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PRACTICE THEORY

Joseph Rouse

Anthropology, sociology, and related subfields of history have increasingly taken "practices" as their primary object of study in the last several decades of the twentieth century. Applications of the practice idiom extend from the most mundane aspects of everyday life to highly structured activities in institutional settings. Some of the patterns of performances identified as "practices" are quite localized geographically or historically, while others are of much more general extent. Practices range from ephemeral doings to stable long-term patterns of activity. Attention to practices often requires extensive examination of relevant equipment and material culture, but can also assign constitutive roles to vocabulary and other linguistic forms or performances. The range and scope of activities taken by various theorists to constitute "practices" can be made evident by a few characteristic examples from the practice theory literature. They include spatially dispersed but relatively short-lived activities such as Nasdaq stock market Internet "day trading" [Schatzki, 2002] or academic presentations on the international conference circuit [Rabinow, 1996], but also relatively stable and widespread patterns of social relations such as willfully self-interested bargaining [Taylor, 1985]. Many practices are culturally specific, such as the Kabyle gift-exchanges discussed by Bourdieu [1977] or the secret baptism of money by Colombian peasants described by Taussig [1980]. Yet some practice theorists also refer to activities which take various culturally specific forms, such as eating with specific utensils and preparing food accordingly [Dreyfus, 1991], while others identify long-standing institutionalized activities such as chess ([Haugeland, 1998]; [MacIntyre, 1981]), medicine (MacIntyre), or science. In the latter case, the practice idiom has ranged in scope from references to science generally as a practice [Pickering, 1992] to examining historically specific experimental systems and instruments ([Kohler, 1994]; [Schaffer, 1992]) experiments [Pickering, 1995], disciplinary cultures [Knorr-Cetina, 1999], pedagogical regimes [Warwick, 2003], ways of organizing experimental venues and work groups [Galison, 1996], and styles of theoretical work [Galison, 1998].

The theoretical uses of the concept of practice within social theory and philosophy of the social sciences have been as diverse as the kinds of examples employed. Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's work on understanding and rule-following have been prominent influences upon practice theories, but so has Foucault in each major stage of his work. Prominent sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu or Anthony Giddens are often cited as practice theorists, while Sherry Ortner's [1984] review article on "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties" proposed "practice" as the central theme of anthropological theory in the 1980's, a trend that continues today.

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Ortner argued that "the newer practice orientation" in anthropology incorporated a "palpable Marxist influence" which led "the shaping power of culture/structure" to be "viewed rather darkly, as a matter of 'constraint', 'hegemony', and 'symbolic domination"' [1994, 390–91]. Yet conservative theorists such as Michael Oakeshott, Michael Polanyi, or Alasdair MacIntyre have also made central use of the practice idiom, or been retroactively cited as practice theorists. Reference to "scientific practices" has been a central theme of much of the recent literature in science studies as well, not only as a descriptive category, but as a theoretical articulation of a move beyond its earlier characterization as the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (e.g., [Pickering, 1992]). Ethnomethodological work in sociology, too, is now often presented as attending to everyday practices and agents' understanding of the practices they engage in (see Lynch, this volume). Although Judith Butler [1989; 1991] does not emphasize the term 'practices' in her widely influential work on the performativity of gender, her analysis also has considerable resonance with practice theories. Indeed, in an influential critical study of practice theories, Turner draws their boundaries even more widely, claiming that "a large family of terms [are] used interchangeably with 'practices', among them. . . some of the most widely used terms in philosophy and the humanities such as tradition, tacit knowledge, *Weltanschauung*, paradigm, ideology, framework, and presupposition" [1994, 2].

An especially contentious issue in practice theories has been the place of language within social or cultural practices. Some theorists ([Dreyfus, [1979] 1991]; [Bourdieu, [1970] 1990] and [Polanyi, 1958] are prominent examples) make central to their discussion of practices those aspects of human activity which they regard as tacit and perhaps even inexpressible in language. Their accounts suggest that the practice idiom is important because it calls attention to important aspects of human life that will likely remain hidden to those social scientists and theorists who give pride of place to language and linguistically articulable thoughts. Yet many people employing the practice idiom go in the opposite direction, identifying "practices" primarily by the vocabulary, linguistically articulable presuppositions, or conceptual relations that participants in the practice share. Still others treat language itself (or "discursive practices") as a paradigmatic application of practice talk. Robert Brandom [1976] and Richard Rorty [1991], for example, claim that the differences between representationalist and social practice approaches mark the most fundamental issue in contemporary philosophy of language.

The diversity of work in social science, social theory, and philosophy that employs the practice idiom (either as a developed theory of social practices, or as an empirical correlate to such a theory) might thus suggest that the term 'practice' has no theoretical coherence. Perhaps the ubiquity of practice talk merely reflects current intellectual fashion with no substantial conceptual significance, or worse, an underlying theoretical confusion assimilating incompatible conceptions of social life under a superficially common term. A different challenge to the felicity of understanding social life in practice-theoretical terms has been proposed by Turner [1994]. He suggested that the broad attractiveness of the practice idiom arises

from the deceptive appearance that it has resolved some fundamental recurrent problems in social theory, in ways that turn out to be superficial or empty:

> The idea of 'practice' and its cognates has this odd kind of promissory utility. They promise that they can be turned into something more precise. But the value of the concepts is destroyed when they are pushed in the direction of meeting their promise. [Turner, 1994, 116]

Assessing these worries about the coherence or substance of the practice concept and its applications within the social sciences and social theory will therefore be a central concern of this essay.

The diversity and the extent of theoretical invocations of practices militates against any attempt to provide a comprehensive catalog of the major contributors to practice theory. The criteria for inclusion would themselves be centrally at issue in any such exposition. Moreover, such an enterprise would be misguided unless it can be shown that practice theory has sufficient conceptual integrity and theoretical coherence to merit consideration as a distinct genre of social theory. I shall therefore address the topic of practice theory in two parts. The first part of the essay will articulate the thematic rationale for practice theoretical approaches. Instead of an exposition of competing theories or theorists, I will address the principal concerns that have motivated theoretical attention to "practices" in philosophy, social theory, and social science. While I shall try to situate the more prominent practice theorists within this thematic survey, the themes themselves and the principal ways they have been taken up will be my primary focus. In the second part of the essay, I turn to some prominent theoretical challenges confronting practice theories, and assess their significance. Contra Turner, I shall argue that the practice idiom remains an important conceptual resource for social theory and philosophy. Turner's and other criticisms nevertheless reveal important inadequacies in many current conceptions of practice theory. Adequately addressing these theoretical challenges will therefore require some significant revisions in many extant conceptions of social practices and their theoretical articulation.

1 WHAT IS "PRACTICE THEORY"?

I highlight six principal considerations that make "practices" a central theme in social theory, social science, or philosophy. These considerations have different importance for various practice theorists, and in some cases, theorists differ substantially in their treatments of the theme. Collectively, however, they express clearly the rationales for theoretical attention to practices.

1.1 Practices, Rules and Norms

Perhaps the single most important philosophical background to practice theory is provided jointly by Wittgenstein's work on rule-following, and Heidegger's account of understanding and interpretation. They pose fundamental concerns for

any conception of social life and understanding that emphasizes rules, norms, conventions, or meanings. Such conceptions of the domain of sociology, anthropology, and other human sciences are widespread within the philosophy of the social sciences. The notions that society or culture is the realm of activities and institutions governed or constituted by rules, of meaningful performances rather than merely physical or biological processes, or of actions according to norms rather than (or as well as) causally determined events are ubiquitous. Such conceptions of the social domain trace back to Kant's contrast between behavior according to natural law, and action governed by a *conception* of law, i.e. by a *norm*. Actions governed by norms also involve understanding and responding to the meaning of one's action, and of the situation in which one acts. Indeed, grasping and responding appropriately to meaning is perhaps the exemplary case of normative governance.

For Kant, of course, a norm was simply a rule (or law) one imposes upon oneself. Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's contributions to practice theory stem primarily from their parallel criticisms of this conception of the normativity of human thought and action. Wittgenstein's treatment of this issue stems from his discussion of rule-following in the first part of *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's central point is that rules are not self-interpreting. Given only a rule, the possibility always remains open to follow the rule in deviant ways. One might then try to specify how the rule is to be interpreted, but any such interpretation would itself be another rule open to deviant application. Wittgenstein drew a complex conclusion from this concern,

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.
>
> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another... What this shows is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases. [1953, I par. 201]

The challenge, then, is to characterize this way of grasping rules without interpreting them, which is "exhibited in actual cases."

Heidegger makes a closely parallel point that has been comparably influential upon practice theory, in his discussion of understanding and interpretation (*Auslegung*) in *Being and Time*. Heidegger claims that all interpretation (including linguistic assertion) draws upon a more basic understanding or competence that is not explicitly articulated. Indeed, for Heidegger, understanding (as a form of competence) is the more basic notion, and "interpretation" is simply understanding's "own possibility of developing itself... [through] the working-out of possibilities

projected in understanding" [1962, 188-89, H148]. For Heidegger, interpretation is involved whenever one interprets something "as" something, whether one interprets something as a hammer by using it to hammer a nail, or by making explicit assertions about it. In either case, the interpretation is only possible against the background of a prior understanding of the situation. This prior understanding makes three crucial contributions to the intelligibility of the interpretation.[1] In Heidegger's example of hammering, one must already understand the general context of carpentry (the relation between hammers, boards, nails, buildings or furniture, and the various purposes they serve), one must have a sense of how to proceed (hammers must be picked up to be used, held by the handle, swung rather than thrown, hit the nail on the head rather than the shaft and so forth), and one's interpretation is governed by a general sense of what would bring it to fulfillment or completion. Without some prior practical grasp of these considerations, nothing one does with a hammer could amount to hammering with it (indeed, there could *be* no hammers without such understanding of hammering). The outcome of an interpretation, however, then recedes into the understanding which projects possibilities for further interpretation.

Why have these aspects of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's work been important for practice theory in the philosophy of the social sciences? Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms can be construed as a regress argument against any regulist conception of social life or normativity. If to act according to norms is to follow a rule, and rule-following can be done correctly or incorrectly, then a vicious regress of rules would render action according to norms impossible. Kripke [1982] notoriously places this skeptical issue front and center in his widely discussed interpretation of Wittgenstein. So construed, Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's challenges to the autonomy of rules or explicitly articulated meanings or norms pose a central concern for the philosophy of the social sciences. The upshot of both criticisms is that there must be a level or dimension of human understanding expressed in what we do that is more fundamental than any explicit interpretation of that understanding. The concept of a "practice" is then widely invoked in social theory to identify the locus of this background understanding or competence that makes it possible to follow rules, obey norms, and articulate and grasp meanings. Practice theorists thereby hope to develop Wittgenstein's enigmatic claim that rules and rule-following draw upon "agreement in forms of life" [PI 241], and Heidegger's more elaborated claim that the most basic articulation of everyday human being comes not from individual self-determining action, but from "what one does" (*das Man*, the "anyone").

