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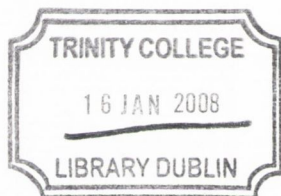
**ANSCOMBE'S PHILOSOPHY OF
ACTION AND ITS ORIGINS**

PhD

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TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

2006



THESIS
8317

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SUMMARY

G. E. M. Anscombe's work is seminal to action theory. Her major work in this area, *Intention*, first published in 1957, has been very influential in shaping the modern debate on issues such as the nature of action, the status of folk psychology, the relation between reasons and causes and so on. Yet to my mind no major scholarly analysis of her philosophy of action has been thus far undertaken.

Anscombe, one of Wittgenstein's students, followed the style and method of his later works. This method is opposed to traditional philosophical views about language, meaning, and mind, views that were taken by Wittgenstein himself to be fully expressed in the *Philosophical Investigations*. So various aspects of Anscombe's 'Wittgensteinian' method are initially examined, in particular its opposition to traditional "inner" entities in the mind and causal accounts of intention and intentional action.

With the stylistic and methodological underpinnings of Anscombe's approach in place, the nature of her philosophy of action and intention is more easily understood. The central theme is an opposition to traditional theories that take the meaning of terms such as 'intentional', 'intention' and 'expression of intention' to lie in certain designated physical or mental entities such as "inner" intentions, acts of will or brain processes.

Anscombe's alternative is a 'linguistic' account, in which the meaning or 'life' of our action concepts is seen to depend on their application in the 'language game'. 'Intentional' thus refers to a *form of description of events* as opposed to a natural phenomenon. Knowledge of action is not seen to involve the observation of inner entities but is instead characterised in terms of its "direction" of justification: for Anscombe, such "practical" knowledge is interpreted in terms of desire viewed as final rather than as efficient causation. Anscombe thus goes beyond the later Wittgenstein's scattered remarks on action and provides a detailed, structured *analysis* of action and intention. The resulting 'conceptual dualism' and anti-reductionism in her account arguably formed the basis of the modern debate on the status of folk psychology and exerted a direct, though perhaps not fully appreciated, influence on key philosophers such as Daniel Dennett and Donald Davidson.

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I dedicate this work to my parents and to Marie

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CHAPTER 1: THE EVOLUTION OF ANSCOMBE'S APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY

I. A GENERAL COMPARISON BETWEEN WITTGENSTEIN AND ANSCOMBE

1. Anscombe's relation to Wittgenstein.

G. E. M. Anscombe was born in 1919 in Limerick where her father, a British army officer, was posted. As a youth she read widely and was particularly impressed in her early to mid teenage years by a work called *Natural Theology* by a 19th century Jesuit.¹ Not only did she find the theological content stimulating but the philosophical as well. She read this book with great enthusiasm and 'found it all convincing except for two things.' One was the doctrine of *Scientia Media* according to which God was capable of knowing what would happen *if* such and such an event had occurred, even though it didn't. This she could not believe since she could not accept that 'there could be such a thing as what someone would have done if...', for example, 'how someone would have spent his life had he not died as a child'.²

Although she couldn't 'see how this stuff could be true' and was indeed puzzled by it, it was 'the other stumbling block that got [her] into philosophy.'³ The Jesuit book contained an argument for the existence of a First Cause and a proof of a 'principle of causality' which entailed that every occurrence must have a cause. The proof struck the young Anscombe as circular. She took this to be a mistake by the author and so reformulated the argument in order to improve it, at least to her own satisfaction. Each improved version satisfied her for a time but eventually she 'tore them up when [she] found they were no good, and went around asking people *why*, if something had happened, they would be sure it had a cause.' She found that no one had the answer to this and after 'two or three years effort' she had produced five versions of the would-be-proof, each of which she found guilty of the same error. Anscombe's natural affinity toward and capacity for philosophical problems was also reflected in her interest in another central area of philosophy, perception. Anscombe became

'hooked' on the problem of perception without realising that her problem was philosophical. She was convinced that she saw objects, that the notion of an object was a logically necessary component of seeing. However once she moved beyond consideration of ordinary artefacts, she found that even concepts like 'wood' and 'sky' could not be so intuitively associated with the notion of 'object', a discovery that had her 'amidships'.

Anscombe graduated from Sydenham College and entered Oxford where she read Mods and Greats (classics, ancient history and philosophy) at St Hugh's College, where she, like Peter Geach became a convert to Catholicism. They were to marry three years later. Anscombe's philosophical intensity and perplexity about issues of perception remained with her throughout her studies at Oxford: 'For years I would spend time, in cafes, for example, staring at objects saying to myself: 'I see a packet [of cigarettes] but what do I really see? How can I say that I see anything more than a yellow expanse?''⁴ Prior to entrance to undergraduate philosophy, she attended H. H. Price's lectures on perception and phenomenalism where she 'used sit tearing [her] gown into little strips because [she] wanted to argue so much with what he said'. Although she felt that these lectures were 'absolutely about the stuff' of perception, she still felt trapped by phenomenalism and hated it. She found it of little use to merely point out difficulties in theories of perception. 'The strength, the central nerve of [phenomenalism] remained alive and raged achingly.'⁵

The philosophical pain only began to show signs of subsidence upon her first meeting Wittgenstein, who had resumed lecturing in Cambridge in 1944. It was only on visiting his classes in 1944 that Anscombe saw the nerve being extracted.

Anscombe was one of Wittgenstein's most enthusiastic students. Her exceptional philosophical abilities impressed Wittgenstein. Anscombe took up a research fellowship at Sommerville College, Oxford, but continued to attend tutorials with Wittgenstein in Cambridge once a week, in the company of another student W. A. Hijab. By the end of the year she had become one of Wittgenstein's closest friends and trusted students. Although Wittgenstein generally disliked academic women, he made an exception for Anscombe, perhaps explained by his reference to her as 'old man'. 'Thank God we've got rid of all the

women!' he once said to her at a lecture, on finding that no other female students were in attendance.'⁶

Anscombe remained in contact with Wittgenstein throughout his life. She paid visits to him on his trip to Ireland in the late 1940's. She spent time with him when Wittgenstein visited Vienna – she was already there trying to improve her German for the translation of his works. To a degree Anscombe also acted as *his* philosophical stimulus on these occasions, especially when Wittgenstein's energies were low on account of health problems. Before he died in 1951, Wittgenstein named Anscombe one of the three executor's of his literary estate and entrusted her with the task of translating his works. Translating such a difficult philosopher is no easy task and the highly acclaimed accomplishment of it reflects Anscombe's philosophical power. Her translation of *Philosophical Investigations* has never been seen as a mere *translation* as such, nor invited any attempt at a rival translation. Among other translations by Anscombe are Wittgenstein's most valued works: *Notebooks 1914-16*, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology Vol. 1*, *Zettel* and his last work *On Certainty*.

Anscombe's own philosophical investigations into psychological concepts are, as we shall see, explicitly Wittgensteinian in form and content. I have thus far prepared the way for approaching her work by filling in the necessary context and bringing out the central features of Wittgenstein's views. I will now bring out the Wittgensteinian basis of Anscombe's work in the philosophy of mind.

