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Theoretical Anarchism

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Abstract

Philosophical anarchists hold that there is no such thing as genuine practical authority. Most epistemologists seem to at least tacitly accept an analogous position with respect to theoretical authority, that there is no such thing as a kind of authority over belief that is robustly analogous to genuine practical authority. I argue that appreciating this has an important consequence. Absent reason to think that there is a relevant difference between the practical and theoretical cases, anarchism about practical and theoretical authority should either stand or fall together.

I. Introduction

In his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Thomas Reid claims that there is a class of mental capacities or activities that are irreducibly social in nature. He terms such mental capacities "social operations of mind."

When [a person] asks information, or receives it; when he bears testimony, or receives the testimony of another; when he asks a favor, or accepts one; when he gives a command to his servant, or receives one from a superior: when he plights his faith in a promise or contract; these are acts of social intercourse between intelligent beings, and can have no place in solitude. They suppose understanding and will; but they suppose something more, which is neither understanding nor will; that is, society with other intelligent beings.

(2002, 68) [End Page 219]

Reid's catalogue of social operations of mind includes both theoretical and practical or cognitive and conative activities. He classes the asking and receiving of information and the giving and receiving of testimony alongside the asking and receiving of favors, the giving and receiving of commands and promises, and the formation of contracts, claiming that all such activities cannot be reduced to the operation of some combination of individual solitary capacities.

To ask a question, is as simple an operation as to judge or reason; yet it is neither judgment, nor reasoning, nor simple apprehension, nor is it any composition of these. Testimony is neither simple apprehension, nor judgment, nor reasoning. The same may be said of a promise, or of a contract. These acts of mind are perfectly understood by every man of common understanding; but, when Philosophers attempt to bring them within the pale of their divisions, by analysing them, they find inexplicable mysteries, and even contradictions, in them.

(2002, 68)

By the "inexplicable mysteries" that result when philosophers attempt to analyze the social operations of mind in terms of solitary operations, Reid presumably has in mind Hume's famous discussion of promise and contract, but he is clear that these mysteries arise much more broadly whenever one attempts to reduce any of the social operations of mind to capacities that are solitary.

Stephen Darwall has made similar claims concerning the phenomenon of the second person. In *The Second-Person Standpoint*, Darwall claims that there are a variety of speech acts that purport to provide a distinctive kind of reason for action

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ultimately requires defending a positive alternative account of the nature of authority, something that I have not attempted here. However, I do hope to have motivated the idea that, *pace* Darwall, the problem here is one that spans the divide between theoretical and practical reason. The philosophical anarchist position is one that applies equally to theoretical and practical authority, and so we have good reason to think that a positive defense of authority as a distinctively social or second-personal transaction should be capable of applying to both authority over belief and authority over action.

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that arises only within the context of interpersonal or social relations. He calls these reasons “second-personal reasons.”

A second-personal reason is one whose validity depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons and, therefore, on the possibility of the reason’s being addressed person-to-person. Reasons addressed or presupposed in orders, requests, claims, reproaches, complaints, demands, promises, contracts, givings of consent, commands, and so on are all second-personal in this sense. They simply wouldn’t exist but for their role in second-personal address.

(2006, 8; original emphasis)

Darwall claims that orders, requests, claims, reproaches, complaints, demands, promises, contracts, givings of consent, and commands are all speech acts capable of generating distinctively second-personal reasons, reasons that “wouldn’t exist but for their role in second-personal address,” and he holds that the phenomenon of the second person cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of anything non-second-personal.

These notions—second-personal authority, valid claim or demand, second-personal reason, and responsibility—therefore comprise an interdefinable circle; each implies all the rest. Moreover, I contend, there is no way to break into this circle from outside it. Propositions formulated only with normative and evaluative concepts that are not already implicitly second-personal cannot adequately ground propositions formulated with concepts within the circle.

(2006, 12) [End Page 220]

Darwall's conception of the second person is sophisticated and complex, and it might appear to have little in common with Reid's discussion of the social operations of mind. But it is worth noting that Reid himself explicitly links the exercise of his social operations of mind, many of which are identical to the speech acts that Darwall claims are capable of producing irreducibly second-personal reasons, to the phenomenon of the second person.

In all languages, the second person of verbs, the pronoun of the second-person, and the vocative case in nouns, are appropriated to the expression of social operations of mind, and could never have had place in language but for this purpose: Nor is it a good argument against this observation that, by a rhetorical figure, we sometimes address persons that are absent, or even inanimated beings, in the second person. For it ought to be remembered, that all figurative ways of using words or phrases suppose a natural and literal meaning of them.

(2002, 70)

Reid claims that the function of the grammatical second person is to aid in the exercise of the social operations of mind, and he even goes so far as to claim that without the social operations, language would have no need for the second person.

In this respect, there is a striking similarity between the phenomena that Reid identifies under the heading of the social operations of mind and the phenomena that Darwall identifies under the heading of the second-person standpoint. Though their respective accounts of these phenomena differ considerably, they both think that there is something philosophically significant at work in transactions like promising, contracting, and commanding. Moreover, they both think that appreciating

Anscombe identifies, there is a deeper commonality that spans even this difference. **[End Page 237]**

The philosophical anarchist position that I have been concerned with in this paper is one that targets this deeper commonality. The anarchist is not worried about the fact that we must solve coordination problems. In Wolff's example of the autonomous ship passenger, the passenger treats the captain's orders much as she would the directives of someone charged with solving a simple coordination problem. Wolff thinks that this is consistent with refusing to treat what the captain says as a distinctively authoritative reason for action. It is the idea of distinctively authoritative reasons, of reasons that require that a subject suspend her own private judgment, that the anarchist opposes, and we haven't yet seen good reason to think that the possibility of such distinctively authoritative reasons for belief is ruled out by the nature of theoretical rationality. The disanalogy that Anscombe identifies between authority over belief and authority over action, though genuine, thus poses no threat to the idea that the theoretical and practical guises of philosophical anarchism should either stand or fall together.

Clearly, there is much more to be said about these issues. Nevertheless, I think that we have here a limited defense of Reid's contention that, at least with respect to the particular phenomenon of authority, the problems involved in understanding this distinctively social phenomenon are problems that span the divide between theoretical and practical reason. Philosophical anarchism can be understood as a particular instance of the general desire to reduce the social or second-personal operations of mind to operations that are solitary or third personal. In arguing that there is no such thing as legitimate or genuine authority, the anarchist contends that the only proper relation we can bear to the directives of de facto authorities is to treat them as merely reliable indicators of what to do or believe, just as we treat the output of ordinary impersonal instruments. Rejecting this position

drive on the right or the left prior to the authority's decision. In the case of arbitration, there is a fact of the matter concerning, for example, whether one of the parties breached a contract, and the arbitrator is tasked not only with making a decision but with making the right decision, with determining whether a contract was breached and, if so, what remedies ought to be implemented. If the arbitrator determines that a contract was breached and directs one party to pay restitution, then the arbitrator's directive gives the guilty party a distinctively authoritative reason to act. The arbitrator "makes it right" for the party to pay restitution in that she gives the party good reason to do so. However, it is not clear that the arbitrator "makes it right" for the party to do this in the sense of making the action correct. The arbitrator's job is to figure out the course of action that is the independently correct one in the situation and to then give the parties reason to pursue it. Similarly, the job of a theoretical authority is to determine what is independently the case and then to give her audience reason to believe it.

