" is given application (Anscombe, 2000, p. 24). What is crucial at the first instance is therefore not the answer, but the fact that it has a form that allows for the application of the question. In this sense, Anscombe says, the case of action is the same as with the question about the meaning of a word, since asking about the meaning of a word already presupposes having assumed that the word is a word with meaning (Anscombe, 2000, p. 83).[4] Thus, the "why" question has application because what it seeks is to uncover what "in order to" something was done, but the very question already

[3] Here what was already mentioned toward the end of the previous section in relation to Anscombe and Thompson and the type of philosophical explanation of action and life, respectively.

[4] In a similar sense, Ford points out —by comparing Anscombe's method in the study of action with Frege's in the study of arithmetic— that intentional action is that to which the "why" question has application, just as in the case of numbers the questions of quantity such as "how many" already presuppose the form of numbers. And the answer in either case is not what is relevant; for one would otherwise have to say, in the case of numbers, that they are countable because they can be counted, or in the case of action, that it is action because it is done for reasons for action. Rather, what matters is the form that they present (Ford, 2015).

shows that the action has that form and what remains is to make it explicit. This form has typically been represented in the A–D structure, as in the following example:

A) I am moving my arm.
B) Because I am breaking an egg.
C) Because I am making an omelet.
D) Because I am pleasing my friend.

The form of description of the action is explicitly displayed in the form taken by the answers to the "why?" question. What is interesting is that the "why?" question suggests a relevance of language in the ascription of intentionality in action. This would suggest that we cannot speak of animal intentional action, since they lack language. However, if the idea is that the form precedes the answer to the question then we precisely describe what animals do in a way that is perfectly compatible with the use of our concepts of intention, insofar as "we describe what further they are doing *in* doing something" (Anscombe, 2000, p. 86). Thus, the dog is moving its feet *in* getting up on the bed *in* going to rest with its owner, and so on. This is what Anscombe calls the "enlarged description" of what an agent does, and which would mark the form of action.

However, Anscombe acknowledges that an extended description can be given of any physical phenomenon, so it cannot be only that which sheds light on the form of intentional action (Anscombe, 2000, p. 86). Thus, we can say that more is happening to a volcano as the temperature rises and it erupts, insofar as we can situate it within a longer process. And we cannot respond, "ah, but it is not a way of extending the description as action," since that would fall into the same circularity we are trying to avoid. Thus, it is not only a matter of an extended description of what the agent does, but also of a kind of knowledge about what is being done (Anscombe, 2000, p. 86). Now then, how should we understand this knowledge? Notice that the very form of description as action can be applied to something the agent did not think they were doing. Suppose the following description:

E) He is moving his arm
F) Because he is breaking an egg
G) Because he is cooking scrambled eggs
H) Because he is pleasing his friend.

The third observer notices that the agent's technique is too poor to actually be making an omelet. Yet this second description still has the same form as the first, even if it is not something the agent knows they are doing. Thus, the series A–D and E–H would both have the form of action, but the first would be intentional because the subject knows what they are doing. But does this make sense in light of the attempt to deny an "extra feature" in the characterization of intentional action? Would this not mean that intentional action is precisely an event to which a cognitive condition has been added?

The key in all Anscombian theories lies in the particular idea of practical knowledge. However, there is a mistaken way of comprehending what Anscombe means by this, and it is the source of much misunderstanding of what it means to say that action is a form of description. A central part of this misunderstanding begins with Davidson's carbon paper example. With it, Davidson seeks to refute Anscombe, arguing that when writing the person does not know with precision what is being inscribed, and yet we would not say that they are not acting intentionally in writing what they write (Davidson, 2001b). The fundamental problem in Davidson and other recent debates on practical knowledge is that they present the issue according to the following separation: on one hand, the knowledge that the agent has of what they believe they are doing, and on the other hand, the description of what the agent actually does. Obstacles arise precisely from the discordance between the two. From this perspective, Anscombe's theory undoubtedly appears flawed. However, the fundamental question is how we shape, not the agent's knowledge, but the description of what the agent does. In other words, within this understanding of practical knowledge, how is it possible to determine its object of knowledge, that is, the action.[5] It is crucial, for understanding Anscombe, to take seriously the idea that practical knowledge "is the cause of what it understands", and that, in this sense, it has a structure that is quite distinct from speculative knowledge which is derived from the objects known (Anscombe, 2000, p. 87). In this respect, the mistaken way of interpreting practical knowledge lies precisely in understanding it as a kind of speculative knowledge about what one is doing.