The point of introducing "practice" talk here is highlighted by contrast to behaviorist approaches to the human sciences. Behaviorists (psychological behaviorism

[1]Heidegger has technical terms for these three aspects of the understanding presupposed by any interpretation: *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, *Vorgriff*, collectively referred to as the *Vor-struktur* of interpretation. The standard [1962] translation renders these terms as "fore-having", "fore-sight", "fore-conception", and "fore-structure", although I think they might be more felicitously rendered in English as pre-possession, preview, preconception, and pre-structuring.

was perhaps exemplary of this theoretical and methodological genre, but behaviorist approaches were also influential throughout the social sciences at mid-century) were suspicious of mental or intentional concepts. They hoped to redirect the human sciences toward the study of human behavior, conceived as publicly observable movements in contrast to internal mental representations or interpretations. The orientation of behaviorism was reductive or eliminativist: behavior was to be described in non-intentional, non-normative terms, such that human social life could be described and explained in terms congenial to a strict empiricist. Charles Taylor characterizes this empiricist/behaviorist orientation as the aspiration to describe human life in terms of "features which can supposedly be identified in abstraction from our understanding or not understanding experiential meaning, [in] brute data identifications" [1985, 28].

Practice theories also encourage attention to publicly accessible performances rather than private mental events or states. Their aim is typically not to avoid intentional or normative locutions, however, but to make them accessible and comprehensible. While attending primarily to "outward" performance rather than "inner" belief or desire, such performances are usually described in what Geertz [1973] characterized as "thick" descriptive terms rather than the extremely thin language demanded by behaviorists. The claim is that human performances and activities are themselves meaningful, rather than having meaning imposed upon or infused within them by animating beliefs, desires, and intentions. Indeed, the stronger suggestion is that rules, norms and concepts get their meaning, and their normative authority and force, from their embodiment in publicly accessible activity. Taylor's account is characteristic of this move:

> The situation we have here is one in which the vocabulary of a given social dimension is grounded in the shape of social practice in this dimension; that is, the vocabulary would not make sense, could not be applied sensibly, where this range of practices did not prevail. And yet this range of practices could not exist without the prevalence of this or some related vocabulary. [1985, 2, 33–34]

I will return below to the question of just *how* rules, norms, meanings, conventions or vocabularies are supposed to be grounded in practices, and how that grounding might make possible the intelligibility and continuity of society or culture. norms —)

1.2 Reconciling Social Structure or Culture with Individual Agency

A second theme in practice theories has been to mediate, or perhaps by-pass, perennial discussions of the relative priority of individual agency and social or cultural structures.[2] The issue in these debates has typically been whether the

[2]For more extensive discussion of these debates, see Zahle, this volume; for elaboration of parallel discussions in anthropology concerning the concept of culture, see Risjord, this volume.

social sciences can and should refer to and achieve knowledge of social wholes (institutions, cultures, social structure, traditions, etc.) that cannot be decomposed into actions by or states of individual agents.[3] The autonomy of anthropology or sociology as distinctively *social* sciences would obviously seem to be enhanced if there are irreducible social or cultural structures that are the proper object of these sciences. Critics of social or cultural wholism have nevertheless raised ontological questions about the existence of social or cultural wholes except as composites of individuals and their actions, and methodological and epistemological questions about how knowledge of such wholes could be grounded in evidence. Wholists have responded in turn that the intelligibility of individual actions often depends upon their social or cultural context. If one simply examined the actions of individuals without reference to supra-individual settings, such familiar activities as voting, exchanging money, performing a ritual, or even speaking a language might not make sense. Individual actions and agents may thus only be identifiable and understandable as components of a larger culture or society.

Practice theories typically resolve these disputes by acknowledging that both sides grasp something important. At one level, practices are composed of individual performances.[4] These performances nevertheless take place, and are only intelligible, against the more or less stable background of other performances. "Practices" thus constitute the background that replaces what earlier wholist theorists would have described as "culture" or "social structure." The relevant social structures and cultural backgrounds are understood dynamically, however, through their continuing reproduction in practice and their transmission to and uptake by new practitioners. While there is nothing more to the practice than its ongoing performative reproduction, these performances cannot be properly characterized or understood apart from their belonging to or participation within a practice sustained over time by the interaction of multiple practictioners and/or performances. Ortner concludes that,

[3]There have been two very different uses of the term 'holism' in the philosophy of the social sciences. In one sense (discussed by Zahle, this volume), holism is the view that there exist social or culture entities ("wholes") that cannot be fully understood in terms of the actions or states of individual human agents. In another sense of the term, which has been especially prominent in philosophical reflection upon psychological states and linguistic meanings, a property is holistic if one thing cannot have the property unless many other things also have this property. Since there are no useful alternative terms for these two very important concepts, in the remainder of the article I will take advantage of orthographic ambiguities, and refer to the existence of supra-individual entities as "wholism", and to the interdependence of property ascriptions as "holism".

[4]Most practice theorists would identify these performances as the actions of individual agents. Some theorists influenced by Heidegger, however, would emphasize that the "who" performing most basic, everyday human activities is anonymous and undifferentiated, rather than being an already individuated subject or self. Individuation and responsibility only takes place against the background of these anonymous performances. Foucault and many of those he influenced go further in identifying the individual subject as something constituted by rather than underlying and presupposed by actions or performances. Butler [1989] succinctly exemplifies such a theoretical approach: "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. ... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results". [p. 25]

> The modern versions of practice theory appear unique in accepting all three sides of the... triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction. [1984, 159]

This emphasis upon the dynamics of social structures and their governance or constraint of individual actions gives a strongly historical dimension to any practice-theoretical approach to sociology or anthropology. Such dynamics also allow for conceiving a "cultural" background that is not monolithic or uncontested, which has been a very important consideration in recent anthropological work. Anthropologists had long worked with a conception of culture that treated cultures as unified and systematic. Kluckhohn and Kroeber's formulation typifies such a conception:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. [Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1963, 181]

Instead of positing such a unified conception of culture, practice theories recognize the co-existence of alternative practices within the same cultural milieu, differing conceptions of or perspectives on the same practices, and ongoing contestation and struggle over the maintenance and reproduction of cultural norms. Moreover, practice theories provide additional resources for understanding cross-cultural interaction brought about through migration, political domination, or trade relations. Instead of treating cultural interaction as a matter of translation between whole cultural systems, practice theorists can recognize more localized practices of partial interpretation and exchange that can be somewhat isolated from other practices and meanings that function within each of the interacting fields of cultural practice.[5] The acknowledgement of cultural dissonance within practice theory also allows practice theorists to recognize the differential uses and meanings of cross-cultural interaction within intracultural politics [Traweek, 1996].

While practice theorists generally share a conception of social or cultural structures as existing only through their continuing reproduction in practices, they differ extensively over the degree of stability that practices can sustain. Bourdieu , for example, claims that,

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions,

[5] For an interesting discussion of such partial interactions, understood as "local coordination" rather than systematic translation and understanding, see [Galison, 1996, ch. 9].

> structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures. . . . [1990, 53]

Bourdieu thus conceives of *habitus* as having a degree of stability not so different from that posited in more traditional anthropological conceptions of culture. At the other extreme, one might compare Steve Fuller's [1993, xv] characterization of the basic conditions of knowledge transmission:

> Knowledge exists only through its embodiment in linguistic and other social practices, [which] exist only by being reproduced from context to context [through] the continual adaptation of knowledge to social circumstances [with] few systemic checks for mutual coherence. . . Given these basic truths about the nature of knowledge transmission, . . . it is highly unlikely that anything as purportedly uniform as a mind-set, a worldview, or even a proposition could persist through repeated transmissions in time and space.

There is of course good reason to think that different social practices might vary in their stability over time, such that the extent to which social practices sustain a relatively stable background for individual action would be a strictly empirical question, admitting of no useful general philosophical treatment apart from characterizing some of the considerations that might generate continuity or change.

Much more fundamental differences arise concerning *how* patterns of social practice supposedly govern, influence, or constitute the actions of individual practitioners. This is perhaps the central issue for any practical-theoretical conception of social life. If practices are temporally extended patterns of activity by multiple agents (perhaps encompassing more than one generation of practitioners), then the question of how this pattern is sustained, transmitted, and imposed upon subsequent performances has to be a primary theoretical concern. Turner captures the problem well:

> We often cannot understand what other people mean other than by translation, . . . [and] often cannot understand what the behavior, gesture and doings of other people mean other than by consciously inventing and then selecting on the basis of observation a hypothesis that explains this behavior. But we know that the people we are attempting to understand did not themselves acquire their capacity to speak a language through formal teaching or books, or come to understand one another's gestures and performances by consciously constructing and testing hypotheses. So there must be some way to acquire [these] capacities. The puzzle is how they are acquired. [1994, 46]

Turner [1994] argues forcefully that this puzzle has not and probably cannot be solved in ways that would vindicate the aspirations of practice theories.

There are fundamentally two strategies for resolving Turner's puzzle so as to understand how the practices that supposedly provide a social/cultural background governing individual performances are transmitted between practitioners and sustained over time. Taylor [1995] characterizes these two strategies as different ways of reading Wittgenstein's claim that "'obeying a rule' is a practice" [1953, I, par. 202]:

> There are two broad schools of interpretation of Wittgenstein, ... two ways of understanding the phenomenon of the unarticulated background [to rule-following]. The first would interpret ... the connections that form our background [as] just de facto links, not susceptible of any justification. For instance, they are imposed by our society; we are conditioned to make them. ... The second interpretation takes the background as really incorporating understanding; that is, a grasp on things which although quite unarticulated may allow us to formulate reasons and explanations when challenged. [Taylor, 1995, 167–68]

Taylor cites Kripke's [1982] influential book on Wittgenstein as a clear example of the first strategy, but there is a long tradition of understanding socialization into shared practices as a matter of sheer imitation, training, and sanctions, which transmit and enforce the continuity of practices by straightforwardly causal means. Bourdieu perhaps most prominently exemplifies this strategy among practice theorists in the social sciences. For example, he claims that,

> The objective homogenizing of group or class *habitus* that results from homogeneity of conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted in the absence of any direct interaction or ... explicit coordination. [Bourdieu, 1990, 58–59]

Much of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* [1977] also emphasizes the role of training in creating a conforming subject, for example, but in this respect he merely follows Nietzsche [1967, 61]:

> Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges, the most repulsive mutilations, the cruelest rites of all the religious cults — all this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.

This strategy for understanding the transmission and maintenance of practices and norms is sufficiently familiar that Brandom [1994] could allow a caricatured example to stand in for it: "a prelinguistic community could express its practical grasp of a norm of conduct by beating with sticks any of its members who are perceived as transgressing that norm" [1994, 34].

This first strategy offers the advantage that, if it worked, it would make the normative and meaningful aspects of human behavior more readily intelligible by solving several problems at once. Both the problem of understanding the character and functioning of irreducibly wholistic social or cultural phenomena, and the problem of understanding the authority and force of norms (which may, of course, just be a special case of the former problem) have long been found philosophically troubling. If practice theorists could provide a clear causal basis (in the form of relatively non-mysterious processes such as imitation, training, and sanctioning) for the institution and maintenance of social or cultural patterns exercising normative authority over individual performances, this would seem to constitute genuine philosophical progress. Adherents of the second strategy suspect that it cannot be done, and that rationality and understanding permeate social and cultural practices. For these latter practice theorists, the aim of practice theory is not to reduce social wholes to individual performances or norms to non-normative causal interaction, but simply to articulate insightfully and in detail how human understanding is inculcated and developed through social interaction.