2. Anscombe's Wittgensteinian perspective.

Modern philosophy of mind, especially in the last three decades, has seen a wide range of *theories* about mental phenomena. In the early 1960's, behaviourism and the mind-brain identity theory seemed to start an avalanche of various attempted solutions to the problem of the relation between the mental states and bodily/brain states. The aim was to provide a satisfactory *theory* explaining continuity between our physical and mental vocabulary. The mind-brain identity theory, with its harsh reduction of first conscious-state types and then mental states in general to brain-state types, gave way to functionalism, which maintained an

Aristotelian form-matter sort of relation between mental and physical kinds. Various technical words were introduced to characterise ever more subtle conceptions of the sought-for relations; ‘Type-token distinction’, ‘non-reductive materialism’, ‘survenience’. All attempts seemed problematic, urging some to come up with deflationist theories such as epiphenomenalism and eliminative materialism. The ‘mind-body’ problem is still alive and active. There are lots of other areas of modern philosophy of mind that attract similar theories and attempts at explanations in physical terms – mental causation, intentionality and consciousness. Again, in all of these, a similar preponderance of naturalistic theory is the order of the day.

Earlier in the twentieth century, prior to Anscombe’s work in the philosophy of mind, a very different atmosphere prevailed, mainly because the dominant theory of mind was Cartesian Dualism. Dualism had not only a strong hold on the minds of philosophers. It is fair to say that it had worked its way into western culture and into the ‘man in the streets’ way of looking at issues about the mind. Anscombe, with Wittgenstein, is one of those philosophers who opposed this whole way of looking at philosophy and philosophy of mind. The approach to philosophy she opposed has since come back into fashion in certain areas in the philosophy of mind, for example in discussions about the *phenomenon* of the mental. To take another example, in the discussions about the nature of human action, the emphasis will be on a critique of the mysterious ‘acts of will’ that seem to be central and need explaining. If the discussion is about intention, then some account of how to distinguish behaviour involving intention from mere physical behaviours is thought to be necessary. What one generally expects is that the piece of philosophy will be about things that can be seen, visualised or imagined – either actual objects like the brain or ‘tangible’ concepts like mental images.

The Wittgensteinian tradition, from which Anscombe works, began mainly in the transition period between the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. The drive behind the change in Wittgenstein’s outlook was primarily *negative*. Wittgenstein believed that the *Tractatus* was the best attempt that could possibly be made to cope with the problems of traditional philosophy. Once he began to notice flaws in its Logical Atomism, he was

disposed to question the way the *problems* had been presented rather than the solutions, the whole set of presuppositions underlying the project itself, rather than the theories it produced.

This resulted in adopting an approach to philosophical issues involving a preconceived resistance to Platonic essentialism, Cartesian dualism, reductionism and even the theory of language and meaning upon which they rested. This explains a lot of the philosophical framework or viewpoint Anscombe adopts in her work. The consequences of these pre-investigative resistances are enormous. The whole paradigm of the Cartesian ‘inner’ drops out of the picture – we are no longer allowed to talk of access to an inner soul and its private contents. In a related way, we cannot get our will-to-theorise off the ground because the objects (inner) we wish to understand by explanation can no longer even be properly defined.

This does not mean that we are forced to place our philosophical stalls ‘outside’ in the observed *physical* world. Rather, the analytical ground does not recognise an *ontological* distinction between the inner and the outer at all. We are allowed to talk of expressions, mental images and sensations, and about what people say and do. The two-world view is so much a part of our way of looking at things that we tend to assume that Anscombe, on pain of deflecting dualism, must be a materialist: that we must conceive of all that *exists* to be objects like rocks, brains and bones, to which the meanings of our mental vocabulary must be reduced. However, this crude behaviourism is as far from Anscombe’s outlook as Cartesian Dualism. For both would place her investigation in the business of theorising and explaining mental terms mechanistically or in terms of processes. There *is* no place for an account of the nature of *things* in Anscombe’s philosophical arena, where *things* are conceived of as objects or ideas or mixtures of both.

The danger associated with the concept of the ‘inner’ is that it might be conceived as a place full of objects. Anscombe’s inquiries preclude a theoretical connotation to the term ‘inner’ – the ‘inner’ as a place, is absent from the philosophical starting point. Thus there is a shift in focus to what others would think of as ‘outside’ but might be better described as public. Language and behaviour is thus the predominant arena of Anscombe’s approach. Because theoretical explanation is not an option, analytical description of behaviour and

language-in-use is the central aim, with the ever-present awareness that the Cartesian/theoretical urge is continually wants to reassert itself throughout the process.

One might wonder whether to expect anything worthwhile from Anscombe's investigative standpoint. It says nothing about the world or phenomena, mental or otherwise that could count as information. It does not recognise a 'mind' and it offers no theories or explanations. This would be a mistake. What Anscombe is in the business of doing is describing our language to get clear about our mental terms and their linguistic form. She is continuing the Wittgensteinian project of clarifying the logical grammar or interweaving the fabric of our psychological words. Indeed this would seem like a very flat inquiry if linguistic description were seen as describing our ordinary grammar and providing an itinerary of our ordinary psychological word meanings, construed in terms of their designated objects. But the source of philosophical life and tension in Anscombe's work can only be appreciated if the Wittgensteinian use-view of language is first recognised as a starting point. Only then does a conflict arise between the description of how ordinary psychological language is used on the one hand and the philosophical use on the other. Only then is there a subject matter available that requires conceptual skill to navigate.

3. Positive and negative aims.

With the absence of an inner-world view of the reference of the language of psychology, the onus is on the description of the use of this part of language. In this way Anscombe's philosophy of mind is *purely* linguistic – the notion of an object is philosophically neutral and all that is available are conflicting descriptions of word use and the related linguistic and behavioural patterns they are entrenched in. Hence positively, the aim is the correct description of a terrain of the use of a given psychological term, negatively it is constantly to stop and defeat a Cartesian or explanatory or essentialist or theoretical or referentialist approach, re-asserting itself. Only then will the positive aim of clarification of psychological terms by appeal to ordinary language use be successful. Thus in her paper "The Intentionality of Perception: a Grammatical Feature", Anscombe attacks both representative realism and direct realism:

In the philosophy of sense-perception there are two opposing positions. One says what we are immediately aware of in sensations is sense-impressions The other, taken up nowadays by "ordinary language" philosophy, says that on the contrary we at any rate *see* objects . . . without any intermediaries I wish to say that both positions are wrong; that both misunderstand verbs of sense-perception, because verbs are intentional or essentially have an intentional object.⁷

Anscombe then supplies a list of ten sentences, each an example expressing an aspect of the way the verb 'see' is used. This example shows the appeal to ordinary language use and how it is harnessed to rid mental terms of their philosophical misconceptions, thus aiding perspicuous representation of the term in question.

