

Anscombe on intentional action

Towards an understanding of practical knowledge

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I, Samuel Charles Tyer, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Anscombe's notion of practical knowledge has often been misunderstood. My central aim is to rectify this misunderstanding through clarifying Anscombe's method and tying together three core aspects of *Intention*: (i) INTENTION as a formal concept; (ii) practical reason; and (iii) practical knowledge. First, I show that Anscombe thinks that there is a particular form of representation that is internal to the employment of the concept INTENTION. Second, I show that the order contained within this form of representation is one and the same as the order present in the structure of intentional actions. Third, I show that this identity obtains only by virtue of practical reasoning. Finally, I show that, given practical reasoning's role in securing this identity, we can then properly understand Anscombe's notion of practical knowledge.

Impact statement

This thesis is intended as a contribution to a growing body of Anscombe scholarship that wishes to take Anscombe seriously as an exciting alternative to much contemporary action-theory. It is also intended to serve as one way of understanding what it would mean to claim that an agent has practical knowledge of her own intentional actions – a much disputed topic in contemporary action-theory.

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A note on references

References to the works of G. E. M. Anscombe and Ludwig Wittgenstein make use of the following abbreviations:

- I** *Intention* (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- IWT** *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- CD** “Causality and Determination” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- MMP** “Modern Moral Philosophy” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- PJ** “On Promising and its Justice, and Whether It Needs be Respected
In Foro Interno” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- PI** “Practical Inference” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- RP** “The Reality of the Past” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- S** “Substance” (G. E. M. Anscombe)
- UD** “Under a Description” (G. E. M. Anscombe)

- PI** *Philosophical Investigations* (Ludwig Wittgenstein)
- TLP** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

Introduction

While frequently praised and cited as the birth of contemporary action theory¹, G. E. M. Anscombe's *Intention* has with equal frequency not been met on its own terms or taken on its own merits. This is evident in those initial reviewers (some more sympathetic than others) who found the work a baffling exercise whose central point was not as readily discernible as it ought to have been. It is also evident in those thinkers who see *Intention* as a particularly inspired starting point for philosophical investigation into agency, but only inasmuch as it is seen as a collection of underdeveloped thoughts in need of being made more philosophically robust.² In this way, *Intention* can very well begin to seem something of an especially good philosophical launching pad. I join a chorus of voices in thinking such an assessment to be misguided and in need of rectification.³ Such rectification is, of course, a colossal undertaking, but it is an undertaking that this piece hopefully makes some contribution to.

This contribution will be by way of clarifying Anscombe's notion of practical knowledge, as well as clarifying that notion's place in *Intention* as a whole. The central aim of these clarifications is to make clear how Anscombe's understanding of practical knowledge is both

- 1 For instance, amongst the effusive appraisals decorating the back cover of the 2nd edition's 2000 reprint, we find Robert Brandom declaring *Intention* to be “the font from which all subsequent philosophical thought about agency flows.”
- 2 For these two particular strands of reactions to *Intention*, see Wiseman (2016a, 20-1; 2016b, 208-12). Of the first sort, Wiseman notes P. T. Heath, Kurt Baier and Joseph Cowen among others. Of the second sort, Donald Davidson is perhaps the most obvious candidate, but as we shall see I think many contemporary action theorists fall squarely into this second strand.
- 3 I am thinking especially of Anton Ford, Rosalind Hursthouse, Douglas Lavin, Michael Thompson, Candace Vogler and Rachael Wiseman as members of this chorus. Each of them has, in their own way, attempted to disambiguate the received picture of Anscombe from the actual Anscombe in order to put the real work of *Intention* up for critical appraisal. I am indebted to each of them.

coherent and philosophically attractive by the lights of the work in which it is embedded. This piece is, therefore, a flatly exegetical one. But the exegesis therein has, I think, wider import for contemporary action theory more generally.

Douglas Lavin (2015) has spoken of Anscombe's *Intention* as offering us a genuine alternative to the prevalent mode in which philosophy has framed the question of agency. That mode, he writes, is a *decompositional approach* in which

action consists of a not-intrinsically-intentional happening, a 'mere happening,' occurring in a context where certain further facts obtain. The basic task for the philosophical investigation of action is now set: to arrive at a specification of these further facts. (610-1)

This approach therefore takes as fundamental for action-theory a question which we can schematize as the following:

Happening + x = Action. What is x?⁴

Lavin's thought is that Anscombe serves as an alternative to this decompositional approach not by offering a completely unique answer to this purportedly fundamental question, but instead by engaging with a different question altogether (614). To get Anscombe right and to critically engage with what she herself says, then, requires getting clear on what this question is and what answer Anscombe sees herself as providing.

If we *can* get clear on all this, then we will also be able to assess

4 This is the bit of Wittgensteinian arithmetic that Lavin speaks of (2015, 610), so-called since it takes seriously the question raised by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "[W]hat is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm rises from the fact that I raise my arm?" (PI §621). See also Boyle and Lavin (168-74). As far as I am aware, the phrase "Wittgensteinian arithmetic" is first used by Velleman in the introduction to his *The Possibility of Practical Reason*.

just how much Anscombe's *Intention* truly contains the radical potential to refresh and renew action-theory at its very core. My hope is that in trying to represent accurately Anscombe's thought on practical knowledge, I am therefore equally trying to make a case for *Intention's* having such a radical potential. With these aims now firmly established, I now indicate how these aims are to be met.

In Chapter 1, I assess two sorts of misunderstanding that serve as impediments to understanding Anscombe's thought on practical knowledge, these being: (i) That Anscombe is looking to answer certain sorts of questions that she is in fact not; and (ii) That *Intention* can be readily carved up into independent philosophical theses. I then go on to discuss Anscombe's method in *Intention* in order to dispel these aforementioned misunderstandings.

In Chapter 2, I look at Anscombe's claim that INTENTION is a formal concept. This is the first core claim in understanding practical knowledge. I first characterise what it is for a concept to be a formal one before explicating how to understand INTENTION as such a concept. I close by outlining why Anscombe thinks INTENTION must be – and indeed can only be – understood as a formal concept.

In Chapter 3, I turn to practical knowledge itself. The character of INTENTION as a formal concept provides the first clue to understanding this notion, since it allows us to understand the *structure* of action. With this structure in hand, I examine the intimate link between practical reason and practical knowledge. This allows me to finally demarcate the place that practical knowledge has within *Intention* as a whole.

I then conclude by outlining the use that the investigation carried out here may have for future inquiry into Anscombe's *Intention*.

1.

Making way for practical knowledge

1.1.

Forms of disagreement

I imagine that it would raise few philosophical eyebrows to say that it was Anscombe who placed the notion of practical knowledge squarely onto the contemporary action-theoretic map and that it is Anscombe's characterisation of this notion that has often served as the most salient starting point for discussions of an agent's knowledge of her own actions.⁵ Minimally characterised, practical knowledge is the knowledge an agent has of her own intentional actions (I 50-1) such that: (i) If an agent is, for instance, intentionally sawing a plank⁶ then she knows that she is sawing a plank; and (ii) If an agent knows that she is sawing a plank then she knows this without observation.

Many action theorists have found this an exciting but not entirely convincing notion. They have, thereby, in the same breath defended and resisted it. Pickard (2004) actively rejects Anscombe's insistence that practical knowledge must be non-observational, whilst still holding on to the idea that there is still a distinctively practical form of knowledge. Contrastingly, Newstead (2006) accepts that an agent possesses non-observational knowledge of her own intentional actions, but rejects that

5 This is not to say that Anscombe is the originator of an idea of this kind – Anscombe herself notes its ancient and medieval lineage (I 57) and Schwenkler isolates Aquinas and Aristotle as two clear influences on Anscombe in this regard (2015, 1; see also I 87 where Anscombe explicitly aligns herself with Aquinas on practical knowledge). The importance of practical knowledge and its cognates (agent's knowledge, authorial knowledge, knowledge in intention, etc.) for the action theory that follows in the wake of *Intention* is, however, largely due to Anscombe.

6 The example is Anscombe's own (I 11-2).

this requires us to speak of *practical* knowledge. Meanwhile, Setiya (2016a; 2016b) endeavours to do justice to Anscombe's insight by weakening her proposal, rendering it into the following form:

If A is doing φ intentionally, A believes that he is doing it, or else he is doing φ by doing other things, in which he does believe. (Setiya 2016a, 41).

However ostensibly slight in some cases, there is clear disagreement here. After all, each of these thinkers is explicitly marking a difference from Anscombe. Still, there are various forms of disagreement that two philosophers can be engaged in and it remains for us to specify what form(s) we are dealing with here.

There are three key forms of disagreement that we will be making use of throughout. First, there is insubstantial disagreement. This is disagreement on which nothing of genuine philosophical significance hangs – for instance two philosophers can disagree as to the preferred spelling of the English word *shown*.⁷ Second, there is substantial disagreement. This is disagreement constituted by an explicit difference of position concerning a certain issue or set of issues within a given philosophical field. Third, there is what I will call fundamental disagreement. This is disagreement concerning the aims and orientation of a particular philosophical field, including disagreement as to which questions ought to be asked, which ought to be disregarded and what a successful inquiry within this given field will look like. Concerns that look more typically metaphilosophical start to crop up here, particularly questions of methodology.

Now, it initially appears that we are here dealing with various substantial disagreements, so it will be best to be explicit about how such

⁷ Throughout her works Anscombe preferred to make use of the more archaic *shewn*.

disagreements are supposed to work. Consider the following question which has been of particular significance in the metaphysics of action: Are actions events? (We will hereafter refer to this question simply as **Event**.) Various philosophers have responded in one way or another to this prompting question and we will isolate a few for illustrative purposes. Helen Steward (2012; 2018) and Maria Alvarez and John Hyman (1998) have each argued for the thesis that an action is not an event, but is instead a process (Steward) or the causing of an event (Alvarez and Hyman). On the other hand, Donald Davidson claims that “there is a fairly definite subclass of events which are actions” (2001b, 44; see also 47) and Jennifer Hornsby (2012) follows him on this score.⁸

Each of these philosophers can be seen as providing a response to **Event** by way of answering **Event** either affirmatively or negatively. Because of this, we can divide their responses into the following classes of answer:

(Event.1) The affirmative class of answer, i.e. the class containing the responses of those philosophers who answer “Yes” to **Event**.

(Event.2) The negative class of answer, i.e. the class containing the responses of those philosophers who answer “No” to **Event**.

We assign Davidson and Hornsby to the class (Event.1), while we assign Steward, Alvarez and Hyman to the class (Event.2). Now what is important for establishing that these two groups of philosophers are engaged in substantial disagreement is that the two classes delineated here are mutually exclusive – one cannot in good faith answer both

⁸ Hornsby's paper is more complex than the attribution of this one claim makes it appear. Her central aim is to argue that actions “are not all that agents participate in: also they engage in activity.” (2012, 235). In other words, while Hornsby happily takes actions to be events, she is dedicated to broadening the perceived boundaries of agency beyond just actions and thereby beyond just events.

