

Two Notions of Intentional Action?¹

Solving a puzzle in Anscombe's *Intention*

0. What is intentional action? A puzzle in Anscombe's *Intention*

What is intentional action? In her (1957) *Intention*, Anscombe appeared to give not one, but two answers: first, intentional actions are actions to which a special sense of the question 'Why?' is applicable (9),² and second, they form a sub-class of the things a person knows without observation (14). Call these Anscombe's 'Why-Question Characterisation' (WQC), and her 'Agent's Knowledge Characterisation' (AKC), of intentional action.

Anscombe never suggests that WQC and AKC deliver two different notions of intentional action, and anyway it is not plausible that 'intentional action' is ambiguous. We should assume, then, that Anscombe means WQC and AKC to converge on a single phenomenon. But she does not fully explain this convergence, at least not explicitly.

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² Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers throughout refer to *Intention* (Harvard University Press 2nd ed., 2000).

Anscombe does link the two characterisations by saying that the special ‘Why?’ is refused application by both ‘I was not aware I was doing that’ (11), and ‘I knew I was doing that, but only because I observed it’ (14). And this entails that if S grants application to the special ‘Why?’, asked of her φ -ing, then S knows that she is φ -ing without observation: WQC implies AKC.

But if WQC and AKC both characterise intentional action, and intentional action is a univocal notion, then AKC must apply not just *if* but *only if* WQC applies, and Anscombe’s remark noted above does not speak to this. And even being told that AKC and WQC apply to all and only the same phenomena would leave us with a puzzle: why should this be? After all, there is no general relationship between how some phenomenon is to be explained and how, by whom, or even whether, it is known.

This paper offers a solution to the puzzle. The idea will be that both WQC and AKC characterise intentional actions as behaviours which ‘have a point’, where this point is dependent on their agents’ recognition of it. Explaining why this is will require providing a holistic elucidation not only of WQC and AKC themselves, but of several other key concepts in *Intention*, including those of practical reasons, the *sui generis* kind of explanation of action in terms of these, the distinction between practical and speculative knowledge, the formal features which mark this distinction, and of Anscombe’s characterisation of practical knowledge as knowledge ‘in intention’.

Before I offer this elucidation, I want to describe and diagnose an oddity in the way in which *Intention* has influenced the development of action-theory over the past forty years. Against this background, the need to solve the puzzle I have identified becomes particularly acute.

1. The odd influence of Anscombe's *Intention*

The influence of Anscombe's *Intention* on the development of the philosophy of action is huge and well-recognised, but it takes a rather odd form. On the one hand, several of Anscombe's key ideas, distinctions, concepts and examples have been appropriated by philosophers writing in *Intention*'s wake, and now form part of the standard action-theoretic toolkit. On the other, these ideas tend, in the hands of their appropriators, to take on a rather different form to that in which they appear in *Intention*.³

The ideas with which this paper is centrally concerned – that of a special question 'Why?' and of non-observational or 'practical' knowledge of intentional action – are no exception to this tendency. I take each idea in turn.

Whilst *Intention* was part of then-orthodox Wittgensteinian thinking about agency,⁴ many of its key ideas have been filtered through their influence on Davidson, with the idea that intentional action is subject to the question 'Why?' representing a prime example. Briefly, the Wittgensteinian school was characterised by a rejection of causalist conceptions of central action-theoretic concepts such as action done *for reasons* or *voluntarily*, and by a focus – instead – on the normative and epistemological dimensions of agency.⁵ The causalist tradition had persisted in

³ Three examples: 1) Anscombe's 'A-D series' (§§23, 26) becomes in Davidson's hands the more metaphysically loaded 'accordion effect' (Davidson 2001b, 53–61). 2) Her distinction between two mistakes – in judgment and in performance – is transformed by Searle (1976) into the metaphor of 'direction of fit' (which is then often wrongly attributed to Anscombe herself). The metaphor gives us a misleading view not only of Anscombe's thinking but also of the attitudes it is supposed to apply to – especially of desires and intentions (see Alvarez 2010, 70; Teichmann 2008, 23). 3) Anscombe's observation that an action is intentional only under a description (e.g. §6) is also accepted by Davidson. But he used it to infer the extremely un-Anscombean thesis that 'we never do more than move our bodies [and that] the rest is up to nature' (Davidson 2001b, 59).

⁴ On Wittgenstein's influence on Anscombe's methodology, see (Teichmann 2008, 2014; Wiseman 2016); on his influence on her substantive philosophy of action see Alvarez (2017).

⁵ The move from interest in *voluntary* action to interest in *intentional* action was itself prompted by *Intention* (Alvarez

various guises at least since Descartes,⁶ but its grip had been loosened by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953 [2001], esp. §§641-647),⁷ and by Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949 [2000], Ch. 3). Both works argued that causalist conceptions of key action-theoretic concepts rested on conceptual and linguistic misunderstandings.⁸

Nevertheless, Davidson was heavily influenced by *Intention*, citing Anscombe frequently, taking up a number of her ideas in his own philosophy, and describing *Intention* as 'the most important treatment of action since Aristotle' (*Intention*, 2000; front cover). His project in 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes' (1963) and later papers was to integrate aspects of the Wittgensteinian approach to agency – largely *via* Anscombe – within a broadly causal framework. As Wiseman puts it,

[Davidson] seemed to be offering a way to acknowledge what Anscombe was on to when she insisted on [the separation between reasons and causes], and to retain a role for the question 'Why?' in eliciting reason-giving explanation. (Wiseman 2016, 22, see also Stoutland 2011, 8–9).

What Davidson argued was that – *contra* the Wittgensteinians – answering 'Why?' with a reason for acting is perfectly consistent with representing that reason (for Davidson, a belief-desire pair) as the action's cause, and that furthermore, we *must* view the connection between reason and action as casual if it is not to remain 'mysterious' (Davidson 2001a, 11).

2017, 498; Alvarez and Hyman *forthcoming*).