The critical or negative task of Anscombe's philosophy of mind generally recognises three strains of pathology, in keeping with her Wittgensteinian roots: dualism, essentialism, and the appeal to explanatory mental mechanisms or naturalistic processes. The opposition to Cartesianism is well expressed in her considerations about acts of will in *Intention*:

I think the difficulty of this question that has lead some people to say that what one knows as intentional action is only the intention or possibly also the bodily movement; and that the rest is known by observation to be the *result*, which was also willed in the intention. But this is a mad account; for the only sense I can give to 'willing' is that in which I might stare at something and will it to move.⁸

This shows clearly the Wittgensteinian tendency to expose the Cartesian interpretation in terms of an inner-outer picture. The inner Cartesian items, intention and volition are brought in to explain the resulting bodily movement. The priority of this philosophical/Cartesian interpretation is challenged by recollecting the way we use the word 'move' in 'I move my arm' and 'I move the matchbox'. In the one case we are certainly not reporting on some (inner) process of which we are aware. In the latter case we are reporting but not about

anything inner. The Cartesian inner-object view is also specifically opposed in Anscombe's article 'The First Person'⁹, where it is argued that the indirect reflexive or 'I', is not a referring term and in the paper 'Events in the Mind', Anscombe argues against the idea that reports of 'intention, understanding, knowledge and belief must make mention of something "before one's mind."¹⁰

Anscombe is not just opposed to Cartesian analyses in her critical approach to mental terms – all essentialist explanations are opposed. In *Intention* she devotes a whole section to opposing an interpretation of the use of the phrase 'intentional action' which aims at supplying it with a fixed referent – any referent, be it Cartesian or physical – in order to ground an understanding of it: "We do not add anything attaching to the action at the time it is done by describing it as intentional".¹¹ To call it intentional is to assign it to the class of intentional actions and so to indicate that we should consider the question 'Why?' relevant to it in the sense that I have described.' Here, Anscombe is asserting an account of the meaning of 'intentional action' in terms of our adopting a certain sort of language and set of concepts, and opposing any physicalist, causalist, or essentialist attempt to define it by reference to a specific internal entity or process.

In a similar manner Anscombe, in defending intentional action as a form of description which we adopt for special purposes, resists reducing actions such as 'Telephoning', 'Talking', 'Hiring', 'Standing for' to kinds of behaviouristic (and so physicalistic) processes. These intentional descriptions 'Are all descriptions which go beyond physics.' This shows how Anscombe's philosophical standpoint precludes not merely Cartesianism but also any form of materialism or scientific reductionism. Rather 'one ought call [descriptions of intentional action] vital descriptions.'¹² By 'vital', Anscombe means that these types of descriptions involve beliefs and desires. An animal is said to be 'stalking' or 'running' or 'jumping' whereas a stone is never described in this way. The former is a totally different form of description, involving the concepts of action, such as 'want' and 'aim'. The language game surrounding the use of the phrase 'intentional action' is in this respect autonomous, exhibiting a holistic detachment from what could lie 'beyond' or 'behind' it as a limit – either

matter or mental mechanism. The middle course between Cartesianism and reductive physicalism leaves only non-reduced behaviour and the language we choose to describe it adequately in view. The descriptions of what people do and say achieves autonomy of their own through the equation of meaning with use. This is related to the expressive account of first person present indicative psychological utterances, which also brings the meaning of psychological terms away from the “inner” and toward ‘behavioural’ interpretation.

4. Structure and Style.

The opposition to theory-building in any form also helps explain and shape the negative and positive aspects of Anscombe’s work in the philosophy of mind. The positive descriptive task follows naturally from the abandonment of any explanation in terms of mechanisms or processes and the negative critical task follows from attempts to resist the resurgence or continuity of theoretical explanation. The *style and structure* of her work in the philosophy of mind are shaped by the same forces. The traditional structure would proceed from the goal of theory and constructive argument – a beginning, middle and end so to speak, with commentary on the moves made throughout, with introduction and conclusion at the start and finish. This can’t be the form Anscombe’s writing takes. Rather, the structure is piecemeal and the progress incremental. This is reflected in her work in general in the philosophy of mind – there is no one, nor could there *be one* that could express her ‘theory of the mind’. For there is no such theory. There are only errors exposed and insights exemplified. Thus her investigations have taken the form of various individual papers and one piece-meal book: *Intention*. The works together do not form a tight body which could be assimilated into one account of a specific aspect of the mental or a particular traditional problem and *a fortiori* into any overall picture. The aim is to clarify various central concepts of the psychological language game – to provide a clear account of regions of grammar or linguistic use. This piecemeal approach is reflected in the lack of an air of finality about individual papers. Of course they are ‘final’ in the sense that they have completed their argument, critical or otherwise, but there is still present a general sense of the descriptive

which precludes argued conclusions, answers, “solutions” that amount to new knowledge about an aspect of mind. Thus, like Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, there is a strong sense that her works are just that: investigations rather than theories or theorems or generalisations.

This is expressed particularly in *Intention*. Like the *Investigations*, it is composed of numbered sections and it would be a difficult task to tie them all together into one line of reasoning, as they often seem to be self sufficient pieces of conceptual investigation rather than parts of a linear whole. There is little agreement about what all the sections as a whole amount to among commentators, nor is there anything approaching a consensus as to what exact direction the line of reasoning is moving at various stages.

The fact that Anscombe’s writings are grammatical inquiries is not the only reason that they are piecemeal. The psychological language game is not set by precise margins. Psychological concepts are seen to bear a family resemblance to one another. Strict definitions are ruled out – physical or mental (inner ostensive definition) methods of articulation are ruled out. Furthermore, since psychological concepts have the criteria of their use in verbal expression and behaviour, their specification will involve a degree of vagueness since behavioural criteria are difficult to specify exactly. Think of the criteria for anger, construed in terms of facial expression and body movement, for example.

A good example of much of what has been said so far is found in the first few sections of *Intention* where Anscombe exhibits her Wittgensteinian method, standpoint and style very clearly. You expect some kind of definition of intention and perhaps some account of intention as an ‘in-the-head’ phenomenon plus an account of how it can be made to fit in with the physical environment. Instead there is a faithful commitment to the use of the term in ordinary language. (Three uses or senses of the family resemblance concept ‘intention’ are provided). No priority is given to the use ‘intention *with which*’ (one of the senses) as opposed to its use in the expression of intention and its use in describing action. Thus it goes against the grain in so far as one does not expect equal status to be given to all of the uses of the terms ‘intention’, ‘intentional’, ‘intend’. This also reveals how Anscombe is continuing

the Wittgensteinian task of investigating the language game associated with a concept; how the concept of intention is variously used in practice and the logical relations between these uses and other related concepts. The grammatical investigation also necessitates a piecemeal multi-faceted investigation since it is destined to split off according to the different uses investigated.

Anscombe also adopts two further specifically Wittgensteinian methods in her inquiries into mental concepts: the idea of an imaginary conversation and the use of imaginative thought experiments to expose verbal misconceptions. In the *Philosophical Investigations* most of the content takes the form of the author conversing with an imaginary interlocuter. Anscombe at times uses a similar method, not involving an actual interlocuter but at least arguments provided in tacit question-answer form or "What I would say" form. Thus in discussing the phenomenon of lying about intentions, Anscombe says:

A lie however, is possible here; and if I lie, what I say is a lie because of something present not future. I might even be lying in saying I was going to do something, though I afterwards did it. The answer to this is that a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind, and one's mind may be either an opinion, or a mind to make something the case.¹³

In "The First Person", Anscombe uses a thought experiment to facilitate answering her question "Is it really true that "I" is only not called a proper name because everyone uses it only to refer to himself?" She proceeds: 'Imagine a society in which everyone is labelled with two names. One appears on their back and one at the top of their chests, and these names, which their bearers cannot see, are various: "B" to "Z" let us say. The other "A" is stamped on the inside of their wrists.'¹⁴ These imaginative thought experiments are clearly adopted from the method of Wittgenstein.

II. A COMPARATIVE SURVEY OF WITTGENSTEIN AND ANSCOMBE'S INQUIRIES INTO ACTION AND INTENTION

1. Introduction

The aim of the following section is to show the links between Anscombe and Wittgenstein and to set out various themes (which will be developed later) in their joint approach. It would be difficult to provide an interpretation of Anscombe's account of action and intention without first showing how it was influenced by Wittgenstein. In order to illustrate the link between Anscombe and Wittgenstein, I will point out the similarities and some differences between their approaches to action and intention. The similarities derive from the fact that Anscombe took her lead from Wittgenstein in examining the issues she did about intention, and she also adopted an approach that was similar to Wittgenstein's in certain respects. The differences between the two derive primarily from the fact that Anscombe offered a much more developed account of intention than Wittgenstein, who characteristically only left us with certain remarks mainly in the *Investigations* but also in the Blue and Brown Books.

