

2019

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Recommended Citation

Joseph Raz, *On Dancy's Account of Practical Reasoning*, OXFORD LEGAL STUDIES RESEARCH PAPER NO. 50/2019; COLUMBIA PUBLIC LAW RESEARCH PAPER NO. 14-636 (2019).

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On Dancy's account of practical reasoning

J. Raz¹

1. DANCY'S ARGUMENT

Jonathan Dancy has written extensively and influentially about practical reasons. I am among many who have learnt much from his writings. His most recent book, *Practical Shape*, is no exception. It contains many valuable observations. For me personally it proved helpful in offering a good number of critical discussions and criticism of some of my views. I have much to say about them, sometimes to incorporate his insights and correct my mistakes, sometimes to clarify and reinforce my views. I will, however, refrain from doing so here.² This comment is about the main aim of the book, to vindicate an important thesis, one which so far has found less support. Dancy states it at the beginning of the Précis:

T1: "Practical reasoning is reasoning whose conclusion is an action" (p1).³

¹ Columbia University and Kings College London. I am grateful to John Hyman and Eliot Michaelson for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

² My own views on the subject, which on many point supplement the comments below are to be found in Part Two of *From Normativity to Responsibility* and in the article on "Normativity: the role of reasoning"

³ I am quoting from Dancy's précis written for this exchange. In the book he writes: 'Practical reasoning is not going to be any form of inference, and it will have neither premises nor conclusion' (end of 1.10). I take it that his emphasis is on rejecting the identification of reasoning with inference. As he allows himself to talk of conclusions of practical reasoning, I will do the same, and where there are conclusions there are the premises from which one concludes.

Dancy assumes, of course, that

T1a: It is possible to engage in practical reasoning.

It may be correct to say that he takes T1 to be a real definition of an existing type of reasoning. Some people may dissent, claiming that if T1 is true then T1a is false. That is, they will argue that if T1 defines a type of reasoning then there cannot be reasoning of that type. I will assume that that is a mistake, and that if T1 defines a type of reasoning then there can be reasoning of that type. I will argue that T1 does not define a type of reasoning.

Dancy ends the opening paragraph writing:

T2: “I try to show that an action can stand in just the same relation or relations to the reasoning that leads to it as a belief can stand in to the reasoning that leads to it” (p1).⁴

The language shows that Dancy is not begging the question. He is not assuming that ‘reasoning that led to an action’ means reasoning whose conclusion was that action. T1 is a thesis about the real definition of practical reasoning. Its truth has to be established, and the argument, T2 tells us, will be, or will include showing (1) that reasoning can lead to actions and (2) that when it does that in the same way in which it leads to a belief, then actions are the conclusions of the reasoning that led to them. Namely, they are such conclusions when the reasoning leads to the action in the same way in which reasoning to a belief leads to a belief (The mental state, rather than its object). In other words, I take T2 to establish the way in which Dancy aims to prove that T1 is a true definition of a type of reasoning.

⁴ Section 2.1

So, when does reasoning lead to action and belief? Here is an example:

S1: Jake is getting more and more upset. Jill presented him with an argument showing that his chief of staff, Harry, has betrayed his deepest secrets to his rivals. Jake cannot believe that. But after Jill leaves, he goes through the evidence once more, and finds no way to avoid the conclusion that Harry betrayed him. He cannot take it. He rages against Jill, comes to believe that she is not a true friend and breaks off all relations with her. Call this *Blame the Messenger*.

S2. As in S1 with the addition that in the evening after Jill left, Jake was walking home while reasoning about the evidence, and his reasoning led him to lose his way. Call this *The Fog of Thought*.

There is little doubt that his reasoning led him, in the circumstances, to believe that Jill is not a true friend and to the action of breaking off relations with her (in S1) and to losing his way (in S2). I think it is plausible to take this as a case in which the reasoning led both to a belief and to an action and did so in the same way. So, *Blame the Messenger* illustrates that T2 is true. But it does not establish T1.