Taylor himself distinguished these two strategies precisely in order to argue for the second approach, in which the transmission and uptake of practices always involves human understanding:

> We have to think of man as a self-interpreting animal. He is necessarily so, for there is no such thing as the structure of meanings for him independently of his interpretation of them; for one is woven into the other. ... Already to be a living agent is to experience one's situation in terms of certain meanings; and this in a sense can be thought of as a sort of proto-'interpretation'. [Taylor, 1985, 26–27]

How is this a conception of the transmission of patterns of practice? Taylor's point is that practitioners must learn a practice from the performances of others (presumably including their responses to correct and incorrect performances by oneself and others). Such learning is not merely a matter of imitating the movements of others or being trained or disciplined into correct performance by straightforwardly causal means, but instead requires appropriate uptake, which involves some *understanding* of the performance to which one responds. The capacity for such "proto-interpretive" uptake is presumably acquired gradually, as one's responses to earlier performances are assessed in light of a more extensive background of experience, including one's interpretation of others' responses to one's own previous performances ("our aim is to replace [a] confused, incomplete, partially erroneous self-interpretation by a correct one, and in doing this we look not only to the self-interpretation but to the stream of behavior in which it is set" [Taylor, 1985, 26]).

Note well that Taylor describes such a grasp of one's situation and possible responses in terms of meanings implicit in practices as nevertheless only "a sort of '*proto*'-interpretation". His qualification is intended to take account of the Wittgensteinian and Heideggerian criticism of regulism concerning norms. If our

interpretive responses were themselves explicit articulations of the meaning of a performance, or resulted from a rule for generating new performances of the practice, it would violate that fundamental insight behind practice theories. So the ability to learn how to participate in a practice must involve a grasp of other performances as meaningful without needing to (or perhaps even being able to) spell out explicitly what one has grasped. Just how one could possibly have a form of know-how that is more than causal product and less than explicitly articulated cognition will be a central theme of the next section.

Before turning to that point, however, I want to consider the possibility of combining Taylor's two Wittgensteinian strategies. Such combinations ought to evoke initial suspicion, because of the temptation to equivocate on the notion of a practice. If one were to use Taylor's first strategy when talking about how practices are transmitted between individuals, and his second strategy to characterize how the norms implicit in these practices affect subsequent performances, the result would seem superficially powerful. The straightforwardly causal mechanisms of transmission would render the resulting socially or culturally "wholistic" patterns unmysterious, while their richly meaningful content and normative force would enable them to have far-reaching effects upon individual performances and responses to them. The suggestion that the widespread appeal of practice theory turns on just such equivocations is integral to Turner's conclusion that this appeal is spurious.

There are nevertheless ways of combining the two approaches that need not depend upon conceptual sleight-of-hand. On such an account, "thin" forms of interaction and transmission would be necessary but not sufficient contributions to the transmission and maintenance of social practices. Language learning offers an especially clear illustration of how such conceptions would work. One could not learn to speak a natural language without the capacity to differentiate linguistic signs (phonemes, letters, gestures or whatever serves as the relevant tokens), and the ability and disposition to reproduce them by imitation. Babies babbling and imitating the sounds made by others are not yet language speakers, however. Language is holistic,[6] in the sense that a speaker cannot have the ability to understand and produce one sentence unless she can understand and produce many of them, in appropriately interconnected ways. So having acquired the causally-generated ability to imitate meaningful utterances, our proto-speaker must then somehow be able to pick up on their semantic significance. The realization of this capacity would undoubtedly require appropriate responses from others (additional utterances to imitate and respond to, but also appropriate corrections of and constructive responses to one's own performances). Speakers characteristically respond to language learners by treating them as if they had a capacity they manifestly do not yet have, by responding to their imitative utterances as if they were already meaningful performances. Yet such efforts to initiate others into the practice would not work unless these cues prompted (rather than merely causally provoking) the right kinds of response from the learner. Training and proto-interpretive or expressive

[6]See note 3 above for the distinction I am drawing between the terms 'wholism' and 'holism'.

uptake are both necessary, so as to produce not merely de facto conformity to social norms, but a self-policing conformism [Haugeland, 1982].

In fact, most practice theorists who explicitly address the issue (such as [Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986]; [Foucault, [1977] 1978]; [Schatzki, 1996]; [Brandom, 1994]) advocate such a hybrid combination of Taylor's two strategies. There are really only two grounds for defending the second strategy by itself. Phenomenologically-influenced practice theorists (Taylor himself is a good example) argue that there is no distinct component of merely-causal transmission of practices; even the infant language-learner is imbued with a richly affective sense of her surroundings and her own response to it as meaningful, however inarticulately. Practice theorists influenced by Davidson [1984; 1986] or Sellars [1963], on the other hand, may treat what the latter calls the space of causes and the space of reasons as parallel, non-intersecting domains of understanding, such that a theory of social practice could only avail itself of conceptual resources internal to the space of reasons.[7]

I shall return to the difference between merely causally-induced behavior and spontaneously produced performances of a practice in the second part of my discussion below, when I assess Turner's criticisms of practice theories. The next section, however, does discuss an aspect of practice theory that has often played a pivotal role in the effort to understand how social practices could transmit wholistic patterns of culture or society to new individual practitioners in ways that could constructively shape or govern their performances.

1.3 Bodily Skills and Disciplines

A third important theme in practice theory has been the central role of human bodies and bodily comportment. Emphasis within practice theory upon understanding human agency and social interaction as bodily performance has countered intellectualist conceptions of culture and social life, although the charge of intellectualism comes from many directions. Ortner [1984], for example, detects a strong Marxist-materialist background within practice-theoretical criticisms of a perceived tendency toward an idealist conception of culture as systems of symbols or meanings. Polanyi [1958], by contrast, mobilizes a conception of scientific understanding as bodily skill and "conviviality", in order to counter the Marxist-inspired aspiration to a socially-responsible administration of science prominently espoused by J. D. Bernal.

Undoubtedly, an important rationale for attending to bodily comportment is precisely the aspiration to reconcile the causal and normative dimensions of social life, or the simultaneously socially constrained/enabled and individually spontaneous character of human agency. The human body, as both causally affected and effective object in the natural world, and unified capacity for self-directed

[7]These attempts to block any theoretical crossover between causal interaction and rational justification are more-naturalistically-respectable descendants of Kant's sharp distinction between the phenomenal realm of causally determined objects, and the noumenal realm of (possibly) free, self-determining rational beings.

movement and expression, seems promising as a site for understanding how these apparently exclusive conceptual registers can be accommodated together. Practice theorists thus understand human bodies as both the locus of agency, affective response and cultural expression, and the target of power and normalization. The challenge, of course, is to characterize human bodily interaction with other bodies and a shared environment in ways that actually resolve these dual conceptions. The danger is that appeals to the role of the body in social life merely name the coincidence of the causal and normative conceptual registers, in ways that obscure their lack of reconciliation.

Taylor's two strategies for understanding Wittgenstein have evident counterparts in practice-theoretical conceptions of human embodiment. Some practice theorists characterize bodily dispositions or habits as the locus of continuity in social practices: a practice can be sustained over time because it is inculcated in the ongoing dispositions or habits of individual agents. For example, Bourdieu explicates his influential conception of the *habitus* by claiming that "the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions... generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands" [1990, 54]. Such conceptions exemplify the notion that causally instituted, de facto patterns of behavior provide the background that makes possible rule-following and other complex normative activity. Their appeals to imitation, repetition and imprinting, training, and sanctions make the human body the crucial intermediary in the transmission, acquisition, and reproduction of social practices. This first strategy always provides the temptation to an equivocation, however, in which one's resolutely causal account of the acquisition of habits or dispositions slips into an account allowing for much more richly expressive and flexible exercise of these austerely-acquired patterns of behavior. Bourdieu, for example, went on to characterize the habitus as both "the product of a particular class of objective regularities" and also as a form of "spontaneity without consciousness or will" [1990, 55, 56].

More commonly, however, practice theorists locate a continuous background to the discontinuous performances of a practice in bodily skills, and even bodily intentionality, rather than in mere dispositions or habits. Practice-theorists' discussions of skills seek an alternative to two apparently exhaustive ways of characterizing perception and action. On the one hand, there are the objectively-describable, causally-induced movements and internal processes of bodies as natural objects. On the other hand, there are actions in which the body is a more or less transparent medium for consciously reflective action. As cases that do not fit within these alternatives, for example, Polanyi cites an expert pianist's touch and an ordinary bicyclist's ability to maintain balance amongst a variety of countervailing forces. Here, he claims, "rules of art can be useful, but do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art [and] cannot replace this knowledge" [1958, 50]. The body becomes the locus of such "practical knowledge", which is

neither merely causal conditioning nor consciously articulable rational action.

While such appeals to practical skill are common among practice theorists, Hubert Dreyfus ([Dreyfus, [1979; 1984; 1991]; [Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986]) has developed an elaborated characterization of skills, drawing extensively upon previous work by Merleau-Ponty [1962], Heidegger [1963] and Todes [2001]. There are four crucial components to his account. First is the practical unification of one's command of one's own body, an implicit "I can" that is the bodily-intentional analogue to the Kantian "I think" that tacitly accompanies all mental representations. Unlike objects, whose motions can be decomposed into the separate movements of their parts, the entire body works together as a unity in skillful movement. Even when an action is focused in one bodily member, such as the arm or hand, such performance takes place against the background of a balanced, poised, directed bodily set that enables that effective focus. Second, bodily performances are intentionally directed toward objects, but without intentional intermediaries (such as meanings or spatial representations). One consequence of this conception is that there is no sharp distinction between perception and action, or bodily receptivity and spontaneity, for all bodily skills involve the coordination of bodily movement with a receptive responsiveness to one's surroundings. In order to grasp a teacup with my hand, I do not need to locate hand and cup perceptually in a three-dimensional space and then coordinate their intersection in practice. Rather, I direct my arm toward the cup itself, and responsively conform my hand to its contours, its delicacy, and its heft. The need to proceed in an explicitly representationalist way that human agents do not share turned out to be an insuperable obstacle to guiding effective robotic action by traditionally-conceived artificial intelligence [Dreyfus, 1979]. Dreyfus originally expressed his conception of skillful bodily practice as a phenomenological critique of early artificial intelligence, although he later pointed to the rise of parallel-processing, connectionist work as empirical vindication of these phenomenological insights.

This second point, the lack of intentional mediation to bodily intentionality, becomes especially important for understanding social interaction, since one can pick up on and respond to the expressive movements of others without having to infer their intentions or articulate their meaning. This immediacy of bodily interactions transforms Turner's challenge concerning the transmission of practices. Implicit in the concept of "transmission" is the notion that a performance is present and complete in one embodied agent, and then needs to be imparted to another agent in an equally self-contained form. But Dreyfus and others argue that bodily movement is not like that. The body is not merely interactive with its surroundings, but "intimately" involved with it, so as to efface any sharp boundary between them.[8] When one's skillful responsiveness is involved with the bodily performances of others, we get not the transmission of a skill from one agent to another, but the "dialogical" shaping of action, such that it is "effected by an

[8] I owe this distinction between an "interaction" between clearly bounded components of a situation, and an "intimate" entanglement that cannot be usefully disentangled, to [Haugeland, 1999, ch. 9].

integrated, nonindividual agent" [Taylor, 1991, 310]. At the most basic levels of bodily performance, human agency is realized through participation in practices that are "ours" before they can be "mine".

Dreyfus's third point, the flexibility of bodily skills, contrasts skillful movement to ingrained habits or other causally induced repetitions. Skills do not merely repeat the same movements, or the same connections between environmental cue and bodily response. They instead permit a flexible responsiveness to changing circumstances. Instead of repeating the same sequence of muscular contractions, skilled performances manifest a common embodied sense, a directedness toward a goal through varying means. Having learned to spike a volleyball, I do not do the same thing again and again, but am instead capable of doing something slightly different each time, in response to slightly different circumstances. A bodily orientation toward a task, which requires varied performance under varying circumstances, is what we acquire in learning a skill.