The general overlap between Anscombe and Wittgenstein's approach to intention and action relate to the fact that Anscombe took up Wittgenstein's remarks on the topic and developed them in *Intention*. Consequently, Anscombe and Wittgenstein both examine much the same aspects of the "language-game" for action and intention. (The concept of a language-game, as we shall see, is Wittgenstein's. In the *Philosophical Investigations* he states that "language-game" is "meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity"¹⁵ and that language games consist of "language and the action into which it is woven"¹⁶). In what follows, I will go through what I take to be the aspects of Anscombe's analysis of intention that are directly related to Wittgenstein's investigation. In general, these similarities are variations on the core issues of private inner objects and the causation of action.

2. A shared “linguistic” method.

Anscombe adopts the same investigative perspective as Wittgenstein insofar as she rejects the “inner-outer” model. This does not relate specifically to her analysis of the language game for intention, but it is important to mention it at the outset because it is an important general similarity in their approaches. I do not claim that Anscombe and Wittgenstein’s methods overlap precisely. All I aim to show here is that they share important views about language and meaning that significantly impact on their inquiries.

Anscombe’s examination of intention centres on language users and their behaviour seen from the “external” point of view, and she rejects the idea that human beings are made of an inner mental realm and an outer physical body. Thus, in the early stages of her analysis of intentional action, she explicitly states that what she will look at is what “a man actually does” and not into his mind in order to say what his intentions are. In other words, she is taking seriously our capacity to say what a person is doing just by looking at their bodily movements and the situation they are in. For example, if we notice a person sitting in a café writing on the page of a newspaper with a chequered grid on it we can state with reasonable confidence that he is filling out a crossword puzzle.

There is evidence of this approach in the writings of Wittgenstein too. This is best illustrated by listing some of his remarks that bear similarity to Anscombe’s on this issue:

Do not ask yourself “how does it work with *me*?” Ask “what do I know about someone else?”¹⁷

What is the purpose of telling someone that a time ago I had such-and-such a wish? – Look on the language-game as the *primary* thing. And look on the feelings, etc., as you look on a way of regarding the language-game, as interpretation.¹⁸

Our mistake is to look for an explanation [of intention] where we ought to look at what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’. That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played*.¹⁹

Many similar examples could be taken from Wittgenstein, but it is clear from these three that Anscombe followed a very similar route to him in her investigative approach. Although interpretation of the later Wittgenstein is bound to be controversial, it seems to me that remarks like those above are similar to those made by Anscombe on the approach one is to adopt when it comes to examining things in the area of “the mind.” This need not be any highly specific interpretation of Wittgensteinian method – all I want to suggest is that both Anscombe and Wittgenstein obviously want to avoid appeal to “inner” private entities in their investigations. We can safely say that Wittgenstein urges us to examine language games rather than “entities” of some sort or other, and likewise, Anscombe wants to look to what people do and say in her investigation. This similarity could be summed up by saying that Anscombe shares with Wittgenstein a resistance to introspection construed as looking into a private psychological realm of mental entities that can supposedly somehow be grasped by an inner eye. I take this to be roughly part of a linguistic approach because rejecting such a view of the inner leads naturally to investigating the “outer” form of life – to examining language-using human beings and their activities. (Although proceeding this way is not the only way of resisting an orthodox introspective approach; one could also develop e.g. a naturalistic program).

Another important dimension of Anscombe’s linguistic approach is seen in her sustained inquiry into the nature of the act of asking *questions* about a person’s intentions and actions. Anscombe tries to characterize intentional action events mainly by distinguishing them from physical events. But what she recognizes is ultimately a distinction in two types of *language games* as opposed to two different types of phenomena linguistically represented. For this reason, she seizes on questions of the form “Why did you do that ?” and attempts to characterise this “Why?” in order to state clearly the region of *language* pertaining specifically to action and intention.

This way of approaching questions about actions and reasons is also found in remarks Wittgenstein makes in the *Blue and Brown* books and in the *Investigations*:

The tribe [in this thought experiment] may, on the other hand, have a language which comprises 'giving reasons'. Now this game of giving the reason why one acts in a particular way does not involve finding the cause of one's actions (by frequent observations of the conditions under which they arise).²⁰

The double use of the word "why", asking for the cause and asking for the motive . . . gives rise to the confusion that a motive is a cause of which we are immediately aware, a cause 'seen from the inside', or a cause experienced.²¹

Wittgenstein's inquiries into the nature of reasons for acting focus on the language game of asking for and giving reasons. This further shows how Anscombe and Wittgenstein share a broadly similar way of addressing this key area of intention.

A final similarity and quite obvious aspect of the "linguistic" method that Anscombe shares with Wittgenstein is her appeal to the idea that the meaning of words like "intention" and "action" is to be found in their use as opposed to anything they might be thought to signify. In particular, they share a common opposition to the idea that psychological words get their meaning by signifying some kind of psychological state or entity. I take this to be a relatively uncontroversial aspect of the later Wittgenstein. For example, he asks "How do we *refer* to sensations? . . . how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? – of the word "pain" for example."²² He suggests that the verbal expression of pain "replaces crying and does not describe it." He thus rejects approaches that attempt to account for the meaning of the word "pain" by positing (private) states that the word supposedly names, and he proposes that the meaning of the word pain is something that is grasped through language games. He follows such remarks with the claim that "knowing" an intention "means that the expression of uncertainty is senseless."²³ In other words he is arguing that knowing one's intention is not the same as knowing that e.g. the bird above is a herring gull and not a fulmar. Knowing one's intention is not knowing that there is something "there" that we refer to every time we utter remarks such as "My intention is to climb that hill today" or "I intend to win this race."

3. Anscombe and Wittgenstein against “inner” intentions.

The above account suggests a very general similarity between the approaches adopted by Wittgenstein and Anscombe – their shared resistance to reducing the inquiry to an investigation into psychological *phenomena* as opposed to the language surrounding our use of psychological words. However, there are more specific continuities in their respective treatments of intention that relate to the conclusions they arrive at about the nature of the language game for intention. There are roughly five basic overlaps in their treatments of this language game: (a) a rejection of the theory that the word “intention” refers to an inner object; (b) a rejection of the view that knowledge of intention and action is a form of empirical knowledge; (c) a rejection of causal explanations of the concept of willing and of intention. I will outline (a) in the present section and go on to briefly discuss the other points in subsequent sections.

Wittgenstein’s remarks in the *Investigations* indicate that his aim is to bring into question the traditional idea that having an intention involves undergoing a special psychological process or observing any inner occurrence that the word “intention” refers to. His remarks from roughly §633-§660 cluster around the issue of recalling a past intention, specifically what is involved in trying to remember what one was going to do or say on a certain occasion in the past. For example, in §635 he remarks that remembering what one was going to say seems to involve something like reading “the darkness” – recalling a few details seem to enable one to say what one was going to say. The account Wittgenstein seems to favour thus avoids reference to an intention as any kind of entity. In remembering an intention the inner experience of intending “seems to vanish” and instead one recalls “thoughts, feelings, movements, and also connexions with earlier situations”²⁴ Moreover, he urges us to consider the “natural expression of intention”²⁵ as when an animal tries to escape or a cat stalks a bird and to consider “the language game as the *primary* thing”.²⁶

Anscombe also rejects the idea that the word “intention” refers to an inner object. In characterising the intention *with which* a person is going to do something, she does not appeal to

any special experience, sensation, type of thought, or mental occurrence. She puts forward a *criterion* by which to tell when an intention is “present” in terms of a type of logical fit between an agent’s expression of intention and his beliefs about his/her further actions. Again, this is connected to the remarks made by Wittgenstein quoted above – for Anscombe a “man’s intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is” because it is subject to certain logical constraints that other members of the speech community can apply in their inquiries.