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[5] See, for example, the various debates on anti-luminosity arguments in action, in which the conditions of such practical knowledge are precisely discussed under the scrutiny of examples that challenge it (see Glasscock, 2019). It is noteworthy that one of the responses involves identifying that the cognitive condition is weaker, namely, that one merely knows that they are acting, rather than knowing that they are acting intentionally (Beddor & Pavese, 2022). But how can the latter be possible?

To explain what this means, let us note that a fundamental aspect of the A–D series is that can also be represented in the D–A form and, along this path, the relevant question is no longer "why?" but "how?". For instance: How are you pleasing your friend? By making him an omelet, and so forth. In this sense, Ford argues, the reverse of the "why?" question —namely, the "how?" question—no longer reveals "the structure of what one thinks insofar as one thinks about action. Rather, its opposite, calculation, reveals the structure of what one thinks insofar as one is acting" (Ford, 2017, p. 227). In this sense, the series D–A now represents the agent's practical reasoning in action and the self-consciousness that the agent possesses, while acting, of what they are doing and of the means necessary to achieve the end they have set. Here precisely is where we find the idea of practical knowledge, i.e., is that which gives unity and its enlarged form to action, insofar as the A–D series becomes a series with that teleological order inasmuch as the agent self-consciously recognizes that order. As Lavin points out, "the agent herself is aware of the elements that are ordered (for if she were not aware of them, the relevant why-question would not apply), and of the order in which they stand (for it is precisely this order that she is expected to articulate in response to Anscombe's question 'Why?') (Lavin, 2015, p. 621). Thus, in Anscombe the idea of practical knowledge as the cause of what it understand appeals to the notion of a "formal principle that unifies action", i.e., "the formal cause of its object, or that in virtue of which a person's movements and their effects constitute a unity of means and ends" (Schwenkler, 2015, p. 4). Practical knowledge is not knowledge of the event but rather that without which such events could not be described as actions at all (Schwenkler, 2015, p. 7). The fundamental point, therefore, lies in the fact that practical knowledge is not explained by the idea of antecedent cognitive elements that cause or explain the action, but rather by the idea that cognitive elements are the form of the event as an action, thereby providing its unity.

This different understanding of practical knowledge also allows us to comprehend the relationship between intentional and non-intentional action, avoiding reference to an extra feature. Ford characterizes this as a third type of Aristotelian genus–species relation, namely, the essential one. In this type, the specie that is essential is neither more nor less fundamental than the genus, there is no priority (Ford, 2011, p. 91). One example is the relation between inference, valid inference, and invalid inference. Inference is the genus, whose species are valid and invalid inference, but valid inference is the essential form of inference, since we need to understand its correct form to understand the genus. In the same sense, the relation between intentional action and action can be understood: action is the genus, and intentional action is the species that

constitutes the essence of the genus. Thus, action in general cannot be understood without grasping its essential form, which is intentional action. Non-intentional action, in turn, is merely an incorrect form of the same, in which the agent does not do what happens. What is relevant is that if the form is the same in the case of non-intentional action, then the attribution of error to the agent acting, as in case E–F, is explained either as an error on the part of the observer in ascribing a kind of practical knowledge to the agent in doing what they do, or as an error in the agent's own acting. In the latter case, the agent, while reasoning practically in a certain way, does not act as they believe, i.e., the mistake is in the performance (Anscombe, 2000, p. 5). Yet, to understand this mistake precisely as a mistake in performance already implies recognizing that the agent possesses a practical knowledge that confers unity upon an action, even if failed.[6]

Now, the question is how this connects with the issue of animal intentional action. If what gives form and unity to action is practical knowledge understood in this way, then there is no longer an appeal to a separate mental state that allows intentionality to be attributed to an event, but rather a dependence of the form of the event as an action on a mode of reason. But the question is: how do we give that form and unity to animals? Should we also speak of practical knowledge? And if so, can it be in the same form as in the case of humans?