Dreyfus does not deny, however, that there can be an element of explicit rule-following or repetitive movement in the acquisition of skills. His final point is that explicit rule-following and merely habitual motions are characteristic of novice rather than expert performance. When first learning a skill, we "go through the motions" in awkward, but explicitly specified terms. As these movements become more familiar, however, we can pick up on the pattern, in ways that leave the rule behind (indeed, often violate it). The early, halting and relatively ineffective initial movements are replaced by a different way of engaging the world with one's body. Earlier, I referred to Dreyfus as one who combined Taylor's two Wittgensteinian strategies, but he does so in a distinctive way. Causally-induced or rule-guided movements are an important part of the process of learning a practice, but only as precursors to a more effective mastery of a task which leaves behind all vestiges of its initial acquisition.

Practice theorists' emphasis upon bodily agency, intentionality, expressiveness, and affective response might initially seem to rest uneasily with the role of social constraint in practice theories. Yet practice theories do crucially insist that individual actions are shaped by social practices and the norms they embody, and often recognize the body as the primary target of social normalization and the exercise of power (e.g., [Foucault, 1977]). Can the spontaneous, expressive body, and the docile, normalized body inhabit the same organism? Perhaps surprisingly, this combination is often conceived not just as the compatible co-existence of opposing vectors of body-world relations, but as mutually reinforcing conceptions. Foucault, for example, identified the domain of *power* relations specifically in opposition to the merely causal imposition of force, and insisted that it was appropriate to speak of power as "including an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" [Foucault, 1982, 221]. Foucault is hardly unique in this respect, however. A philosophical tradition going back to Kant and Hegel emphasizes a fundamental

connection between freedom and normative constraint; social practices institute the very meanings, possibilities, and goods in terms of which human beings can understand themselves and act for reasons. In Brandom's succinct formulation: "The self-cultivation of an individual consists in the exercise and expansion of expressive freedom by subjecting oneself to the novel discipline of a set of social practices" [1979, 195]. The distinctive contribution of practice theories in this respect is to locate both discipline and expressive freedom in coordinated bodily engagement with the world.

1.4 Language and Tacit Knowledge

Practice theorists' emphasis upon bodily skills or dispositions co-exists uneasily with the integral role of language in social life. Virtually every practice theorist treats this as an important theme, but they take it in some apparently discordant directions. Many theorists argue that practices have a crucial "tacit" dimension, a level of competence or performance prior to, and perhaps even inaccessible to verbal articulation. Practice theories are replete with reference to what can be shown but not said, or competently enacted only when freed from verbal mediation. Yet other practice theorists identify practices precisely by linguistically-articulated characteristics, such as shared presuppositions, conceptual frameworks, vocabularies, or "languages".[9] For these theorists, what unites the disparate performances of a practice is their linguistically-expressible background, which amounts to the practitioners' shared but unarticulated understanding of their performances. The conceptions of what a "practice" is thus range from understanding practices as pre-linguistic and perhaps inarticulable, to accounts of social life as thoroughly linguistically constituted. Still a third perspective on this issue arises in several influential strains of practice theory, which take language itself as an exemplary social practice. These conceptions of discursive practice variously draw upon the work of philosophers as diverse as J. L. Austin, Foucault, W. v. O. Quine, Jacques Derrida, Taylor, or Brandom.

Despite this apparent diversity in treatments of the role of language, all of these conceptions stem from different senses of the claim that social agents' understanding of their actions and interactions with others cannot be understood solely in terms of explicitly articulated and accepted propositions or rules. To this extent, the question of the place of language or discursive practice within practice theory is continuous with the influence of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms of normative regulism, and also with the widespread emphasis upon bodily comportment. The extraordinary range of differences in their conceptions of language as part of social practices express different conceptions of the "tacit" dimension of social life.

Perhaps the most widespread version of this point emphasizes the shared "presuppositions" of some community or culture (with many other terms such as "tradi-

[9]For a more complete discussion of conceptual schemes in the social sciences, see Henderson, this volume.

tion", "paradigm", "commitments", "ideology", "theory", or "research program" used to express a similar point).[10] Turner thus concluded that,

> Together with such concepts as ideology, structures of knowledge, *Weltanschauungen* and a host of other similar usages, the idea that there is something cognitive or quasi-cognitive that is 'behind' or prior to that which is explicit and publicly uttered that is implicit and unuttered became the common currency of sociologists of knowledge, historians of ideas, political theorists, anthropologists, and others. [1994, 29]

These themes became especially prominent through their emergence in the philosophy of natural science from the late 1950's through the 1970's. Against the prevailing logical empiricist claim that the norms of scientific reasoning could be expressed as purely formal, logical principles that any rational human being should endorse, Kuhn [1970], Toulmin [1962, Feyerabend [1962], Polanyi [1958] and Hanson [1958] and others argued that substantive commitments shared by scientific communities played an ineliminable role in actual scientific reasoning. Many practice theorists concluded that if even the natural sciences, an apparent exemplar of rationality, rely upon prior unarticulated commitments, then surely other areas of human activity do likewise.

Shared presuppositions play different roles in various conceptions of practices, however. Often their role was conceived as justificatory. Queries or criticisms of practitioners' performances would be met with enthymematic arguments whose validity depended upon the unarticulated presuppositions, whereas these presuppositions themselves were not given further justification even when articulated and questioned. Such conceptions of the role of presuppositions frequently invoked Wittgenstein's remark that at some point in seeking justifications for what I do, "I reach bedrock and my spade is turned" [1953, I, par. 217]. For these theorists, the crucial presuppositions of a practice were shared commitments that functioned as justificatory bedrock. The sense in which such presuppositions were "tacit" was that a social practice could and typically did proceed coherently in the absence of any explicit articulation of or agreement about these basic presuppositions. Practitioners responded to performances by others by acting in ways consistent with an acceptance of similar underlying beliefs, but without needing to express them, let alone justify them. Those who questioned these presuppositions were supposedly more often ignored or ostracized than answered.

A different conception of shared presuppositions often arose in practice theories more influenced by Heidegger, Gadamer, Dilthey, and the hermeneutical tradition.[11] Here presuppositions are invoked primarily in understanding how agents' participation in a practice makes sense (to the agent herself as much as to an

[10] For further discussion of issues raised by conceptions of practices as constituted by shared presuppositions, see Jarvie, this volume.

[11] For further discussion of this tradition in the philosophy of the social sciences, see Outhwaite, this volume.

interpreter). Taylor offers a clear example to illustrate this conception of practical presuppositions:

> The vision of society as a large-scale enterprise of production in which widely different functions are integrated into interdependence... is not just a set of ideas in people's heads, but is an important aspect of the reality which we live in modern society. And at the same time, these ideas are embedded in this matrix in that they are constitutive of it; that is, we would not be able to live in this type of society unless we were imbued with these ideas or some others which could call forth the discipline and voluntary coordination needed to operate this kind of economy. [Taylor, 1985, 46]

Here these ideas are tacit in the sense that they are so "obvious" to everyone embedded in such a social practice that they do not need to be said; indeed, many people may have difficulty recognizing the possibility of serious alternatives. Normally, they do not serve to justify actions so much as simply to render them intelligible. Nevertheless, they can be articulated, whether by social theorists aiming to understand what people do, by dissenters from the practices that incorporate this tacit vision of society, or by travelers who arrive with different preconceptions. Moreover, once these presuppositions have been brought to explicit attention, their role can shift toward justification: for example, a participant in these practices who has become more attentive to her constitutive commitments may now respond to dissenters by noting how much of what she values would have to be abandoned to institute an alternative matrix of social life. In contrast to those inspired by Wittgenstein's image of reaching justificatory bedrock, hermeneuticists claim that the process of interpreting social practices never ends. Anyone engaging in such interpretation, however, brings to it further unarticulated presuppositions, whose articulation would invoke still further background, and so on.

This sense of shared presuppositions as grounding the intelligibility of social practices sometimes carries over to a stronger sense in which they might be "tacit": their implicit acceptance might be necessary conditions for understanding the practice at all. Kuhn, for example, at some points talks about scientists who presuppose different research paradigms as having radically "incommensurable" conceptions such that they actually "work in a different world". The result is that in defending their points of view, they end up "talking through one another", failing to grasp adequately the meaning of one another's claims, either by literally misunderstanding them, or at least by failing to grasp what it would mean to engage in the practice from within such a conceptualization of the world [Kuhn. 1970, 103, 118, 132]. Such an account of tacit understanding might seem to make social science impossible, by making the sense of radically different social practices inaccessible to interpreters not already participants in them. Anthropology in particular might seem challenged by such a conception of cultural difference as involving constitutive presuppositions of social life. But Kuhn himself insisted that such radical incommensurability of social practices only prevented understanding other

practices simply by translation into one's own familiar terms. The alternative route to cross-cultural understanding, one long integral to the self-conception of ethnographic practice, has been to immerse oneself in an alternative way of life as a participant or participant-observer:

> To translate a theory or worldview into one's own language is not to make it one's own. For that one must go native, discover that one is thinking and working in, not simply translating out of, a language that was previously foreign. That transition is not, however, one that an individual may make or refrain from making by deliberation and choice... [Instead] he finds he has slipped into the new language without a decision having been made. [Kuhn, 1970, 204]

A further shift is often involved as one moves toward stronger senses in which the presuppositions that constitute a practice are tacit rather than fully articulated. In these stronger claims, the constitutive presuppositions of a practice are often identified with something akin to a (natural) language rather than to specific statements expressible within that language. The sense in which these presuppositions are tacit thus involves their constitutive role in shaping the very language (and social context) in which any explicit articulation takes place. Wittgenstein has also been highly influential on this theme as well, with frequent reference to this passage from *Philosophical Investigations*:

> It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. [1953, I, par. 241]

Conceptions of practices as constituted by tacit presuppositions have been subject to a variety of telling criticisms. Those practice theories that interpret the presuppositions of a practice as constituting justificatory bedrock have been claimed to lead to an untenable or undesirable epistemological relativism.[12] Those theories that instead take different practices to presuppose mutually incomprehensible or incommunicable ways of understanding the world or experience have also been widely criticized. The more mundane critical responses have appealed to de facto successes in interpreting apparently divergent social or cultural practices (committed defenders of conceptual incommensurability may, of course, question the adequacy of such supposed successes). Davidson [1984, ch. 13] challenged accounts of conceptual incommensurability more fundamentally, arguing that they are committed to an incoherent distinction between a conceptual scheme and its empirical or objective content.

Yet another line of criticism of interpretive appeals to tacit presuppositions has been integral to Turner's attack on practice theory. His objection is to the identification of shared presuppositions as the basis for treating various performances as instances of the same practice. The difficulty comes from the supposedly tacit

[12]For more extensive discussion of this issue, see Jarvie, this volume.

character of the presuppositions. First, there is a problem of underdetermination. There are various ways to assign implicit premises to agents' performances so as to justify them or make their meaning intelligible. Yet since the presuppositions are supposedly tacit, there is no evidence other than the performances themselves for choosing among alternative construals of the underlying presuppositions. The problem of underdetermination then points toward what Turner takes to be a deeper issue. Why should we think that there is any common basis at all underlying the diverse performances that an interpreter takes to be instances of the same practice? Turner concludes that the only legitimate standard for assigning tacit presuppositions to the supposed instances of a practice would be if there were a basis for demonstrating their "psychological reality" in individual cases. Otherwise, practice theory could not satisfy

> the need to connect the stuff of thought to the world of cause and substance. The predictive use of... the 'psychological' concept of presupposition and its variants depends on the idea that there is some substance to it, something with more continuity than the words or acts which exhibit the practice or presuppositions. ... Unless we can proceed as if a practice were real, a cause that persisted, we would have no basis for using our past understandings or interpretations to warrant future interpretations. [Turner, 1994, 37–38].