⁶ These various guises up until Russell's *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) are helpfully catalogued in Hyman (2015; appendix 1). In the Sixties, the causalist approach expressed itself in the application of the positivistic 'covering law' model of explanation to the explanation of action (Hempel 1961; for discussion see Stoutland 2011, 7–8).

⁷ For discussion see Alvarez (2017).

⁸ Later key proponents of these arguments include (Hampshire 1959; Kenny 1963; Melden 1961).

Whilst Anscombe's original 'Why?' was precisely not a causal question (she was explicit that 'Why?' is rejected by citing an action's cause (24)), in Davidson's hands, 'Why?' asks both for the agent's reasons for acting, and for the action's cause. As it became standard to think that Davidson had conclusively shown anti-causalist approaches to agency to be based on faulty arguments, direct engagement with Anscombe's own (anti-causalist) discussion of 'Why?' for many came to seem unnecessary.

One aspect of Anscombe's thinking in *Intention* which Davidson didn't incorporate into his 'synthesis' was her emphasis on the epistemology of intentional action. Anscombe thought not only that we tend to have non-observational (or 'practical') knowledge of our intentional actions, but that it is this knowledge which renders action intentional. This kind of approach to understanding intentional action doesn't sit easily with a causal approach to action. After all, whether or not some behaviour has a certain kind of cause appears to be completely independent of whether or not anyone (including the agent) knows, or even believes, that this is the case.

Despite not being taken up by Davidson, Anscombe's idea of non-observational knowledge of action has more recently made its own impact on the action-theoretic literature. In his *Practical Reflection* (1989), David Velleman attempted – notwithstanding the difficulty mentioned above – to incorporate Anscombe's insights about practical non-observational knowledge into a causalist framework. The resulting account is generally thought to contain unacceptably implausible commitments (Langton 2004; Setiya 2008; O'Brien 2003), but has nevertheless had an important influence on the literature. The past twenty years or so have seen growing attention to the epistemology of intentional action, and in particular to Anscombe's insistence that our

knowledge of what we are intentionally doing is ‘without observation’, and (less frequently) to her appeal to ‘practical knowledge’.⁹

Most philosophers have thought that Anscombe was over-stating things when she said that intentional action is *essentially* known without observation, encouraged by Davidson’s extremely influential suggestion that ‘[a] man may be making ten carbon copies as he writes, and this may be intentional; yet he may not know that he is’; that ‘all he knows is that he is trying.’ (Davidson, 2001b, p. 50, cf. Davidson 2001c, p. 92).¹⁰ Still, most have agreed with Anscombe that we do very often know what we are intentionally doing, and that this knowledge is in some sense non-observational. Discussions in the literature largely focus on the question of how this is possible, given that actions are typically, after all, perfectly observable public happenings.

Like the appropriation of her question ‘Why?’, the appropriation of her idea that we know our own actions without observation very often takes a form that is in some crucial respect rather *un-Anscombean*. Sometimes (as with ‘Why?’), this is because non-observational knowledge is explained within a causalist framework (Peacocke 2003; Pickard 2004; Paul 2009), which as we have seen, Anscombe herself rejected. More commonly, it is because philosophers try to understand this knowledge in the context of orthodox epistemological assumptions which, we will see later on, Anscombe rejected as well. Thus in this literature we find non-observational knowledge of action being explained as epistemically grounded in non-perceptual ‘agent’s awareness’ (Peacocke 2003; O’Brien 2003), in a non-observational role played in action by

⁹ Prior to c. 2000, attention to non-observational knowledge of action were largely restricted to arguments manifesting scepticism about its coherence (e.g. Chisholm 1959; Jones 1960), or about its essential involvement in intentional action (Donnellan 1963; Davidson 2001b, 50, 2001d, 92); notable exceptions are (Hampshire 1959; Strawson 1959; Velleman 1989).

¹⁰ That this is a genuine counterexample is not beyond question. For dissent see (Thompson 2011, 209–10; Haddock 2011, 165–69).

perception (Grünbaum 2009, 2011; Pickard 2004; Schwenkler 2011), in evidence, available to the agent, that she will do what she intends (Velleman 1989; Paul 2009), or has reason to do (Newstead 2006, 2009), or in agents' dispositions to execute their intentions (Setiya 2009).¹¹

In the literatures I have been describing, Anscombe's 'Why?' and her idea of non-observational knowledge of action are selectively cherry-picked from *Intention*, at the same time as other of her key claims are left to one side, because they are deemed too obscure or bombastic, or because they conflict with these authors' prior commitments, commitments which Anscombe did not share. But the result of doing so seems not simply to be adopting Anscombe's ideas, or even adapting them to the authors' preferred theoretical frameworks. Rather, it seems to be simply rejecting them. This can go unnoticed by the authors cited above, who sometimes explicitly represent themselves as developing 'Anscombean' accounts, even when it is recognised that the direction in which the ideas are developed is not Anscombe's. Why is this?

I would like to suggest that the selective approach to reading *Intention* goes hand-in-hand with conceiving the book as a collection of more or less unrelated observations, insights, distinctions, examples and claims. If one reads *Intention* like this then it may well seem that one can accept Anscombe's insight that intentional action is essentially subject to a 'Why?' which asks for reasons for action, whilst rejecting her insistence that one would refuse application to the question by citing a cause. And it might seem possible to understand Anscombe's conception of our non-observational knowledge of intentional action whilst ignoring or playing down her difficult claim

¹¹ These authors tend to reject, ignore or misconstrue one or both of the two formal features Anscombe takes to characterise practical knowledge, what I will later term Theophrastus' and Aquinas' Features (see below, esp. §§3&5).

that this knowledge cannot be understood in the terms made available by orthodox epistemology – by what she rejects as ‘an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge’ (57).