4. On Animal Action: From Practical Knowledge to Forms of Life

Toward the conclusion of his work on animal action in Anscombe, Martin Gustafsson raises the question of how action, animal action, and human action relate to one another, considering the types of genus–species distinctions in the Aristotelian sense introduced by Ford in this discussion. In this regard, he leaves open the question of whether the relationship between animal action and action is of the essential genus–species type, in which case animal action would not constitute the essence but precisely the impure form —analogous to invalid inference— whereas the essential form would be human action and the genus would be action; or whether it is rather a categorial genus–species relationship in which animal and human actions are two

[6] About mistakes in the performance, Haddock says: "They may rather constitute what we might call "hiccups" or "glitches"— mistakes of performance that do not falsify statements as to what one is doing, and thereby allow for the possibility of one's practical knowledge remaining the same, in spite of one's mistake" (Haddock, 2011, p. 169).

distinct determinations of the same genus, namely action, whose metaphysical priority over the genus does not entail priority between species (see generally Gustafsson, 2016, p. 234). Gustafsson notes that animal action does not appear to be a failed version of action; it does not seem to possess the same type of imperfection as invalid inference, and in this sense, the difference appears not to correspond to a hierarchical distinction but to a symmetrical distinction between different types (Gustafsson, 2016, p. 234).

There is one way of approaching Gustafson's question that, in light of the analysis in the previous section, seems incorrect. If the form of action depends on an extended description of what an agent does —represented in the A–D structure—, then the form of human and animal action need not differ: following Anscombe, both are doing something more *in* doing what they do. In this sense, conceiving of animal action in relation to human action as if it marked a different kind of event may be mistaken. However, there is another way of understanding this suggestion that does guide the research question. Gustafsson states that what is peculiar to human intentional action is that it transgresses the biological limits that constrain animal action, and that this transgression involves concepts such as freedom, self-consciousness, and practical knowledge (Gustafsson, 2016, P. 234). In a certain sense, it is one thing for the extended form of action not to change from human to animal and to be what characterizes an event as an action, and quite another how that extended form of action becomes what it is. As we have seen in the case of human action, this form corresponds to an attribution of practical reasoning to the agent, and Gustafsson's point is that there seems to be something distinctive in the way the whole A–D structure is unified in the human case that is absent in the animal case. This suggestion invites us to think not in terms of a difference between human and animal action, but in terms of their respective modes of rationality, insofar as the source that unifies the action as a whole is drawn from these modes.

Discussions regarding human and animal rationality are typically marked by two types of theories. On the one hand, there are "additive theories of rationality", i.e. "theories that defend that the package of capacities that make us rational as something that might be 'added on' to a mind that already forms an intelligible system apart from this addition" (Boyle, 2016, p. 528). On the other hand, there are "transformative theories of rationality", i.e. "Such theories take the very nature of perceptual and desiderative capacities to be transformed by the presence of rationality, in a way that makes rational perceiving and rational desiring essentially different from their merely animal counterparts" (Boyle, 2016, p. 530). In this sense, it is not an addition of

appetitive, sentient and rational parts, but rather a mode in which the soul is configured in having these three faculties.[7] The point of transformative theories is that those beings who possess a sentient and an appetitive part —supposedly animals— do not simply have one more faculty than those who possess only a sentient part —supposedly plants. As Haase argues, it is not that the general form of the soul functions as a schema for each type of soul; rather, it is the articulation of the principle of its order, and each living being is the ground of its own organization into parts (Haase, 2016, p. 107). Thus, it is not a matter of having more or fewer faculties, but of the way in which these faculties are arranged.