In dealing with intentional action, Anscombe is vehement that the intentional aspect of deliberate movements is not a property that the action description names. Thus in §19 she argues that we do not “add anything attaching to the action at the time it is done by describing it as intentional”. The word “intentional” is not the name of a special feature of bodily movements that we apply on noticing that someone is doing such and such a thing. This argument is complicated and receives further treatment later (see chapter 3, part I). However, it is clear that Anscombe rejects the idea that an action could be called intentional in virtue of some inner state of mind of the agent while it is occurring.

Finally, Anscombe is seen to be clearly in line with Wittgenstein’s rejection of “inner” intentions in her account of expressions of intention. Her main point here is that when a person utters a statement such as “I am going to the shops”, he is not verbally describing or representing an inner state of intention. For example, she argues that when one lies about their intentions they are not giving a false representation of what is in their mind: a lying intention is not “a false report of the contents of one’s mind, as when one lies in response to the query “A penny for your thoughts””.²⁷ If I am thinking “That is not funny” but say otherwise, then I am giving a false account of my thoughts. However, if I lie about my intention of going to the shops there may have been no such thought about the shops or my going there to falsely “represent” in the first place. I may have jumped up from the couch, grabbed my coat and opened the door with the image of a box of tea before my mind. As Anscombe says, “one’s mind may be either an opinion, or a mind to make something the case”, and the latter type of “mind” does not lend itself well to the idea of being properly or improperly represented in language.

This sketch demonstrates the key overlap between Wittgenstein and Anscombe in their investigations into the language game surrounding intention. Both agree that we are looking in the wrong place if we think we can illuminate the concept by examining the contents of the inner mind as if the word “intention” were the label of a property, experience, or state. The next major point of contact between their treatments I will discuss relates to the concept of mental causation.

4. Anscombe and Wittgenstein against empiricist accounts of knowledge of action and intention.

Wittgenstein makes several remarks in the *Investigations* against the idea that we know our intentional actions and/or our intentions in a manner similar to the way we know what is happening in the world around us. The type of account of knowledge of action put forward by William James or other empiricists like David Hume and John Locke is his target. In what follows, I will provide a short overview of this empiricist approach and trace Wittgenstein’s related critical remarks in the *Investigations* and Anscombe’s similar remarks in *Intention*.

Empiricist intuitions about action and intention are clearly visible in John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He attempts to show “from experience” that it is the “uneasiness of desire” that determines voluntary action. He argues that it is only when a person “feels uneasiness” in wanting something that his will is initiated:

If we inquire into the reason of what experience makes so evident in fact, and examine, why it is uneasiness alone operates on the will, and determines it in its choice, we shall find that, we being capable but of one determination of the will to one action at once, the present uneasiness that we are under does *naturally* determine the will.²⁸

Locke thus provides a description of what seems to happen in voluntary action, and he arrives at the conclusion that certain special experiences are what define volition. Thus, he treats volition as a phenomenon that can be understood by observing what is going on in oneself during or

prior to the action. He makes the assumption that intentional actions are states that can be known by examining them, and he suggests that observation of experience shows how they are the kinds of events that involve bodily movement preceded by an uneasiness of desire. Although he rejects the idea of an actual occult power of the will, he does examine his own experiences and arrives at an empirical account of what is going on during voluntary acts: "volition is nothing but that particular determination of the mind, whereby, barely by a thought, the mind endeavours to give rise, continuation, or stop, to any action which it takes to be in its power."²⁹ More importantly, in the absence of any distinct impression of a *power* of will, he proceeds to explain will in terms of the consciously experienced *antecedents* to voluntary actions. Thus, although he sharply distinguishes between will and desire, he continually stresses that it is "uneasiness of the mind for want of some absent good" that determines the will and that this uneasiness is thus a form of desire. In other words, Locke's account of knowledge of action examines conscious experience to find that desires "determine" the will and thus presupposes that willing is the kind of phenomenon that can be in some sense understood through empirical observation. Similarly, Hume states that the will is "the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowing give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind".³⁰

William James' account of voluntary action clearly embraces this approach too. In the *Principles of Psychology* he suggests that voluntary actions can be characterized by examining what goes on in the mind at the time of acting – that we can come to know the nature of action by observing what occurs in experience. Specifically, he argues that "a mental conception made up of memory-images of [previous sensations of movement]" defines "which specific act it is".³¹ In other words, James maintains that the description we give to a certain action, such as "kicking a ball" or "moving a pawn" is something we know through a "mental conception" of previous sensations associated with such bodily movements. Thus, for example, he suggests that we know we are going downstairs through the idea of an end coupled with a series of guiding sensations which successively arise.³² Moreover, he argues for "the absolute need of *guiding sensations* of some kind for the successful carrying out of a concatenated series of movements".

Interestingly, he also suggests that in the absence of guiding sensations – in cases where a patient has suffered neural damage for example – the action “can still be guided by the sense of sight”.³³ He still appeals to experiential knowledge to characterize what is involved in knowing actions that lack kinaesthetic feeling – only it is ordinary empirical knowledge of what is going on in the world rather than what is going on in the mind.

Wittgenstein opposes this kind of empiricist account of the knowledge of action in the *Investigations*. He seems to directly refer to James’ analysis in addressing the suggestion that my kinaesthetic sensations “advise me of the movement and position of my limbs”.³⁴ He presents certain criticisms of this idea and argues that “knowing” a voluntary movement only means “being able to describe it” in the same way that we can describe the direction from which a sound is coming without appeal to sensations in our ears. His earlier discussion of what is involved in remembering a prior intention also shows a strong resistance to empiricist analyses. There he puts forward critical remarks directed at the theory that one has “a particular feeling, an inner experience” of intending that is recalled in the moment of remembering an intention. But it is noted that the inner experience here “seems to vanish” and that what is actually recalled in such situations are “thoughts, feelings, movements, and also connexions with earlier movements” rather than a specific inner sensation unique to the intention.³⁵ Wittgenstein also offers specific remarks about voluntary action that resist the empiricist account. He states that voluntary movement “is marked by the absence of surprise” in the sense that knowledge of action is not the kind of thing that involves witnessing something happening such that one could say “See, my arm is going up!” when raising it.³⁶ In general, these remarks attack the idea that we know we have, for example, raised our arm by detecting a feeling, the latter being the “criterion” or “measure” of recognition.³⁷