“Yes” and “No” to the same question, after all. For instance, we cannot assign Davidson and Hornsby to (Event.1) without thereby actively excluding them from (Event.2).

This can, of course, be made more explicit by setting out the underlying logical structure of the two classes as:

(Class.1) p

(Class.2) $\neg p$

where p stands for some proposition. (In the case of **Event**, p would of course be the proposition that actions are events.) This should not, however, lead us to think that all possible class division is like this. After all, various affirmative propositions will naturally exclude one another – “Actions are events” and “Actions are processes” will do so as long as one affirms that events cannot be processes. Dividing the classes according to affirmation and denial of a proposition simply allows us to make explicit that these classes are *necessarily* mutually exclusive.

So, substantial disagreement between Philosopher A and Philosopher B consists in the following conditions being met:

- (i) Philosopher A and Philosopher B each respond to the same question;
- (ii) Philosopher A's response is sorted into Class α ;
- (iii) Philosopher B's response is sorted into Class β ;
- (iv) Class α and Class β are mutually exclusive.

Now when we turn back to those thinkers writing on practical knowledge it seems that this is precisely what is going on. We can, for instance, think of the disagreement between Anscombe and Pickard in the following way. Firstly, each of them is responding to the same question: Does an agent have non-observational knowledge of her own

intentional actions? Secondly, each provides their own responses which can be sorted into their respective answer classes. So we could have:

(Knowledge.1) An agent has non-observational knowledge of her intentional actions.

(Knowledge.2) An agent does not have non-observational knowledge of her intentional actions.

Anscombe, of course, is sorted into (Knowledge.1) and Pickard is sorted into (Knowledge.2). As in the case of **Event**, we have here two classes that are necessarily mutually exclusive since they can be represented as:

(Knowledge.1) p

(Knowledge.2) $\neg p$

where p stands for the proposition that an agent has non-observational knowledge of her intentional actions.⁹ Having set it out in this way, it appears clear – even rather obvious – that Anscombe and Pickard are engaged in substantial disagreement by virtue of a difference of position regarding a specific issue, viz. whether agents have non-observational knowledge of their intentional actions.¹⁰

My suggestion is that this appearance is just that: an appearance. It is an appearance compounded, of course, by the fact that these disagreements look like they follow the regular formula of claim and counterclaim. It is also an appearance compounded by a fundamental misunderstanding of Anscombe that obscures the character of what she is actually up to. Such a misunderstanding masks the real root of the

⁹ The inciting question could, of course have been different. For instance, we could have chosen the following: What kind of knowledge does an agent have of her own intentional actions? For our purposes, it does not matter much. The question chosen in the body of the text does, however, have the heuristic advantage of mirroring **Event** in the division of its answer classes.

¹⁰ The same process can, of course, be carried out with Newstead or Setiya instead of Pickard. The only relevant difference will be the issue concerning which a difference of position between Anscombe and the respective philosopher can be identified. Newstead's, for instance, would be: Is the non-observational knowledge an agent has of her own intentional actions practical knowledge?

difference we are trying to trace.

None of this is to say, of course, that any of the three philosophers I have singled out would agree with even part of this assessment. I think that, as far as these philosophers are concerned, what I have called substantial disagreement adequately captures what they take themselves to be doing vis-à-vis Anscombe. This does not, however, detract from the point. Whether or not they themselves would acknowledge it, my contention remains that: (i) They are not, in fact, engaged in substantial disagreement with Anscombe; and (ii) They misunderstand Anscombe by framing their engagement with her in terms of a difference of position.

It does not, of course, discredit the work done in the papers referenced at the outset to say that their authors have misunderstood Anscombe and thereby misidentified the source of their disagreement with her. Pickard, Newstead and Setiya are, no doubt, each engaged in work that is vital for their expressed research aims and thus clearly has value independent of how it may profit our understanding of Anscombe. But I take it as a given that any philosopher who *does* explicitly look to engage with Anscombe must engage with the actual Anscombe. In other words, we must be clear about what Anscombe herself means by practical knowledge lest we find ourselves in agreement or disagreement with a mere phantom. This is all, of course, merely stipulative until we can specify what exactly Anscombe is and is not doing in *Intention*, thus exposing and remedying the fundamental misunderstanding I think is at work. This is what will occupy us for the rest of this piece.

1.2.

Resistances and recognition

The fundamental misunderstanding of Anscombe that I am hoping to identify consists of two core kinds of resistance to the work done in *Intention*:

- (1) Projecting back on to Anscombe research aims and interests that she is not engaging with.
- (2) Partitioning the work into independent philosophical theses that can be independently asserted.

For sake of ease, I will refer to the first of these simply as projecting and the second simply as partitioning. Both projecting and partitioning are, I think, ways in which the actual work of *Intention* has been resisted, but not genuinely engaged with. I will first outline projecting before outlining partitioning. I will then offer a brief characterisation of how these two core resistances can often be mutually reinforcing. This will constitute the negative project of our piece in which we outline how not to approach Anscombe if we wish to get her right.

We begin with projecting. Rosalind Hursthouse has written of *Intention* that the account of intentional action therein is true and that general recognition of its truth has not been particularly forthcoming (83). I cannot possibly hope to pronounce on the former of these two claims, but the latter (at least in a suitably modified form) is of supreme importance since it captures well the problematic I am aiming to identify. What would it mean for the purported truth of *Intention* to go unrecognised? An answer that immediately suggests itself is, of course, that Anscombe holds theses that a significant portion of philosophers deny or do not hold. If this is what Hursthouse is indicating, then it

amounts to saying that these philosophers are engaged in substantial disagreement with Anscombe. I take it that Hursthouse has something else in mind.

This is how she opens her paper:

When I first read *Intention* as a student it seemed misnamed, since, I thought, it gave an account of intentional action all right, but left me still wondering what an intention was. It was only with years of rereading that I came to see that one beauty of the account was that it eliminated the need to ask. (83)

Let us say I am a reader of *Intention* and I have not eliminated my need to ask what an intention is. Furthermore, in reading *Intention* I find myself at odds with Anscombe over what an intention is. If Hursthouse is correct that *Intention* does not provide an answer to the question of what an intention is, then there is no claim that Anscombe makes as to what intentions are with which I can (and do) disagree. If I am to maintain that there is disagreement between myself and Anscombe, then, I must maintain one of the two following things. I either: (i) maintain that Anscombe and I are engaged in disagreement that is not substantial; or (ii) maintain that – despite appearances – Anscombe is in fact answering the question of what an intention is and that her answer is inadequate.

The first of our two options permits me to say that Anscombe and I are engaged in either insubstantial or fundamental disagreement. The former would require that I deny that the question of what an intention is has any philosophical importance, so I presume that to be inadmissible. I must, therefore, opt for the latter and maintain that Anscombe and I are engaged in fundamental disagreement. Such

disagreement, as per before, concerns the very questions around which Anscombe has constructed her investigation. I will disagree with her disregard for the question as to what an intention is, not any claim she makes in response to that question. Any resistance I make to the work will, therefore, occur prior to concrete engagement with any of its claims and I will resist the work at a more fundamental level.

The second of our two options is what I have identified as projecting. Projecting requires two conditions. The first condition is that a philosopher orient themselves around questions or concerns that Anscombe is not engaging with. The second condition is that they attempt to engage with Anscombe by projecting back on to her the research aims and interests that are generated by these very questions and concerns. This is most likely to occur with questions typically central to contemporary metaphysics and epistemology of action. If one assumes, for instance, that Anscombe will furnish us with a definition of intentional action which specifies a conjunction of conditions to be met by an event in order that it be an intentional action, then disappointment is inevitable.¹¹ Here Anscombe offers a stark contrast to a variety of action theorists, most notably Donald Davidson.¹² Davidson famously argues in his “Actions, Reasons, and Causes” that:

- (1) Intentional actions are done for a primary reason;
- (2) A primary reason is a pro-attitude and belief pair;
- (3) To cite an action's primary reason is to cite its cause.

For Davidson, intentional actions are isolated and identified by way of their aetiology. In other words, there is a causal condition an action

¹¹ Though, as Wiseman notes, it can look as if Anscombe often comes very close to doing just this (2016a, 54).

¹² Or at least the received picture of Donald Davidson.

must meet in order for it to be intentional.¹³

Now, Anscombe does offer something like a criterion for identifying when we are dealing with an intentional action in an oft-quoted passage:

What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer that I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting. (I 9)

We will return to this passage but for now I simply note that an initially tempting way to read this passage is that Anscombe is offering a necessary condition that an action must meet in order for it to be intentional: It must be done for a reason. In this respect, it looks as if Davidson and Anscombe are closer in spirit than anticipated. After all, Davidson's claim that intentional actions are done for a primary reason is a refinement of his claim that intentional actions are done for reasons.

This is, of course, a misreading. What Anscombe in fact says is that when the relevant 'Why?' question has application, then we are dealing with an intentional action. This needn't imply that any action in

¹³ Davidson usually talks simply of “action” in his paper, but I think it relatively clear that he is treating “action” as synonymous with “intentional action” for his purposes. Compare the later “The Logical Form of Action Sentences”: “to describe an action as intentional is to describe the action in light of certain attitudes and beliefs of a particular person” (2001b, 122) – the particular person of course being the agent of the specific action in question. As far as I can see Davidson treats the question of when an event is an intentional action and when an action is intentional as equivalently answered by citing the relevant aetiology of the event/action in question. Whether Davidson would allow that an event can be an action without being an intentional action – and therefore that there is a sense of “action” that is not synonymous with “intentional action” – is a separate issue.

question was in fact done for a reason.¹⁴ Just in noting this we already see how projection has the capacity to obscure what Anscombe is doing in *Intention*.¹⁵ In expecting Anscombe to provide a certain sort of account in response to a certain sort of question, we can be tempted to distort her claims. So we may now present a modified form of Hursthouse's claim: The true character of Anscombe's investigation has often gone unrecognised.

We now turn to partitioning. *Intention* has often been carved up into independent philosophical theses capable of scrutiny and reiteration outside of the work in which these purported theses are embedded. This is, of course, standard practice for philosophy as a discipline – focussing on the individual arguments and claims of a given philosopher or school is, at this point, standard fare. But in this particular case such carving is, no doubt, symptomatic of the mistaken assessment that Rachael Wiseman finds common to readers (even those sympathetic to Anscombe): the assessment that Anscombe's work (*Intention* included) is “neither unified nor systematic” (Wiseman 2016a, 1). If one takes *Intention* to be an essentially disunified collection of theses then it makes partitioning that much easier since one will not see the need to place each purported thesis within the context of what surrounds it.