If we assume that this last theory fits more appropriately with the type of philosophical explanation proposed toward the end of the second section, we must say that human rationality is a *mode* of rationality that modifies the appetitive and sentient parts. If each living being is the ground of its own organization into parts, then "the power of thought is the power of self-organization" (Haase, 2016, p. 107). Accordingly, says Haase, in the subjectivity of the mere organism, such as a plant, these faculties are merely formal —that is, one can think of them in terms of three phases; in the subjectivity of the conscious animal, these three faculties are three aspects that develop in an interrelated yet distinct process. And in the subjectivity of the self-conscious being, what is distinctive is that the three faculties appear as a division arising from subjectivity itself (Haase, 2016, p. 109). In a similar vein, Eric Marcus attempts to resolve the problem of how to sustain the claim that there is animal action —and that such action, insofar as it is arranged in a means–ends structure, presupposes practical knowledge— while also accounting for the fact that animals do not appear as rational beings in the same way as humans. Following a Transformative Theory, Marcus argues that the difference lies precisely in how one understands this power, since only rational creatures are capable of determining which ends are worth pursuing and practical thought in humans is the exercise of such power (Marcus, 2021, p. 8). In this sense, "the intention of the animal exists only as realized in behavior" (Marcus, 2021, p. 22). This, we might say, is consistent with Haase and helps clarify his position: it is not that animals lack a mode of rationality, but that the form of their rationality —and the way in which

[7] Although the reference to the "soul" here may seem unwarranted or vague, in the cited literature it refers to the Aristotelian division into three parts of the soul: the sentient, the appetitive, and the rational. It is not an empirically obscure concept, but rather a conceptual way of unifying these very parts.

it orders their actions within a means–ends structure— is realized in its own act and not in the self-conscious assumption of certain practical ends.

If this is correct, then I am now in a position to present my thesis. Whereas in the human case the unity and form of action is given by the subject's practical knowledge as a form of self-consciousness of certain practical ends and their means —that is, as the mode of its rationality— in the case of the animal such practical knowledge lacks self-consciousness. Lacking self-consciousness, the animal lacks the capacity to organize its own activity in that way; instead, the organization of its own activity is based on its being as an animal —let us say on the mode of being the animal that it is— with respect to which it lacks the self-awareness to determine itself as such. This distinction is reflected in the way the "why?" question applies. In the human case, we have already discussed how the answer aims to make explicit the agent's practical reasoning. In this sense, the human form of life does not admit, as a coherent answer, "because he is human". Yet it does seem to make sense, within a chain of responses to the question of why a dog runs in circles after eating, to reply: "because he is a dog".[8] Of course, the literal answer does not provide information, but the plausibility of the response lies in the implication that this is what dogs do, such that we can then make a further judgment of the kind: dogs run in circles after eating. This does not mean, once again, that animals do not act; it means that the unity of conscious action differs from that of self-conscious action. In the case of the animal, we cannot expect a kind of answer that refers to how the animal *itself*, in the execution of the action, links its means-ends in a D–A series. What we expect is a kind of response that refers to the way in which that animal specifically is, this is, the form of life of the animal.

But is not this notion of the form of life an empirical matter, which was precisely what I was attempting to deny? Let us return to Thompson to account for the logical structure of the judgment concerning the form of life. Thompson argues that the type of judgment expressed when we speak about life are what he calls "natural-historical judgments", which exhibit the following structure: "The S is F." For instance, "the cat has four legs" (Thompson, 2009, p. 64). What matters is that the reference to a form of life is already contained in the thought of the individual (Thompson, 2009, p. 81). This means that any judgment concerning an individual living being presupposes a logical form that represents the individual as a bearer of a form of life and thereby refers to a natural-historical judgment. Thus, for example, when we classify an

[8] I am grateful to Joris Veefkind for this point.