Yet the interpretive character of practice-theoretical appeals to shared presuppositions provides no basis for connecting overt performances to underlying causal processes within individual psychology.

All of these conceptions of practices as constituted by shared presuppositions are what one might call "linguistic" conceptions of practices. Whether what practitioners tacitly share is a commitment to specific assertions within a language, or something more akin to the language itself, the notion of 'presupposition' suggests some form of semantic content. Those practice theorists who emphasize the bodily basis of practices, however, often emphasize a very different relation between language and social practice. If the crucial components of a practice are bodily skills, dispositions, habits, or other performances, then the description of the practice does not have the same kind of seemingly constitutive relation to the practice itself that is suggested by an identification of practices by their presuppositions. Marcel Mauss's [1979] discussion of distinctively French and American styles of walking provides a relatively early and widely discussed example of a non-linguistic practice. One might well describe this difference, as Mauss himself attempted, but there is normally no semantic content to how someone walks. Anthropologists especially have often been attentive to the kinesthetic character of cultural practices. Geertz's [1973, ch. 15] classic essay "Deep Play", for example, is replete with discussions of culturally exemplary ways of running, squatting, stroking the feathers of a fighting cock, and avoiding bodily acknowledgement of others, and this in an essay which then explicitly identifies such kinesthetic performances as akin to texts to be "read". Bourdieu, Dreyfus, Taylor, Polanyi

and other practice theorists also emphasize a level of meaning and understanding which, if not utterly inaccessible to language, is nevertheless much more a matter of practical performance and perceptual recognition. The skillful know-how underlying social practices supposedly bypasses any verbal expression, even (or perhaps especially) in the process of its acquisition or transmission, which requires leaving rules behind in order to achieve a distinctively bodily capacity. Thus Dreyfus claims that, "in acquiring a skill ... there comes a moment when we finally can perform automatically, ... [having] picked up the muscular gestalt which gives our behavior a new flexibility and smoothness" [1979, 248–49]. On these conceptions of social practices, then, substantial aspects of social life and social understanding are fundamentally non-linguistic.

The question of whether and how we should understand social practices as linguistic or non-linguistic is further complicated by the conception of language itself in practice-theoretical terms. The ability to speak and understand language, after all, is very much a form of practical, bodily know-how. The difference between the halting, uneven speech of a language learner and the smooth, rapid flow of a fluent speaker (and the comparable difference in their perceptual skill in discriminating the words spoken by others) is an especially telling example of Dreyfus's distinction between expert skill and the incompetence of explicitly rule-guided action. The difficulty in following through with a conception of language-learning as the acquisition of a bodily skill is the apparent opposition between the supposedly tacit or inarticulate character of bodily skills, and the semantic content that is expressed through language use. Most philosophers who have acknowledged the importance of bodily skill in language use have tended to employ stratigraphic metaphors to incorporate both aspects of language. The practical and perceptual aspects of language use are taken to comprise one "level" of linguistic competence, while a grasp of semantics and pragmatics are regarded as another level, which is accessible to us in a different way.[13] The difficulty with these metaphors is that the supposedly different levels of linguistic understanding and competence are realized in exactly the same performances. There is no way to exercise semantic competence without also exercising the practical/perceptual bodily skills of a language speaker, for the performances of each are exactly the same performances. I will return to the question of how to think about these aspects of linguistic or discursive practice in the second part of the essay.

Perhaps because of this difficulty of integrating the practical-perceptual and the semantic aspects of language, most attempts to understand language use in terms of practice theory have considered linguistic or discursive practice solely at the level of pragmatics or semantics. The pragmatic aspects of language came to philosophical prominence through what is commonly called the theory of speech acts. J. L. Austin [1962] noted that many linguistic performances are actions performed through the use of words. Promising, commanding, christening, questioning, marrying, doubting, ruling out of order, sentencing a prisoner, proposing,

[13]For a good example of an explicit appeal to the metaphor of practical and semantic skill constituting different "levels" of linguistic competence, see [Dreyfus, 2002, 313–322].

suggesting, and a host of other cases exemplify actions that are typically performed by uttering appropriate words in felicitous circumstances. The circumstances matter, because in many cases, the successful performance of the act depends upon them. I cannot marry two people by pronouncing them married, unless I have the appropriate institutional standing, and they are present before me having fulfilled additional institutional requirements. I similarly cannot rule a question out of order, christen a ship, or command you to do something without the appropriate standing in the right setting.

Much more intricate conceptions of the pragmatics of language have been developed within sociology in the form of conversational analysis and ethnomethodology.[14] These methodologically conceived programs have focused upon the kinds of social work done within everyday linguistic practice. They share with Austin's account of speech acts (and related work by [Grice, 1988] and [Searle, 1969]), however, a severing of their analysis of the pragmatics of language use from the determination of its semantics. These analyses of discursive practice take for granted that the meanings of the words and sentences used in conversation, or in specific speech acts, are determined by means other than the pragmatics of their use in context. Searle and Grice, for example, look to the psychological states of speakers (their beliefs, desires, intentions, and so forth) to determine the meanings of their words, and only on that basis examine the pragmatic work done by uttering those words in specific social circumstances. These practical-theoretical accounts are thus of limited scope; they are accounts of how linguistic meanings and structures instituted by other means are used as part of a social practice of conversation or to accomplish specific kinds of socially situated performance.

A more ambitiously practice-theoretical conception of language emerges from the work of W. v. O. Quine [1960] and Donald Davidson [1984; 1986], although it is not often expressed in those terms.[15] They propose to account for language use and understanding in terms of what they call "radical translation" or "radical interpretation". The practice of radical interpretation is taken to be a model of language use more generally. Ostensibly, it only seems to concern how to interpret the utterances and other behavior of someone else in terms of a language that I take myself already to understand. Such interpretation proceeds on the assumption that the speaker's performances are governed by norms of rationality.[16]

[14]For further discussion of ethnomethodology and its treatment of conversational language, see Lynch, this volume.

[15]Brandom [1976] and Rorty [1991] do explicitly include Quine and Davidson among those philosophers of language who conceive language as a "social practice" rather than a representation.

[16]This formulation in terms of rationality is Davidson's rather than Quine's. Quine had hoped to use the conception of language use as modeled by radical translation to facilitate a behaviorist reduction of semantics. Davidson eschewed any such reductionist project, taking norms of rationality as irreducible and constitutive of language and thought. Their views thus diverge in intent. I nevertheless include Quine as at least a precursor to a practice-theoretic conception of language, because his conceptions of radical translation and the principle of charity were crucial precursors to Davidsonian radical interpretation and Brandom's [1994] model of "discursive scorekeeping" as exemplary practice-theoretic models of language.

The meaning of her utterances are determined by what makes the best systematic rational sense of them under their various circumstances of utterance. The presumption is that the speaker utters mostly truths and behaves mostly rationally. Only on this presumption can one plausibly use one body of evidence (the whole of the speaker's utterances and behavior in specific circumstances) to solve for two variables, their meaning and their truth value. Of course, one's interpretation is constantly changing in subtle ways as new evidence accumulates, such that radical interpretation is an ongoing practice. This conception of the interpretation of other speakers expands into a thoroughgoing practice-theoretic conception of language as soon as one recognizes that, for Quine or Davidson, to speak a language is implicitly to interpret one's own performances as rational in this way. In Quine's famous formulation, "radical translation begins at home" [1969, 46]. Thus, for Quine or Davidson, their semantic theories are attempts to express in an articulated theoretical model the capacities that are implicit in the performances of competent speakers of a natural language.

Davidson had employed a traditional representationalist structure (derived from [Tarski, 1944]) as a conceptual instrument for a practice-theoretic account of language, in which he modeled the interpretation (and self-interpretation) of speakers via a systematic representation of the language being spoken. The extent to which this was a model of linguistic practice rather than of the structure of a language became clearer in his influential [1986] "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", which claimed that linguistic ability involved "no learnable common core of consistent behavior, no shared grammar or rules, no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance. ...[T]here is no such thing as a language, ...a clearly defined structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases" [Davidson, 1986, 445–46]. Instead, there is only the activity of interpretation itself (of which speaking is also implicitly an example, as self-interpretation), which always outruns any systematic structure acquired or presupposed in advance.

Robert Brandom [1994] develops an even more thoroughgoing model of language use along broadly Davidsonian lines, but now explicitly presented as a practice-theoretic conception. Where Davidson modeled discursive practice as implicitly involving an interpretation of the idiolect of a speaker,[17] Brandom modeled discursive practice itself as "deontic scorekeeping" in which speakers keep track of the commitments undertaken and the entitlements accrued by fellow participants in the practice. Each subsequent performance calls for a revision of that participant's discursive score, her overall balance of commitments and entitlements. Brandom then shows how to account for logical and semantic concepts in terms of their expressive role in discursive practice. The account culminates in the effort to show how the representational dimensions of language use, including their accountability to speakers' causal interaction with objects through perception and action, can

[17]Strictly speaking, Davidsonian radical interpretation could just as well be applied to a collection or community of speakers, or alternatively to a fragment of the discursive performance of a single speaker.

be understood in terms of norms implicit in discursive practice.

A somewhat different way of thinking about language as discursive practice arises in Foucault's work. Foucault's initial discussions of discourse and discursive practice resembled those accounts of practices that take them to presuppose a shared commitment to a language. Foucault [1972 was primarily interested in what he called "serious" speech, the effort to make authoritative knowledge claims. He then argued that the specific statements that circulate within a discourse only function as knowledge (*connaissance*) because they belong to a systematically interconnected "discursive formation" that specifies which statements are even candidates for serious consideration as truths and which other statements are relevant to their assessment. Moreover, in the human sciences, the more fundamental knowledge (*savoir*) articulated by the structure of these discursive formations incorporates the objects of knowledge as well as what is said about them: in these domains, he argued, the very objects of knowledge were constituted within discursive practice. In his later work, Foucault [1977; 1979] expanded this conception to give central place to seemingly non-discursive elements of these constitutive practices. Forms of bodily discipline, training, normalization (including practices of examination and confession) worked in concert with these discursive patterns to constitute new forms of knowledge and power that function together. These themes have been developed further in Butler's [1989] influential account of the discursive-performative constitution of gender, and her subsequent efforts [1993] to show how the body itself is "materialized" through such discursive performativity. Working within this theoretical orientation, Barad [forthcoming] argues that Butler's account does not adequately account for the materiality of discourse and embodiment, but Barad then develops an alternative conception of the performative character of "material-discursive practice" that proposes to remedy this deficiency.

These efforts to understand the linguistic or discursive dimensions of social practice, and to integrate them with a conception of material or bodily practice, have been among the most contested and conceptually difficult aspects of practice theory. I return to these issues in part 2, where I assess the challenges confronting practice-theoretical conceptions of social theory and social life.