So even though Anscombe is right that in some cases, particularly those that involve solving coordination problems, practical authorities are capable of making a certain course of action correct, it would be a mistake to think that this is true of all cases of legitimate practical authority. While a military officer may frequently be tasked with solving coordination problems and, in so doing, may thereby make certain actions correct, she may often also be tasked with figuring out which actions are independently correct in certain situations and then giving her soldiers reason to pursue them. Presumably, the officer's order to ceasefire is of this latter variety. What all cases of practical authority have in common is that they involve the giving of a particular kind of reason, a distinctively authoritative reason, but for all that we have seen thus far, this is something that is true of theoretical authority as well. So even if theoretical and practical authority sometimes differ in the sense that

the philosophical significance of such transactions requires appreciating their irreducibly social character. It requires appreciating that what is going on in such transactions is not something that can be reduced to some combination of individual or third-personal materials.

Despite these similarities, Reid and Darwall differ in one crucial respect. Whereas Reid includes cognitive operations like the asking and receiving of information and the giving and receiving of testimony among his social operations of mind, Darwall holds that the phenomenon of the second person is essentially practical. He claims that there can be no such thing as an irreducibly second-personal reason for belief, and he holds that cognitive transactions like the giving and receiving of testimony must ultimately bottom out in third-personal considerations (2006, 57). Whereas Reid sees an important continuity between what is going on in transactions like testifying and commanding, Darwall sees a striking and important discontinuity.

In *Testimony, Trust, and Authority*, I argued that there is just as much reason to think that there can be irreducibly second-personal reasons for belief as there is to think that there can be irreducibly second-personal reasons for action and that Darwall's reasons for thinking the contrary are unconvincing. I do not wish to rehearse or defend that argument here. Instead, I would like to begin to approach the general disagreement between Reid and Darwall by both narrowing my focus and taking a rather large step back. Rather than focusing on general claims about [End Page 221] the nature of the second person or of second-personal reasons, I want to focus on one particular kind of second-personal transaction, that involved in the exercise of authority, particularly in the giving and receiving of orders and commands. And rather than attempt to give a positive general account of the nature of such authority relations, I want to examine a worry about their very existence. There is a position in political philosophy that denies

that there is any such thing as genuine, legitimate, or *de jure* authority, that there is any such thing as a person or group in a position to make it the case that others ought to do things simply by directing them to do so.¹ This position is typically called *philosophical anarchism*. Philosophical anarchists admit the existence of *de facto* authorities—persons or groups that claim authority and have the power to make it the case that others comply with their directives—but they hold that power to enforce compliance is insufficient for genuine authority. A genuine authority is not only able to make people do things but to make it the case that they *ought* to do things simply by directing them to do so. Such genuine authority, claims the philosophical anarchist, doesn't exist.

Importantly, philosophical anarchism doesn't entail political anarchism. Philosophical anarchism is a position concerning the existence of genuine authority. This philosophical position doesn't entail the political position that existing states and institutions ought to be opposed or eliminated. Philosophical anarchists hold that even if there is no such thing as genuine authority, we might still have good moral and prudential reasons for conforming to the law. Moreover, avowed philosophical anarchists divide according to whether they take the anarchist thesis to be an a priori thesis concerning whether there can possibly be such a thing as genuine authority or an a posteriori

¹ Legitimate or *de jure* authorities are often characterized as having a “right to rule” that generates for others a corresponding “duty to obey.” The idea that authorities have a right to rule has been questioned. See, for example, Enoch (2012). Moreover, as I argue below, the philosophical anarchist position can be formulated in such a way as to leave to one side questions about whether subjects have a duty or obligation of obedience. I thus take the core of the philosophical anarchist position to target the idea that authorities are *in a position* (whether or not they have a right to this position) to make it the case that others *ought to do things* (whether or not they have a duty or obligation to do these things) simply by directing them to do so.

right is not only that it gives the audience a sufficient reason for performing the action. The authority's decision is what makes the action objectively correct.

Anscombe thus points to what I take to be a genuine disanalogy between theoretical and practical authority. The decisions of practical authorities are capable of making actions right or good in a way that the decisions of theoretical authorities are not capable of making beliefs true.²³ However, practical authorities do not only solve coordination problems, and when they are not simply solving coordination problems, it is less clear that they are capable of “making actions right” in a sense that goes beyond that of giving the audience a sufficient (authoritative) reason for performing the action. Consider the case of arbitration.²⁴ When disputing parties agree to enter arbitration, they agree to bind themselves to the decision of the arbitrator. This is similar to the above case of a group of people agreeing to bind themselves to the decisions of an authority charged with solving a coordination problem. However, in the above case, there was no fact of the matter about whether it was right to

²³ This is related to a distinction drawn by Friedman (1990) between being “in authority” and being “an authority.” A person is in authority when there is an established and agreed-upon procedure that puts her in the position of deciding a course of action concerning which there would otherwise be disagreement. A person is an authority when she has special access to an independent order of facts. Friedman thinks that these are both forms of authority and that in both cases the directives of the authorities involved amount to distinctively authoritative reasons for belief or action, but he holds, rightly, that the presuppositions of the two forms of authority differ. As I read Friedman, however, the distinction between being in authority and an authority doesn't map cleanly onto the distinction between practical and theoretical authority. Friedman holds that all theoretical authorities are in the position of being an authority, and he holds that only practical authorities are in the position of being in authority. However, he seems to hold that some practical authorities are both in authority and an authority and that some practical authorities may only be an authority.

²⁴ Raz frequently appeals to the case of arbitration in support of his service conception of authority.

and a belief can be justified without being true. Apart from self-referential cases like the one mentioned above, speakers are not generally capable of making what they say a true thing to believe. However, they are certainly capable of making what they say a justified thing to think. A speaker's testimony that *p* often amounts to sufficient epistemic reason for believing that *p*, and so speakers are in this sense capable of making it right for an audience to believe something.