These two kinds of resistances – projecting and partitioning – are harmful to understanding Anscombe not only in that they distort her thought, but also in that they can mutually enforce one another. We can, for instance, assume that Anscombe is answering questions of the following sort:

¹⁴ See Lawrence (265-7).

¹⁵ Compare chapter 3 of Wiseman (2016a), where Wiseman makes much the same complaint about Setiya's understanding of Anscombe on the central task for the philosophy of intention. See Setiya (2018) by way of comparison.

Are actions events?

When is an event an action?

Are reasons causes?

Having assumed this, we isolate portions of the text that seem to be making an argument in response to one of these questions and consider them in isolation from the rest of *Intention*. Thus projecting leads into partitioning. Equally, however, if one assumes at the outset that there is no essential unity to *Intention*, then it becomes possible – and perhaps rather tempting – to read *Intention* as composed of answers to the sorts of questions just noted. Thus partitioning leads into projecting.

The thinkers that initiated the negative project of this piece – Pickard, Newstead and Setiya – are, as I have already said, not engaged in substantive disagreement with Anscombe on practical knowledge. We are now in a position to elucidate why. They are engaged in projecting and partitioning – though, as I have also already said, they would most likely not accept this characterisation. If this is indeed the case then it is in need of a corrective. The most attractive corrective that suggests itself is that these writers begin to understand themselves as engaged in fundamental disagreement with Anscombe, thereby shifting the tenor of their work. I think such engagement with Anscombe would be immensely fruitful, as it would take seriously her methodological commitments and would give prominence to the issue of what sorts of questions are pertinent to a philosophical inquiry into human agency. This can only be undertaken, however, if the misunderstanding propounded by projecting and partitioning is itself first remedied.

So to reiterate what was said in the prior section: If Anscombe is to serve as a touchstone for action theorists thinking about practical knowledge then it should be the actual Anscombe that does so. The hope of the remainder of this piece is to go some way towards setting forth

the actual Anscombe. Its guiding imperative is, therefore, to follow Anscombe as closely as possible and to place her thought on practical knowledge back within the work of *Intention* as a whole and, where necessary, within Anscombe's wider corpus.

1.3.

Questions of method

Having completed the negative project of the prior section, we will now strive to begin our positive project of outlining what Anscombe is doing. Anscombe begins *Intention* by noting a confusion, but not a confusion about actions, agents or intentions *per se*. The confusion she highlights concerns “the character of the concept” INTENTION (I 1). She notes that there are three kinds of statement employing the concept INTENTION:

Expressions of intention for the future;
Intentional actions;
The intentions with which things are
done.

These are what she calls the “three heads” of the concept (I iii). Anscombe's contention is that if one narrows one's focus unduly on one of these so-called heads then one will inevitably make claims that are false for the remaining two heads (I 1). One can, of course, claim that the various senses of “intentional” and its cognates as they occur in statements of the three kinds are equivocal, thereby licensing this narrower focus. But Anscombe is blunt about the prospects of such licensing. The concept INTENTION is, she says, “clearly not equivocal” (loc. cit.).

An adequate philosophical account of the concept INTENTION will therefore be one that shows there to be a genuine unity to the concept and thus a genuine unity between the three statement kinds. The

genuine unity of the concept can only be shown, however, by uncovering the very thing that we are – in Anscombe's phrase – in the dark about: the *character* of the concept up for investigation. So the guiding question of Anscombe's inquiry is this: What is the character of the concept INTENTION? We can see here just how thoroughly projecting obscures what Anscombe is doing. To put it rather artlessly, questions about events, causes and even actions are about ontological items and their natures. A question concerning events – say – seeks to understand and outline what it is to be an ontological item of a certain kind, i.e. what properties it must have or what metaphysical conditions it must meet. Anscombe's question is patently not like this. She does not ask what an intention is; her concern is solely and strictly the *concept* INTENTION. Projecting thus compounds misunderstanding by taking claims Anscombe makes about a concept to be claims about an ontological item. As we shall see, for Anscombe the former type of claim belongs to a very specific sort of inquiry that cannot be undertaken to answer categorically metaphysical questions.

We should, however, say more about what prompts Anscombe's question. Anscombe nowhere indicates that human beings are not, generally speaking, competent in the application of the concept INTENTION.¹⁶ As Anscombe writes:

I am sitting in a chair writing and anyone grown to the age of reason in the same world would know this as soon as he saw me, and in general it would be his first account of what I was doing [...]. (I 8)

In fact, even a child can give a report of what someone is doing intentionally (I 80). Correct usage of the concept INTENTION is not thereby impugned by raising the question of what kind of concept it is.¹⁷ Yet for

¹⁶ See Wiseman (2016a, 62).

¹⁷ This is not to say that Anscombe's work cannot have normative implications for

all that Anscombe is indicating that we lack an adequate philosophical account of that concept. Anscombe is not alone in highlighting this sort of issue. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes: “I know well enough what [time] is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.” (XI.14).¹⁸ There is great insight here into the type of philosophical problem Anscombe is seeking to address. If there is something that human beings cannot or do not do, then there is very little mystery as to how or why we could not give an adequate account of what it is to do that thing. However, when we lack an adequate account of something that we do regularly and with relative ease – indeed something that seems woven into the entire fabric of human life – then something has gone awry. It is as if the carpenter could suddenly say nothing about carpentry.

We are drawn to say we understand the concept INTENTION since we are competent in its application. Yet we are also drawn to say that we do not understand it since we lack an adequate account of it. It thus begins to look as if we both do and do not understand the very same thing. Anscombe, of course, thinks that there is a solution to this quandary. It is a solution we find hinted at in Wittgenstein: “Something that one knows when nobody asks one, but no longer knows when one is asked to explain it, is something that has to be *called to mind*. (And it is obviously something which, for some reason, it is difficult to call to mind.)” (PI §89).

If we are to bridge this gap between understanding and ignorance of the concept INTENTION, then we must call that concept to mind. What

concept-usage. Getting the character of the concept right may reveal to us that certain common statement types ostensibly employing the concept INTENTION are in fact sheer nonsense and thus ought to be abandoned. That an intention is completely explicable as a mental item may very well be one such statement type (I 9). (Compare what Cora Diamond says about *proposition* as a logical kind in Wittgenstein [2019, 146-8].)

¹⁸ See also Tugendhat (8).

does such calling to mind consist in? Anscombe's answer is: a description of use.¹⁹ Now, if we are describing the use of a genuinely unified concept then the account given through this description of use will itself have to be genuinely unified. It must describe accurately and fully each and every aspect of the concept at hand as well as how these aspects hang together. Thus, the description of use Anscombe offers us will not be a mere cataloguing of potential token and type instances of sentences involving the concept INTENTION. It will instead help to identify the similarities underlying these various instances without which these instances would not be possible.²⁰

The process of identifying these similarities without which the concept could not be applied is equally the process of detailing what Cora Diamond calls “the look of human life containing rules” (1995, 5). For instance, Anscombe does not hold it as relevant to investigating the concept INTENTION that it would be odd to say of a man crossing the street that he was doing so intentionally (I 29). Her thought is that, regardless of whether we withhold the word “intentional” or not, we are still employing the concept INTENTION here. The employment of a concept does not only involve statements explicitly making use of that concept. It thus goes beyond simple assertoric statements of the sort “This is an intentional action of hers” or “He intentionally did such-and-such”. The employment of a concept necessarily involves certain sorts of expectations, reactions and potential lines of inquiry in addition to such assertoric statements. It involves, in short, a capacity to respond in certain intelligible ways to things that are themselves intelligible in certain ways. That is what I take Diamond to mean by the look of human life containing rules. In providing a description of use of the concept

¹⁹ This is a strategy she employs elsewhere. See CD 137 and RP 117-9.

²⁰ This allows us to see why partitioning compounds error when reading Anscombe. The exact claims that Anscombe is making do not have independent plausibility precisely because each claim is itself only one part of a unified project of setting forth the concept INTENTION.

INTENTION, Anscombe is looking to describe what human life which makes use of the concept INTENTION looks like so as to illuminate *for us* what we are doing in employing the concept. In other words, her description of use will outline how the concept INTENTION can be understood as a way of “going on intelligently and intelligibly” (Diamond 1995, 5).

With this in mind, I think we can see what Rachael Wiseman means in claiming that *Intention* is not in the business of offering a theory of action (2016b, 208) and that the whole work offers its reader something that “isn't a philosophical thesis at all” (UD 223). If what Anscombe is offering us is a description of use of the concept INTENTION, then what she is looking to do is to clarify what is already going on. This is why the method is descriptive. Certainly she is looking to illuminate what we in fact do so as to assuage us our misunderstanding. But her task is to set forth what goes into the employment of the concept, not to explain *why* what does go into it does so. Anscombe herself says that a theory “will at least (a) determine answers in obscure or borderline cases; (b) give an interpretation of known facts.” (UD 222). As far as I can see neither of these is an aim of her work in *Intention*. Since Anscombe is describing what is already going on, it is unlikely that she is looking to provide *new* criteria which determine answers in borderline cases. Equally she is not looking to provide an *interpretation* of known facts. The facts are the facts and her task is to describe them.

So we have now set out Anscombe's guiding question and the method that she envisages will help answer it. Still, none of what I have said necessitates thinking that Anscombe's method is any good. Indeed, while I think those philosophers that initiated the chapter misunderstand Anscombe, that most certainly does not mean that they are thereby obliged to buy into what she is doing. Indeed, as I have said, I think it would be fruitful of them to actively take issue with Anscombe's

method – if they find it objectionable, of course. But Anscombe's method is Anscombe's method, as glib as it might sound to put it that way. If one is intending to get her right, one must accept that this is what she is doing.²¹ This is so regardless of the opinion one may hold of what she is doing.

To close, I indicate the structure of the remainder of this piece. In outlining the description of use she sees as necessary, Anscombe makes the following two claims:

- (1) INTENTION is a formal concept.
- (2) An agent has practical knowledge of her intentional actions.

Further to this, given that the aim of this description of use is to provide a unified account of the concept INTENTION, each of these claims requires and illuminates the other. They are, in other words, both crucial and interdependent aspects of the concept under investigation. They are each therefore only properly understood when taken together in the context of the kind of investigation Anscombe is undertaking. So, in Chapter 2, we tackle the first claim. We outline what is meant by formal concepthood before detailing what it means for INTENTION to be a formal concept. Then, in Chapter 3, we tackle the second claim and its relation to the first claim. We explain how INTENTION as a formal concept elucidates the *structure* of action and how this structure explains the role of practical reason in accounting for practical knowledge. We then address the issue of what it means for practical knowledge to be non-observational.

²¹ Pace Thompson, for whom the Wittgensteinian tenor of these methodological commitments is merely “a buzzing noise that distracts the reader” (2011, 199).

2.

Anscombe's formal account of intention

2.1.