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Anscombe’s analysis of intentional action is her resistance to this empirical account of the knowledge of action. She shares Wittgenstein’s opposition to the kinds of accounts put forward by philosophers like Locke and James. Without going into too much detail, her account could be described as one that rejects the idea that our intentional actions fall into the class of things that can be *known by observation*.³⁸ In fact, she

delineates the very concept of intentional action in terms of this “non-observational knowledge”, as we shall see. Ultimately, she shows that intentional actions are those that are subject to *practical* knowledge but initially she characterizes intentional action as that which is subject to non-observational knowledge. She suggests that a person knows intentional actions without observation “because nothing shews him” what is happening during the action. I can raise my arm with my eyes closed, which suggests that we do not need to observe what is going on in the world to tell that such-and-such a voluntary action is going on. Even more importantly, we do not observe anything *internal* either at the time of acting that could tell us that an action of a certain description is going on. Throughout *Intention* Anscombe radically opposes the empiricist account despite intuitions that some form of observation or empirical awareness is needed to characterise a certain action as intentional. For example, she considers a case where someone meaning to paint a wall yellow without observation may in fact not be doing this at all because e.g. the paint was switched so that the wall turned out blue. An example like this brings into focus the intuition that observation *is* required in order to *know* for certain the description of one’s action. But she insists in response to this that a person can have both observational *and* non-observational knowledge of an action. Like Wittgenstein, who stressed the lack of surprise involved in raising one’s arm intentionally, she mentions that knowledge of intentional action is the kind of knowledge a person asked “Why are you ringing the bell?” would deny having when they respond “Good heavens! I didn’t know *I* was ringing it!”.³⁹ In response to an analysis like that presented by James, she holds that knowledge of action “is otherwise than with the external senses” because if someone says that their “leg is bent when it is lying straight out, it would be wrong to say that [they] had mis-judged an inner kinaesthetic appearance as an appearance of his leg bent”.⁴⁰ Anscombe battles to make sense of this latter idea throughout the second half of *Intention* and eventually resuscitates Aquinas’ account of knowledge of action – practical knowledge – to account for it. (We shall examine practical knowledge later, in chapter 4). Her characterisation of knowledge of action as a special practical form knowledge is the ultimate rejection of the empiricist model because it does not rely on the detection of anything in “inner” or “outer” experience. Her critique of the empiricist theory of knowledge of action thus overlaps

with Wittgenstein's, also questioning the role of inner objects, observation, surprise, and other things associated with ordinary empirical knowledge in the investigation into intentional action.

5. Anscombe and Wittgenstein against "causal" accounts of action and intention.

In characterising the concept of a "causal" theory of action here I distinguish between a strong and a weak account. I see a strong causal theory of action as one where an intentional action is seen as something that can be explained in terms of actual causal components of some kind – perhaps physical or psychological states of some type. Below I will briefly show how this type of account occurs in the empiricist accounts of action I have just discussed. I characterize a weak causal account of intentional action as one that is committed to the view that intentional actions are typically subject to causal explanation – in terms of, for example, folk psychological terms – but which is not committed to the view that actions are the kinds of phenomena that can be explained in terms of actual physical or mental, causally efficacious, phenomena. That is, on my distinction, weak causal theories are neutral on the issue as to whether actions can be explained in ways that are anything like the way actual phenomena in the world are explained – by reference to powers of some kind that can be identified in causal sequences leading up to the end movement that is described as such-and-such an action. I find it useful to make this distinction because I see Anscombe as a philosopher who is opposed to both kinds of causal theory for intentional action. Moreover, many modern philosophers who have adopted a similar stance to Anscombe in relation to intentional action could be referred to as anti-causalists insofar as they reject the strong causal account but at the same time can still be called causalists because they agree with the weak causal theory. (As we shall see later, Donald Davidson and Daniel Dennett are two philosophers who resist Anscombe's anti-causalism for intentional action).

Locke seems to come close to putting forth a strong causal thesis when he characterises volition or "willing" as "an act of the mind directing its thought to the production of any action, thereby exerting its power to produce it."⁴¹ Although he does not state in detail the nature of this process, and stresses that "powers" are not special faculties, he clearly uses mechanistic

language to explain willing and voluntary action insofar as he refers to determining powers and acts of mind. In other words, Locke appears to have understood voluntary actions to be those actions that are in some way *brought about* by antecedent acts of will or mental acts. Interestingly, Locke seems to want to maintain an alternative thesis at the same time: that since on his account powers are *relations* it is the person that acts to bring about a voluntary action and not a distinct faculty. Yet he still retains the conflicting language of mechanism and causation in his account of willing.

Hume is similar to Locke in explaining volition only he is even more adamant that we should not talk of an actual *power* of the will. His central reason for stating this is that when we analyse our own experiences we do not actually detect any internal impressions of power. Thus, he criticises the view that there is anything like the “creative power” of the will, “by which it raises from nothing a new idea, and with a kind of Fiat, imitates the omnipotence of the Maker”.⁴² However, also like Locke, he seems to want to retain the idea that the motion of bodily parts “follows the command of the will” and that this is “a matter of common experience, like other natural events”. Hume’s language suggests that human beings supposedly *bring about* voluntary bodily movements even though our idea of this power “is not copied from any sentiment or consciousness of power within ourselves”.⁴³ He states that “the motion of our body follows upon the command of our will”⁴⁴ and that volition “is surely an act of the mind”.⁴⁵

William James follows a line similar to Hume and Locke but tends to appeal more directly to causal language in his account of willing. Thus he states that movement “is the natural immediate effect of feeling, irrespective of what the quality of the feeling may be. It is so in reflex action, it is so in emotional expression, it is so in voluntary life.”⁴⁶ He characterises certain decisions or determinations as things that come from “within, and not from without”.⁴⁷ Furthermore, he suggests that the “willing terminates with the prevalence of the [motive] idea; and whether the act then follows or not is a matter quite immaterial, so far as the willing itself goes”.⁴⁸ He also mixes into this account some neurological explanation: “The movements which ensue are exclusively physiological phenomena, following according to physiological laws upon the neural events to which the idea corresponds”.⁴⁹ James’s account is thus couched in distinctly

causal terms, and his reports seem to go beyond what Hume and Locke will permit based on their empirical investigations. James openly defends the view that the mind actually brings about bodily movements by a mental *fiat* and that such mental phenomena like decisions and feelings of effort precede and give rise to voluntary movement.

These accounts all suggest that willing involves a mental act of some kind, regardless of how it is to be defined or described. This causal approach is one of the main targets of both Anscombe and Wittgenstein's treatment of intentional action. Wittgenstein presents several criticisms of this idea that voluntary actions are brought about by mental acts. He notes that when I raise my arm voluntarily "I do not use any instrument to bring the movement about" and that my wish to do so "is not such an instrument either". Thus, he attacks the idea that willing can be broken down into a series of mechanical-causal episodes that could be triggered by a mental state such as wishing. He also attacks the idea that an act of trying could be that which brings about intentional actions, stating that when I raise my arm "I do not usually *try* to raise it".⁵⁰ Wittgenstein makes several other remarks like these that attack the above type of causal account.

Anscombe's opposition to the view that intentional actions are brought about by mental acts operates at various levels, and that part of her analysis cannot be quickly summed up here. However, a few things can be pointed out to illustrate the similarity of her approach to Wittgenstein's on this issue. She distinguishes reasons and motives from both ordinary causes and what she calls mental causes, the latter being conscious mental states that we recall as having made us do such-and-such a thing like jump back or sneeze or slam a door. In other words, Anscombe makes a definite, if not rough, distinction between intentional actions and those that are explained in either physical or mental causal terms.

Like Wittgenstein, she also directly attacks the mechanistic account of willing, arguing that "it is an error to try to push what is known by being the content of intention back and back; first to the bodily movement, then perhaps to the contraction of the muscles, then to the attempt to do the thing, which comes right at the beginning". This attempt to act that comes right at the beginning obviously refers to the kind of fiat mentioned in James's account,⁵¹ and it would also

apply to the mental acts that Locke and Hume seem to suggest give rise to voluntary acts. Moreover, Anscombe's resistance to this causal/mechanistic account of willing and acting intentionally is also encapsulated in her maxim "I do what happens", a formula that de-emphasises explanation of what I do in terms of antecedent causal states because what gets done is seen to be coincident with what happens.