Anscombe seems to be claiming that practical authorities are capable of doing something analogous to the first sense of making it right to believe something, something analogous to making something a true thing to think. Not only are practical authorities capable of making something a justified thing to do, of giving an audience sufficient reason to do something, they are capable of making that thing "a good thing to do." I think that there is a sense in which this is correct. Imagine that a group of people determines that a decision needs to be made concerning a certain course of action, for example, whether to drive on the right- or the left-hand side of the road. There is disagreement within the group as to which course of action to pursue. Some people would prefer driving on the left, while some would prefer driving on the right. It is imperative that everyone does one or the other, but it doesn't matter which. The group therefore decides to put one person in charge of making the decision. This person is charged with determining for everyone else what to do, and when she makes a decision, when she declares, say, that everyone must drive on the right, this decision makes it the case that driving on the right is "a good thing to do." We can imagine that prior to her decision, there simply wasn't a fact of the matter concerning whether driving on the right or on the left was the good or appropriate thing to do. But after the decision, driving on the right is clearly the thing to do. This seems to be a clear case in which an authority's decision "makes it right" to do what she demands, and the sense in [End Page 236] which her decision makes the action

thesis concerning whether existing legal and political institutions are genuinely authoritative.²

In this paper I will be concerned with one particularly austere version of the a priori philosophical anarchist position. I will argue that most contemporary epistemologists seem to at least tacitly accept a position concerning authority over belief that is structurally analogous to this austere a priori philosophical anarchist position concerning authority over action. Just as the a priori philosophical anarchist holds that there can be no such thing as genuine authority over action, most contemporary epistemologists seem to at least tacitly accept that there can be no such thing as genuine authority over belief, that the very idea of a kind of authority over belief that is robustly analogous to legitimate practical authority is incoherent.³ Most contemporary epistemologists are, in this respect, theoretical anarchists.⁴

Appreciating this has an important consequence. If theoretical anarchism genuinely parallels the a priori philosophical anarchist position with respect to practical authority, then absent reason to think that there is a relevant disanalogy between the theoretical and practical cases, there is good reason to think that the theoretical and practical guises of philosophical anarchism should either stand or fall together. If we want to accept theoretical anarchism, as nearly all epistemologists do, then we should be prepared to accept practical anarchism, and if we want to [End Page 222] reject practical anarchism, as nearly

² A priori anarchism is defended by Wolff (1970). A posteriori anarchism is defended by Simmons (1979).

³ A notable exception is Zagzebski (2012).

⁴ Note also that the position I am here calling "theoretical anarchism" is very different from the position that Feyerabend (1975) famously calls "epistemological anarchism." Epistemological anarchism is a position concerning scientific methodology, that there is no scientific methodology that is in a privileged position to yield knowledge. Theoretical anarchism, as I explain below, is a position concerning reasons for belief.

all political philosophers do, then we should be prepared to reject theoretical anarchism.

Some political philosophers, including H. L. A. Hart and Joseph Raz, seem prepared to reject both practical and theoretical anarchism.⁵ I think that this is the correct course to take, but I will not argue for this directly here.⁶ Rejecting philosophical anarchism ultimately requires presenting a satisfying general account of the nature of authority, and in this paper I only try to set the stage for such an account by arguing that the fate of practical anarchism is quite plausibly linked to the fate of theoretical anarchism. If this is right, then there is good reason to think that a satisfying general account of the nature of authority should be capable of explaining both theoretical and practical authority. This amounts to a partial defense of Reid's contention that the phenomena he identifies under the heading of the social operations of mind spans the divide between theoretical and practical reason. At the very least, it should lead us to reconsider whether and in what way the concept of authority ought to play a role in epistemological theorizing similar to the role that it typically plays in social and political theory.

Section II provides a very general characterization of one version of the philosophical anarchist position with respect to practical authority. This version of the anarchist position is a position concerning reasons for action. The anarchist holds that there is no such thing as what I call *a distinctively authoritative reason for action*, no such thing as a reason for action of

⁵ See, in particular, Hart (1990, 107) and Raz (2009, 155–56).

⁶ As I argue below, a priori philosophical anarchists hold that the very concept of authority and the ordinary practices structured in terms of this concept, practices such as ordering and commanding, are incoherent. If this is correct, then those who believe in the existence of genuine authority are not only mistaken, they actually believe something nonsensical (Shapiro 2002, 383). Like most political philosophers (including a posteriori philosophical anarchists) I think that this is enough to make the a priori philosophical anarchist position highly implausible.

of disobedience. But someone with authority over what you think is not at liberty, within limits, to decide what you shall think among the range of possible thoughts on a given matter; what makes it right for you to think what you think, given that it is your business to form a judgment at all, is simply that it is true, and no decision can make something a true thing for you to think as the decision of someone in authority can make something a good thing for you to do.

(1983, 44) [End Page 235]

Anscombe claims that a practical authority's decision about what you shall do is what "makes it right" or makes it "a good thing for you to do." In contrast, a theoretical authority is not capable of "making it right" for you to think something; she is not capable of making something "a true thing for you to think."

It is certainly correct that, generally speaking, a speaker's telling me that p doesn't make it true that p. There are exceptions. A speaker's telling me that she is telling me something does make it true that she is telling me something, but this is an odd case. A scientist's telling me that global warming is occurring does not make it true that global warming is occurring, and this might make for a difference between theoretical and practical authority. After all, practical authorities certainly seem capable of making it right that we do things.

What Anscombe says here, however, fails to distinguish between two different senses in which an authority might "make it right" that a speaker do or believe something. Consider first the case of belief. In one sense, for a belief to be "right" is for it to be true. In another sense, for a belief to be "right" is for it to be justified, for it to be based on sufficient epistemic reasons. A belief can be right in one of these senses without being right in the other. A belief can be true without being justified,

even while thinking that the command is mistaken, the soldier clearly settles positively the question whether to Φ . In a second sense of “for herself,” however, the soldier doesn’t judge “for herself” or “in her own private judgment” that so acting is the thing to do. Instead, on the basis of only those considerations that the soldier understands as providing a further account of the character of the action as to be done, considerations that do not include the officer’s command, the soldier judges that so acting is not the thing to do. This sense of judging “for oneself” is one that necessarily factors out the speaker’s command, but for all that we have seen thus far, this is not relevantly different from what is going on in cases in which an audience believes a speaker that p even while judging that, absent the speaker’s testimony, she wouldn’t “in her own private judgment” believe that p.

Anscombe is thus concerned to make room for a kind of suspension of private judgment with respect to belief that, for all that we have seen thus far, parallels the kind of suspension of private judgment involved in obedience to practical authority. What, then, of the disanalogy she wishes to draw between authority over action and authority over belief? Anscombe goes on to claim that the disanalogy she is concerned with pertains to what is capable of “making it right” that a person do or believe something.

There is a difference between saying: You did not do as I told you, and that is bad, because it was I, whom you ought to obey, who told you, and: You did not believe what I said, and that is bad, because it was I, whom you ought to believe, who told you.

The difference lies in this: that the one with authority over what you do, can decide, within limits, what you shall do; his decision is what makes it right for you to do what he says—if the reproach against you, when you disobey him, is only that

the kind that authoritative practical directives purport to provide. Authoritative directives purport to provide reasons for action that require that an agent “suspend her own private judgment” concerning what to do in favor of the judgment of the authority, and this, claims the anarchist, is incoherent. There can be no such reasons.

Section III applies this philosophical anarchist position to the case of theoretical authority. Just as the anarchist about practical authority holds that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for action, the anarchist about theoretical authority holds that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for belief. There is no such thing as a reason for belief that requires that a subject suspend her own private judgment concerning what is the case in favor of the judgment of an authority.