Outlines of formal concepthood

I have said that the first claim Anscombe makes in outlining her description of use is that INTENTION is a formal concept. This, of course, tells us very little if we lack an understanding of what it means for a concept to be a formal one. The task of this section is to provide such an understanding.

If we are to understand formal concepthood and the use Anscombe makes of it, there is no better place to start than Anscombe herself. Anscombe had cause to write about formal concepts in her study on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Beginning at TLP 4.126, Wittgenstein undertakes to elucidate the character of formal concepts in contrast to non-formal concepts. Following Wittgenstein's elucidation, Anscombe writes that a formal concept

[α] cannot be properly expressed by a predicate or general term, [β] but only by the way we apply the corresponding sort of sign [...]. (IWT 102)²²

We separate her exposition here into two components: the negative component and the positive component. The former corresponds to the α claim, while the latter corresponds to the β claim.

We will first tackle what is meant by the negative component.

²² The interpolations of α and β are, as indicated, mine.

Consider the non-formal concept *BALD* and the use made of it in the following judgement: Socrates is bald. The use made here of the concept *BALD* is property-predicative since, in making the judgement, the judger has predicated of Socrates the property baldness. In predicating baldness of Socrates, the judgement is capable of adding to someone's understanding of Socrates. There is something further that someone unaware of Socrates' follicular condition will learn about him, i.e. that he is bald. This goes, presumably, for all predicative uses of concepts. I can say of something that it is red, smooth, noisy, wooden and thus provide someone with new descriptions under which to understand or cognise the thing thus described. (These chosen examples are all broadly contained in a class of answers to the question "What is it like?")

The negative component amounts to denying that this is possible with formal concepts. Let us take a concept that Frege famously argued was a formal one: the concept *TRUE*.²³ Frege notes that there is a natural inclination to think of *TRUE* as straightforwardly usable as property-predicative since claims of the sort "This statement is true" share their surface grammar with claims of the sort "Socrates is bald" (1997, 326). He urges us to resist this temptation. A non-formal concept applied to a subject in a property-predicative judgement adds, as we said, to the understanding of that subject. When we claim that a statement is true, however, we add nothing to our understanding of that statement, since "the sentence 'I smell the scent of violets' has just the same content as the sentence 'It is true that I smell the scent of violets'." (ibid., 328). Part of what Frege is getting at here is, I think, that the former embedded claim cannot be made without the latter embedded claim and, furthermore, the former cannot be understood without the latter. To

²³ Frege argues for this in his paper "Thought". See Goldfarb (73-5). Whether *TRUE* is indeed a formal concept – and therefore whether Frege's *argument* is any good – will not detain us. *TRUE* is chosen only for its illustrative power.

assert that p just is to assert that p is true.²⁴ This contrasts with our non-formal example. I can readily talk, think and have knowledge of Socrates without employing the description _____ *is bald* – though I presumably must have *some* description under which I can cognise him. So, formal concepts cannot provide new descriptions under which a subject can be cognised and are, therefore, unemployable in property-predicative judgements.

Let us now look at the positive component of Anscombe's exposition. This component can be made clearer by what immediately follows the β claim in the text, where Anscombe writes that

the only proper way of expressing a formal concept is (as Frege held for the concept 'object', 'concept', 'function') the use of a special style of variable; and what makes a style of variable special is not (say) belonging to a special alphabet, but something that comes out in the use of the variable. (IWT 102)

What shows an object falling under a formal concept is not predication (as per the negative component) but instead the use of a variable to represent that object.²⁵ To illustrate, we return to Frege's understanding of f_{TRUE} as a formal concept. In understanding a sentence to be an assertion, we take it to be representable using the variable p . The possible representations may of course vary superficially – one may simply write p , or one may instead write *that p* – but they each understand p as standing in for a statement along the lines of “Such-and-

24 This means, then, that for Frege there is a certain equivalence or identity between “ p ” and “ p is true”. What that equivalency/identity amounts to is an issue unto itself.

25 See also Diamond (2019, 129-30) for a characterisation of this according to two different kinds of generality: (i) the generality of a property; and (ii) the generality of a variable. Compare the account in Ford (2011) of accidental generality as opposed to categorial generality.

such is the case”. We can take Frege's claim to be, in part, that in representing an assertion as p we also represent it as falling under the concept TRUE, since “ p ” and “ p is true” are equivalent in content. So the variable used to represent the statement equally represents that the statement falls under the concept TRUE.

This is, however, only half of the story. It is not simply the fact that we use a variable that shows an object to fall under a given formal concept. After all, I could write p on a bit of paper and present it to you, saying “This is a variable.” You will perhaps be able to say straight off that we are dealing with an object's falling under a formal concept, but you will be completely unable to say *which* formal concept except by merely guessing. This is because a formal concept is only properly represented by the precise way in which we use a variable.

Let us consider an example. Anscombe notes that the sentence “The sun is red” can be considered in two ways (IWT 76). In the first way we regard it as “_____red” such that the sentence is about the sun. In the second way we regard it as “The sun_____” such that the sentence is about red.²⁶ We can readily rewrite these two ways of considering the sentence “The sun is red” in the following fashion:

x is red.

The sun is F.

In their rewritten form, we clearly demarcate what we take the sentence to be about by placing a relevant variable in the necessary place. This variable also indicates that what can fill the argument place marked by the variable falls under a formal concept. “ x ” will, for instance, indicate that whatever it stands in for will fall under the Fregean formal concept OBJECT. But “ x ” does not indicate this by its sheer presence. Again, if I

²⁶ Anscombe's point here is different from the one I am raising, but there are certain points of contact.

simply wrote x it would tell us very little. “ x ” represents that whatever can fill its argument place falls under the formal concept OBJECT by virtue of its place in a given sentence. The variable operates as an indicator of formal concepthood only within its function as a placeholder for an argument place in a complete sentence.

This is what Anscombe means when she talks of the use of a variable. What is important is not the mere presence of a variable, but *what the variable is doing* in the sentence in which it is embedded. Now we can imagine any number of sentences that make use of the same variable in the same way. So, we may have:

x is spherical.

x is rather bright today.

x is worthy of divine worship.

x shall hopefully be out tomorrow.

Nothing, in short, hinges on the specified content of the sentence itself for formal concepthood. What is important is that, regardless of content, these sentences share a certain structure. In the above examples, that structure is “ x is_____”, where this gap specifies any content that could conceivably follow “ x is”. This shared structure is what I will call a form of representation. This is what I take Wittgenstein to be referring to when he claims that “every variable presents a constant form, which all its values possess” (TLP 4.1271). To fall under a formal concept just is to be capable of being put into the requisite form of representation. So, for something to fall under the formal concept OBJECT just is to be capable of filling the argument place in sentences of the sort “ x is_____”.

One interesting result of this is that it leaves open the possibility of specifying a formal concept by virtue of a relation that obtains *between* variables rather than just the role of a single variable in a certain sort of sentence. Rather than “ x is_____”, for instance, we may with

equal justification write “x is F”. If, then, something is incapable of meaningfully filling the lacuna in “_____is F” then it is incapable of filling the argument place marked by “x”, i.e. it is incapable of falling under the formal concept OBJECT. Thus we can readily identify formal concepts that can be specified by reference to the possible filling of a variable *in relation to another variable*. As we will see, INTENTION is a formal concept of just this sort.

2.2.

INTENTION as a formal concept

If the guiding question of Intention is “What is the character of the concept INTENTION?”, then it must be admitted that there is a superficially simple answer: INTENTION is a formal concept. Indeed, much of *Intention* can be seen as an explanation of – and expansion on – this very claim. In the following chapter, for instance, we will see that Anscombe's introduction of practical knowledge and practical reason are intimately tied up with INTENTION as a formal concept. But the claim by itself is not informative and is in need of being made explicit. The first stage of this was completed in the prior section, in which an overview of formal concepthood was given. We can now use the results of that section to understand this superficially simple answer that we have isolated.

In a crucial passage, Anscombe writes that “the term 'intentional' has reference to a *form* of description of events.” (I 84). This is, I take it, the proper statement that INTENTION is a formal concept and it is worth dwelling on for a moment. Anscombe's talk of a *form of description* can seem somewhat mystifying, or at the very least unhelpful. After all, specifying that the relevant form is of descriptions does not by itself help to elucidate what is meant. Having examined formal concepthood,

however, we are in a position to make sense of it. All Anscombe means is that, whatever form of representation is proper to INTENTION, what will be capable of coming to fill the variable places within it will be descriptions.²⁷ To be more precise, for this particular concept, the descriptions we are concerned with will be descriptions of what is happening, what will happen or what has happened. (Hence why the descriptions are *of events*.)

So we have what can fill our variable places. But, as we have already said, the sheer presence of a variable tells us very little – even if we know what is capable of coming to fill its place, as we do here. If intentional refers to a form of description, then, it must mean that there is a specific and unique form of representation that such descriptions can go into. This is what Anscombe characterises in what immediately follows the proper statement of INTENTION as formal concept: “Events are typically described in this form when 'in order to' or 'because' (in one sense) is attached to their descriptions” (I 84-5).

These two guises of the form of representation – “in order to” and “because” – are, of course, aspects of a unified concept and so, though they are superficially different, we will see that they are in fact identical in form. I will refer to the first of these as the calculative guise and to the second as the explanatory guise.

In the calculative guise of this form of representation, we represent actions as forming a series of variables linked by the locution “in order to”. So, we could have “A in order to B in order to C in order to D”. This will, no doubt, be immediately recognisable as what Anscombe calls the A-B-C-D series (I 45). This first guise of the form of

²⁷ This is why it makes perfect sense for Wiseman to claim that the form of representation that is internal to the concept INTENTION “is a formal order which holds *between descriptions*” (2016a, 113; emphasis added).

representation internal to INTENTION is thus one in which descriptions are ranged in a series of dependence. Anscombe writes that as we move along the series, “each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one, though independent of the following one.” (I 45). The series swells, as it were, as it goes along. This scale of dependency, this swelling, is what we would say is the precise way in which the variables are used. As such, it serves as a specification of the form of representation internal to the concept INTENTION and the variables are used in such a way that the place of each variable in the series is responsive to the placement of all the other variables present in the series. (This is why INTENTION is a formal concept that can be specified by reference to the possible filling of a variable *in relation to another variable*.)

What we have just outlined should not, however, lead us to erroneously assume that the series is thereby merely aggregative. As Will Small rightly recognises, a given series of variables arranged in the form “A in order to B in order to C in order to D” is to be taken as forming a single unit (161). This is part and parcel of what Anscombe characterised as the *use* of the variable. Even if we wish to isolate, for some purpose, the initial variable – which is, according to Anscombe's characterisation, independent of the variables following it – it will only function as a variable representing an object falling under the formal concept INTENTION by virtue of its place within its given series. Its independence simply consists in that it serves as the starting point for the series and that its status as *this starting point* is not dependent on what follows it. But its status as a variable in the series – a status that serves as a condition for its being the *starting point* of a given series – is dependent on its place within the series itself as a single unit.²⁸ This is

²⁸ As an additional note, it is the unity of the series that also permits us to reverse its order. Instead of “A in order to B in order to C in order to D” it is equally permissible to represent this series as “D by C by B by A”. The possibility of this

precisely analogous to the way in which “x” in “x is red” can only serve as a variable for the concept OBJECT by virtue of occurring in a complete predicative sentence.