Why not? Is it not a case in which Jake's conclusion was to sever relations with Jill, and also one in which his conclusion was to believe that she is not a true friend?

I suspect that in tracing the routes to Dancy's endorsement of T1 the misguided move from T2 to T1 is at the heart of the story. But first a few words about a possible misleading interpretation of 'conclusion'. Could it be that someone was led to believe that if a reasoning concludes with an action (meaning that it leads to an action) it follows that that action was the

conclusion of that reasoning (meaning the last step of the reasoning, such that that reasoning was incomplete until the action was done)? 'A conclusion' is the last (or intermediately last) state or phase of an event or process.⁵ The first World War concluded with the defeat of Germany and the Treaty of Versailles. In the course of the war various leaders reasoned about the way to continue, and how to triumph in the war. The war of which their reasonings were a part concluded with the Treaty of Versailles. So, we could say that their reasoning concluded with that treaty – but only in the sense that the reasoning (is part of what) led to it. It does not follow that the treaty was part of the reasoning, its last part, its conclusion, the part without which the reasoning would not have been complete. To show that action can be the conclusion of reasoning (as is claimed by T1) it is not enough to show that it can be the conclusion of something of which the reasoning is a part. It has to be part of the reasoning to be the conclusion of the reasoning. Somewhat more precisely: to establish T1 one has to establish

T3: An action is the conclusion of a reasoning if it is part of the reasoning.

Perhaps I should have said the last part (or step) of the reasoning. I left that claim out of T3 for it seems that the difficulty in establishing T1 is establishing T3, and not establishing T2.

⁵ Hence, just to mention the point briefly, another mistake to avoid is that the reaching of a conclusion is necessarily a mental act. Sometimes it is, but most of the conclusions we reach, whether or not as a result of reasoning, are transitions to a new state or process, which need not be due to any act. For example, the belief with which we conclude a reasoning is acquired of necessity by our becoming convinced that the inference underlying the reasoning concludes with a proposition which that belief expresses.

Let us return to the *Blame the Messenger* case. As I understand him Dancy agrees with T3. He seems to think, however, that T2 establishes it. Why? My two stories (aimed to establish that if one thing, call it A, leads to another, B, it does not follow that B is part of A) do not make me think that every cause (or causal factor) leads to its effect. There are additional conditions. Some conditions that may occur to people are not essential to the truth of 'A leads to B' propositions. They are features of the context of discourse in which 'lead' occurs. Jane may have been killed in a blast that engulfed her because she delayed leaving her lover by a few minutes, finding it difficult to leave that morning. People would say that her love led to her death. They do not mean that her love is to blame for her death. They merely highlight the arbitrary ways of the world, its bitter ironies, etc. The connection between cause (reasoning) and effect (break with Jill) is stronger in the *Blame the Messenger*: the content of the reasoning, rather than the mere occurrence of a reasoning, led to the result. In this regard *The Fog of Thought* is less clearly a case of reasoning leading to loss of way, unless it was the content of the reasoning that is responsible. It may or may not have been. The irrationality of Jake's reactions is neither here nor there. Many reasonings are irrational. It is implausible to hold that therefore they do not lead to anything. If Jake's conclusion (say that Jill is not a good friend) is part of his reasoning, then irrational reasoning must be capable of leading somewhere, including somewhere it is irrational to be led to. Likewise, it is plausible to think, reasoning can also lead to irrational destinations that are not part of the reasoning itself.

Nothing in my remarks about T2 and about being a conclusion so far need be or is disputed by Dancy. His emphasis is on 'led in the same way' – on actions and beliefs being led to in the same way by reasoning, showing that actions can be the conclusions of reasoning if beliefs can. As I mentioned before, I take

the belief and the action that Jake was led to in *Blame the Messenger* to have been led to in the same way, and Dancy says nothing that suggests that that is a mistake.