Finally, section IV examines a series of remarks of Elizabeth Anscombe’s that might be taken to point to a relevant difference between the theoretical and practical cases, a difference that might give us reason to think that the truth of theoretical anarchism simply follows from the distinctive nature of theoretical rationality. If this is the case, then we needn’t think that the theoretical and practical guises of philosophical anarchism should either stand or fall together. I argue that although Anscombe identifies a genuine disanalogy between authority over belief and authority over action, this disanalogy concerns a feature of practical authority different from that which is targeted by the philosophical anarchist. It therefore poses no threat to the idea that practical and theoretical anarchism should either stand or fall together. [End Page 223]

II. Philosophical Anarchism

Arguments for philosophical anarchism are typically cast in moral terms. Philosophical anarchists typically hold that there

is something immoral or unjust about obedience to authority. William Godwin, possibly the first modern philosophical anarchist, claims that “[t]o a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of attaining that rule, the exercise of his understanding” (1971, 90). Godwin holds that genuine obedience to authority involves suspending the exercise of one’s understanding and thus that obedience to authority is inherently unjust. In a similar fashion, Robert Paul Wolff, one of the most influential contemporary philosophical anarchists, claims that “[w]hen I place myself in the hands of another, and permit him to determine the principles by which I shall guide my behavior, I repudiate the freedom and reason which give me dignity. I am then guilty of what Kant might have called the sin of willful heteronomy” (1970, 71–72). Wolff holds that we have a moral duty to be autonomous, to make ourselves the ultimate authors of our decisions. Like Godwin, he holds that genuine obedience to authority involves willingly making someone else the ultimate author of our decisions. Genuine obedience is therefore immoral.

One might reasonably question whether autonomy is a moral duty and hence whether there is something inherently immoral about obedience to authority. As Scott Shapiro has argued, however, the philosophical anarchist position can be formulated while abstracting away from such specifically moral considerations (2002, 390). The reason that anarchists like Godwin and Wolff hold that there is something immoral or unjust about genuine obedience to authority is that they have a particular conception of the nature of obedience. On this conception, genuinely obeying an authority’s directive—treating the authority’s directive as the kind of reason for action that it purports to be—involves acting in a way that is inconsistent with rational autonomy. This claim is independent of any particular claims concerning the value of autonomy, and hence one might accept that there is no such thing as genuine

have any basis for such judgments if he did not already rely on his own moral judgments to some extent; but it would be sophistical to argue from this that his own conscience must after all be for him the last word about what he ought to do.

(1983, 46–47)

Though what Anscombe says here concerns specifically moral matters, it has wider application. Anscombe distinguishes between two senses of judging or believing “for oneself.” In the first sense, to believe for oneself is simply to believe. Of course, one cannot believe in this sense without believing for oneself. In the second sense, to believe for oneself is to believe on the basis of considerations that give “some further account” of what one believes, for example, to believe that global warming is occurring on the basis of one’s understanding of the scientific evidence that counts in favor of this conclusion. This sense of believing for oneself rules out belief based on theoretical authority, but it would be foolish to think that one must **[End Page 234]** always believe for oneself in this sense. One might very well judge that someone else’s judgment concerning, for example, the relevant scientific evidence, is more likely to be correct than one’s own and therefore substitute another’s judgment on these matters for one’s own.

Anscombe’s discussion of the confusion that can arise from conflating these two different senses of believing for oneself also applies to the case of obedience. Here also there are two senses in which one might be said to settle “for oneself” the question whether to Φ . In the first sense, to settle for oneself the question whether to Φ is simply to settle this question, either positively or negatively. Clearly, in this sense of settling a question “for oneself,” an agent cannot obey a speaker’s command to Φ without settling positively the question whether to Φ . In the case of the soldier obeying her officer’s command to Φ

that that is much more likely than what one could have been inclined to think if left to oneself.

(1981, 46)

Even though accepting a speaker's testimony requires judging that *p* is true, this doesn't show that one cannot believe that *p* on the strength of a speaker's telling one that *p* while recognizing that, "if left to oneself," one wouldn't believe that *p*. What, then, does it mean to make a judgment concerning some moral matter "for oneself"?

I call it a judgment that he makes for himself when he judges on a ground that he can see for himself; he does not merely judge "that is wrong," he judges "that is wrong because ..." and then follows some further account of the action, which he can judge, and which he also judges to make the action wrong. To rely exclusively on one's own conscience (one's 'unaided' conscience) is to refuse to judge anything in practical matters unless in this sense one is able to judge for oneself. Now in this sense of "one's own conscience" only a foolish person thinks that his own conscience is the last word, so far as he is concerned, about what to do. For just as any reasonable man knows that his memory may sometimes deceive him, any reasonable man knows that what one has conscientiously decided on one may later conscientiously regret. A man may have reason to judge that another man's moral counsel is more reliable than his own unaided conscience; he will in any case be well advised to take counsel with others; he may, moreover, have reason to believe that some public source of moral teaching is more reliable than his own unaided judgment. Of course he would not

authority without accepting that there is anything immoral about obedience to authority.

Philosophical anarchism is typically characterized as the denial that subjects have a duty or obligation to obey the directives of purported practical authorities. The anarchist position can be construed more fundamentally, however, as a thesis about reasons for action. In denying that there is such a thing as a duty or obligation of obedience, the anarchist is denying that the directives of purported practical authorities, directives such as orders and commands, provide an audience with a distinctive kind of reason for action, a distinctive kind of reason for complying with the directive. Depending on how one construes the nature of obligation, this distinctive kind of reason for action might amount to a duty or an obligation. Nevertheless, the anarchist position can be formulated in such a way as to leave to one side particular conceptions of the nature of obligation. On this formulation, philosophical anarchism is the view that there is no such thing as a *distinctively* [End Page 224] *authoritative reason for action*, no such thing as a reason for action of the kind that orders and commands intuitively purport to provide.⁷

The philosophical anarchist thus recognizes that practical authorities purport to exercise a particular kind of normative

⁷ Shapiro argues that the anarchist position is most fundamentally a position concerning "the space of reasons," namely that "the only reasons that exist are either content-dependent or non-peremptory" (2002, 390). On Shapiro's account, the anarchist holds that there is no such thing as a content-independent peremptory reason. This is very similar to the position that I present here. However, for reasons that I cannot get into here, I think that the anarchist might actually be in a position to accept that authoritative directives amount to content-independent peremptory reasons. I have thus formulated the anarchist position as the denial that there is any such thing as a *distinctively authoritative reason*, a reason that, as I discuss below, requires that an agent "suspend her own private judgment" concerning what to do. Most fundamentally, the anarchist is opposed to the idea that there can be reasons for action that require that an agent not make up her own mind about what to do.

power. They purport to have the power to generate for others, through the issuing of practical directives, reasons for action that would not exist absent the directive. Authorities purport to create reasons. Moreover, the anarchist recognizes that the reasons that practical authorities purport to create are of a distinctive kind. Authoritative practical directives purport to provide reasons for action that are predicated on the audience's "suspending her own private judgment" concerning what to do in favor of the judgment of the authority. If the audience acts as directed but without suspending her own private judgment concerning what to do, then she conforms to the directive without genuinely obeying. She acts as directed, but she doesn't act for the distinctive kind of reason that the directive purports to provide.⁸