insect as a certain type, we are attending to a *wider context* that can already be discerned in the form of the insect itself (Thompson, 2009, p. 81). For this reason, it is not necessary to possess complete knowledge of a given form of life in order to make such judgments and, for this reason, empirical investigation into what is a form of life comes after the fact of having already considered that individual as bearing one form of life or another. The logical structure of this judgment is what enables empirical investigation, not the other way around. Thus, if we understand that the animal's mode of rationality is a conscious mode that lack self-consciousness, and that conscious action is an action that refers to the form of life of the agent, then in attributing an intentional action, our judgment takes the logical form explained by Thompson. We say that a dog acts as it does because we are attending to a wider context that refers to "natural-historical judgments" about dogs. The A-D series —such as dog is moving its feet *in* getting up on the bed *in* going to rest with its owner, and so on— it finds its unity in the implicit reference to a wider context, namely, the form of life of which that dog is a bearer. Empirical investigation will help us to determine that wider context more clearly, but what is relevant is that the judgment concerning animal intentional action has this prior structure, which allows us to attribute intentionality to animals, even those about which we have no clues regarding their nature.

Now, according to Thompson, such a judgment about a form of life takes the form of a generalization, but this generalization is not statistical; rather, it appeals to the normal conditions presupposed by the very form of life under consideration (Thompson, 2009, p. 69). This implies that it is logically possible, in such a judgment, that no individual corresponding to that form of life instantiates all the predicates we may ascribe to it, since "nobody is perfect" (Thompson, 2009, p. 72). It is coherent to say that "the dog has four legs and two eyes" and yet encounter dogs with three legs and one eye without thereby ceasing to classify them as dogs. In this way, the structure of judgments concerning a form of life establishes that certain individuals belong to that form of life, but does not thereby quantify the predicates attributed to the kind with respect to all its individuals (Boyle, 2012, p. 11). This is fundamental, because it is precisely the logical form of this kind of judgment that allows us to understand the attribution of non-intentionality in animal action: The fact that judging an animal to act intentionally entails a natural-historical judgment about the kind of animals of that form of life does not imply that every individual must perform those actions; for example, dogs do not typically fall onto their backs, yet I saw my dog fall off the bed onto its back. Thompson observes that although natural-

historical judgments are not inherently normative, it is precisely in virtue of their structure that we are able to formulate normative judgments concerning individuals. The first judgment is directed toward the form of life itself, whereas the second judgment recognizes that an individual failing to correspond to that form of life is thereby defective, i.e., naturally defective (Thompson, 2009, 80). Thus, the three-legged dog is naturally defective with respect to the form of life of the dog, and the dog that edges too close to the side of the bed and falls backwards is an individual acting defectively, precisely because our primary judgment concerning dogs refers to a form of life that does not fall on its back.

In this way, returning to Gustafsson's initial question, it seems correct that animal action and human action are two types of action that do not hold metaphysical priority over one another. Animal action does not appear defective because the way of characterizing its intentionality refers to its form of life, and it is the judgment about this form of life that allows the action to be unified, i.e., it enables an enlarged description of the A–D type. Thus, we do not need to refer to the form of rationality that unifies human action to unify animal action. On the human side, by contrast, there is no such overlap in the judgment between action and form of life, precisely because reference to the human form of life is a reference to a practically self-conscious form of life (Haase, 2018). In this case, the natural-historical judgment does not hold the same weight, since the individual organizes their own activity in manner that is self-conscious of the practical ends they choose.[9]

5. Conclusion

In this work I have sought to articulate a way of understanding the logical form of judgment when we think in animal intentional action. My first step was to expose the difficulties in theories that ground the intentionality of action in mental states conceived as distinct from the event we call action. Such theories falter: either they restrict genuine action to the human sphere—reducing animal action to a metaphor— or they rely on empirical inquiry to sustain their claims —without explaining how an action is initially identified as intentional. The alternative is to maintain a theory in which action is a mode of determination of the event. In this view, its form

[9] This last sentence —that refers to the normativity of human action— is something with which Thompson would not agree, but this discussion will need to be reserved for later.

and unity are explained through a cognitive element that is not external to the event but is precisely its form —namely, practical knowledge. In the human case, such practical knowledge takes the form of the subject's self-consciousness of means and ends (represented in the A–D series). My fundamental thesis was that, in the absence of this self-consciousness in the animal, the proper way to grasp the form and unity of its action is by reference to its form of life. Finally, I attempted to show how the notion of a form of life can be explained as a logical form of judgment.

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