Closely related to this is Anscombe's rejection of "belief-desire" accounts of intentional action. It seems to me that in driving a wedge between mental-cause explanation and reason-explanation, Anscombe simultaneously distinguishes between analysing intentional actions in terms of antecedent beliefs and desires on the one hand and analysing them in terms of reasons on the other. (Although her criticism is not directed at desire as such, but at the kind of approach that views desire as a prior state of the agent or as efficient causation giving rise to an intentional action. In fact, when Anscombe rejects causal accounts of intentional action, she targets efficient causation (causation in terms of prior states or events) and champions final causation). She criticises "the epistemology characteristic of Locke, and also of Hume", which takes any "sort of wanting to be an internal impression" of some kind and which consequently take it that "a particular tickle or itch" could be the "point of doing anything whatsoever".⁵² Of course, Anscombe does not want to bring in an extra mental phenomenon, the "intention", to explain intentional actions without appeal to beliefs and desires. Rather, her analysis recognises that the "area" of language surrounding intentional action is different to that surrounding belief-desire talk.

In closing this section, it is worth pointing out how integrated and closely related these three types of criticism are in Anscombe and Wittgenstein's accounts. To attack the idea that intention and intentional action can be analysed in terms of inner mental states is tightly linked to both the ideas that actions are not brought about by mental acts and the idea that what we know in intentional action is not some impression or process. In fact, in Anscombe's case, problems with the mechanistic account of willing and the theory that action involves reference to mysterious inner states motivate and eventually give way to a preoccupation with arriving at an alternative to empiricist approaches to *knowledge* of action. This emphasis on the problem of

knowledge of intentional action is one of the ways in which Anscombe's analysis differs from Wittgenstein's investigations. In what follows, I will sketch some of the differences between Anscombe and Wittgenstein's approaches to action and intention.

6. Some differences between Anscombe and Wittgenstein in their approaches to action and intention.

(a) Other philosophers

Anscombe shows a willingness to draw on other philosophers in her account of action. She explicitly mentions Hume, Locke and James in order to mark off her own account from the type of analyses they offered. For example, she mentions how her account is unlike one that makes "the real object of willing just an idea, like William James".⁵³ In her analysis of wanting she claims that the "absurd philosophy" surrounding this concept is connected to "the epistemology characteristic of Locke, and also of Hume".⁵⁴ In examining motives, she states that the "account of motive popularised by Professor Ryle does not appear satisfactory".⁵⁵ In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein does not explicitly make references to other philosophers in his discussion of terms such as willing, intention and action. So we can see that Anscombe was more willing to explicitly contextualise her conclusions in the context of the philosophers she is challenging.

However, Anscombe does not only bring in other philosophers in negatively characterising her stance. She also develops her views on action and intention by drawing on certain philosophers, especially Aristotle and Aquinas. In providing her anti-empiricist account of practical knowledge and "trying to get" she provides a sustained account of Aristotle's practical syllogism. She further develops her account of practical knowledge by appeal to Aquinas, who described practical knowledge as "the cause of what it understands".⁵⁶ Her use of other philosophers in discussing action is clearly seen in *Three Philosophers*, where she contrasts Aquinas and Hume's views on action and desire:

Now for Aquinas, will essentially consists, not in a peculiar quality of experience [which for Hume was an internal impression], but precisely in the peculiar sort of causality expressed by 'knowingly give rise to'. A voluntary act takes place as the fulfilment of a tendency that arises from the agent's consideration of the goal of the tendency.⁵⁷

Anscombe actively employed other philosophers and could be said to be offering a more traditional treatment of the concept of intention than Wittgenstein in this respect. While Wittgenstein had similar aims to Anscombe, he did not explicitly contrast his views to those offered by empiricists such as James, Locke and Hume. But in presenting her positive account Anscombe definitely breaks with Wittgenstein insofar as she tries to develop and extend her analysis through the frameworks of previous philosophers.

(b) An *analysis* of intention.

This leads on to another difference between Anscombe and Wittgenstein's approaches. Not only does Anscombe bring in more traditional philosophy, she goes beyond Wittgenstein in her attempt to provide a full analysis of the concept of intention.

While Wittgenstein provides certain remarks about intention, willing and action, Anscombe presents a fuller treatment. In the early part of *Intention* she is at pains to provide a non-circular demarcation of the concept of intentional action. She tries to isolate the concept to be examined – a move that is more typical of a traditional analysis that would seek initially to define what it is that is being studied. Although Anscombe does not argue that "intentional" has an "essence" in the traditional sense, she does try to "define" it or mark it off from other language games, such as those relating to the use of "involuntary", "motive" and "mental cause".

Anscombe also covers various aspects of intention in more detail than Wittgenstein, including topics such as the individuation of action, practical knowledge and the intention with which something is done. Her discussion is thus more comprehensive than Wittgenstein's. This is reflected in a further difference – Anscombe's use of technical terms. There is no mention of

specialised terms such as knowledge without observation, mental causation and practical knowledge in Wittgenstein's investigation into the concepts of intention and action. This shows that Anscombe aimed to provide a more thorough conceptual map of intention that expanded on Wittgenstein's pioneering remarks.

To the extent that Anscombe presented an analysis of intention there is even a slight tension between her approach and Wittgenstein's. Anscombe's application of specialised terms suggests that she recognised a court of appeal beyond the language game itself. One could argue that for Wittgenstein the language game was the primary thing. His remarks in the *Investigations* were mainly critical of, for example, the role of kinaesthetic sensation in willing or of orthodox expectations about what expressions of intention represent. However, in using psychological concepts like mental causation and non-observational knowledge to articulate the terms she is studying, Anscombe seems to accept that her topic can be analysed in a way that goes beyond the critical investigation of linguistic use. This is particularly evident in her concluding thesis that "intentional" has reference to "a form of description of events".⁵⁸ This remark captures something that Wittgenstein would surely have agreed with: that "intentional" does not mean what it does in virtue of some "inner" extra state or process that accompanies certain bodily movements. However, there is no suggestion in the *Investigations* that he would have tried to provide a formula like Anscombe has. This applies equally to Anscombe's claim that "I do what happens"⁵⁹ and that practical knowledge is "the cause of what it understands"⁶⁰ Similarly, her attempt to offer *some* explanation of why it is that certain things should be subject to the question "Why?" indicates that Anscombe was willing to extend her account beyond the language game. While Anscombe does define "intentional action in terms of language – the special question 'Why?'"⁶¹ – she nonetheless is more inclined to subject this claim to further analysis beyond the language itself.

(c) Types of description

Although one may disagree with these extra elements Anscombe's inquiry adds to the Wittgenstein's investigations into intention and action, her analysis does show clearly

something that was not as obvious in the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein did comment on the differences between, for example, “I am going to take some pills” and “I am going to be sick”, where the former is an expression of intention and the latter a prediction. However, it is one of the virtues of Anscombe’s analysis that she makes it very clear that our concepts for action and intention involve a *different form of description* than physical concepts. Thus, she states that “the description of something that goes on in the world as ‘building a house’ or ‘writing a sentence on a blackboard’ is a description employing concepts of human action”⁶² but that it is a mistake “to look for *the* fundamental description of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this”.⁶³ In other words, Anscombe’s analysis of intention and action identifies the fact that our use of concepts such as “intentional”, “voluntary”, and “want” follow different rules of application to “physical” concepts. In providing an analysis *Intention* thus brought out more clearly a distinction that was perhaps not as obvious in the *Investigations*. This distinction, between “folk psychological concepts” and “physical” concepts is obviously important as it has come to dominate discussions in the philosophy of mind and action ever since.