1.5 Social Science and Social Life

Those practice theories that emphasize a tacit, inarticulate dimension to social practice give especially clear impetus to another theme. How should one conceive the relation between the presuppositions, norms, or skills implicit in social practice, and the effort to articulate this background explicitly within social science or social theory? Many practice theorists have been centrally concerned to theorize the relation between social inquiry and social life. At one extreme on this issue, consider once again Bourdieu, who sharply contrasts the stances of disinterested social scientists and habituated social actors:

> Science has a time which is not that of practice. For the analyst,

> time disappears. ... Only for someone who withdraws from the game completely, who totally breaks the spell, the *illusio*, renouncing all the stakes, ... can the temporal succession [of practice] be seen as a pure discontinuity and the world appear in the absurdity of a future-less, and therefore sense-less, present. [Bourdieu, 1990, 81, 82]

For Bourdieu, the social scientist's aspiration to a disinterested objectivity marks a sharp break between a practice-participant's understanding of what she is doing, which is deeply embedded in the bodily dispositions and action-orientation of a *habitus*, and the social scientist's articulated, tense-less understanding that is detached from any stakes in the practice itself.

Several other practice theorists also sharply distinguish the aspiration to scientific understanding from an understanding embedded in social practice, but to a very different end. MacIntyre, Polanyi, and Dreyfus each argues, on somewhat different grounds, that a practice-theoretic understanding of social life shows why a genuinely scientific understanding of social practices is fundamentally unattainable. For MacIntyre [1981], the mark of a genuine social science would be the articulation of social scientific laws, and the predictive power they would confer. Without such predictive capacity, the managerial or policy-making aspirations of social science would be baseless. Yet MacIntyre argues that social practices are indeed unpredictable, for multiple reasons: their interactive, "game-theoretic" character, their openness to constitutive conceptual innovation (which is unpredictable by the analyst in the sense that to predict a conceptual change in a sufficiently fine-grained way would be to bring it about already), the first-person predictive opacity of future decisions, and the pure contingency of some causal determinants of social practice. Polanyi [1958] argues against the social scientific analysis and administrative direction of practices on different grounds. Practices that draw upon skilled performances are not properly predictable or manageable, because the guidance and direction of a practice requires the skilled judgment of the practitioner rather than the rule-based analysis available to a social analyst. Dreyfus [1984] both extends Polanyi's argument through his more extensive analysis of skills, and interestingly applies it to the linguistic and conceptual dimension of social life. He claims that the concepts employed within and partially constitutive of social practices are structured differently than the concepts employed within any social scientific "theory". Using an example of gift-giving practices derived from Bourdieu [1977], he argues that a social scientist's analysis of gift exchange must always diverge from the participant's grasp of, for example, what differentiates "gifts" from trades, because the participant possesses a flexible responsiveness to novel situations that cannot be captured in a predictively successful social scientific theory.

The differences between Bourdieu and MacIntyre, Polanyi or Dreyfus concerning the possibility of social science highlight their more basic agreement about the essential character of genuinely scientific analysis in the social sciences. All insist that science must be objective, distinterested, predictive, and employing concepts whose proper use is determined intratheoretically. Without that agreement, their

differences over whether a scientific analysis of social practice, so conceived, is attainable would be but a quaint curiosity. Not surprisingly, most other practice theorists reject this conception of the aspirations and norms of social science. One alternative approach to the relation between social analysis and social practice is developed in various ways by hermeneutical practice theories (e.g., Taylor or most anthropological conceptions of practices), ethnomethodologists, and Foucauldian genealogists. These theorists take their own social-theoretical accounts of practices and their meaning or significance to be continuous with the "self-interpreting" character of social practices.[18] Precisely because the theorist's interpretation is itself situated within her own field of significant action, her account will never reach completion or closure, but it is not thereby rendered pointless. The point of social theory is itself situated within the field of ongoing activity to which it contributes.

Another prominent response to this issue has been to understand scientific inquiry as itself a practice, understandable in the same way as any other social practice. Not surprisingly, this possibility has made the practice idiom especially attractive to social studies of science. If both science and social life more generally are best conceived as "practices", that would give clear impetus to the aspiration to a social science of science.[19] Yet this conception of social science as a kind of meta-practice has also raised serious and far-reaching questions about the epistemic, political, and rhetorical aims of social scientific inquiry, and its representation of other agents and practices. Within anthropology, these problems were centrally posed in Clifford and Marcus [1986] and remain live issues throughout the discipline; within science studies, they have been widely discussed under the heading of "reflexivity" or "diffraction".[20] Perhaps the most striking character of these debates has been the deep disagreements over the locus of the challenge to social scientific practice. Is the difficulty epistemic (and thus continuous with, or perhaps radicalizing, familiar debates about social and cultural relativism), moral and political (the not-always-intended alliance between the quest for authoritative knowledge and the influence of hegemonic political power, and/or the role of authoritative scientific representation in preempting or silencing the self-presentation of social actors), or rhetorical (a quest for new forms of writing and representation that undermine or supplement the implicit authorial authority of the writer or

[18]These theorists differ, of course, in their conception of how social practices are "self-interpreting", including whether 'interpretation' is the appropriate concept (ethnomethodologists emphasize conceptions of practical knowledge and judgment that do not treat participants in practices as "judgmental dopes" [Garfinkel ,1967]; Foucault [1970; 1977; 1978] seeks to conceive his own genealogical "history of the present" as disclosing and partially resisting the networks of power/knowledge within which it is situated, without invoking variations on an "analytic of finitude" that conceives human agents as both transcendental subjects and empirically determined objects, so he would surely have taken 'interpretation' to be problematic on these grounds).

[19]For extensive discussion of the practice idiom within science studies, see [Pickering, 1992]; [Rouse, 1996; 1999]; [Rabinow, 1996], and [Barad, forthcoming].

[20]Prominent discussions of reflexivity within science studies include [Woolgar, 1988]; [Ashmore, 1989]; [Pickering, 1992]. The claim that 'diffraction' is a more appropriate light metaphor than 'reflection' is developed by [Haraway, 1997], and [Barad, forthcoming].

theorist)? Both rhetorically and politically, these arguments have often suggested that the authorial or cultural self-understanding of the inquirer is as much or more at issue in the practice of social science as are the practices of the ostensible "objects" of social scientific inquiry (see, for example, [Marcus and Fischer, 1986]; [Rosaldo, 1989]; [Traweek, 1992]).

1.6 Practices and the Autonomy of the Social

My final expository theme is the frequent appeal to a conception of practices as the proper domain of the social sciences, in order to secure their disciplinary or conceptual autonomy. The most common challenges to conceptions of sociology and anthropology as distinctively "social" sciences have come from psychology (especially conceptions of instrumental or computational rationality in cognition and action), neoclassical economics, and evolutionary biology. These challenges are discussed extensively in other contributions to this volume, so I will only briefly highlight the distinctive contributions of practice theory to these debates.[21] The principal features of social practices that might make them immune to reductive treatment in psychological, economic, or biological terms have already been presented in the preceding sections. The historical and cultural particularity of practices, and the ways in which the meaning of individual performances of a practice depend upon their particular context are perhaps the most frequent grounds for appeal to practice theory in defense of an autonomously *social* science. Practice theory would thereby resist any reduction of social context to the thoughts and actions of individual agents by showing how to understand the latter as dependent upon the constitution of meanings that are irreducibly social, without thereby being ontologically mysterious or epistemically inaccessible. The emphasis upon a level of bodily disposition, discipline, or skill that cannot be made fully explicit as rules or conscious intentions has also been prominently employed to challenge the encroachment of instrumental or computational conceptions of rationality upon the social constitution, comprehension, and deployment of meaning.

Practice theory may also go beyond merely preserving an autonomous domain of social science, by challenging the conceptual or disciplinary autonomy of psychology, neoclassical economics or biology in turn. Within economics itself, the imperial aspirations of neoclassical models of individual economic behavior have already been qualified by widespread recognition of the ineliminable importance of specific institutional contexts in mediating economic behavior, in ways that resonate with practice theory in sociology and anthropology (for example, see [Rutherford, 1996]). Practice theory may offer a more radical challenge to any psychological reduction of social practices, however. Dreyfus long ago noted that the domain of distinctively psychological theorizing occupies a curiously intermediary position between biology and higher-level descriptions of socially-situated action:

[21] For further discussion, see Shweder, this volume; Roth, this volume; Pizzorno, this volume; Zahle, this volume; and Haines, this volume.

> The brain is clearly a physical object which uses physical processes to transform energy from the physical world. But if psychology is to differ from biology, the psychologist must be able to describe some level of functioning other than the physical-chemical reactions in the brain. [Dreyfus, 1979, 163]

For most of the efforts to understand social life in psychological terms, this distinctively psychological "level" of functioning is characterized in the terms of so-called "folk psychology", the attribution of beliefs, desires, hopes, intentions, and other propositionally contentful states to individual agents, as part of a psychological explanation of what they do. There are at least two distinct kinds of practice-theoretical challenge to this strategy of psychological reduction of social life. Those practice theorists that emphasize the role of bodily skills (especially [Dreyfus, 1979]; [Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986]; [Haugeland, 1998]) deny that there need be any semantically contentful psychological intermediaries between the description of bodily action at the biological level, and its description in terms of socially and culturally situated practices. These practice theories thus suggest that ordinary perception and action often has no appropriate description at the intermediary "psychological" level, but is appropriately and perspicuously described and explained in practice-theoretical terms.

A more radical and far-reaching practice-theoretical challenge to folk-psychological conceptions arises within some theories of discursive practice. The objection is that the supposedly characteristic psychological categories of belief, desire, intention, perception, and other "propositional attitudes" in fact do not refer to *psychological* states at all, but instead characterize "normative statuses" that are constituted within distinctively *social* practices. Brandom [1994] offers the most extensively developed version of this line of argument. He points out that the propositional attitude concepts are ambiguous. When they refer to intentional contents that speakers or agents explicitly endorse (or would endorse upon reflection), they might plausibly be mistaken for psychological states that might somehow be physically realized in people's minds or bodies. But these concepts are also appropriately used to characterize commitments that other agents attribute to someone to make best rational sense of her actions. He then proposes a unitary conception of these two kinds of ascriptions, as normative statuses taken on through participation in public, discursive practices. The apparent difference between two kinds of belief or desire would then simply mark two ways of acquiring the normative status of a semantically contentful commitment (or entitlement) within a social practice, by first-person avowal and third-person ascription. Brandom's model of discursive practices would thus obviate any intermediary cognitive-psychological "level" between neurophysiology and social practice, understanding the ascription of individual beliefs and desires as part of a complex, socially-articulated discursive practice. Rouse [2002] then expands the scope of Brandom's argument by extending it to encompass perception and action as well as belief, desire or intention, thereby integrating Brandom's challenge to the autonomy of psychological explanation with that posed by practice theorists who emphasize bodily skills.

2 CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS IN PRACTICE THEORY

The six themes I highlighted in the first part of the paper provide some unity to the various projects in sociology, anthropology, social theory, and the philosophy of social science that have been characterized as contributions to practice theory. My discussion showed the considerable diversity and controversy that persists amidst this thematic unity, because various practice theorists develop these themes in different, and sometimes opposing directions. In this section, I shall address a different kind of controversy concerning practice theory. The issues that concern me now are not simply points about which practice theorists disagree, but issues that may pose conceptual difficulties for practice theories collectively. There are three such points that I shall address. The first issue is whether the appeal to practices can actually resolve the problems about justification and normativity that were highlighted by Wittgenstein and Heidegger. The second concerns the conception of meaning and its explicit articulation that underlies the distinction sometimes invoked in practice theories between what is (or can be) explicitly formulated in rules or language, and the tacit, perhaps inarticulable background to such formulations. The final issue is the significance of conceiving practices as "social" practices, that is, as characteristic forms of human interaction which can largely be abstracted from their material embodiment and environment.