Imagine that I order you to give me your wallet. I have no authority over you, and so my directive doesn't, of itself, give you a reason to give me your wallet. You might judge that I could really use the money and on this basis decide to give me your wallet, but here you conform to my directive without genuinely obeying. You perform the action that I direct you to perform, but you do not act for the kind of reason that my directive purports to provide. This is because you have come to your own conclusion—you have made up your own mind—that giving me your wallet is the thing to do in the situation. Even if you take my order to be a reliable indicator of the fact that I could really use the money, in deciding to give me your wallet on the basis of this fact, you are making up your own mind what to do. Authoritative practical directives purport to provide reasons for action regardless of the audience's own private judgment concerning the merits of the directed action. Hence, to the extent that an audience's action is based on her own private judgment

⁸ For discussion of various examples of the use of the metaphor of suspending private judgment in relation to authority over both belief and action, see Friedman (1990).

However, if this is all that is going on in the practical case, then it appears that something analogous is possible in the theoretical realm. Imagine that you tell me that something extremely improbable happened to you in the past. I argue with you, claiming that the occurrence of such an event is indeed extremely improbable, but you stick to your guns. You insist that despite the acknowledged improbability of such an event, the event did indeed occur. After arguing for a while, you say to me, "Look, I'm telling you that this happened. You're just going to have to believe me." This looks like a case in which it might be perfectly rational for me to believe you that *p* in spite of the fact that, absent your testimony, I wouldn't believe that *p*. Clearly, this is not a case in which I both believe that *p* is false and nevertheless accept your testimony, but as we've seen, the case of the soldier isn't like this either. In both this theoretical case and the practical case of the soldier, we have a subject rationally accepting a speaker's testimony or command despite judging that, absent the speaker's testimony or command, this wouldn't be the thing to believe or do. **[End Page 233]**

Interestingly, Anscombe seems to make this very point herself. In discussing the idea that one's own conscience must be the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong, she writes:

There is confusion here. Let conscience be one's judgment of right and wrong, i.e. of good and evil in conduct, of what is virtuous and what vicious to do. Then to say that one's own conscience is necessarily supreme arbiter in such matters is to say that necessarily what one judges right and wrong, one judges right and wrong.

One could similarly say that one cannot think anything to be true without thinking it. But that does not tend to show that one cannot think a thing on the strength of what someone else says, judging

oretical realm has the following form. The subject both believes that p is false and accepts the speaker's testimony, thereby believing that p is true. This cannot be rational. A subject cannot rationally settle the question whether p both positively and negatively. However, the same is true in the practical sphere. A subject cannot rationally settle the practical question whether to Φ both positively and negatively. To settle the practical question whether to Φ is, I take it, to set one's will or form an intention.²¹ But one cannot rationally settle this question negatively, thereby willing or intending not to Φ , and accept a speaker's command, thereby willing or intending to Φ . Moreover, the case of the soldier doesn't have this form. The soldier does not both intend not to Φ and intend to Φ . Rather, she intends to Φ on the basis of her commanding officer's order, thereby settling positively the question whether to Φ , even though, in a sense that remains to be explained, she judges that the officer's order is mistaken.

In this respect, whatever exactly it means to say that the soldier judges that the officer's command is mistaken, it must amount to something less than the soldier's settling negatively the question whether to Φ . Perhaps the soldier simply counts as having settled negatively the question whether, absent the officer's command, Φ -ing would be the thing to do.²² This would be to say that, absent the speaker's command, the speaker wouldn't settle positively the question whether to Φ .

²¹ I take it that to settle the question whether to Φ is not to form a belief or judgment that Φ -ing is the thing to do. For one way of making out the claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is action or intention-formation rather than belief or judgment about what to do, see Hieronymi (2009).

²² In McMyler (2011), I argue that such a judgment must be a theoretical judgment about a practical subject matter. This is a further issue that leads to confusion concerning what is involved in suspending private judgment in the practical and theoretical realms, but one that does not, I think, make for a difference in the possibilities for the exercise of authority. Since the discussion here is complicated enough, I have suppressed this issue here.

concerning what to do, then to that extent she has not acted for the particular kind of reason that the directive purports to provide.

This characterization of the kind of reason for action that authoritative practical directives purport to provide relies heavily on the unexplained metaphor of suspending private judgment. At this level of abstraction, however, there is something extremely intuitive about this metaphor. Authoritative practical directives appear to be distinguished from other speech acts intended to influence the actions of others by the way in which they purport to provide reasons for action that somehow substitute the authority's judgment for that of the audience. In this respect, ordering or commanding someone to do something is very different from advising someone to do something. In advising an audience to do something, a speaker is presenting an audience with considerations that count in favor of a course of action completely independently of the speaker's act of presenting them to the audience. The audience is then in the position of coming to her own conclusion concerning whether these independently available considerations make the course of action the thing to do in the situation. In contrast, when a speaker [End Page 225] commands an audience to do something, the speaker is not simply presenting the audience with a consideration that counts in favor of acting independently of the command, and the audience is not thereby left in the position of having to come to her own conclusion concerning whether so acting is the thing to do. The command itself purports to provide a reason for action regardless of the audience's own private judgment concerning the merits of the directed action. Hence, it can be the case that the audience ought to act as directed even if she thinks that the command is mistaken, even

if she thinks that, in her own private judgment, so acting is not the thing to do.⁹

The philosophical anarchist position that I am concerned with here holds that this intuitive feature of authoritative practical directives is incoherent. The anarchist accepts that authoritative practical directives purport to provide reasons for action that are predicated on an audience's suspending her own private judgment concerning what to do in favor of the judgment of the authority.¹⁰ However, she holds that to genuinely suspend one's own private judgment concerning what to do would be to divorce one's actions from one's responsiveness to practical reasons.¹¹ Insofar as this is the case, there can be no such thing as a genuine reason for action that requires such suspension of private judgment, no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason. If there were such reasons, they would be

⁹ I raise some problems for understanding what exactly is going on in such a situation in section IV.

¹⁰ One might reject the idea that authoritative practical directives even purport to provide reasons that require that an agent suspend her own private judgment, however, one will then face the difficulty of finding some other way to distinguish between the speech acts of commanding and advising. The anarchist accepts that commands are distinguished from advice in that they require that an agent suspend private judgment in favor of the judgment of someone else. This is what makes commanding an (attempted) exercise of authority.