But there is another way of reading *Intention*; as offering a holistic and internally coherent account of the members of, and conceptual relationships between, an interconnected family of notions. If *Intention* is properly read in this second way, then it simply won’t be possible to select individual claims, and transpose them into alternative conceptual frameworks, without significantly changing their sense. This second way of reading the book has been gaining ground since roughly the turn of the 21st century, due to recent work by so-called ‘Neo-Anscombean’ philosophers.¹² The Neo-Anscombeans have tended to engage directly with text of *Intention*, in many cases reading Anscombe not through the lens of later philosophy of action, but with reference to her own influences; Aristotle (Boyle and Lavin 2010; Lavin 2015; Thompson 2008), Aquinas (Schwenkler 2015), Frege (Diamond 1991; Thompson 2008), and Wittgenstein (Teichmann 2014, 2008; Wiseman 2016). Reading *Intention* in this way has led to various ideas in *Intention* being understood in their own context rather than in alien environments such as those of the causal theory of action or of standard ‘contemplative’ assumptions about knowledge.

Properly understanding Anscombe’s ideas in *Intention* requires recognising that it is a unified work, and elucidating them holistically; in concert with one another. This makes solving our puzzle particularly pressing: if understanding any of Anscombe’s ideas in *Intention* requires seeing how they interrelate, then we won’t properly appreciate Anscombe’s thinking about intentional

¹² See Hursthouse (2000), Moran (2004), Rödl (2007), Teichmann (2008, 2014), Thompson (2008), Boyle and Lavin (2010), van Miltenburg (2012), Roessler (2013), Ford (2015), Lavin (2015), Wiseman (2016) and apart from the piece by Kieran Setiya, the papers collected in Ford et al. (2011). Plausibly, this more direct engagement with *Intention* was prompted by the publication of the 2nd Edition in 2000.

action unless we can understand how both of her characterisations – WQC and AKC – pick it out, and further, unless we understand how and why they relate to one another.

A holistic reading of *Intention* both requires, and makes possible, a proper understanding of Anscombe's conception of intentional action. Yet despite capturing the right approach to reading *Intention*, the Neo-Anscombean literature has not yet delivered an explicit solution to our puzzle. That is not to say that there are not some excellent discussions in this literature, which interpret and/or draw on one or both of Anscombe's characterisations, and which bear on a solution to the puzzle. It is just that whatever explanation these discussions and interpretations may contain, of exactly how and why WQC and AKC converge, this is either implicit, or incomplete, or a mixture of the two.¹³

In order to fully understand the holistic character of the account of intentional action offered in *Intention*, we need a clear and explicit solution to the puzzle. The remainder of this paper attempts to provide one.

2. The Question 'Why?_{RA}' and Having a Point

Here I start to elucidate WQC, by beginning to explain the special question 'Why'. We will see that the question applies to behaviours performance of which matters to the agent, or, as I shall say, behaviours which 'have a point'.

¹³ For example, it is relatively common to pick up on and try to explain Anscombe's claim that 'the notion of 'practical knowledge' can only be understood if we first understand 'practical reasoning' (57) (Wiseman 2016, ch. 6; Haddock 2011, 162–65). But this does not fully explain why WQC and AKC converge, because Anscombe thinks that some actions are intentional (and so according to AKC, objects of practical knowledge) but not done on the basis of practical reasoning (25, 65).

2.1 Why?_{RA} and a special kind of explanation

Anscombe introduces WQC as follows:

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 special sense of the question ‘Why?’ has application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting.

(9)

As ‘Why?’ asks for an explanation of some phenomenon, a particular sense of ‘Why?’ asks for a particular kind of explanation.

‘Why did Daisy blink?’, for instance, might ask for a teleological explanation in terms of the aim of blinking, or for an efficient-causal explanation. These are not the only kinds of explanation, and one of Anscombe’s key thoughts is that intentional action is subject to a *sui generis* kind of explanation in terms of practical reasons or reasons for action (expressions I will use interchangeably). I will use ‘Why?_{RA}’ to indicate the ‘Why?’ which enquires after reasons for action and ‘Why?’ (*sans* subscript) to indicate the question in some other sense, or neutrally between its senses – context will disambiguate.

WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour to which ‘Why?_{RA}’ is applicable.¹⁴ But, says Anscombe,

¹⁴ I am using ‘behaviour’ as a semi-technical term to cover anything someone might be said to ‘do’. ‘Behaviours’ thus include both non-agential doings like blinking, and non-movement-involving actions like lying still or imagining

this is not a sufficient statement, because the question “What is the relevant sense of the question ‘Why?’” and “What is meant by ‘reason for acting?’” are one and the same. (Ibid.)

The problem is that there are various things one might mean by ‘a reason’ and which might be proffered in response to ‘Why?’ asked of some behaviour. There is a sense in which we ‘give a reason’ for Daisy’s blinking by giving its aim; another in which we ‘give a reason’ by noting its causal antecedents. But neither ‘reason’ can be the special kind demanded by ‘Why?_{RA}’: Daisy’s blinking is not intentional. To avoid ‘going round in circles’ (10), we must further elucidate both ‘Why?_{RA}’ and the special kind of ‘reason’.

Anscombe starts by describing our practice with ‘Why?_{RA}’, considering how the question is both refused and granted application. My introduction noted two ways in which it is refused application (‘I was not aware I was doing that’ and ‘I knew I was doing that, but only because I observed it’), and explained their (limited) import to our interpretative puzzle. Here I consider how ‘Why?_{RA}’ is granted application. Doing so will help us understand when an action is potentially explicable by practical reasons, in the special sense indicated above, but which will be fully spelled out only by the end of §4.

‘Why?_{RA}’ can be granted application positively or negatively. I take each in turn.

2.2 Granting ‘Why?_{RA}’ application positively

heaven. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this journal for prompting me to clarify this.

Answering ‘Why?_{RA}’ positively involves giving a reason for action of the special kind. These are split into intentions and motives.

Giving an intention is indicating some future or present action, or something wanted,¹⁵ at which the queried behaviour aims, for instance if one meets ‘[Why_{RA}] are you crossing the road[?]’ with ‘I am going to look in that shop window’ (35), or ‘Why?_{RA} are you lying on that bed?’ with ‘I’m doing yoga’.¹⁶

Motives, by contrast, do not imply an aim. A motive might be ‘backwards-looking’ or ‘interpretative’ (or a mixture (21)). Giving a backwards-looking motive suggests some past event which one perceives as somehow good or bad, and as thereby inviting a certain kind of response. For example, ‘Why_{RA} are you burning down Jones’ house?’ might be met with ‘He killed my father’, indicating a past (bad) event, and representing the act as done out of revenge. Or it might be met simply with ‘Revenge!’, which suggests there was some bad past event to which burning down Jones’ house appears (to the agent) a fitting response. Other examples of backwards-looking motives are ‘gratitude, and remorse, and pity for something specific’ (20).