To say of an action that it is intentional is, then, to say that there is a description of it that is capable of filling a variable place in the form of representation “A in order to B”. Naturally, of course, it may also be the case that there are several descriptions of the same action capable of filling these variables in a longer series. The form of representation is, in principle, infinitely iterable – though it is exceedingly doubtful that finite beings such as ourselves would have much use for such an infinitely iterated series.

When we shift to the explanatory guise, we find that the form of representation has reversed the order of dependence we have become accustomed to with the calculative guise. In a series of “A because B because C because D” the *independent* variable is D - the terminal point. This is because, as we proceed along the series, each variable awaits explanation by the next one. “A because _____” awaits completion in a way that “A because B” does not. “A because B” could very easily be complete in and of itself. In the series “A because B because C because D”, the variable “D” is, then, independent inasmuch as its serving as the terminal point does not depend on what comes before it. It is a terminal point merely by virtue of its place in the series. Of course, though, what went for the calculative order goes for the explanatory order: a given series in this form must be taken to be a single unit and thus what holds of formal concepthood in general holds here as it did with the calculative order.²⁹

reversal is down to the fact that, even in this reversed form, the order of dependency remains unchanged. A still remains independent of the other variables, only this time its independence consists of its status as a *terminal point* of the series.

²⁹ Again, just as our calculative series was reversible, so is our new series: “B therefore A” and so on.

Now, if we attend to the fact that in each guise there is an order of dependence and to the fact that any series in each guise can be readily reversed, I think the result we reach is the following: The explanatory order is itself simply the reverse of the calculative order and the calculative order is itself simply the reverse of the explanatory order.³⁰ We set out the possible series types:

	Original	Reverse
Calculative	(1) A in order to B	(2) B by A
Explanatory	(3) A because B	(4) B therefore A

What I think is essential to see that these guises are the reverse of one another is to see that there is an important sense in which (1) and (4) are equivalent and in which (2) and (3) are equivalent. If I say that I am doing A in order to do B, then I am equally saying that my doing B requires my doing A. If I say that I am doing B by doing A then I am equally saying that I am doing A because I am doing B. There is, then, a sense in which these two guises are simply identical: the reverse of each is the original of the other. The identity obtains precisely because *both* of them are in fact reversible.

With this, we can now see that at least one use that Anscombe makes of the “Why?” question is to get us to see this identity. The “Why?” question sets out the underlying structure of representation involved in the concept INTENTION as we employ it³¹ by revealing that intelligible answers to it either occur in the calculative order or in the explanatory order. When asked of my action “Why?” I either set out descriptions of what I am doing in a calculative series beginning with an

30 Compare Ford (2015, 138-40).

31 See Michael Thompson (2008, 47-8).

independent description or I set out descriptions of what I am doing in an explanatory order such that I reach an independent description that properly and intelligibly terminates the series.³² But the fact that each is equally an intelligible form of answer to the question “Why?” shows that in applying the concept INTENTION we are making use of a single form of representation: one that is shown by the potential relations of dependence among variables standing in for descriptions.

One important methodological point that we can also now raise is that Anscombe refuses, in Vogler's words, to “treat action as given” (2001, 442).³³ Anscombe rejects taking INTENTION as a standard concept that can be isolated as already given to us in an intelligible sense, in the way that the non-formal concept BALD may be.³⁴ The calculative and explanatory guises given here are not outlined in terms of actions, agency or intentions. They are instead revealed to be intelligible orders of dependence that hold among descriptions of what happens. We thus avoid the “circles” that Anscombe cautions us against moving in (I 10) by providing a description of what it is to apply the concept INTENTION without invoking terms this description was intended to illuminate.

2.3

Why formal?

It now remains for us to outline why Anscombe thinks INTENTION can only be understood as a formal concept. This will be primarily constituted by an exposition of the second paragraph of *Intention* §19. This paragraph is,

³² I take it that this is the result of *Intention* §20, where Anscombe argues that, if we suppose “further intentions with which” to be excluded as possible answers to the “Why?” question, then we would not be left with a “distinct concept of intentional action at all.” (I 32).

³³ See also Vogler (2002, 218-22).

³⁴ Anscombe's work here contrasts in interesting ways with the research program recently put forward by Yair Levy in which intentional action is to be taken as “metaphysically basic” (705) and thereby something like a primitive given.

even by the standards of *Intention*, a compact and almost gnomic passage. We can, at best, set out a plausible enough reconstruction of Anscombe's thought here in the hopes that it illuminates what leads Anscombe to make the claims we have explored in the previous two sections.

She begins by stating the thesis she is hoping to establish: “an action is not called 'intentional' in virtue of any extra feature which exists when it is performed” (I 28). This is, as we are now in a position to see, simply the negative component of formal concepthood applied to the concept INTENTION. If one can establish that this negative component does indeed hold of INTENTION, then one will have paved the way to isolate it as a formal concept and outline it as such. Anscombe's procedure is not to straightforwardly deny that any such feature exists or could possibly exist. She in fact proceeds by taking up the supposition that such a feature does indeed exist. She calls this feature *I* and I shall follow her in this.

One and the same action, she reminds us, can be intentional under one description and unintentional under another. So my action could be intentional under the description *putting my book down*, but unintentional under the description *putting my book on top of a pool of ink*. This, as she claims in *Under a Description*, is not a theory of action- or event-identity. It is, instead, a datum that any philosophical account of INTENTION must take into consideration. It is because of this datum that we cannot talk of an action's being intentional without providing a description under which the action is indeed intentional.

A further component feeding into this requirement is Anscombe's clear disdain for wandering through “'bare particular' country” (UD

220).³⁵ The motivations behind such disdain is a separate issue to which we cannot do justice. For our purposes, however, we can note that Anscombe clearly takes it that to talk of an action is always to talk of it under some description. There is simply is no other way to do so:

The proper answer to 'What is the action, which has all these descriptions?' is to give one of the descriptions. Any one, it does not matter which; or perhaps it would be best to offer a choice, saying 'Take whichever you prefer.' (loc. cit.)

So if we wish to talk about an action then, naturally, it will be a requirement on us to provide a description under which the action falls. Furthermore, if we are concerned with the action inasmuch as it is intentional, then we must provide a description under which the action in question was done intentionally.

Anscombe now asks us to consider the act of picking up a hammer. In doing so, an agent will undoubtedly contract various muscles, but we would not say of him that he intentionally contracted these muscles. This is not to say that an agent could never contract a specific set of muscles intentionally. I may, for instance, deliberately contract a calf muscle just for the sake of it or in order to improve my leg strength. What Anscombe is gesturing at is that when someone is engaged in picking up a hammer, *that* is what we would give as the most immediate description of what he was doing, regardless of what else we might say he was doing – contracting muscles, casting a shadow, frowning his brow, etc.

To help us get clear on this, let us examine in full a passage that we had cause to quote part of earlier:

³⁵ Compare Anscombe's gripe with the "phantasmic notion of the individual as a 'bare particular' with no properties" (S 38).

I am sitting in a chair writing and anyone grown to the age of reason in the same world would know this as soon as he saw me, and in general it would be his first account of what I was doing; if this were something he arrived at with difficulty, and what he knew straight off were precisely how I was affecting the acoustic properties of the room (to me a very recondite piece of information), then communication between us would be rather severely impaired. (I 8)

What Anscombe is raising here is that it is part of the mastery of the concept INTENTION – whatever character that concept has – that the action-descriptions we employ allow for our use of the concept to be intelligible. To put forward a rather silly case, if I make a statement purportedly using the concept INTENTION whilst employing an action-description consisting of words I have entirely made up, then whatever I am doing in making that statement – if I am doing anything – it is not properly employing the concept which I am supposed to have mastery of. The concept itself imposes limits on what can count as intelligible use of it. I think, for Anscombe, to say of the man picking up the hammer that he is intentionally contracting some (particular) muscles *rather than* that he is picking up the hammer is a (perhaps less extreme) case of not using the concept INTENTION intelligibly. Someone choosing to say that the man in question was intentionally contracting some muscles would always be open to the question “What do you mean to indicate by using *that* description rather this one?” Such a question does not arise in the usual case where someone says of the man picking up a hammer that he is picking up a hammer.³⁶

³⁶ This, no doubt, is a feature both of having mastered the concept and of the fact that picking up a hammer is already a perfectly intelligible thing to do. Were the relevant description *spreading green books on the roof* – to take one of Anscombe's

Michael Thompson puts the idea in terms of the fact that our world “is a human world, is something that essentially and at one stroke decks its bearers out with a pile of possible objects of volition, or descriptions of intentional action” (2011, 202). Such decking out comes, I take it, not from coming to learn an itemised list which one is able to remember like some sort of encyclopedia of action-descriptions. Rather, it comes from the mastery of the concept, since to master the concept is, at least in part, to have the requisite competence to recognise on a given occasion what action-descriptions are and are not intelligible in statements using the concept INTENTION.³⁷ The thought, then, is that when we have an extrasomatic description – by which I just mean a description going beyond the body of the agent – available for a given action, intelligible employment of the concept INTENTION requires we make use of that description. Such a description may not be available, but when it is the requirement holds. The use of a merely somatic description – by which I just mean a description involving only the body of the agent – is to be understood, therefore, as the exception and not the rule.³⁸

own examples (I 28) – then the intelligibility of my using the concept INTENTION could be put in to question. At the very least its intelligibility would await further conformation. This is partly what I take Wiseman to mean when she claims that “when a description that doesn't usually appear in this form [of representation] does so, we will need some 'filling out'.” (2016a, 154).

37 The idea that there are descriptions that simply are or are not intelligible is an oversimplification. I think Anscombe could certainly allow for a graded understanding of intelligibility in the employment of a concept.

38 I take what I am outlining here to be limits of intelligibility of the concept INTENTION. I take it that these limits – like the possibility of an action's being intentional under one description and unintentional under another – are to serve as constraints on the account we give of the concept. They are not, therefore, claims as such. Instead, they serve as conditions for what would count as an adequate claim within the investigation Anscombe is undertaking. This is, I must admit, a particular philosophical knot that I cannot untie here. A proper explication of these limits would provide an account of how we can make sense of Anscombe's slogan “I do what happens” (I 52) and would give a prominent role to *transaction* in providing an adequate philosophical account of human agency. For some excellent examples of the latter, see Ford (2013), (2014) and (2018), as well as Coope (2005) and (2007).