¹¹ Godwin thus construes obedience to authority as a kind of mental slavery, a slavery that he claims is actually more injurious to one's humanity than actual physical enslavement (1971, 124). While someone who is coerced or physically forced into acting at least retains the ability to exercise her own rational powers, the obedient agent actually cedes these powers to the authority. Her mind thus becomes a mere instrument (an "agent" in another sense of the word) for carrying out the wishes of another. A strikingly similar picture of obedience emerges from the social psychologist Stanley Milgram's analysis of his infamous experiments on obedience to authority. Milgram claims that when a person obeys an authority she enters what he calls "the agentic state," a state explicitly opposed to that of autonomy. From within the agentic state, a person defines herself [End Page 239] as a mere instrument for the use of others and no longer deems herself responsible for what she does (1974, 133–34).

is mistaken is tantamount to a rejection of her authority, while in the case of authority over action, an audience's judging that what the authority demands is mistaken is consistent with respecting her authority (1981, 43). If someone tells me that p , and if I think that the speaker is mistaken, that p isn't the case, then I am not treating her as a theoretical authority on the matter. In contrast, if someone tells me to Φ , and if I think that the speaker is mistaken, that Φ -ing isn't the thing to do in the situation, then I might very well continue to treat her as an authority. I might rationally obey the speaker's demand while continuing to think that the demand is mistaken.

One might take this as reason to deny that the kind of suspension of private judgment intuitively required for genuine obedience to practical authority is so much as possible in the theoretical realm. As we have seen, such suspension of private judgment makes room for cases in which it is rational for a subject to obey an authority's command to Φ even though the subject thinks, in her own private judgment, that Φ -ing is not the thing to do. A soldier might judge that her commanding officer's order to Φ is mistaken but still rationally decide to Φ . However, [End Page 232] it might seem that there is no room for such cases in the theoretical realm. There is no room for cases in which it is rational for a subject to judge, in her own private judgment, that p is false and still accept the speaker's testimony, thereby believing that p . One might take this to demonstrate that the kind of suspension of private judgment that is intuitively required for genuine obedience to practical authority has no genuine analogue in the theoretical realm.²⁰

I think that this purported disanalogy between the theoretical and practical cases is, at the very least, overblown. Consider, first, the theoretical case. The case that isn't possible in the the-

²⁰ I discuss a similar issue in the context of Darwall's (2006) claim that there can be no such thing as a genuinely or irreducibly second-personal reason for belief in McMyler (2011). My treatment of the issue here differs slightly from that earlier discussion.

tionality makes it the case that there can be no such thing as a kind of authority over belief robustly analogous to legitimate practical authority, then nothing like the anarchist challenge to the existence of legitimate practical authority can even arise in the theoretical realm.

Though many philosophers seem to be attracted to the idea that theoretical and practical rationality differ fundamentally with respect to the issue of authority, this idea is rarely argued for in any detail.¹⁹ In the end, countering this idea will require providing a general theory of the differences between theoretical and practical rationality and of the way in which authority can be exercised in the theoretical and practical domains. I hope to provide such a general theory elsewhere. For now, however, I would like to end by pointing to some of the difficulties involved in developing a convincing argument for this widely accepted idea. In order to do this, I want to examine a series of remarks of Elizabeth Anscombe's aimed at articulating some of the important differences between theoretical and practical authority. While Anscombe does not, as I read her, deny the existence of genuine theoretical authority, she is at pains to argue that there are significant differences between authority over belief and authority over action, differences that might lead one to think that, whatever theoretical authority actually amounts to, it cannot be something that robustly parallels legitimate practical authority.

In "Authority in Morals" (1981), Anscombe examines the complex question of whether and in what respect there can be authorities in moral matters. Preparatory to her discussion of specifically moral authority, she describes several interconnected differences between authority over belief and authority over action. She begins by noting that, in the case of authority over belief, an audience's judging that what the authority says

¹⁹ For some attempts to argue in this direction, in addition to Darwall (2006), see Owens (2008) and Enoch (2011).

reasons for action acting on which would be acting for a non-reason. The very idea of such a reason is incoherent, and insofar as authoritative practical directives purport to provide such reasons, these directives are incoherent as well. This means that when an agent takes herself to be acting for such a distinctively authoritative reason, she is acting irrationally. She is acting on the basis of a consideration that does not, in the way in which it purports, bear positively on the question what to do.¹²

Importantly, in claiming that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for action, philosophical anarchists are not denying that the directives of *de facto* practical authorities can amount to genuine reasons for action. Wolff presents an example of a ship passenger taking the commands of the ship's captain to be genuine reasons for acting as directed without genuinely obeying and so without sacrificing her rational autonomy:

Taking responsibility for one's actions means making the final decisions about what one should do. For the autonomous man, there is strictly speaking no such thing as a *command*. If someone in my environment is issuing what are intended as commands, and if he or others expect those commands to be obeyed, that fact will be taken account of in my deliberations. I may decide that I ought to do what the person is commanding me to do, and it may even be that his issuing of the command is the factor in the situation which makes

¹² The anarchist position that I am concerned with here despairs of the possibility of making coherent sense of the idea of a distinctively authoritative reason. Unsurprisingly, philosophers seeking to defend the existence of *de jure* authority have for the most part attempted to provide coherent accounts of this idea. See, for example, Raz (1979) and (1986), Hart (1990), and Friedman (1990).

it desirable to do so. For example, if I am on a sinking ship and the captain is giving orders for manning the lifeboats, and if everyone else is obeying the captain *because he is the captain*, I may decide that under the circumstances I had better do what he says, since the confusion caused by disobeying him would be generally harmful. But insofar as I make such a decision, I am not *obeying his command*; that is, I am not acknowledging him as [End Page 226] having authority over me. I would make the same decision, for exactly the same reasons, if one of the passengers had started to issue “orders” and had, in the confusion, come to be obeyed.

(1970, 15–16; original emphasis)

This passage has puzzled commentators. Harry Frankfurt, for example, claims that Wolff is here being flatly inconsistent (1973, 409). Whereas Wolff sometimes claims that the autonomous agent “may do what another tells him, but not *because* he has been told to do it” (1970,14), in this passage, Wolff portrays the ship passenger as maintaining her autonomy even though she clearly acts as she does *because* she has been told to do so. The captain’s issuing of the command is, as Wolff puts it, “the factor in the situation” on the basis of which the passenger autonomously decides to act.

I think that we can make sense of what Wolff says about the ship passenger without charging him with inconsistency. The anarchist about practical authority can reject obedience to authority while at the same time admitting that the commands of practical authorities can amount to genuine reasons for action by claiming that the kind of reason for action provided by a speaker’s command is in no way distinctively authoritative. Orders and commands are nothing more than ordinary events that an audience must take into account in making up her own mind

for belief or action that is predicated on a subject’s suspending her own private judgment.

IV. Should Theoretical and Practical Anarchism Stand or Fall Together?

The structural parallel between the anarchist positions with respect to theoretical and practical authority suggests, I think, that the two positions should either stand or fall together. If we accept theoretical anarchism, as most epistemologists do, then we should be prepared to accept practical anarchism, and if we reject practical anarchism, as most political philosophers do, then we should be prepared to reject theoretical anarchism. Perhaps this can be avoided, however. Perhaps the fate of theoretical anarchism shouldn’t be tied in this way to the fate of practical anarchism. One might argue that the truth of theoretical anarchism is simply a function of the nature of theoretical rationality and, as a result, that it has no implications for practical authority. One of the ways in which theoretical and practical rationality differ would then be that only practical rationality admits of distinctively authoritative reasons, and the concept of legitimate or *de jure* authority would then be an essentially practical concept that has no direct application to belief. This could be construed as a particular application of Darwall’s broader claim that there is something essentially practical about the second-person standpoint.