Giving an interpretative motive is not representing the queried behaviour as a response to some event, but is saying ‘something like ‘See the action in this light’ (21). Anscombe lists love, curiosity, despair and vanity as examples. Peter gives an interpretative motive in answering ‘Why_{RA}

¹⁵ The present/future distinction here is not sharp (39-40), which links to the fact that ‘I am going to...’ is, like ‘I am doing...’, in the present progressive. This observation is key to Anscombe’s treatment of the metaphysics of actions done with further intentions (esp. §§22-26); for discussion see (Rödl 2007; Thompson 2008).

¹⁶ Anscombe’s actual question here is ‘What are you doing?’ (35; my emphasis). For the (limited) interchangeability of ‘what?’ and ‘why?’, see esp. *Intention* §23.

are you oiling that bike?’ with ‘Out of love’, and suggests one, to me at least, by saying, ‘It’s Luke’s bike’.

Distinguishing these ways of granting ‘Why?_{RA}’ application helps us see what they have in common: they all explain what it is about the queried behaviour which made performing it worthwhile or, as I will say, they explain the behaviour’s *point*.¹⁷ Citing an aim or intention does this by representing the behaviour as a way of achieving something one wants; citing a backwards-looking motives does it by representing the behaviour as called-for by some (good or bad) past event, and citing an interpretative motive does it by categorising the behaviour within a set of recognisable motivational kinds: love, curiosity, despair, etc.

2.3 Granting ‘Why?_{RA}’ application negatively

Granting application to ‘Why?_{RA}’ negatively, involves denying that one’s action was done for any kind of reason:

Now of course a possible answer to the question [‘Why?_{RA}’] is one like ‘I just thought I would’ or ‘It was an impulse’ or ‘For no particular reason’ or ‘It was an idle action – I was just doodling’.

(25)

How can answering ‘Why?_{RA}’ negatively be granting application to the question, if the question seeks a reason for action, and answering negatively is denying there is any such reason?

¹⁷ This language, of intentional actions ‘having a point’ does not come from *Intention*. But there is nothing in *Intention* which renders it antithetical to Anscombe’s discussion. On the contrary, it helps us tie together several of that discussion’s strands.

The answer is that in granting application to ‘Why?_{RA}’, one represents one’s behaviour as of the right kind to be explained by practical reasons, but a behaviour’s being of this kind needn’t mean that it actually has such an explanation. The idea of a behaviour’s having a point helps us mark this distinction.

I said above that giving a practical reason (positively granting ‘Why?_{RA}’ application) articulates the point of the queried behaviour. But not all actions which have a point have a point which is articulate; which can be explained in terms of practical reasons. Say I am asked ‘Why?_{RA} are you doing an impression of Bob Dylan?’, and I respond, ‘No particular reason – I just felt like it.’ I here represent doing a Bob Dylan impression as having a point – as being worthwhile to me – because it was something I felt like doing. But I also suggest that that is all there is to be said: there is no further explanation of why I felt like doing it – because I felt like e.g. practising for Karaoke this evening, or diffusing an awkward situation. The point of my action is non-articulate, or as I will term it, ‘atomic’.¹⁸

2.4 Summing up

‘Why?_{RA}’ can be granted application positively or negatively. It is granted positively when one gives a practical reason of some kind, thus explaining or articulating the point of one’s action. Granting ‘Why?_{RA}’ application negatively, by contrast, represents the queried behaviour as having

¹⁸ The claim is not that *my action itself* is ‘atomic’, lacking internal complexity: doing my Bob Dylan impression may require me to e.g. sing ‘her name is Lucifer’. The idea is rather that under the description ‘doing a Bob Dylan impression’, there is nothing more to say in explanation of its point.

a point which cannot be further explained or articulated; which is what I have called ‘atomic’. So WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour with a point, whether articulate or atomic.

A worry here is that an action’s having a point is too closely related to its being intentional, or to ‘Why?_{RA}’s being applicable to it, to serve any explanatory purpose. But although they are closely related, these three notions are not coextensive. This will become especially clear in §4 where we will see that some non-intentional behaviours have a point, and that ‘Why?_{RA}’ fails to apply to behaviours of this kind.¹⁹

3. Practical Knowledge and Having a Point

In this section I will explain that like WQC, AKC also characterises intentional action as behaviour with a point.

Anscombe states AKC as follows:

Intentional actions are a sub-class of the events in a man’s history which are known to him *not* just because he observes them. (24; see also p. 14)

Anscombe identifies the relevant sub-class of events as the objects of *practical* knowledge, which is distinguished from other kinds of knowledge (including other kinds of non-observational

¹⁹ This does not entail that we could understand the notion of *having a point* without also understanding the notion of *being intentional* (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for another journal for prompting me to clarify this point). It is integral to the holistic reading of *Intention* to which I committed myself in §1, that we mutually elucidate its key concepts, with none being treated as fundamental relative to the others. That we can elucidate A in terms of (*inter alia*) B does not entail that A can be grasped without also grasping B. This is the main difference between conceptual elucidation and conceptual analysis.

knowledge) in virtue of displaying two characteristic formal features, what I will call Theophrastus' and Aquinas' Features. I will come to Aquinas' Feature in §5.1; here I describe Theophrastus' Feature (§3.1), and explain why knowledge characterised by Theophrastus' Feature will take in behaviours which have a point (§3.2).