Despite all this, Anscombe also notes that the man does not unintentionally contract his muscles just because it is not an intelligible immediate description of his intentional action. She therefore recommends that we call his contraction of muscles *preintentional*. With this in place, Anscombe asks us to suppose that “preintentional movement + *I*” guarantees the performance of an intentional action. In other words, she is asking us to think of INTENTION as a non-formal concept capable of straightforward property-predication – albeit predication of a property that we have no independent specification of; for now, it is merely *I*. She then immediately raises an explanatory problem for this supposition: just guaranteeing that *an* intentional action is performed does not provide us with a description of *which* intentional action is performed.

We therefore must begin to examine what our *I* must be like. Anscombe offers two possibilities: (i) *I* is interpreted as a description of an action; (ii) *I* has an internal relation to a description of an action. While Anscombe offers these as two alternatives, they are really just two ways of indicating the same thing. Given that we must talk of an intentional action under a description and that the preintentional movement does not supply such a description, Anscombe's central point is that, whatever *I* is, it must in some way provide a description of the action *as an intentional action*, i.e. it must provide us with a description that can be intelligibly used in statements using the concept INTENTION. For sake of ease, I will proceed from here on to talk as if *I* is straightforwardly an action-description. I will, in other words, take Anscombe's first possibility for the sake of this exposition.

So we have what our *I* must be like, in some vague sense. But now, Anscombe says, let us look to what in this case we already know. This turns out, as she indicates, to not be much at all. We know “the man

considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles” (I 28) and that is it. It is the case that this is all we know since the initial question that is guiding us concerns the bit of Anscombean arithmetic “preintentional movement + *I*”. We have an idea of what can be subsumed under the class of preintentional movements, i.e. those somatic descriptions which cannot be intelligibly used in statements employing the concept INTENTION. What cannot be thus subsumed, however, must either be assigned to *I* or dismissed as irrelevant. But we have at this point no clear way of knowing what is to be assigned to *I*. Indeed, Anscombe's point of contention is that it is completely and utterly unclear how one would go about assigning any description to *I* given that all we know are our agent's preintentional movements.

There is, she says, nothing in the contraction of the man's muscles considered in isolation that “can possibly determine the content of that description” (I 29) we are looking for – that description that can take the place of *I* in any given bit of Anscombean arithmetic. Consider the following description of a preintentional movement: “He is tensing his calf muscle.” This may be a perfectly true description that can be given in an account of what someone is currently doing. But, by itself, it provides no indication as to any other possible descriptions that could equally go into such an account. There are, to be sure, any number of descriptions that could unproblematically accompany “He is tensing his calf muscle”. For instance:

He is doing yoga.

He is dancing.

He is walking to the library.

He is performing in a marching band.

The problem Anscombe is highlighting is that even if the possible descriptions that could accompany “He is tensing his calf muscle” – and thus could serve as an *I* in a given situation in which this somatic

description holds – were restricted to just these four listed above, we have absolutely no criteria for identifying which *I* is supposed to be accompanying the preintentional movement *unless we already look beyond the preintentional movement*.

I take it that this is the result Anscombe is indicating when she states that if this is so then “it is a mere happy accident that an *I* relevant to the wider context and further consequences ever accompanies the preintentional movements in which a man performs a given intentional action.” (I 29). Her thought is that in the Anscombean arithmetic “preintentional movements + *I*”, the preintentional movements can do absolutely no explanatory work in determining the *I*. There is, however, nothing else to which we could possibly point to determine the *I* either. Thus whatever description comes to fill the *I* place will be essentially accidental to the unity of “preintentional movements + *I*” in which it is supposed to be embedded. Thus, if I do what I would say I was intending to do, it would be a matter of mere luck. On this picture that Anscombe is putting up for scrutiny, nothing in me as an agent contributes to what I actually end up doing. It therefore generates a fissure between what I do and what I can intend to do. A significant part of the issue for Anscombe here is, I think, that this fissure can either compound or be a result of taking the concept INTENTION to be equivocal across its three heads. This, as we have already seen, she regards as a patent mistake.

Though Anscombe elaborates on and adds to what I have just set out here, I take myself to have outlined the core of Anscombe's argument. In seeing that, whatever this *I* is, it can only accidentally contribute to my performing an intentional action, Anscombe roundly concludes that

the assumption that some feature of the

moment of acting constitutes actions as intentional leads us into inextricable confusions, and we must give it up. (I 29)

The upshot for our purposes is that if we try to treat INTENTION as if it simply adds to the descriptions we could already give of what is happening – much in the same way that BALD could add to the descriptions we could already give of Socrates – then we are doomed to fail. To treat INTENTION in this way just is, however, to treat it as a non-formal concept.

3.

Understanding practical knowledge

3.1

The structure of action

If *Intention* can be said to contribute in any way to the metaphysics of action, then as befits a text of such singular vision it does so in a way quite unique to it. The beginning of this contribution is the result of the previous chapter: our understanding of INTENTION as a formal concept. We saw there that employment of the concept INTENTION consists in representing action-descriptions in series of the form “A in order to B” or “A because B”. This is the proper way of putting things in terms of formal concepthood. But this is only the first step for Anscombe to orient our understanding of the concept INTENTION.

We will recall that Anscombe is providing a description of use of the concept INTENTION and, as we explored in Chapter 1, the use of a concept necessarily involves certain sorts of expectations, reactions and potential lines of inquiry in addition to assertoric statements. The form

of representation outlined in Chapter 2 – taken as a form shared between statements involving action-descriptions – can certainly account for concept usage according to assertoric statements. For instance, “A in order to B” may be filled in with something like “He is walking to the market in order to buy milk.” Yet it does not tell us the whole story. A complete account will set before us those “enormously complicated tacit conventions” that go directly into our mastery of the concept INTENTION (I 80).³⁹

INTENTION as a formal concept not only provides us with a new form of linguistic representation, but also provides us with a way in which what happens can be made intelligible for us. There are expectations that one has when someone undertakes to provide descriptions of an intentional action. The most central of these is, of course, that the provided descriptions occur in the form of representation specified in the prior chapter. But such expectations of assertoric statements do not *exhaust* the concept INTENTION. We will recall that even when we withhold the word “intentional” on a given occasion, Anscombe thinks we can still be competently employing the concept INTENTION. Now the issue facing us is to understand what it means to employ a concept outside of making use of it in language. The answer I will suggest is that to employ a concept outside of language is, in part at least, *to take things in a certain way*.

Let us illustrate this. Say, for instance, that I take a rattlesnake in the corner of my living room to be dangerous. Part of this taking-the-rattlesnake-to-be-dangerous consists in the fact that I can – and very well may – make statements to the effect of “That snake over there is ever so dangerous!” But another part of it is that my taking the rattlesnake to be dangerous will immediately place constraints on what

39 Anscombe is borrowing a phrase from Wittgenstein here. See TLP 4.002.

can count as: (i) the intelligibility of my behaviour; and (ii) the intelligibility of the snake *for me*.

We will tackle (i) first. In taking the rattlesnake to be dangerous, certain behavioural responses immediately become appropriate, or at the very least more appropriate.⁴⁰ For my behaviour to qualify as intelligible in the light of taking the rattlesnake to be dangerous, I must engage in these appropriate behavioural responses. It is, for instance, perfectly intelligible – and, indeed, understandable – that, if I consider that snake in the corner to be dangerous, then I will stay away from the corner. If I approach the corner and purposefully provoke the snake, however, my behaviour immediately becomes unintelligible. (An onlooker may say to themselves “He thought that snake was dangerous, so why on Earth did he do *that*? It makes no sense to me.”) In such a situation, it is as if there is a mismatch between my conception of the snake and my engagement with it.

I think we can get clearer on what is going on here by looking at what Anscombe has to say about something's being unintelligible *within* language. She writes that there is a type of unintelligibility such that a linguistic construction is unintelligible “not because one did not know what [it] meant, but because one could not make out what the man means by saying [it] here.” (I 27). In such cases, one can grasp on a purely linguistic level what is said – what is said is syntactically and grammatically fine. Consider a case in which someone says “Chicago tastes so delicious!” to me. In this case, I certainly know the meaning of each word and I understand the construction of the sentence in which each word is placed. But what I cannot even begin to understand is why anyone would want to make such a statement in the first place. The

⁴⁰ As I noted with intelligibility, I see nothing to prevent Anscombe from accepting a graded understanding of appropriateness.

point, or purpose, of the statement eludes me entirely since it is not a use of language that I can readily recognise.

My contention is that the non-linguistic unintelligibility highlighted here is much the same. In the rattlesnake example, it is not as if my onlooker does not understand my behaviour in the sense that he cannot begin to give true descriptions of what I am doing. Indeed, he can say “That man is approaching the corner where the snake is,” straight off without issue. What eludes his understanding is why I should behave in such a way in the first place, given that I take the rattlesnake in the corner to be dangerous. The point, or purpose, of my behaviour eludes him entirely.

We will now tackle (ii). In taking the rattlesnake to be dangerous, I provide myself with a context in which the things I know to be true of the snake can form a unified pattern. For instance, I can know of the snake that he is jutting his head forth, is bearing his fangs, is hissing, and so on. Now if I do not regard the snake in any particular way, then it may very well appear to me that there is no connection among these true descriptions. I may simply think that the snake does one thing and then another and then another, and that is all there is to say about it. If I take the snake to be dangerous, however, then I am capable of seeing these true descriptions as aspects of, for instance, a general disposition of the snake to attack.

Now, it is pretty clear that different ways of taking the snake will lead to different ways of understanding how these various true descriptions hang together. As a point of contrast, if I take the snake to be sick, then this collection of true descriptions may lead me to think that the poor thing is actually having a seizure! But the point of importance is that taking the snake in a certain way – whatever that way

is – provides a context in which I can understand a set of true descriptions about it as intelligibly patterned and properly unified.

My thought is that employing the concept *INTENTION* outside of language is much the same. The sort of non-linguistic concept mastery at work here sets constraints on what it is to behave intelligibly and what it is for what is happening to be intelligible *for me*.⁴¹ We will discuss the former of these when we come to talk of practical reasoning. For now, the latter is what will occupy us.

In non-linguistic employments of the concept of *INTENTION*, I come to find what is happening as intelligible inasmuch as I take it to be structured in a certain way and it is this particular structure that provides me with a context in which I can understand a set of true descriptions about what is happening as intelligibly patterned and properly unified.