If this is right, then it would explain why the anarchist position regarding theoretical authority is rarely even formulated let alone argued for. If theoretical anarchism simply follows from the nature of theoretical rationality, then this position might look fundamentally different from the philosophical anarchist [End Page 231] position with respect to practical authority, so different, in fact, that it might not even deserve to be called a form of anarchism. If the nature of theoretical ra-

ment” in the way that is intuitively required for genuine obedience or assent to authority involves suspending one’s responsiveness to reasons and is therefore inconsistent with rational agency.¹⁸ According to the philosophical anarchist, the very idea of a distinctively authoritative reason for belief or action is incoherent, and so there can be no such thing as genuine theoretical or practical authority. The philosophical anarchist can admit the existence of *de facto* theoretical and practical authorities, authorities whose directives purport to provide distinctively authoritative reasons for belief and action, and she can even admit that these directives can, in the appropriate circumstances, amount to genuine reasons for belief and action. However, she denies that these reasons are distinctively authoritative. She denies that there is any such thing as a reason

¹⁸ Godwin appears to accept both practical and theoretical anarchism, and his arguments for the significance of private judgment in action are often bound up with epistemological considerations. Like Locke, Godwin holds that knowledge consists in the perception of relations of agreement and disagreement between ideas, and also like Locke, Godwin thinks that, as a result, genuine knowledge cannot be acquired from human testimony. In order for me to know, for example, that the three angles of a plane triangle are equal to two right angles, it is not enough that Euclid or some other mathematician has told me that this is so. I must be able to understand the proof for myself. According to Godwin, this is true not only of propositions of mathematics and geometry, but of every proposition: “Every proposition has an intrinsic evidence of its own. Every consequence has premises from which it flows; and upon them, and not upon anything else, its validity depends” (1971, 92). Godwin thinks that as goes for knowledge, so goes for action. Just as every proposition has its own “intrinsic evidence” that amounts to the sole basis upon which it can be known, so every action has its own “intrinsic tendency to be performed” that amounts to the sole basis upon which it can be rationally performed. The only truly legitimate form of authority is thus “the authority of reason” (1971, 121), and the only truly legitimate form of obedience is obedience to the dictates of one’s own understanding: “The purest kind of obedience is, where an action flows from the independent conviction of our private judgment, where we are directed, not by the precarious and mutable interference of another, but by a recollection of the intrinsic and indefeasible tendency of the action to be performed” (1971, 119). [End Page 240]

concerning what to do. In certain circumstances, a speaker’s command may be “the factor in the situation” that makes it the case that the audience ought to act as commanded, but in judging that this is the case, an audience is doing nothing more than exercising her own judgment. If an audience proceeds to act as commanded, then she will be merely conforming to the command. She will not be genuinely obeying.

In this respect, to say that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for action is not to say that *de facto* authoritative directives cannot provide genuine reasons for action. The commands of others can provide perfectly genuine reasons for action without providing distinctively authoritative reasons. In fact, the view that authoritative directives cannot provide genuine reasons for action—a view encouraged, admittedly, by Wolff’s claim that the autonomous agent may do what she is told but not *because* she has been told to do it—is so profoundly implausible that it is difficult to imagine any philosophical anarchist actually accepting it. The orders and commands of speakers are ordinary empirical events that should be capable of figuring into an agent’s reasoning about what to do in the same way as any other ordinary events. Just as a child’s scream can give me a reason to rush to her aid, so can the commands of authorities give us reasons to act, even reasons to act in conformity with the commands. To deny this would be to single authoritative directives out as a special class of events that, for some mysterious reason, are simply incapable of bearing on the question what to do.

This means that if we are to interpret the anarchist position at all charitably, we shouldn’t interpret it as denying that authoritative directives can provide genuine reasons for action. When Wolff claims that the autonomous individual may do [End Page 227] what she is told, but not because she has been told to do it, he isn’t denying that the autonomous individual may take her being told to do something to bear positively on the question whether to do it. What Wolff is denying is that

the autonomous individual takes her being told to do something to be a consideration that counts in favor of doing it *in a distinctively authoritative way*, in a way that is predicated on the individual's suspending her own private judgment concerning what to do. This helps to explain Wolff's claim that, for the autonomous individual, there is strictly speaking no such thing as a command (1970, 15). Surely, the autonomous individual recognizes that there are such things as commands. She recognizes that there exist speech acts that are issued with particular authoritative intentions and that thereby purport to provide a distinctively authoritative reason for action. According to the anarchist, these intentions are incoherent—there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for action, and so the intention to give such a reason to an audience is an intention that cannot possibly be fulfilled. *De facto* authoritative directives therefore cannot provide reasons for action in the way in which they are intended. Nevertheless, they can still provide reasons for action in ways other than that in which they are intended.

III. Anarchism and Theoretical Authority

With this formulation of the philosophical anarchist position concerning reasons for action in view, we can now begin to assess how this position might apply to theoretical authority, or authority over belief. Philosophical anarchism is almost invariably formulated as a thesis about practical authority. Anarchists hold that there are no genuine practical authorities, no persons or groups whose directives generate for others duties or obligations of obedience. So formulated, this position might appear difficult to apply to theoretical authority. Theoretical authorities do not demand obedience, and we don't appear to have a duty or obligation to believe the statements of theoretical authorities.

tual representation. They thus tend to construe testimony as analogous to the kind of non-inductive "evidence" provided by perceptual experience. Importantly, the reason for belief provided by this non-inductive testimonial evidence is not taken to be predicated on anything like the audience's suspending her own private judgment concerning the content of the testimony, and so these anti-reductionist positions appear to be consistent with the theoretical anarchist rejection of genuine theoretical authority.

In this respect, I think that it is fair to say that most contemporary epistemologists would be inclined to accept theoretical anarchism. This epistemological position is rarely explicitly formulated, and to my knowledge it is never referred to as a kind of anarchism. But this actually points to the strength of the anarchist position. Anarchism with respect to theoretical authority is typically taken to be so obviously correct that it is difficult to understand how it could possibly be denied. How can a speaker's testimony possibly be anything other than more or less reliable evidence that an audience uses to make up her own mind what to believe? Anarchism with respect to practical authority isn't typically taken to be so obvious, but it isn't clear why it shouldn't be. One might equally wonder how it could possibly be denied. How can a speaker's command that an audience do something possibly be anything other than a more or less reliable guide that the audience uses to make up her own mind what to do? **[End Page 230]**