3.1 Practical Knowledge and Theophrastus' Feature

Practical knowledge is knowledge of the form 'I am φ -ing', where φ -ing intentional.²⁰ But this knowledge is not just 'practical' because it concerns action. Practical knowledge also has a distinctive *form* which distinguishes it from ordinary empirical knowledge – what Anscombe calls 'contemplative' (57) or 'speculative' (87-89) knowledge.²¹

Start with the plausible and widely accepted idea that knowledge of contingent facts (of which practical knowledge is a kind) presupposes the possibility of error; that 'there is point in speaking of knowledge only where a contrast exists between 'he knows' and 'he (merely) thinks he knows' (14). Someone who knows has succeeded in a way that someone who merely thinks he knows has failed.

The success involved in knowing can be understood in terms of a matching between mind and world, judgment and fact. Standardly, the judgment is successful or erroneous depending on whether it matches up with the facts, so that the success involved in knowing is identified with

²⁰ Practical knowledge can also be future-directed; I stick to the present-directed case for simplicity.

²¹ Anscombe discusses a parallel difference – between practical and theoretical *reasoning* – in *Intention* §§33-44. A discussion of these passages would add depth to the current interpretation, but space does not allow for doing that here. For discussion see e.g. (Wiseman 2016, ch. 6).

the success of correctly (truly) judging. If I judge that this potato is a King Edward, but it is actually a Maris Piper, then my judgment is mistaken, and my knowledge undermined.

Anscombe observes that ‘modern philosophy’ understands all knowledge on this model, as ‘something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts’, where ‘[t]he facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what is to be said [judged], if it is to be knowledge’ (57).

But she thinks this is a mistake. Commonsense recognises a different way in which a fact-judgment mismatch might be normatively assessed:

In some cases the facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words [judgment], rather than *vice versa*. (4–5)

If knowledge involves a kind of success and the avoidance of a kind of error, then the fact that there are two options for normatively assessing a fact-judgment mismatch makes logical space for there being two kinds of knowledge, each involving a different kind of success, and the avoidance of a different kind of error.

This is just the distinction Anscombe makes between practical and speculative knowledge. Both kinds of knowledge require a successful matching between a person’s judgment and the facts (although as we will see later in §5.1, the *nature* of this matching is rather different in practical and in speculative knowledge). But whereas in speculative knowledge, the facts set the standard on the judgment, which counts as successful only if it matches them, in practical knowledge the judgment sets the standard, and success will be achieved in virtue of the facts matching up to it.

But isn't there a worry here: how could *the facts* be subject to normative assessment; potentially successful or in error? Surely facts just are as they are.

The worry ignores those facts which are about what we *do* – those facts which are dependent on us. It is, of course, these facts which are relevant to our investigation of practical knowledge. Indeed, Anscombe elaborates her observation that sometimes 'facts' are impugned for a fact-judgment mismatch with an example in which it is clear just what kind of 'fact' can bear this responsibility:

e.g. I write something other than I think I am writing: as Theophrastus says (*Magna Moralia*, 1189b 22), the mistake here is in the performance, not in the judgment. (5)

Say I think I am writing – because I mean to be writing – 'causal relationship', but that I am actually writing 'casual relationship'. I thus don't know that I am writing causal relationship, but the knowledge-undermining mistake is with my performance, not with my judgment. Read too literally, Anscombe's claim that 'the facts' can be impugned for not being in accordance with a person's judgment has an air of incoherence about it. But what Anscombe actually says in the last but one quotation is that in such cases the facts are 'so to speak' impugned, indicating that she is speaking loosely. The idea is not the barely intelligible one that facts are subject to normative assessment in relation to what people believe about them. It is the truism that a person can get things wrong in two different ways; she can make a mistake in judgment, or in performance.

It is a formal feature of practical knowledge that it would be undermined by a mistake in performance rather than by a mistake in judgment as in speculative knowledge, and that having practical knowledge depends on making a successful performance, whereas having speculative knowledge depends on making a successful judgment. I will term this formal feature of practical knowledge *Theophrastus' Feature*.²²

The idea that practical knowledge is formally distinctive in displaying Theophrastus' Feature helps us understand why it is only a *sub-class* of non-observational knowledge. Consider the knowledge I might have of '[t]he odd sort of jerk or jump that [my] whole body sometimes gives when [I am] falling asleep' (13). This is non-observational knowledge of something I am doing (jerking). But despite having a practical content, it is not practical knowledge, and what it is knowledge of is not an intentional action. We can now see that this is because it does not display Theophrastus' Feature. For had I judged 'I am jerking' when I was not jerking, I would have been mistaken in having judged wrong, and not in having failed to jerk. When I do have knowledge in such a case, it is non-observational knowledge of action, yet it is speculative, not practical (cf. McDowell, 2011). This is just what AKC predicts: my jerking is *ex hypothesi* not intentional.

It is worth here staving off a common objection to Anscombe's characterisation of practical knowledge as displaying Theophrastus' Feature (see e.g. Setiya 2008, 396 n. 28; Grünbaum 2009, 51): if I am writing 'casual' but judge that I am writing 'causal', I think something is happening which isn't. So isn't Anscombe simply wrong to deny that my judgment is mistaken?

²² The authorship of *Magna Moralia* is disputed. Anscombe appears unusual in attributing it to Theophrastus (thanks to Ellisif Wasmuth, p.c. for discussion), but it's useful to have a label.

But Anscombe does not say that the *only* mistake in such a case is a mistake in performance. In fact she is explicit, in summing up her discussion of practical knowledge, that when someone is intentionally doing something, they have ‘two knowledges’: one practical, one speculative (88-89). A corollary of this is that if one fails of practical knowledge, one fails of speculative knowledge too. In such a case, one makes both a mistaken judgment and a mistaken performance. On the interpretation I am pressing, the former undermines one’s speculative knowledge and the latter one’s practical knowledge. I will come back to this possibility later on (§5.1) when we will consider Anscombe’s famous characterisation of practical knowledge as knowledge ‘in intention’.

3.2 Theophrastus’ Feature and Having a Point

As we have seen, AKC characterises intentional action as an object of not just any old non-observational knowledge, but specifically of practical knowledge, where this is distinctive in displaying Theophrastus’ Feature. We will now see that this means that AKC, like WQC, characterises intentional action as behaviour which has a point.