2.1 Two Concepts of Practice in Response to Normative Regulism

We have seen that practice theories are motivated in substantial part by Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms of normative regulism, which identified the understanding of norms or meanings with grasping and following rules (see section 1.1 above). The question I raise here is whether and how practice theories can successfully account for such understanding in ways that avoid the incoherence of regulist conceptions. Regulism about meanings and norms was incoherent, because rules are themselves meaningful and normative. If understanding a rule and following it correctly requires understanding and following yet another rule that interprets the first rule, then we will never arrive at an account of meaning and normativity. The most common conception of how practice theories overcome this problem is by suggesting that the regress of rules comes to an end in a regularity *exhibited* by what practitioners do, rather than in a rule *followed* by them. In accord with Brandom, I call this alternative a "regularist" conception of practices and the norms that govern them.[22]

The inspiration for regularist practice theories frequently stems either from Heidegger's insistence that an anonymous conformity to what "one" does *(das Man)* is an essential structure of human existence, or Wittgenstein's remark (PI 217) that, "If I have exhausted the justifications [for following the rule in the

[22]Brandom [1994] introduces the terms 'regulist' and 'regularist' for conceptions of normativity in terms of rule-following and regularity-exhibiting, respectively. His own principal criticisms of regulist and regularist conceptions are on pp. 20-26 and 26-29 respectively.

way I do], I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say, 'This is simply what I do"'. The result is to conceive a practice as an exhibited regularity that underlies and undergirds action according to explicit norms or rules. Whether Wittgenstein's or Heidegger's own accounts amount to a regularist conception of practices is a more controversial question; in my view, neither endorses a regularist conception of practices, and indeed, they both develop significant criticisms of regularism, but this is not the place to defend my interpretation of their work.

Turner's [1994] criticisms of practice theories are directed exclusively against regularist conceptions of practices (indeed, he does not acknowledge any alternative to such conceptions). His exposition of social practice theories instead highlights the difference between conceiving the regularities that are constitutive of a practice as semantically contentful presuppositions, or as prior and perhaps even inaccessible to semantic articulation. In the former case, he argues that practice theories cannot account for the psychological reality of the attributed presuppositions; in the latter case, he claims that the causal efficacy of the underlying behavioral regularities cannot be explicated; moreover, in neither case can practice theorists account for the transmissable identity of the regularities that they posit to explain the normativity of social life. Given these difficulties, Turner concludes that there is no adequate evidential basis for the claim that there are regularities of performance behind the manifestly diverse phenomena of social life.

Turner is right to acknowledge a difference between semantically articulated presuppositions and shared patterns of behavior, and also correct to criticize both ways of conceiving practices in terms of underlying regularities. His objections to the psychological reality, causal efficacy, and transmissibility of these regularities nevertheless do not quite get to the heart of a more fundamental difficulty confronting *any* regularist conception of norms or meanings. Regularist conceptions of norms run up against what Brandom [1994] called the gerrymandering problem: a finite set of performances exhibits indefinitely many regularities. One can in principle always identify various performances as instances of the same practice in multiple ways, with no grounds to identify the relevant "practice" (or its presuppositions) with any one of them. These alternative conceptions of the underlying regularity would of course provide differing verdicts as to whether subsequent performances were in accord with prior practice, but the resulting conception would remain underdetermined even by the additional evidence, since the gerrymandering problem recurs. Regularist appeals to exhibited rules thus *cannot* resolve the difficulties confronting regulist conceptions of normativity as rule-following.

There is, however, an alternative conception of practices and normativity that does not reduce them to rules or regularities.[23] On this conception, a practice is not a regularity underlying its constituent performances, but a pattern of interaction among them that expresses their mutual normative accountability. On this "normative" conception of practices, a performance belongs to a practice if

[23]For a more extensive treatment of this conception of practices, see [Rouse, 1999], and [Rouse, 2002], especially chapters 6-9.

it is appropriate to hold it accountable as a correct or incorrect performance of that practice. Such holding to account is itself integral to the practice, and can likewise be done correctly or incorrectly. If incorrectly, then it would appropriately be accountable in turn, by responding to it as would be appropriate to a mistaken holding-accountable. And so forth. Such a conception of practices, as constituted by the mutual accountability of their constituent performances, can be retroactively identified in many familiar practice theorists. For example, Brandom once suggested that "we can envisage a situation in which *every* social practice of [a] community has as its generating response a performance which must be in accord with another social practice" [1979, 189–90], and must ultimately be accountable to an "essentially perspectival", "token-reflexive" conception of objectivity [1994, ch. 9]. MacIntyre's conception of a tradition also exemplifies a normative conception: "What constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations." [1980, 62]. Further examples include Davidson's [1986] denial that discursive practice depends upon a shared language, and my rereading [Rouse, 1999] of Turner's own reinterpretation of Mauss on French and American ways of walking. Wittgenstein's suggested invocation, "This is what we do" can also be appropriated within a normative conception of practices if given the inflection with which a parent tells a child, "We don't hit other children, do we?"; such an utterance does not describe a regularity, but instead holds a prior performance accountable to a norm.

Turner is not alone in failing to recognize even the possibility of a normative conception of practices. Such a conception is difficult to recognize *as* a conception of practices, because it amounts to something like a Galilean or Copernican revolution in philosophical understanding of normativity. Philosophers have long been suspicious of normativity, regarding it as acceptable only when reducible to or otherwise explicable by what is non-normative. Typically, normativity has been characterized in terms of the presence of a special kind of entity (such as values, rules, regularities, commitments, or preferences), or in terms of another modality (such as rational, transcendental, or social necessity). Note well that a regularist conception of practices itself exemplifies the familiar strategy of explicating normativity by reducing it to something non-normative, in this case the exhibiting of a regularity. A normative conception of practices instead makes normativity irreducible. Such irreducibility does not make normativity inexplicable, however.

There are at least three crucial aspects to the explication of a normative conception of practices. First, the bounds of a practice are identified by the ways in which its constitutive performances bear upon one another, rather than by any regularities of behavior or meaning that they encompass. One performance expresses a response to another, for example, by correcting it, rewarding or punishing its performer, drawing inferences from it, translating it, imitating it (perhaps under different circumstances), circumventing its effects, and so on. Not surprisingly, such conceptions have most commonly arisen in accounts of discursive practice. Latour and Woolgar (1986, ch. 2), for example, treat statements within a scientific practice as implicitly "modalizing" other statements, whether by explicitly

referring to and qualifying them ("S claims that p", "S has shown that p", "it is widely acknowledged that p", "despite some recent ill-founded claims to the contrary, $\sim p$", and so forth), or by implicitly referring to them, perhaps by taking them for granted or ignoring them.[24] Brandom's [1994] model of discursive practice as "deontic scorekeeping" offers a much more general conception of an interactive field of performances, mediated by each participant's implicit tracking of the commitments and entitlements accrued by the various participants, such that each subsequent performance affects the significance of others by changing the score. Foucault's conception of power, as "a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately upon others, [but] instead acts upon their actions" [1982, 220], does expand such conceptions beyond the explicitly discursive realm, however. Wartenberg [1990] offers a useful gloss upon this conception, by explicating how the action of one action upon another is mediated by what he calls a "social alignment":

> A situated power relationship between [the performances of] two social agents is thus constituted by the presence of peripheral social agents in the form of a *social alignment*. A field of social agents can constitute an alignment in regard to [the performances of] a social agent if and only if, first of all, their actions in regard to that agent are coordinated... comprehensive[ly] enough that the social agent facing the alignment encounters that alignment as having control over certain things that she might either need or desire... The concept of a social alignment thus provides a way of understanding the "field" that constitutes a situated power relationship *as* a power relationship.[25] [Wartenberg, 1990, 150]

The result is a conception of practices whose performances are integrated within the practice not by a shared semantic content or behavioral similarity, but as a complex network of mutual interaction.

Such networks of mutually interactive performances are not yet normative, however, and hence not yet identifiable as practices. The second crucial feature of practices, normatively conceived, is that these patterns of interaction must constitute something at issue and at stake in their outcome. MacIntyre provides a useful illustration of this point: "If I am a Jew, I have to recognize that the tradition of Judaism is partly constituted by a continuous argument over what it means to be a Jew" [1980, 62]. What it is to be a Jew is at issue in the practices of Judaism

[24] Latour and Woolgar's account of such modalities, and Latour's [1986] later expansion of the conception, do not adequately articulate a normative conception of scientific practice in my view, but they do exemplify the conception of practice-constitutive performances as mutually responsive to one another.

[25] Wartenberg himself talks about alignments of social agents rather than of their performances. I have interpolated the Foucauldian notion that power relations are between actions rather than agents. Elsewhere [Rouse, 1996, ch. 7], I have argued that his characterization solely in terms of social relations between agents also inappropriately omits the role of agents' physical environment and the things, processes, and interactions it contains.

in all their historical complexity; what is at stake in those practices is the difference it would make to resolve that issue one way rather than another. But that difference is not already settled; working it out is what these practices continue to be "about". The issues and stakes constitutive of practices thus indicate the temporality of practices and their normative accountability: practices point ahead of themselves toward something essentially contestable. For a performance to be accountable to norms is not merely for it to interact with other performances, but to do so in a way that can be understood to be for the sake of something at stake in the interaction and its consequences.

Most philosophical conceptions of normativity presume that there must be some determinate norms that already govern the performances accountable to them, and thus that already settle what is at stake in the practices to which those performances belong. Such conceptions might allow for epistemic uncertainty about these norms on the part of the practitioners, but not metaphysical indeterminacy. Normative practice theories, however, take the issues and stakes in practices to be indeterminate (or perspectivally variant), and this amounts to a third crucial feature of their conception of practices. Samuel Wheeler strikingly presents such indeterminacy in the case of the semantic and epistemic norms at stake in discursive practice:

> If truth is a matter of norms, of what "we" say and when we say it, and there is a struggle about what is to be said, truth is loose. We should not think that somehow the truth is already there, waiting to be discovered. "Is true" is like "is a turning point", "is the winning run", or "is a decisive play." Such concepts can only be applied retrospectively. [1990, 132][26]

Brandom characterizes the commitment to the objectivity of conceptual norms (which he takes to be constitutive of the normativity and semantic contentfulness of discursive practices) as essentially perspectival rather than as indeterminate, but he is making a similar point:

> Each perspective is at most *locally* privileged in that it incorporates a structural distinction between objectively correct applications of concepts and applications that are merely subjectively taken to be correct. But none of these perspectives is privileged *in advance* over any other. ...Sorting out who *should* be counted as correct, whose claims and applications of concepts should be treated as authoritative, is a messy retail business. ...[T]here is no bird's-eye view above the fray of competing claims from which those that deserve to prevail can be identified ...[1994, 600, 601, my emphases]

[26]Strictly speaking, the concepts *can* be applied prospectively, and are so applied whenever someone makes a truth claim. The correctness of their application can only be settled retrospectively, however.

Foucault likewise rejects any "sovereign" standpoint "above the fray" from which competing political or epistemic claims can be definitively assessed, colorfully expressed by the claim that "in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" [1978, 88–89).[27] For such views, the normativity of practices is expressed not by any regularity among their performances, or by any already determinate norm to which they are accountable, but instead in the mutual accountability of their constitutive performances to issues and stakes whose definitive resolution is always prospective. Normativity is an interactive orientation toward a future encompassing present circumstances within its past.