I am driven to conclude that T2 does not express Dancy's real thought. He might have been inclined to endorse

T4: an action can stand in just the same relation or relations to the reasoning that leads to it as a belief can stand in to the reasoning *of which it is a conclusion*. [The italicized words were missing in T2].

T4 offers a new way to establish the master thesis, T1. If (a) a belief is the conclusion of a reasoning, and if (b) the reasoning of which it is the conclusion led to it in a certain way, and if (c) the same or another reasoning led to an action in the same kind of way, then that action is part of that reasoning, being its conclusion (or one of them).

Consider *Blame the Messenger* in light of T4: the story does not bear on the question whether Jake's belief that Jill is no true friend of his is part of his reasoning (as both T3 and T4 require). It merely shows that the reasoning led to his belief in the same way in which it led to his action. We can now add that given T4 the action is part of his reasoning if his belief is. If his belief is not, the question whether the action is part of his reasoning is moot and depends on other considerations to that effect (possibly other examples applying T4).

2. SOME TYPES OF REASONING ABOUT WHAT TO DO?

Dancy repeatedly says that **practical reasoning could consist simply in adducing relevant considerations and responding in whatever way is most favoured by those considerations, taken together. The considerations he has in mind are states of affairs that are either reasons for action or states that affect the**

strength of the reasons, or determine when they come into force or when they are suspended or lapse. They may include reasons and other relevant factors for any of the options available to the agent, and even considerations that the agent took to be reasons or that he checked out whether they are reasons and turned out not to be, and more such like considerations. The content of such conditions is represented in propositions and we refer to them using propositions. Propositions that express the conditions that people reason from are called their premises. In parts of the book Dancy objects to discussing reasoning by reference to premises or propositions that express them. But in other parts, he is content to do so himself. There is no contradiction here. His reservations regarding the use of 'premises', he makes clear, relate to their use in articulating certain views that he rejects, mostly the view that true propositions are reasons and that successful reasoning is a valid inference. With some reservations I share his rejections of these views, and in referring to premises I do not intimate their acceptance. Unfortunately, however, at least for me, his delicate handling of the use of 'premise', 'inference' and 'conclusion'⁶ and his terminological shifts leave obscurities about what can be the premises of practical reasoning, as well as whether reasoning allows for interim steps and conclusions (remember his admonition that reasoning is a mark of the complexity of the states of affairs from which one reasons, and is not a matter of intermediate steps). I will, nevertheless, assume that Dancy allows for various intermediate steps in practical reasoning, such as interim conclusions or assumptions introduced *per arguendo*. I will return later to the

⁶ Yes, even though Dancy's main thesis is that actions are (sometimes) conclusions of practical reasoning – he also protests against thinking of reasoning in terms of premises, inferences, and conclusions – again there is no contradiction. He rejects only certain theoretical uses of 'conclusions.'

question whether he also allows a role for normative propositions (e.g. everyone ought to ϕ) in practical reasoning.

Dancy takes practical reasoning to be successful, or valid (as I will say) when the relation of 'is most favoured' exists between an action and the considerations from which one reasons (or the premises stating these considerations, as I tend to write). This characterizes valid reasoning. The instantiation of the relation of being 'most favoured' makes the premises warrant the conclusion, though only if the *all other things are equal* premise is included. The conclusion is warranted because the premises warrant it. Dancy's characterization shows that his 'practical reasoning' relates only to one kind of many, often referred to as practical reasoning.

Here are some examples of what I, and others, often refer to as practical reasoning, and Dancy, finding no fault in them, calls theoretical reasoning:

A: reasoning with the conclusion: 'so far as economic considerations go I should invest in this fund'. The 'so far' clause states that the reasoner is not relying on an 'all other things are equal' premise. Hence no action is warranted, indeed no conclusion about what action the reasoner ought to take follows.