Only some of the things creatures do constitute successful or mistaken performances. Whilst typing, I am making tapping noises with the keys. If one of the keys fails to go ‘tap’ when I hit it – because I hit it too softly – I don’t thereby act in error. But writing ‘casual’ rather than ‘causal’ was an error. What’s the difference?

The difference is that in the case envisaged, making the key go ‘tap’ didn’t matter – it had no point – but there was a point to writing ‘causal’ rather than ‘casual’. Consider how I might act if

I don't do either of these things. Noticing I have not typed 'causal' (but instead 'casual'), I will (*ceteris paribus*) go back and correct what I have written. But if the key doesn't tap, I will not correct it. The idea is not simply that I am unlikely to do so, but that I cannot do so, for there is nothing here to correct, and this is because making the key go 'tap' was not something which had a point. If going back and making the key go 'tap' could count as correcting my performance, this would show that the key's going 'tap' had had a point after all.

The point of writing 'causal relationship' is likely to be articulate – perhaps I am doing so with the intention of defending a premise in an argument I am making. But the relationship between a behaviour's having a point and the potential for its being mistaken or successful also applies to behaviours whose point is atomic. Consider again my Bob Dylan impression, the point of doing which was simply that *a Bob Dylan impression* was what I felt like doing. This performance is just as capable of being successful or mistaken, and if it goes wrong, of being corrected. It will go wrong if e.g. it sounds more like Tom Waits than Bob Dylan, and if this happens there is room for me to correct it.

3.3 *Summing up*

In this section we have seen that the knowledge appealed to in AKC is practical knowledge, which displays Theophrastus' Feature – which is undermined by a mistaken performance. And I have explained that the possibility of a behaviour's manifesting a successful or mistaken performance depends on its having a point (or being such that it would have a point if it were correctly performed). Together these two ideas entail that AKC characterises intentional action as behaviour which has a point, just like WQC, as explained in §2.

4. ‘Why?_{RA}’ and Recognition-Dependence

The results so far might tempt us to simply identify intentional actions as behaviours which have a point. But we cannot do this, for not all behaviours with a point are intentional actions. Here I will distinguish intentional actions as behaviours whose point is dependent on their agents’ recognition of it. Those reasons for action which are proper and peculiar to intentional action, and the explanation of action in these terms, will also be identified as recognition-dependent. By the end of this section we will have shown that WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour with a recognition-dependent point.

4.1 *Having a recognition-dependent point*

Daisy the cow blinks. Her blinking has a point – to keep an advancing speck of dust out of her eye. Her blinking is not intentional. I wink. My winking has a point too – to greet the approaching Jones. My winking is intentional. The difference is that Daisy’s blinking has its point independently of Daisy’s recognition of it, whilst the point of my winking depends on my recognition of it: my winking has a ‘recognition-dependent’ point, whereas Daisy’s blinking does not.²³

Daisy’s blinking could not be recognition-dependent: being a cow, she lacks the conceptual sophistication to recognise the point of her blinking. But it is not only this which makes the

²³ Two clarifications: 1) recognition-dependence in my sense means dependent on the agent’s *own* recognition; 2) the dependence in question is a *formal* rather than an *efficient* causal dependence. Velleman (1989, Ch. 1) develops an account of the latter kind, but it is not Anscombe’s view. We will better understand this dependency by the end of §5.

point of her blinking recognition-independent. I also sometimes blink, as a reflex, just like Daisy. And I am sophisticated enough to recognise the point of doing so, and even to endorse my blinking on the basis of this recognition, thinking to myself what a good job it is I have this reflex, how I value my ocular health. But the point of my blinking is not determined by my recognition of it: for me and Daisy alike, the point of blinking is determined by facts about our (species') biology.²⁴

So intentional actions are not simply actions with a point. Instead we can identify them as actions whose point is recognition-dependent.

A quick clarification: I don't claim that intentional actions only have a recognition-dependent point. Behaviours can be worthwhile in various ways, can have various points, and these can be variously determined, some recognition-dependently, some not. We can even allow a behaviour to have a point determined both recognition-dependently and recognition-independently. The point of my drinking, for example, is to quench my thirst. This point is determined recognition-independently, by facts about animal biology. But the point of my drinking – to quench my thirst – can be recognition-dependent too, as when I realise I haven't had enough water today and deliberately take a sip. And in such a case the biologically-determined point does not disappear.

So the idea is not that intentional actions have only a recognition-dependent point. It is this: *it is insofar as* a behaviour has a recognition-dependent point that it is done intentionally.

²⁴ Of course blinking might have a recognition-dependent point (imagine Hugh Grant acting in a film), but such blinkings would be intentional.

4.2 Recognition-dependency and 'Why?_{RA}'

Implicit in the foregoing is the idea that not only the point of a behaviour, but also its explanation or articulation (when it has one) can be recognition-dependent or otherwise. I said in §2 that giving a reason explains a behaviour's point, and also that there is a 'reason' for Daisy's blinking, in some sense, just as there is for my winking. Keeping dust out of her eyes is a 'reason' for Daisy's blinking in that the point of her blinking can be explained on this basis.

Equally, its being a way of greeting Jones is a 'reason' for my winking, because the point of my winking can be explained on this basis. But these are reasons in different senses of 'reason'. And this difference can be understood in terms of recognition-dependence: the explanation of my winking in terms of its being a way of greeting Jones is dependent on my being able to explain it by citing this reason, whereas the explanation of Daisy's (or my) blinking in terms of its keeping her (or my) eyes dust-free is not dependent on her (or my) being able to explain it in these terms.

So like the point of a behaviour itself, the explanation or articulation of this point (when it has one) in terms of reasons, and the reasons in terms of which it is explained or articulated, come in a recognition-dependent and a recognition-independent form. The reasons for action which are proper and particular to intentional action, and the *sui generis* explanation of action in terms of these, are characterised by recognition-dependence.