This rejection of even the possibility of a sovereign standpoint that could definitively resolve perspectival differences or overcome the metaphysical indeterminacy of what is at issue and at stake in social practices thereby also commits normative practice theories to the continuity of social theory and social life. On such a conception, the performances that contribute to a practice at least implicitly already express an interpretation of what is at issue and at stake in the practice. Moreover, any effort to stand outside of an ongoing practice and definitively identify the norms that govern its performances is instead incorporated within the practice, as one more contribution to shaping what the practice will become. As Arthur Fine nicely summarized this point in the case of scientific practice,

> If science is a performance, then it is one where the audience and crew play as well. Directions for interpretation are also part of the act. If there are questions and conjectures about the meaning of this or that, or its purpose, then there is room for those in the production too. The script, moreover, is never finished, and no past dialogue can fix future action. Such a performance... picks out is own interpretations, locally, as it goes along. [1986, 148]

Such a conception of normativity is especially suitable for naturalists, since it deliberately eschews any determination of norms from a standpoint outside of nature and history, yet it is also non-reductive. The causal nexus within which an action is situated does not determine its normative significance, but it does substantially affect it. Indeed, within normative conceptions of social practice, the concept of power takes on a central role precisely in order to express the relations between causes and norms. 'Power' does not denote a substantive capacity within the world (it is distinct from force or violence, for example); instead, it expresses how one action affects the situation in which other actions occur, so as to reconfigure what is at issue and at stake for the relevant actors.[28]

[27] Foucault's willingness to extend his criticism of the role of sovereignty within political theory to a comparable criticism of "epistemic sovereignty" is only implicit in his account of the mutually constitutive relations of power/knowledge. Rouse [1996] develops an explicit criticism of the aspiration to a standpoint of epistemic sovereignty.

[28] Rouse [2002] explicitly defends both this conception of power as expressive rather than denotative, and its contribution to a naturalistic conception of normativity. Similar conceptions of how actions affect the normative significance of other actions can be readily identified elsewhere,

2.2 Language, Presuppositions, and Discursive Practices

In section 1.4, we saw that the apparent diversity of practice-theoretical treatments of language marked different interpretations of a widely shared commitment that social agents' understanding of their actions and interactions with others cannot be understood solely in terms of explicitly articulated or articulable propositions or rules. This commitment in turn results from practice theorists' acceptance of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms of normative regulism. John Haugeland usefully expresses this common stance toward language as a rejection of what he calls "the first dogma of rationalism", the fundamentally positivist claim that "reality is 'exhausted' by the facts — that is, by the true propositions" [forthcoming, p. 1]. Something seems importantly right about the practice-theoretical criticism of this rationalist dogma. After all, we do many things without ability or need to say them, and our understanding of what we say depends upon many non-linguistic capacities. Moreover, further articulating such matters verbally does not leave the original skills and activities unchanged. Yet difficulties also confront the attempt to characterize some aspects of our skills and dispositions as essentially tacit or inarticulable. The problem is not just one of having to *say* the allegedly unsayable; it is also unclear how to specify in advance the limits of language or linguistic expressibility.

Underlying these difficulties, I think, is a widespread confusion in many such discussions concerning what it is to make something explicit. Defenders of inarticulable knowhow seem to conceive a contrast to explicit articulation as a kind of complete verbal counterpart to what is described; Haugeland's formulation captures it well with the notion that some portion of reality might be "exhaustively" described. His positivist "first dogma of rationalism" would then be the claim that the exhaustibly describable portion of reality is its proper subset. What worries me, however, is the more basic presumption that *whatever* portion of reality is explicitly described is thereby somehow "exhausted". On such conceptions of what it is to make explicit, an assertion represents something, and whatever portion of reality it represents, it represents completely. Moreover, to understand a proposition would then be to grasp its representational content completely. The world would then divide neatly into those portions that are representable and understandable in this way, and those that are not.

The problem with this conception is that it seems to me a hopelessly untenable account of linguistic description or conceptual articulation. The history of early 20th Century philosophy of language can be written as a story of failed attempts to realize such a conception of linguistic expression as something fully present to

however. Most obviously, Foucault's [1977; 1978] account of power/knowledge embodies such a conception. Yet the central argument of MacIntyre [1981] also implicitly treats actions as causally reshaping the normative significance of subsequent actions. His claim is that the conjoined effect of conceptual innovations of modern moral theorists and the emergence of managerial and therapeutic practices has been to change what is at issue and at stake in moral life today; the subtitle of his concluding chapter, "Nietzsche *or* Aristotle, Trotsky *and* St. Benedict", was intended as a capsule expression of his conception of this reconfiguration of those issues and stakes.

the mind, whether in the form of Fregean (or Husserlian) senses, Tractarian pictures (whose representational content can be said, but whose pictorial form can merely be shown), Carnapian formal structures, and so forth. Quine's [1960] and Davidson's [1984] criticisms of the analytic/synthetic and scheme/content distinctions are prominent markers for the failure of any such autonomous conception of linguistic expression. Davidson concludes that such criticisms "erase the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally" [1986, 445–46]. In doing so, they erase any boundary between what can be said in language, and what cannot, not because everything is expressible, but because what it is to express something in language (and to understand what is expressed) is integral to a more extensive practical competence. Indeed, those practice theorists who infer from Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's criticisms of regulism the claim that some parts of reality are essentially inarticulable betray an incomplete understanding of the consequences of those criticisms. Only by exempting language itself from the criticism of regulism, and thereby banishing linguistic meaning from the world into an extraworldly realm of Fregean senses, Husserlian transcendental consciousness, or Carnapian logical form can one preserve a boundary between the expressible and the essentially tacit.

Recognizing how thoroughgoing the criticism of regulism must be thus strongly supports those approaches that incorporate the understanding and use of language within practice theory. To use and respond to words and sentences as semantically significant is to engage in discursive practice. There is a rich and diverse philosophical literature along these lines, from speech act theory, to Davidson or Brandom, to Foucault, which I have already discussed it in section 1.4 above. We can now, however, draw one final and telling conclusion about such conceptions. To talk about discursive practice in this way is not to draw a boundary between discursive and non-discursive practice. Language is itself a social practice that integrally involves a rich practical and perceptual engagement with our surroundings. Indeed, language use itself involves complex bodily skills. But the discursive and the non-discursive are inseparable, not only because discursive practice involves much more than just word use, but also because the much more finely-grained articulation that language makes possible transforms everything else we do. Instead of treating language as an autonomous domain of representation, the best practice theories consider language a pervasive and irreducible aspect of human ways of life. Rather than talking about "language" as a distinctive kind of entity, skill, or structure, such theories emphasize the semantically articulated normativity of all human activities and institutions.

2.3 The Social and the Biological

I will address the third and final conceptual problem within practice theory more briefly, largely because a comparably thorough discussion would take me too far afield. Most practice theories primarily concern *social* practice, that is, the situated doings of human agents as interactive with those of other human agents. Vir-

tually everyone acknowledges that social agents are "also" natural entities causally interactive with their material surroundings, and perhaps more strongly, that social practices depend upon physical and biological capacities of human beings and their environment. Having acknowledged such interaction, however, most theorists then treat social interaction as more or less autonomous from its physical and biological capacities and circumstances. Talk of a more or less autonomous world of meaning, rationality, normativity, or social practice, realized "in" the natural world but conceptually distinct from it, has become the philosophically respectable way to sustain an analogue to Kant's dualism between the phenomenal world governed by natural laws, and the noumenal world of actions according to a rational conception of law.

I nevertheless think it is a mistake to distinguish the social world from its natural environment in this way, such that practice theory would make the social world the domain of autonomously social sciences. Moreover, this mistake is one that practice theory is especially well equipped to overcome. It is not sufficient to acknowledge that the social and natural worlds "interact". Adopting another distinction from Haugeland [1999, ch. 9], I take the important alternative to conceiving social and natural "worlds" as interacting to be recognizing their "intimate" interconnectedness. Haugeland introduced this distinction between "interaction" and "intimacy" to reject not only any clear boundary between mind and body, but also between body and world, concluding that "human intelligence abides in the meaningful, which... extends to the entire human world" [1999, 237]. I would add that the human world and the supposedly inhuman world of nature are *also* too entangled to allow clear and useful boundaries between them.

Practice theories provide multiple reasons to insist upon the intimacy of natural and human worlds. One reason for such insistence is continuous with Haugeland's challenge to the autonomy of mind and body: social practices are embodied, and the bodily skills through which they are realized are intimately responsive to the affordances and resistances of their surroundings. A second consideration arises from the integral role of equipment and "material culture" more generally in human practices. The recurrent difficulty of clearly distinguishing socially instituted norms of correct performance from instrumental norms of success and failure calls for a conception of "practice" that cuts across any boundary between normative social interaction and its causal-environmental nexus. Similar difficulties arise at a macro level in the intertwining of environmental and social or political history. Yet a third reason to recognize the intimate entanglement of nature and social practice arises from the semantic externalism needed for an adequate conception of discursive practice. We cannot understand the normativity of language simply in terms of intralinguistic relations, and/or the pragmatic interrelations between speakers. Language use is intimately connected to the circumstances in which utterances are made. That point parallels my claim in section 2.2 that there can be no interesting boundary between discursive and non-discursive practice.

Language and discursive practice invite further reflection upon what is at stake in the difference between appeals to the interaction or intimacy of nature and

culture. When divisions are made between nature and the human, social world, discursive practice is almost invariably placed on "our" side of the distinction (whereas human anatomy and physiology are mostly conceded to nature). The attainment (both in human evolution and in individual ontogeny) of a physical capacity for speech and hearing (including, presumably, the relevant patterns of neural development) perhaps belongs within biology, but initiation into extant human languages and the cultural patterns they embody is reserved for social and cultural study. Yet such divisions clearly will not do. Theorists of development and evolution nowadays recognize that development is not a self-contained process within an organism, but instead involves characteristic patterns of interaction with its environment; moreover, such developmental patterns are integral to evolution. In this theoretical context, it would be difficult not to acknowledge that the pervasive presence of human speech and written symbols are among the most pervasive and highly influential features of the environments in which human biological development normally occurs. Indeed, the continuing reproduction of natural languages is perhaps the most striking example of what biologists call "niche construction", the ways in which organisms make the relevant environmental circumstances shaping their own development and evolution.[29]

Breaking down the boundaries between the social and the biological may nevertheless seem to resuscitate the specter of biological determinism, or at least of the biological subsumption of social inquiry. Yet such worries depend upon a narrowly reductive conception of biology, which would identify the biological domain with changes in gene frequencies, molecular cell biology, and organismic physiology. Ironically, it is precisely the spectacular successes of molecular genomics that have most extensively challenged (I am inclined to say "demolished") any such narrow conception of the biological domain.[30] I therefore conclude by suggesting that practice theory conceived more adequately in this respect does indeed preserve the integrity of the social sciences, not as a bulwark against reductive appropriation by biological interlopers, however, but instead as an ineliminably rich aspect of a more adequate human biology.

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[29] On "niche construction", see [Laland *et al.*, 2001]. For more general discussion of the new perspectives in evolutionary and developmental biology reflected in this paragraph, see [Oyama, Griffiths and Gray, 2001].

[30] [Dupre, 2004] provides a good introduction to the role of molecular genomics in undermining reductive, gene-centered conceptions of biology.

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