B: reasoning concluding with 'It is fine for me to ϕ '; 'I may ϕ '; 'I am permitted to ϕ '. In such cases the reasoning does not establish that any action is best supported by the premises. There may be other actions supported no less well. Hence no conclusion about what the reasoner ought to do follows. Of course, it would be fine if he ϕ s, and the reasoning, if sound, establishes that. Yet the action - ϕ ing - is not the conclusion of the reasoning because it is not best supported by the premises. Other incompatible conclusions are no less well supported. It is generally assumed that if you accept the premises of a valid

reasoning and its conclusion is not defeated, then there is something wrong with your rejection of the conclusion, it casts doubt on your rationality on this occasion, or points to some other fault. But if your reasoning concludes that you may ϕ there is nothing wrong in your not ϕ ing. Hence though both your reasoning and, if you do ϕ , your action are in good order, the reasoning was not practical reasoning according to Dancy.

C: Reasoning concluding with 'I should make sure that I have enough to live on when I retire (in 30 years' time)'; 'I should give my 5 year old son a great present when he turns 18'; 'If engulfed by fire I must not use the lifts'; 'If my best friend loses his sight I should pay for him to have a home environment suitable for the blind'. Sometimes there is something I can do towards meeting these conclusions, though rather rarely would it be something that I must do. Often it would be something I merely may do. But, sometimes, even though the reasoning is sound there is nothing I can do now, or for a number of years to come, to comply with its conclusion. There is a conclusion I can draw now, but it is a normative belief, making the reasoning, according to Dancy, theoretical.

D: Reasoning concluding with 'The government must make sure the country has oil reserves in case of a sudden loss of the channels of oil import'; 'the city must see to it that the infrastructure is in good repair'. Here the reasoning that ends with these conclusions relates to what someone else ought to do. In itself it does not favour any action by the reasoner, though the conclusion may be among premises in another reasoning, which does support an action by the reasoner.

I think that Dancy is aware that some people think of reasoning ending with such conclusions as practical, simply because they are about what is to be

done, by me, or someone else, now or under some other circumstances. It is also his view that (allowing that the reasons involved in the different cases may favour in somewhat different ways) the character of the reasoning in all these cases is the same as reasoning concluding with an action. That is one of the issues on which, as he tells us, he sides with Kant rather than Aristotle. I do not disagree with any of this. But in light of all that, we need to ask whether in calling the reasoning whose conclusions are normative beliefs of these kinds “theoretical” and those which end in actions “practical” (assuming that there are such), Dancy is simply introducing a linguistic stipulation? Perhaps not; perhaps this use of language points to a theoretical lesson about the relations between Dancy-type practical reasoning (call it ‘A-reasoning’) and reasonings of other kinds?

One suggestion may focus on the relations between reasoning with normative beliefs as its conclusion (call it N-reasoning) and A-reasoning. Is it not the case that N-reasoning is preliminary or preparatory to A-reasoning, which is the ultimate end of normative reasoning and of our practical life? I do not mean that reasoners always precede an A-reasoning with a related N-reasoning or the other way around. Nor do I mean that actions that are normatively in good order are always arrived at by reasoning to them as the conclusion. One can act in conformity with reason by following reasons with no reasoning involved or even by doing the right thing without having a good idea of what reasons make it so. My question is whether the point of having N-reasoning at all, and most of the time the purpose of N-reasoning when one engages in it, is to guide us to the suitable A-reasoning, and to the actions that are its conclusions. The point of reasoning, the suggestion is, is to lead one to right action. N-reasoning tells one what one ought to do, has a right to do, etc., and

its conclusion makes possible A-reasoning and the right actions it concludes with.

I ask about this in a tentative way. A successful thesis along these lines will be more detailed and refined. There is however no need for one, as the answer to the question is negative. It is not true that the point of N-reasoning is a preparation, or something like that, for A-reasoning.