The question 'Why?_{RA}' thus demands recognition-dependent reasons.²⁵ For this reason it is a question which the agent herself is in a special position to answer, a feature of our practice with

²⁵ Note that these reasons need not be, as is sometimes suggested, *teleological*: we saw in §2.2 that not all reasons for

the question which is reflected in Anscombe's discussion, in which 'Why?_{RA}' is addressed, in the first instance to the agent. This is not because a bystander cannot know the agent's reasons; it is because the agent's own capacity to answer the question 'Why?_{RA}' is privileged, in being to a large degree constitutive of the availability of an answer to that question.

The claim is not that agents are infallible with respect to their reasons. Self-deception, forgetfulness and confusion about one's reasons are all possible. But note that in cases of self-deception, we tend not to think of a person as brutally oblivious to her reason as Daisy is brutally oblivious to her 'reason' for blinking. On the contrary, the self-deceived person is conceived as knowing her reasons 'deep down', as capable of uncovering or admitting them if only she were prepared to do so. Again, seeing someone as confused about her reasons goes hand in hand with not seeing their action as straightforwardly intentional, perhaps instead as a strange mix of the intentional and the neurotic. These kinds of case are fascinating and difficult, and certainly merit investigation. But this investigation cannot, and need not, be done here. Our job is to understand how WQC and AKC characterise intentional action, not action which is sort-of-intentional, or intentional-ish.

4.3 Summing up

I have identified intentional actions as actions with recognition-dependent points, practical reasons as recognition-dependent reasons, and the *sui generis* explanation of intentional action in terms of these reasons as recognition-dependent explanation.

action cite an aim. See Müller (2011) and Hursthouse (2000, p. 96); cf. Newstead (2009).

In §2 I explained that WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour with a point, because granting application to ‘Why?_{RA}’ represents one’s behaviour as having a point. Having explained that ‘Why?_{RA}’ asks for a recognition-dependent reason, we can clarify that WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour whose point is recognition-dependent. This shows up in the fact that we treat ‘Why?_{RA}’ as a question the agent of the queried behaviour is in a privileged position to answer.

5. Practical Knowledge and Recognition-Dependence

Having seen that both WQC and AKC characterise intentional actions as actions with a point (§§2&3), and that WQC characterises intentional action as having a recognition-dependent point (§4), all that is left to do to solve our puzzle is to show that AKC too characterises intentional action as behaviour with a recognition-dependent point. In order to do so, let’s turn to the second formal feature of practical knowledge, *Aquinas’ Feature*.

5.1 Practical Knowledge, Aquinas’ Feature and Knowledge ‘in Intention’

Citing Aquinas, Anscombe characterises practical knowledge as,

‘the cause of what it understands’, unlike speculative knowledge, which is ‘derived from the objects known’. (87)

Call being ‘the cause of what it understands’ *Aquinas’ Feature*. Anscombe clarifies the idea as follows:

[Aquinas' Feature] means more than that practical knowledge is observed to be a necessary condition of the production of various results; or that an idea of doing such-and-such in such-and-such way is such a condition. It means that without it what happens does not come under the description – execution of intentions – whose characteristics we have been investigating. (87–88)

The idea here is that practical knowledge is the *formal cause* of 'what it understands'; that only in virtue of an agent's having practical knowledge that she is φ -ing does her φ -ing count as the execution of her intention to φ , and so count as something she does intentionally. But why should this be?

To answer this question let us return for a moment to the idea that practical knowledge displays Theophrastus' Feature, that it requires a successful performance, where the standard for success is set by the agent's judgment.

When discussing Theophrastus' Feature earlier, I avoided being specific about what kind of judgment might play this characteristic standard-setting role in practical knowledge. It now becomes important to clarify that the 'judgments' involved in practical knowledge are intentions, whereas the 'judgments' involved in speculative knowledge are beliefs.²⁶ Although she does not use the word 'intention' when discussing the judgments involved in practical knowledge (she does not use the word 'belief' either), this interpretation is supported by the fact that when Anscombe first uses the expression 'practical knowledge', she characterises it as knowledge 'in

²⁶ I further develop and defend the idea that the differences between practical and speculative knowledge can be explained in terms of their involving, respectively, intention and belief in (Campbell, *forthcoming*).

intention' (57), and by her initial introduction of Theophrastus' Feature, in the context of a discussion of the expression of intention (4-5).

Understanding practical knowledge as differing from speculative knowledge in involving intentions rather than beliefs helps us to see why practical knowledge would display Theophrastus' Feature. For whilst it is hard to see how a belief could set the standard for how a performance is to go, it is easy to see how an intention could. Intentions just are a kind of attitude which set standards on performances, which are to go however they need to in order for the intention to be executed.

Earlier (§3.2) we linked the possibility of a behaviour's being successful or mistaken to the idea of its having a point. Here we can add that intending to do something *eo ipso* means that there would be a point to doing it. This idea should not be understood so strongly as to make it implausible; the thought is not that (e.g.) doing a Bob Dylan impression becomes particularly important to me just in virtue of my intending it. The idea is simply that in intending it I thereby see it as to be done, and that there is *trivially* a point to doing what is to be done.

My intention to do the Bob Dylan impression is also what provides for the possibility of my performance's being mistaken or successful – if I end up sounding more like Tom Waits than Bob Dylan, this is a mistake precisely because Bob Dylan is who I intended to sound like. The same goes for actions whose points are articulate, e.g. for my writing 'causal', in the course of (and so with the intention of) defending a premise. Here again it is because I *intend* to write 'causal' that if I write 'casual', this will be a mistake. In both cases, my intention provides for the

possibility of successful or mistaken performance. It is thus my intention which provides for the possibility of practical knowledge, characterised by Theophrastus' Feature.

Our question was: why should practical knowledge display Aquinas' Feature – why it should be that an intention is executed only in the presence of practical knowledge? We can now give an answer.

My practical knowledge that I am writing 'causal' requires that I judge that I am writing 'causal' and that there is no mistake in performance (Theophrastus' Feature). This 'judgment' is my intention to write 'causal', and there being 'no mistake in performance' means that I *execute* this intention. But executing my intention to write 'causal' just is my intentionally writing 'causal'. So it is only if I meet the requirements on having practical knowledge that I am writing 'causal' that I meet the requirements on intentionally writing 'causal': practical knowledge is the formal cause of what it understands (Aquinas' Feature).