The general philosophical anarchist position that I have articulated thus appears to be one that can be applied to both practical and theoretical authority. Applied to practical authority, it is the view that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative reason for action. Applied to theoretical authority, it is the view that there is no such thing as a distinctively authoritative epistemic reason for belief. Moreover, both the practical and theoretical guises of this anarchist position stem from a common source—the idea that "suspending private judg-

same time admitting that expert testimony can amount to a genuine reason for belief by claiming that the kind of reason for belief provided by such testimony is in no way distinctively authoritative. The testimony of so-called theoretical authorities is nothing more than ordinary inductive evidence that an audience must take into account in making up her own mind concerning what is the case. In certain circumstances, a speaker's testimony might make it the case that the audience ought to believe what the speaker says, but in judging that this is the case, an audience is doing nothing more than exercising her own judgment. If an audience proceeds to believe what she is told, then she will be merely conforming to the speaker's testimony. She will not be genuinely assenting to theoretical authority. Testimonial belief thus does not involve any kind of assent to authority. In particular, it doesn't involve suspending one's own private judgment in favor of the judgment of the authority. Instead, it involves the simple exercise of one's own judgment in proportioning one's belief to the evidence.¹⁶

Most contemporary epistemologists seem to at least tacitly accept this general position concerning theoretical authority. This includes both reductionists and anti-reductionists about testimony. Reductionists about testimony hold that a speaker's testimony amounts to little more than a species of ordinary inductive evidence. Anti-reductionists reject this, but in so doing they rarely go so far as to claim that testimony amounts to anything like a distinctively authoritative reason for belief.¹⁷ Anti-reductionists typically construe comprehension of a speaker's testimony as providing a *prima facie* reason for belief analogous to the *prima facie* reason for belief provided by percep-

¹⁶ One of the clearest historical adherents of this kind of theoretical anarchist position is Locke (1979).

¹⁷ A notable exception is Zagzebski (2012). So-called assurance views of testimony can also be read as pushing in the direction of construing testimony as a kind of authoritative directive. I develop an account of testimony along these lines in McMyler (2011).

Nevertheless, I have argued that the anarchist position concerning practical authority can be construed as a position concerning reasons for action, and theoretical authorities certainly *do* purport to provide reasons. A theoretical authority's testimony, her telling an audience that *p*, purports to provide an audience with an epistemic reason for belief concerning the content of the testimony. Theoretical authorities thus purport to exercise a normative power. They purport to have the power to generate for others through testifying epistemic reasons that would not exist absent the testimony. Moreover, at least superficially, the epistemic reasons that theoretical authorities purport to provide appear very similar to the reasons for action purportedly provided by authoritative practical directives. A theoretical authority's testimony purports to provide an epistemic reason that is predicated on the audience's somehow suspending her own private judgment concerning what is the case in favor of the judgment of the authority. If the audience believes [End Page 228] what the authority says but without suspending her own private judgment, then she conforms to the testimony but without genuinely assenting to the authority. She believes what the authority says, but she doesn't believe for the distinctive kind of reason that the authority's testimony purports to provide.

Imagine that a well-respected climate scientist tells me that global warming is occurring and is largely the result of human activity. This gives me an epistemic reason to believe that global warming is occurring, and it does so even if my own personal experience suggests otherwise. My own personal experience might suggest that average temperatures are actually declining, but the climate scientist is in a better position to know than I am. She is an expert, and her testimony is offered with the intention that it provide me with an epistemic reason that is predicated on my suspending my own private judgment concerning what is the case. The climate scientist is not trying to rationally persuade me that global warming is occurring. She

is not giving me an argument with the intention that I come to my own conclusion about things. She is simply telling me that such and such is the case. Hence, properly accepting her testimony—taking her testimony to be the kind of reason for belief that it purports to be—would appear to require suspending my own private judgment in favor of that of the authority. If I believe what it is that the scientist says but without suspending my own private judgment concerning the facts, then I conform to the authority’s theoretical directive, but I do not believe in the way in which the authority intends. As Elizabeth Anscombe (1979) puts it, I believe what it is that the speaker says, but I do not believe *her*.¹³

Like the anarchist about practical authority, the theoretical anarchist holds that this intuitive feature of authoritative theoretical directives is incoherent. She might accept that authoritative theoretical directives, such as expert testimony, purport to provide epistemic reasons that are predicated on an audience’s suspending her own private judgment concerning what is the case.¹⁴ However, she holds that to genuinely suspend one’s own private judgment concerning what is the case would be to divorce one’s beliefs from one’s responsiveness to epistemic reasons. Insofar as this is the case, there can be no such thing as an epistemic reason for belief that requires such suspension of private judgment, no such thing as a distinctively authorita-

¹³ I discuss several reasons for thinking that the kind of suspension of private judgment intuitively involved in obedience to practical authority is not possible in the theoretical realm in section IV.

¹⁴ One might deny that the testimony of a theoretical authority even purports to provide a reason for belief that is predicated on the audience’s suspending private judgment. I think that this misconstrues the phenomenology of the speech act of telling as opposed to such speech acts as arguing and merely expressing an opinion. Nevertheless, I don’t think that this point is crucial for the parallel that I draw here. One might also deny that the commands of a practical authority even purport to provide a reason for action that is predicated on an audience’s suspending private judgment, and such a position would still plausibly count as a form of practical anarchism.

tive reason for belief. If there were such reasons, they would be epistemic reasons believing on the basis of which would be believing for a non-(epistemic)-reason. The very idea of such a reason is incoherent, and insofar as authoritative theoretical directives purport to provide such reasons, these directives are incoherent as well. This means that when an agent takes herself to believe for such a distinctively authoritative reason, she believes irrationally. She believes on the basis of a consideration that cannot, in the way in which it purports, bear positively on the question what is the case.¹⁵

Just as the anarchist about practical authority is in a position to accept that purportedly authoritative practical directives can amount to genuine reasons for action, so the anarchist about theoretical authority is in a position to accept that purportedly authoritative theoretical directives can amount to genuinely epistemic [End Page 229] reasons. The theoretical anarchist can reject assent to theoretical authority while at the

¹⁵ To deny that there are any distinctively authoritative epistemic reasons for belief is not yet to deny that there are any distinctively authoritative non-epistemic reasons for belief. Genuinely epistemic reasons for believing that *p* are considerations that a subject takes to bear on the question whether *p*. Non-epistemic reasons for believing that *p* are considerations that a subject takes to bear on the question whether to act so as to bring about the belief that *p* by, say, collecting evidence or taking a pill designed to induce the belief. Such non-epistemic reasons for belief are ultimately reasons for action—they are practical reasons—and hence questions about whether such reasons can be distinctively authoritative are questions about practical authority. Theoretical anarchism is a thesis about epistemic reasons. Theoretical authorities purport to provide considerations that bear on the question whether *p*, and they purport to do so in a distinctively authoritative way, in a way that is predicated on the audience’s suspending her own private judgment. The theoretical anarchist denies that such epistemic reasons are possible, but this isn’t yet to deny that there are distinctively authoritative non-epistemic reasons for belief. The theoretical anarchist might accept that a speaker’s command that an audience act to bring about a particular belief provides the audience with a distinctively authoritative reason. One might even call this a distinctively authoritative “reason for belief,” but this is not a distinctively authoritative epistemic reason.