Our feelings and attitudes about ourselves and the world or parts of it, and our beliefs about ourselves and the rest of the world are also major aspects of the quality of our life, as important as our actions. It is common to think that knowledge of how things are with ourselves and in the world contributes to the quality of our life. And so does our normative knowledge. I would not say that not killing people is as important as knowing that one should not kill. But remember that my friend, Jat, may never kill because he is too lazy to do so, but he believes that killing is permissible and sometimes good: refreshing and invigorating. It seems to me that he and his life are very defective, even though he has not acted immorally. In conclusion: normative knowledge can be valuable in itself, and N-reasoning that helps us have solid normative knowledge can be valuable whether or not it leads to A-reasoning.

Furthermore, a good deal of A-reasoning concludes with actions designed to lead us to improve our knowledge, including our normative knowledge.

Dancy does not support the view about the relation between N-reasoning and A-reasoning that I criticized. He does not ask the question to which this failed account was meant to be an answer. But he invokes what he calls the primacy of the practical to explain why if there is N-reasoning there must also be A-reasoning (though this is my own way of putting his point). The primacy of the practical seems to be manifested in several way. The one most relevant here is

the claim that the reasons why one ought to ϕ are the reasons to ϕ . Given this thesis it would be odd, says Dancy, that normative beliefs can be the conclusions of reasoning but actions cannot be the conclusions of the same reasoning. If you have the premises for a valid reasoning to the conclusion that you ought to ϕ you also have the premises for a reasoning concluding with ϕ ing. They are the very same premises, as, according to Dancy, the primacy of the practical establishes.

The primacy of the practical is not taken by him to prove that there is A-reasoning, but it is taken to be an argument to that effect. But it is not. It is an expression of his belief that if there is reason for something then that something can be the conclusion of reasoning with the reasons as its premise. In brief, if Dancy relies on this argument he overlooks the fact that there could be reasons to ϕ for which it is impossible to act, reasons for which it is possible to act but from which it is impossible to reason, as well as reasons from which it is possible to reason that one ought to ϕ and for which it is possible to ϕ , but not to reason to the conclusion $| \phi |$. In some contexts, Dancy is aware of these distinctions, but when it comes to his main thesis: that actions are conclusions of some reasoning, he seems blind to the need to provide a justification of the thesis that does not overlook these distinctions, and therefore that does not take T2 to establish T1. We have seen already that T2 does not establish T1. But it is worth considering some aspects of Dancy's own treatment of this argument.

3. LEARNING FROM THE NATURE OF REASONING?

An action, ϕ ing, can only be the conclusion of a valid instance of reasoning whose premises favour ϕ ing best, show it to be better than any alternative (I skip the explanation which justifies the transition from 'favour best' to

showing it to be the best of any alternatives); in other words, if and only if the premises constitute or establish the existence of a conclusive reason to φ . This suggests three forms of reasoning: First, from $P_1 \dots P_n$ to I must φ (have a conclusive reason to φ etc.). Second, from I must φ to $|I \varphi|$ (the expression between ' $|$ ' and ' $|$ ' is an action rather than its name or a proposition about it; so, the conclusion here is my actually φ ing). Third, from $P_1 \dots P_n$ to $|I \varphi|$, where the reasoning does not include 'I must φ ', or a similar proposition, among its premises or interim conclusions. The first of these is uncontroversially a valid form of reasoning. We can agree that it is theoretical reasoning because it concludes with a belief, and some of us, but not Dancy, will regard it as practical as well, because it is about what we are to do. The third is the focus of Dancy's argument in the book. We may, however, look at the second first: Can one reason from 'I must φ ' to ' $|I \varphi|$ '?

If T2 establishes the possibility of A-reasoning (i.e. of Dancy's practical reasoning) then the answer is that one can, as T2 requires: the relation between 'I have conclusive reason to believe' and believing is the same as that between 'I have a conclusive reason to act' and acting. We know, however, that that is not sufficient to establish the possibility of reasoning. Does anything else vindicate this possibility? The answer depends on the nature of reasoning, a question not addressed by Dancy (unless one thinks that his reliance on T2 is his answer or part of his answer). I will not venture here to offer an account of reasoning. But two elements in such an account are crucial to assessing Dancy. First, the presence of an '*all other things are equal*' premise, and second the character of the derivation of the conclusion from the premises.