Now the type of structure we are looking to identify is not quite what a philosopher such as Devlin Russell (2018) is looking to identify. Russell is interested in understanding an intention as an intentional action under development such that an intention ought to be taken as the earliest possible stage in the life-cycle of an intentional action. Russell is, therefore, concerned with the connections that obtain between my intention and my intentional action.⁴² Russell is, in short, seeking to answer a version of what Wiseman – with no shortage of knowing irony – calls Anscombe's Question (2016a, 49). This question seeks to outline the connection between various ontological items of various kinds. We have already seen that Anscombe is not remotely

41 Compare Frankfurt (72).

42 This is, perhaps, somewhat infelicitous considering that Russell *does* see an intention as simply an earlier part of an intentional action. Still, I think it is accurate to say that he is concerned with the relation between distinct *types* of stages and *this* is not what Anscombe is concerned with.

interested in questions of this sort.

The structure we are looking to outline is one that unifies true descriptions of what is happening into a non-accidental unity⁴³, not a structure that outlines how various kinds of things are ontologically related. So, let us consider the following two descriptions of what is happening:

- (1) Julia is breaking some eggs.
- (2) Julia is making an omelette.

Let us imagine that these descriptions are both true. The structure belonging to what happens will be such that: (a); I can come to understand these two descriptions as forming a meaningful and intelligible unity; and (b) That this unity is non-accidental.

This relevant structure can neither be mere succession nor mere simultaneity. In the case of mere succession, we understand one description to hold at one point in time and the other to hold at a later point. Now, understanding these descriptions in this way *does* provide us with something at least ostensibly like a unity. I can, for instance, range these two descriptions along a time line and thus claim that the descriptions are unified in that they belong together on the same time axis. Such a unity is, however, merely accidental. The relation of succession merely stipulates that these descriptions can be represented as “A then B”. But the relation between the two variables here is far too weak to constitute a non-accidental unity. We can, for instance, imagine that any possible amount of time could pass between each descriptions holding of what happens. Mere succession does not stipulate any particular length of time that must obtain between particular descriptions holding of what happens, it merely stipulates that one thing

⁴³ That the unity must be non-accidental for Anscombe is simply a consequence of the fact that INTENTION is, for her, a formal concept.

follows another. Equally, we can also imagine that only one of the descriptions obtains without the other ever doing so. If all that can be stipulated is that one thing follow another, then what could possibly compel us to think that any description *must* follow the description that happens to be before it? Each of these works of imagination would be perfectly intelligible if the only way we thought what happens to be structured was as mere succession. Thus mere succession is not sufficient to characterise the relevant structure.

What of mere simultaneity? One could claim that the descriptions structured in such a way that they hold simultaneously allows us to say that they are unified by virtue of both occurring *now*. Again, however, this is only an accidental unity. It may very well be true of our descriptions (1) and (2) that they are unified by virtue of both occurring now. But it is equally true of descriptions that hold of two completely different people that they are unified by virtue of both occurring *now* and it would be absurd to suppose that there was any essential unity between *these* descriptions. Thus mere simultaneity is also not sufficient to characterise the relevant structure.

The structure we are looking to uncover must be, therefore, teleological.⁴⁴ If, in employing the concept INTENTION outside of linguistic usage, I come to understand a set of true descriptions about what is happening as intelligibly patterned and properly unified, then this is because I understand them to be structured teleologically. (So, in our chosen examples we understand breaking eggs as teleologically related to making an omelette, i.e. we understand the description “Julia is breaking eggs” as holding *so that* the description “Julia is making an omelette” may also hold.) Understanding what is happening as

⁴⁴ This may have been rather obvious, given the use of the locutions “in order to” and “because” in explicating INTENTION as a formal concept. But I think it is important not to take this teleological structuring for granted – Anscombe certainly didn't.

structured teleologically provides us with a proper, non-accidental unity since the introduction of teleology introduces a relation of dependence such that our second description *necessarily* depends on the first.⁴⁵ The first description's holding is explanatory of the second description's holding.

Anscombe indicates the necessity of such teleological dependency in §22 of *Intention*. In order to make sense of descriptions occurring in the calculative order, she writes that “we must see how the future state of affairs Q is supposed to be a possible later stage in proceedings of which the action P is an earlier stage.” (I 36). On the one hand, as Anscombe herself admits, such seeing may very well involve such things as pieces of scientific knowledge. Thus we *can* have an empirical basis for seeing Q as dependent on P. But I think what Anscombe is really getting at is that in order to use scientific knowledge – for instance – as an empirical basis *we must already be able to take what happens to be intelligible by virtue of being teleologically structured*. The idea of one description of what happens *depending* on another description of what happens requires that we take what happens as structured teleologically. That is a *condition* for the intelligibility of any claim of the sort “P is an earlier stage of Q”. Now *what* can make sense following *what* may be, in Anscombe's phrase, “matter on which there is knowledge or opinion based on observation” (I 50). But this does not detract from the claim that it is taking what happens to be structured teleologically, i.e. that it is employing the concept INTENTION non-linguistically, that provides us with the general form of what it is to take one description to depend non-accidentally on another description, regardless of the precise way in which we come to see this relation of dependence.

Now, when what is happening is brought under the concept

⁴⁵ Compare Lavin (2016, 620-1).

INTENTION, we understand it to be an intentional action. This, however, just means that we understand it to be suitable for representation in either the calculative order or in the explanatory order, i.e. we understand descriptions of what is happening as suitable to form a teleological unity. When we understand something as an intentional action, therefore, we understand the relevant descriptions of what is happening – A and B, say – as themselves teleologically ordered. What this amounts to saying, however, just *is* that intentional actions are themselves structured in a means-end fashion. Intentional actions are teleologically ordered.

This is partly what I take Anscombe to mean in referring to “an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions” (I 80). It is an order that obtains regardless of whether any linguistic statements employing the concept INTENTION are made – an order that we expect to be there when we bring what happens under the concept INTENTION, i.e. when we employ the concept INTENTION outside of language.

3.2

The object of practical knowledge

We now begin our work on practical knowledge. Let us recall the schematic outline of practical knowledge that occurred back in the first chapter: (i) If an agent is, for instance, intentionally sawing a plank then she knows that she is sawing a plank; and (ii) If an agent knows that she is sawing a plank then she knows this without observation.

The first aspect of practical knowledge outlined here is that when an agent has practical knowledge it is of an intentional action of hers under the description(s) which would characterise it as intentional. Now,

the descriptions that characterise an action as intentional are those descriptions capable of filling the variable places in either the calculative order or the explanatory order. Those descriptions, however, are also the very descriptions of the action that are unified in a teleological structure that *belongs* to what is currently happening. So for an agent to have practical knowledge of an intentional action is for her to have practical knowledge of what happens.

Here, I find myself in clear agreement with Kim Frost (2019) who, in reaction to an argument in Thompson (2011), denies that Anscombe understands practical knowledge to be independent of what happens. Now a large part of this denial consists in Frost providing exegesis of a particularly thorny section of the text – *Intention* §45. In this section, Anscombe writes:

I wrote 'I am a fool' on the blackboard with my eyes shut. Now when I said what I wrote, ought I to have said: this is what I am writing, if my intention is getting executed; instead of simply : this is what I am writing?

Orders, however, can be disobeyed, and intentions fail to get executed. That intention for example would not have been executed if something had gone wrong with the chalk or the surface, so that the words did not appear. And my knowledge would have been the same even if this had happened.

(I 82)

There are notorious interpretive issues associated with this passage – not least the task of understanding what voice these remarks are made in (Frost, 316). But what is instructive for our purposes is what Frost has

to say in response:

If the achievement of relevant results is included in the meaning of progressive claims, then by Anscombe's book, when she makes the relevant mistake in performance, the claim 'I am writing "I am a fool" on the board with my eyes shut' is *false*, because she is not achieving, and has not achieved, any of *those* results. (318)

It seems to me that Frost is employing here what we already had cause to uncover in the previous section. To have practical knowledge that I am doing something, it must be intelligible for me to understand how what I have yet to achieve can be in a non-accidental relation of dependence to what I have already achieved. In other words, it must be intelligible for me to understand how what descriptions may come to hold of what is happening can be in a non-accidental relation of dependence to descriptions that now hold of what is happening.

That, however, simply *is* the situation we found ourselves in when examining the structure of what happens in the previous section. There, the solution was that when we employ the concept INTENTION outside of language, we understand what is happening as teleologically structured.⁴⁶ The upshot of what Frost is getting at is, for our purposes, therefore identical to the results of the previous section.

So, when an agent possesses practical knowledge, she possesses practical knowledge of an intentional action of hers, which is to say that she possesses practical knowledge of what happens. This means that, for an agent to have practical knowledge, her conception of what is happening and what is actually happening must "line up" (Vogler 2002, 221) and they must line up non-accidentally.

⁴⁶ Compare Boyle and Lavin (179-81).

But now we seem to face a genuine quandary. The second aspect of practical knowledge we noted was that this knowledge is non-observational.⁴⁷ That practical knowledge is non-observational is, for Anscombe, *definitional* of it. But what we are supposed to have practical knowledge of is what happens. Anscombe outlines the quandary by noting that it is intuitive and rather natural – though hardly philosophically innocent – to think that “what happens *must* be given by observation” (I 53; emphasis added). So we have, on the one hand, the requirement that practical knowledge be of what happens. Then we have, on the other, the requirement that practical knowledge be non-observational. If we think that what happens can only be known via observation, however, then it seems like the lining up that Vogler speaks of is absolutely impossible. What remains for Anscombe – and for us – is to elucidate how this lining up is not at all impossible. My suggestion is that Anscombe does this by showing us that non-observational, practical knowledge is in fact absolutely essential to the concept INTENTION whose use she has been describing. The lining up of my conception of what happens and what in fact happens becomes, then, criterial for the application of the concept, rather than something to be explained by the concept. Where I think Anscombe suggests we look, in order to make sense of all this, is practical reason.

3.3

Practical knowledge and practical reason

Anscombe wrote of practical reasoning that it is “reasoning leading to

⁴⁷ Anscombe usually phrases the thought as knowledge “without observation” (I 13, 49, etc.), but she does herself use the phrase “non-observational knowledge” (I 31) in such a context that the two phrases are presumably equivalent. In any case, as Hursthouse suggests, “non-observational” does not appear to be a corruption of the thought (97 n.9).

action” (I 60). The immediate understanding that one may have of this claim is that practical reasoning is reasoning that concludes or culminates in action, as opposed to belief. Now, it is certainly the case that this understanding has independent plausibility.⁴⁸ But, I do not think it is how *Anscombe* is understanding practical reasoning. There are two key commitments that underscore this. The first commitment is negative: *Anscombe* herself says that practical reasoning does not specify the occurrence of actual mental processes operating on propositional contents (I 80). Thus, if what is meant by the immediate understanding is that the reasoning process occurring prior to the action is a period in which actual mental deliberation is going on, then the immediate understanding can only be wrong by *Anscombe's* lights.

The second commitment is positive: *Anscombe* claims that in describing practical reason, one is describing “an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions” (I 80). This, in fact, rules out any understanding of practical reason as something of a prelude to action. After all, if the order of practical reason is there *whenever* actions are done with intentions, then practical reason does not suddenly disappear as soon as the action begins. The order it is meant to embody is there as the action unfolds.