5.2 *Summing up*

§4 explained how and why WQC characterises intentional action as behaviour with a recognition-dependent point. We can now see that AKC does so too. For AKC characterises intentional actions as the objects of practical knowledge, which as we have now seen is embodied in the execution of intention. We also said here that intentions are features of mind which determine the point of one's actions. And behaviours whose point is determined by a person's mind are behaviours with a recognition-dependent point.

6. Objections and Clarifications

Before closing I will respond to some objections and clarify a couple of points.

The first objection is that it is illegitimate to help myself to the idea that ‘no mistake in performance’ entails that an intention is executed, as I just have in explaining why practical knowledge should display Aquinas’ Feature.²⁷ The objector has in mind cases like Davidson’s famous climber, who intends to drop the companion he’s holding on a rope, in order to rid himself of the weight and the danger to himself (Davidson 2001c, 79), and does so, but only because he is so unnerved by his intention that he is shocked into loosening his grip.²⁸

But the objection does not stick. The climber case shows that *doing what one intends* does not entail that one executes one’s intention, but it does not thereby show that *making no mistake in performance* does not entail that one executes one’s intention. For the climber case is precisely (and *ex hypothesi*) one in which the climber *does* drop his companion by mistake, notwithstanding the fact that dropping his companion is what he intended. Of course, a question remains as to how doing what one intends can fail to be executing one’s intention. Famously, causal theorists like Davidson have a problem answering this question: describing the conditions under which a causal chain between intention and bodily movement makes for the execution of the intention is notoriously difficult. Anscombe has an easy answer: the climber does not have practical knowledge that he is dropping his companion.

²⁷ By an anonymous reviewer for another journal.

²⁸ In Davidson’s original presentation, it is the climber’s *reason* (belief-desire pair) which unnerves him.

The second objection concerns my suggestion that (for Anscombe) the ‘judgments’ involved in practical knowledge are intentions. Philosophers of action in Neo-Anscombean and Neo-Aristotelian traditions often object to a conception of intention as a propositional attitude (Baier 1970; Clark 2001; Thompson 2008; Alvarez 2010; Boyle and Lavin 2010; Hornsby 2016). It might be thought that, because I interpret her as holding that the judgments involved in practical knowledge are intentions, and because practical knowledge is a kind of propositional knowledge, I must interpret Anscombe as holding a ‘propositionalist’ conception of intention. This would be interpretatively problematic because Anscombe almost certainly did not hold a propositionalist conception of intention, and philosophically problematic because in my view these philosophers are right to deny that intentions are propositional attitudes.

But the objection fails. For on my interpretation it is in executing one’s intention that one has practical knowledge. Regardless of whether or not its content is propositional, when I execute my intention to write ‘causal’ I precipitate something with propositional shape, *viz.* the fact that I am writing ‘causal’. It is this fact which is the object of my practical knowledge, on the view I am attributing to Anscombe.

This also allows me to clarify an idea from §3.1. I said there that all knowledge requires a successful ‘matching’ between judgment and fact, and that speculative and practical knowledge differed in whether a fact-judgment mismatch manifests a mistake in judgment or in ‘fact’ (i.e. in performance). But we can now see that there is a further sense in which the kind of ‘matching’ differs between speculative and practical knowledge. In speculative knowledge one ‘matches’ judgment to fact by forming a belief which latches on to how things both are and would be even if that belief had not been formed. But in practical knowledge, one’s executing one’s intention

to write ‘causal’ – one’s intentionally writing ‘causal’ – is both that which one knows (‘what [one’s knowledge] understands’) and one’s knowing of it (‘no mistake in performance’).²⁹ So there is matching between judgment and fact here, just as there is in speculative knowledge, but the fact matched to the judgment is not one which could exist independently of it. ‘Matching’ fact to intention is a matter of *creating* the relevant fact by executing the intention. This very fact could not be created independently of the intention one executes in creating it. (This is another way of thinking about Aquinas’ Feature – the idea that practical knowledge is ‘the cause of what it understands’.)

The final objection is that the centrality in my interpretation of recognition-dependence renders the resulting notion of intentional action overly conceptually demanding. I said, for example, that Daisy doesn’t have the requisite sophistication to recognise the point of her blinking, and so to blink intentionally. But don’t we – and didn’t Anscombe (e.g. p. 5) – want to allow that animals act intentionally?

I stand by the implication that Daisy cannot blink intentionally, but the view I have attributed to Anscombe does not entail that Daisy and other relatively conceptually unsophisticated creatures are incapable of intentional action *tout court*. The view entails only that there are certain restrictions on the kinds of intentional action they can engage in. If Daisy is conceptually sophisticated enough to, for instance, intend to *move towards that* (where ‘that’ picks out the silage manger), then *moving towards that* would have a point, which would be recognition-dependent in virtue of being determined by her intention. Perhaps Daisy can’t have intentions like these, but

²⁹ This and the next objection are due to an anonymous reviewer for another journal. The latter has also been suggested to me independently by Harry Alanen and Jane Heal.

nothing internal to my interpretation of Anscombe rules it out. What might be ruled out is that Daisy's actions can have *articulate* recognition-dependent points, since Daisy cannot explain the point of her actions, but this result is not obviously implausible.

7. Conclusion

Anscombe gives two characterisations of intentional action in *Intention*, one – WQC – in terms of the applicability of a certain sense of the question 'Why?' and one – AKC – in terms of a special kind of non-observational knowledge of the action on the part of the agent. We need to solve the puzzle of how and why these characterisations converge, on pain of adopting the problematic 'selective' reading of *Intention*, or of attributing to Anscombe an implausible conception of intentional action as a heterogeneous class (of 'intentional action' as ambiguous).

My solution is that Anscombe's two characterisations determine a single notion of intentional action, because they converge on behaviours which have a recognition-dependent point. In my view it is very plausible that intentional actions are just such behaviours.

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