Remembering that practical reasoning, as Dancy understands it, shares the character of reasoning generally, it must often be defeasible reasoning. Therefore, practical reasoning, just like theoretical reasoning, is bound to contain a premise (or interim conclusion), that all the premises and conclusions (interim and final), that the reasoning does not reject, are consistent with all that the reasoner knows.⁷ Absent this, the premises cannot warrant the reasoner drawing his conclusion. Logicians debate what logic is relied upon in defeasible reasoning, and whether the condition of consistency with all the reasoner knows is sufficient (given that otherwise the reasoning is valid) to warrant drawing the conclusion. But it seems agreed that at least this condition has to be met. I refer to it as the *all other things are equal* premise. This expression is sometimes used to refer to other conditions, and my use of it should be understood to be merely a matter of convenience.⁸ It has to be included in the reasoning for without this premise the reasoning does not warrant drawing the conclusion. Its relevance to our topic is that it shows why defeasible reasoning cannot consist entirely in drawing conclusions from some state of affairs or principle – that it, the reasoning, involves all that we know, at least to assure us that our conclusion is not defeated, at least not yet.

Now, to the second feature of reasoning relevant to our exploration of Dancy's account. Reasoning is an activity in which the reasoner comes to embrace the conclusion on the basis of the premises. The reasoner, we say colloquially, learns something (expressed in the conclusion) on the basis of the premises, or

⁷ This proposition is always true of the conclusion of reasoning that is deductively valid.

⁸ In any instance of reasoning it is a premise, for rarely, if ever, can an instance of reasoning include substantive examination of the content of what *all other things are equal* would require if it were not a premise but an established conclusion.

more accurately: he takes himself to have learnt something (for he may be wrong, and the conclusion may be false). Only if this condition is met can the activity be an instance of reasoning.

This important point is illustrated by the fact that a recitation of the premises followed by the conclusion with the word 'therefore' between them is not an instance of reasoning. I, or you, can say: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man (these are the premises). Therefore, Socrates is mortal, and yet we did not reason. We did not because our recitation of the premises and conclusion did not teach us anything, nor did it strengthen our existing knowledge or reassure us about something we knew, nor do we take ourselves to have learnt anything. We knew before we started that the premises entail the conclusion and therefore (at least implicitly) that anyone who does not know that Socrates is mortal can learn this by reasoning from the premises, and someone who knew that Socrates is mortal but did not know that that follows from the premises can learn that fact, can learn that the premises entail this conclusion, by a related reasoning from the premises and the conclusion to another conclusion that the premises entail that Socrates is mortal. How one reasons when one does remains to be explained. The point of my observations here is not to explain how one reasons but when. I illustrated a case when one recites, but does not reason.

In discussing Dancy, we are asking whether it is possible for there to be a reasoning with action as its conclusion, and we began by asking whether there can be reasoning from $I \text{ must } \phi$ to $|I \phi|$? To answer that question, we need to generalize from our example. That leads to the lesson that reasoning is a special case of responding to reasons (a special case of T2). It is responding by discovering, by realising that C on the basis of the premises, or that the

premises support C. Realizing is not identical with coming to believe. One can come to believe and one can come to realise without reasoning. But realising is a necessary component of reasoning. It is an experience: in extreme cases we refer to it as the Eureka moment. Reasoning is not a recitation of the argument that supports its conclusion. It is an activity that leads to a realisation that the conclusion is a well-supported answer to the question one is considering, and this is confirmed by our implicit knowledge of what reasoning is.