So what, then, are we to make of practical reasoning? Here is what I think is the pithiest and most perspicacious thing *Anscombe* had to say on the topic:

there is *not* a special 'form' of practical inference. The considerations and their logical relations are just the same whether

⁴⁸ As I am interested in what I shall be calling the *order* of practical reasoning, I will not dwell on the question of how it could be possible for reasoning to conclude in action. This is most certainly not because the question is of no interest. For excellent attempts at defending the thesis that practical reason concludes in action see Clark (2001), Dancy (2014) and Fernandez (2016).

the inference is practical or theoretical. What I mean by the 'considerations' are all those hypotheticals which we have been examining, and also any propositions which show them to be true. The difference between practical and theoretical is mainly a difference in the service to which these considerations are put. (PI 132)

The first thing to note is that the inferences involved in reasoning of *any* type will remain identical across these types. It does not matter what kind of reasoning in which one is engaged, inferences of the form

$$\begin{array}{l} p \\ \text{If } p \text{ then } q \\ q \end{array}$$

will always occur in *this* form. There is no special practical *inference* – in other words, practical reasoning does not concern a special relation among propositions.

The second thing to note allows us to see what practical reasoning *does* concern. Anscombe envisages the difference between theoretical and practical reason as consisting in the different *uses* that they each make of these invariable inferences. Theoretical reasoning puts these inferences to use in the service of finding out whether something is the case. Practical reason puts these same inferences to use in the service of bringing about some end (Wiseman 2016a, 142). My contention is, therefore, that when Anscombe speaks of reasoning *leading* to action, what she means is reasoning that is *conducive* to action – reasoning that is put in the service of doing. This is the sense in which, as Candace Vogler puts it, practical reasoning “underwrites” intentional actions (2002, 217).

This is, however, not a complete characterisation of practical reasoning since we are still unsure exactly what it means to speak of practical reasoning as “an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions” (I 80). What exactly is this order? Anscombe's answer is that it is “the form of a calculation what to do” (I 60). The order of practical reason is therefore a calculative one. It is an order that is representable as “A in order to B” and so on. This, however, is an order we have already encountered: it is the form of representation internal to the concept INTENTION. Thus the deployment of practical reason turns out to be the deployment of the concept INTENTION. This is not really a surprising result. After all, Anscombe herself indicates the identity between the two relevant orders (I 80).

This is, however, only the first step we need to take. In section 3.1., we saw that employment of the concept INTENTION allows what happens to be made intelligible for us by ordering descriptions of what happens into a non-accidental unity that is teleologically ordered. Thus, it turns out that practical reasoning just is the ordering of descriptions into this teleological unity. But we also saw that the employment of the concept INTENTION allows us to understand what is happening as an intentional action. Thus, it also turns out that practical reasoning just is what enables us to understand what happens as an intentional action.

When we understand what happens as an intentional action, we are able to find it intelligible inasmuch as the true descriptions of what is happening can be ordered into a non-accidental teleological unity. But it now turns out that this ordering is possible precisely *because* I engage in representing descriptions of what is happening as a teleological unity. It is *my* representation of these descriptions as ordered according to means and ends that render them intelligible as such. The teleological unity is not there waiting for the concept INTENTION to be applied to it,

like a canvas awaiting paint.

So it is only *because* I am engaging in practical reasoning, deploying my practically rational capacities and representing what is happening as an intentional action that what is actually happening can be intelligibly taken to be an intentional action. This is not to say that I can magically generate any old representation. For instance, I cannot represent what is happening in the form “I am raising my right knee in order to reach Venus.” As we saw in section 3.1., there are constraints on *what* can intelligibly follow *what*.

But we must recall something crucial about this form of representation about which we are talking, i.e. about the calculative order. In section 2.2. we saw that the calculative order formed a series of variables – standing in for descriptions – in relations of dependence. The central point was that in a representation of the form “A in order to B”, B is dependent on A, but A is not dependent on anything else. Now because B is dependent on A, where B obtains in this given form we expect A. This is not so with A in isolation. A is not dependent on B – in fact because it is the initiating link in the calculative chain it is independent of any other descriptions we may give of what is happening. Thus there is a certain plasticity as to what can fill the variable places that follow the initial variable. Compare the case of the man picking up the hammer. When we took the preintentional movement to be the initial description of what was happening, it turned out to be radically undetermined which description could take the place of the subsequent variable. This is because very many descriptions – even ones that appear highly specific – can intelligibly be followed by many other different descriptions.

Just on the basis of the description A, it is not intelligible to

expect any description in particular to follow. But this is not so where intentional action is concerned – one of the purposes of the concept INTENTION was to make it intelligible for us to expect that some descriptions can and will naturally follow others. So where some description A occupies the initial variable place in the calculative order, it is not A itself that renders it intelligible that B will follow it. What makes this intelligible is the representation of *the agent* that on *this occasion* A is in order to B. So while there are constraints on *what* can intelligibly follow *what*, when the descriptions filling the variables in the calculative order *can indeed* intelligibly follow one another, it is my representation of B following A that makes it intelligible to expect B to follow A.

Thus we can now see the role of practical knowledge in the description of use of the concept INTENTION that Anscombe is offering us. It is not by virtue of observing something that we can independently identify as an intentional action that permits us to represent what happens in a calculative order. It is my representation of what happens as obtaining in a calculative order that permits it to be understood as an intentional action. This is the sense in which practical knowledge is “the cause of what it understands” (I 87). It is *my* employment of the concept intention and *my* activity of practical reasoning that actively determines what happens as a teleologically ordered unity.

We can also now explore how employing the concept INTENTION outside of language sets constraints on what it is for me to behave intelligibly. If I understand what is happening as an intentional action in which I am not the agent – i.e. as an action in whose descriptions I do not figure – then part of what it is for me to behave intelligibly is to expect that what is happening is only an intentional action precisely because the agent – who *does* figure in the descriptions of what is happening –

takes it to be so. After all, if any initial description in a putative calculative chain leaves it undetermined what follows, but I still expect that there *is* indeed a description that *will* follow the initial description that holds, then I can only take this to be so *because* of the agent's representation, because of *their* deployment of the concept of INTENTION.

This is why practical knowledge is, in the end, not the explanandum but the explanans. Anscombe writes that without practical knowledge “what happen does not come under the description – execution of intentions” (I 88). If there is not some representation of the agent – i.e. the individual who figures in the descriptions of what happens – which orders descriptions of what happens into a teleological unity, I would no longer be able to see *any* proper unity to what is happening. It would be as if I were watching that rattlesnake, all the while thinking that it was just one unintelligible jerk followed by another.

Conclusion

I have made much of the fact that, for Anscombe, INTENTION is a formal concept and thereby that “intentional” specifies a form of representation. This understanding of INTENTION as a formal concept is so important partly because it allows Anscombe to dissolve the urge to ask certain sorts of questions. If we understand that in employing the concept we are making use of a particular form of representation that is itself *sui generis*, then we can come to understand how what we all already do is in no need of a peculiarly philosophical justification. It is, in fact, *itself* a way in which we are able to provide explanation or justification.

Thus the need to ask question such as “What connects an intention to the action that is meant to follow it?” is dissolved precisely by recognising that the concept of INTENTION is one of the core ways in which we both render things intelligible and behave intelligibly.⁴⁹ To continue asking questions of this sort would be to try to submit one form of intelligibility to another. (An analogy might be: forcing a botanist to treat her plants solely in the manner of a mathematician, i.e. as strictly quantitative.)

This does not, of course, mean that I think Anscombe has thereby dissolved absolutely every need to ask questions concerning the concept INTENTION. Indeed, I think Anscombe actively cautions against reading her in this way. Once her investigation is approaching its completion, Anscombe prompts us to ask the following: What is the point, purpose or good of the concept INTENTION? (I 83-4). Here, I think, is one of the key places in which we find that radical potential I spoke of in the introduction. The types of question that Anscombe sees as pertinent to a philosophical inquiry into human agency do not simply stop at the periphery of an interrelated complex of representations, responses and statements contained in the concept INTENTION. Her thought here is that a philosophical inquiry into human agency – in the form of a description of use of the concept INTENTION – can itself provoke and provide the material for something more akin to a project of ethical inquiry.

This was, of course, a key contention in Anscombe's (in)famous “Modern Moral Philosophy”. In the first of the three theses that Anscombe presents in that paper, she writes that moral philosophy

should be laid aside at any rate until we
have an adequate philosophy of
psychology, in which we are conspicuously

⁴⁹ See Wiseman (2016a, 56-7).

lacking. (MMP 1)

There is much to be said for the notion that Anscombe conceived of *Intention* as fulfilling this dire need for an adequate philosophy of psychology and that the investigation of the monograph was primarily in service of making moral inquiry possible once more.⁵⁰ But what I want to note by way of conclusion is another possibility for understanding the ethical implications of the project undertaken by Anscombe in *Intention*.

Anscombe has written that there is a certain type of necessity “by which something is called necessary if without it good cannot be attained.” (PJ 75). This is the so-called Aristotelian form of necessity to which Philippa Foot endeavours to have us pay heed (15; 45-6; 114). My tentative suggestion is that the practice of competently using the concept INTENTION is itself a necessity without which good cannot be obtained: INTENTION is an Aristotelian necessity.

After having raised the question of the purpose of the concept INTENTION, Anscombe quotes Wittgenstein: “Concepts lead us to make investigations. They are the expression of our interest and direct our interest.” (PI §570). This is, I think, crucial. One of the ways in which the concept INTENTION feeds into our moral practices is by directing our attention to certain features of what happens. As explored in Chapter 3, these features involve a required element of first-person awareness and responsiveness. If such awareness and responsiveness is not on the scene, then we are simply not able to legitimately apply the concept.

My suggestion is that the necessity of this first-personal element in legitimate applications of the concept INTENTION to fellow human beings serves as the proper condition for the possibility of a recognisably human life in which we can mutually bind, predict, but also genuinely

⁵⁰ See especially Wiseman (2016b).

understand one another. It generates the possibility of sincerity, of moral approbation and disapproval, of kindness and care, precisely because it directs our attention to those features of what happens that permit – and often make appropriate – such responses. This is all highly schematic, of course. But the compact version of the thought I am gesturing towards is that the practice of using the concept INTENTION is *itself* a human activity involving a recognisably human good: mutual recognition. This is the sense in which the practice of competently using this very concept is itself a necessity without which good cannot be obtained.

That is, I think, perhaps the most powerful and revisionary path that *Intention* lays for us – a clear and direct bridge between action-theory and ethics. The work done here on practical knowledge is, if you like, a simple lighting of a torch: the construction of a tool to light the path across. If it can be used to even partially illumine the way, then it will have served its purpose.

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