Given that what one is led to when realizing something is a belief, it follows that the conclusion of reasoning is a belief. Therefore, reasoning presupposes the possibility of believing the premises without believing the conclusion. If that possibility does not exist reasoning from those premises to that conclusion is not possible, and of course not necessary.⁹ Suppose that the conclusion of my reasoning was that I must φ , and I do not. If failing to φ is or can be a failure to draw the conclusion from my reasoning, then there must be something that I should have realised in reasoning from the premises and I did not. But there is nothing that I did not realise. Which means that the failure to act is not a failure of reasoning, because the action is not part of the reasoning.

4. DANCY ON NORMATIVE PROPOSITIONS IN PRACTICAL REASONING

It is not clear to me whether Dancy disagrees with the argument that one may not reason from 'I must φ ' to $|\text{I } \varphi|$. If he agrees, his reason is different from mine. I noted earlier an uncertainty whether, according to Dancy, normative

⁹ The paragraph above relies closely on my discussion of the issue in 'Normativity: the Role of Reasoning' [ref]. In part the thrust of the point is to avoid confusing inference as a logical structure with reasoning. P entails P is a correct proposition, but one cannot reason from P to P. But other implications of this lesson refute Dancy.

propositions can figure in A-reasoning either as premises or as interim conclusions. Even true normative propositions are not reasons, nor, I assume, can they affect the strength or applicability of reasons (though of course they can be about all these matters). If we are supposed to take seriously Dancy's insistence that practical reasoning is from states of affairs that are reasons or modifiers of reasons then 'I must ϕ ' cannot be a premise of reasoning. Most of our actions that are performed for a reason rely on knowledge that the reasons exist, often without knowing what they are, knowledge learnt from others, or knowledge we have acquired previously by perception or reasoning that confirmed it. If Dancy's account cannot explain this fact it has very limited relevance to the explanation of our reasoning and activities. Consider the following illustrations:

Refugees 1: I spent days last year considering how we should treat refugees and concluded, having considered all the reasons on all sides, that we ought to welcome refugees. But I had no chance to engage with refugees until today. I know that I ought to welcome them, but I no longer remember why. I cannot (we interpret Dancy to say) reason from our knowledge that we ought to welcome them. If we do, our actions will conform to reason but we will not be acting for the reason to welcome them. To act for the correct reasons we have to reason again from the reasons themselves, without relying on our knowledge of what we must do.

Refugees 2: As in *refugees 1*, except that we never examined the reasons to welcome refugees. We concluded that we ought to welcome them by adopting, for compelling reasons, the conclusions of a committee of inquiry. Again, even though we know what course of action is favoured by reason we cannot act for a reason in following that course of action. We would have to do

the work of the committee ourselves, which may well be not only impracticable, but impossible for us, as we lack the competence to do so.

There are various ways in which Dancy may avoid this conclusion. He can claim that true normative propositions, or knowledge of them, are reasons for action. This is at odds with the spirit of many of his examples, and has other consequences at odds with his views. A more plausible course is to assume that A-reasoning may include premises that are not reasons.

Would that show that the transition from 'I must ϕ ' to $|I \phi|$ is an instance of reasoning? Not if my observations that reasoning involves realisation are correct. By the time you know what you must do there is nothing for you to realise, and no realisation (other than possibly that you are acting as you ought to) is involved in following the belief that your ought to ϕ by ϕ ing.

5. PRACTICAL REASONING WITHOUT INTERIM NORMATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Finally, to Dancy's contention that actions can be conclusions in reasoning from premises which do not include, either as premise or as intermediate conclusion, that 'I have conclusive reason to ϕ ' or that 'I must ϕ '.

I, and probably others, reacted to Dancy's previously published explanations of why actions are the conclusions of some reasoning, saying that he confuses reasoning from premises with acting for a reason. He explains, it was said, what it is to act for a reason, and calls it acting as a conclusion of reasoning. But often action for a reason involves no reasoning. I remember that I have a work-related duty to stop writing now in order to receive an international call, and I do stop. No reasoning is involved. In response, in this book Dancy repeatedly points to the difference between acting for a reason when no reasoning is involved and acting as a conclusion of a reasoning. It is all a

matter of complexity: 'in reasoning one moves from considerations adduced, considerations of sufficient complexity for what is going on not just to be acting for (or more generally responding to) a reason, to whatever sort of response is (as we take it) most favoured by those considerations, taken together.' (0.4) The difference, the only difference, between reasoning to an action and acting for a reason without reasoning is in the complexity of the considerations establishing the reason(s) and what they favour most: 'The move from thought to action is only reasoning if it is complex; otherwise one is just acting for a reason. Either way, the action done is a direct response to the consideration or considerations adduced, in the sense that there is no need for any intermediary. Complexity is one thing and indirectness is another. Action can be a direct response to the complex of considerations that together favour so acting.' (precis)

Complexity, however, is only contingently related to reasoning. Even in contexts in which the connection is strong, while it may be the cause of the need to reason, it does not make reasoning reasoning. Consider a couple of examples: You ask Martha to find out how many windows are on the western front of your house. She goes, looks, and replies 11. You ask Martin the same question and he also goes, looks and replies 11. The difference is that Martha took one look and saw 11 windows. She reported what she saw. No reasoning was involved. Martin, on the other hand, saw three rows of three windows each plus two on one side and worked out that their number adds up to 11. He reasoned his way to the answer. Martha just took the west side of the house in at a glance: saw 11 windows and reported. Martin had to calculate (a form of reasoning) that based on what he saw there are 11 windows. Here is another, similar, example: You ask Maisy what is 27 time 3 and she answers instantly, and without any calculation, 81. Perhaps, she simply knows by heart the

multiplication table of 27. You ask Morton the same question and he comes up with the same answer, but he worked his way to it. He might have added 27 to 27 and added 27 to the result. Or he might have first thought that 20 times 3 is 60 and that 7 times 3 is 21 and that 60 plus 21 is 81. He knew without calculation, the answer to each of the sums he did, but had to reason his way to realising that that is a way of finding the answer to the question he was asked. The lesson is that sometimes complexity does not determine whether reasoning was required. More importantly, it is not the essence of reasoning. Reasoning is a way of finding out the answer to a question by working it out from certain premises.

Does it mean that reasoning always requires more than one premise? No, speaking colloquially there can be reasoning from a single premise. The working out will consist of reflection on its nature, and realising that it includes a certain feature. For example, he told a lie, therefore he is dishonest. But don't you implicitly rely on other premises as well? Certainly. But the major premise—which is probably false—does not need to be “focused on”, or explicitly considered or rehearsed. At least in the case of defeasible reasoning all our knowledge is involved, as the reasoning includes the *all other things are equal* premise, and in any case, all reasoning relies on unstated premises. Speaking colloquially, we mention only the premises we focus on in the reasoning.

Dancy suggests an opposite worry: he correctly points out that according to my view, when acting for a reason, agents rely at least implicitly on the *other things being equal* premise. Does it follow that they are reasoning? No. they may know what is to be done without reasoning, as the previous examples illustrate. This illustrates yet again that whether or not the agent reasons is not

determined, at least not always, by the number or nature of his premises. It depends on whether reasoning is required for him to realise what is the thing to do, or whether he knows it without reasoning. The problem that plagues Dancy's account is that he does not have a sensible account of reasoning, and he is misled by his thought that T2 provides such an account. Many of the mistakes in the book follow from this.

One of them is T1, the claim that actions can be the conclusions of reasoning.¹⁰ For we have seen reason to think that when agents reason their way to an answer to the question what is to be done their reasoning includes the intermediate conclusion that they must perform a certain action (namely, a certain action type), and that once they reached this conclusion there is nothing more for them to realise regarding the answer to the question whose answer they were seeking.

¹⁰ The absence of a sensible account of reasoning undermines Dancy's account of theoretical reasoning as well. But illustrating this point is beyond our current topic.