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CHAPTER 2: EXPRESSION OF INTENTION AND INTENTIONAL ACTION

I. A CRITIQUE OF THE 'INNER OBJECT' VIEW OF EXPRESSIONS OF INTENTION.

Anscombe tries to examine intention by first looking at one of its three main occurrences in the language: expressions of intention. The traditional picture of expressions of intention is clouded by the assumption that the expression is a sign of an intention 'in the mind', that the language signifies what is inside the person at the time of utterance. Such a view of expressions of intention is suggestive of the 'philosophical' errors Wittgenstein drew attention to in the *Investigations*. In particular, the meaning of the verbal expression is seen as a representation of a meaning artefact; a psychological state in this case; the intention. Similarly the rules for labelling objects are being applied to psychological terms in that 'expression of intention' is taken to be the name of a thing or state, in the mind or brain.

This way of looking at expressions of intention is a 'dead end' as far as Anscombe is concerned. A 'philosophical' investigation of this traditional kind into expressions of intention tries to say what the expression is an expression of and this leads to the problems associated with introspective analysis:

... if we try to look for what [the expression of intention] is an expression of, we are likely to find ourselves in one or other of several dead ends, e.g.: psychological jargon about 'drives' and 'sets'; reduction of intention to a species of desire, i.e. a kind of emotion; or irreducible intuition of the meaning of 'I intend'.¹

Attempts to say what the expression signifies lead to theories of the nature of the 'intention' and since the intention seems to be behind intentional actions, the temptation is to view intentions as things that 'move' the person to action, i.e. 'drives', 'emotions', or 'desires'. This is a very natural way of proceeding to examine an expression of intention. Intention is a 'psychological' concept that must be examined 'psychologically', by trying to say what

'goes on in the mind'. When I express an intention to do something, such as go to the shops, the words seem to report a thought or feeling or drive to act to do so. If I want to, goes the traditional story, I can close my eyes and 'sense' that this is the case to confirm that there is indeed such a state of intention underlying my expression. Not surprisingly, Anscombe sides with Wittgenstein in resisting this type of investigation into expressions of intention:

Wittgenstein has shown the impossibility of answering [the question 'How do you know you have just uttered an expression of intention?'] by saying 'He recognizes himself as having, or as having had, an intention of going for a walk, or as having meant the words as an expression of intention'. If this were correct, there would have to be room for the possibility that he misrecognizes. Further, when we remember having meant to do something, what memory reveals as having gone on in our consciousness is a few scanty items at most, which by no means add up to such an intention; or it simply prompts us to use the words 'I meant to . . .', without even a mental picture of which we judge the words to be an appropriate description.²

If an intention was a 'thing' or state that we could 'see', there would be room for error in saying what our intention is. As with physical objects, perception of which is prone to error, 'intentions' would have to be the kinds of things that introspection could sometimes get wrong: 'Oh I thought I was going to the shop, but I was wrong. I was going to the shed.' This is absurd, and yet seems a likely feature of the 'inner object' view of expressions of intention. If intentions are the kind of things that are observed in the mind and then mentioned in reports, presumably such reports can misrepresent due to faulty observations. Also, the act of 'looking in on consciousness' reveals only a 'few scanty items at most, which by no means adds up to an intention.' This remark stems from Wittgenstein's: 'It is as if a snapshot of a scene had been taken, but only a few scattered details of it were to be seen . . . As if I could read the darkness'.³ Actual observation provides nothing like clear cut 'intentions' in the mind in the forms of desires or 'drives' or thoughts. When we describe a

physical object, like a cup, we can point to its features – ‘There is the handle, that is the rim’. If intentions were observed items of consciousness then presumably *something* like this would have to go on in expressing them. But ‘scanty items’ and ‘darkness’ is all that is available to introspective description.

It is because of the poverty of such traditional approaches to examining expressions of intention that Anscombe goes back to the ‘linguistic drawing board’ so to speak, in order to take a clean look at the grammar of expressions of intention. What we find are two language games that look very similar and which must be distinguished in order to arrive at an understanding of their meaning: expressions of intention and predictions. Taken at face value, expressions of intention are statements about the future. They say what is going to occur at a future date: ‘I am going to the shops at lunch’, ‘I am going to win tomorrow’. In this sense they are similar to predictions. Wittgenstein notes that there ‘is an evident kinship between these two language-games, and also a fundamental difference.’ He exemplifies this with an example: “‘I am going to take two powders now, and in half-an-hour I shall be sick.’” Mentioning that you are to take two powders is an expression of intention, while ‘I am going to be sick’ is a prediction. The similarities are clear enough: both types of statement are about the future. But, as Wittgenstein continues, it ‘explains nothing to say that in the first case I am the agent, in the second merely the observer. Or that in the first case I see the causal connexion from inside, in the second from outside.’⁴ Trying to explain the difference between the two statements is more difficult because the usual, ‘philosophical’ intuitions are unsatisfactory: saying that the causal connection is seen ‘from the inside’ for expressions of intention is not helpful.

Anscombe adopts Wittgenstein’s remarks, also beginning with an example from the two different language games, and she also expands on the difficulties associated with Cartesian-styled attempts to explain the differences:

... if I say 'I am going to fail in this exam.' and someone says 'Surely you aren't as bad at the subject as that', I may make my meaning clear by explaining that I was expressing an intention, not giving an estimate of my chances.

If, however we ask in philosophy what the difference is between e.g. 'I am going to be sick' as it would most usually be said, and 'I am going to take a walk', as *it* would most usually be said, it is not illuminating to be told that one is a prediction and the other the expression of an intention. For we are really asking what each of these is. Suppose it is said 'A prediction is a statement about the future'. This suggests that an expression of intention is not. It is perhaps the description – or expression – of a present state of mind, a state which has the properties that characterise it as an intention. Presumably what these are has yet to be discovered. But then it becomes difficult to see why they should be essentially connected with the future, as the intention seems to be. No one is likely to believe that it is an accident, a mere fact of psychology, that those states of mind which are intentions always have to do with the future, in the way that it is a fact of racial psychology, as one might say, that most of the earliest historical traditions concern heroic figures.⁵

An orthodox approach obviously accepts that expressions of intention are 'about the future'. After all, a person does state what is to be done at a future date in expressing an intention. But this is only because the intention that the expression describes, according to an orthodox view, is future directed in some way. Hence Anscombe's remark that on such a view, intentions would have to be states of mind that 'have to do with the future' as a fact of empirical psychology. Both the traditionalist and Anscombe believe that while expressions of intention are future related, they are fundamentally different to predictions (or, more accurately, 'estimates', for Anscombe). What Anscombe rejects is the *way* the difference is explained traditionally, by reference to intentions 'in the mind'. This sets up a basic tension between Anscombe's position and the traditional position. The traditional 'philosopher' will take it that an expressions of intention is essentially a descriptions of 'a present state of

mind' that happens to be future-directed, while for Anscombe, expressions of intention are essentially future directed.

Anscombe adopts a 'hint from Wittgenstein':

. . . we might then first define prediction in general in some such fashion, and then, among predictions, distinguish between commands, expressions of intention, estimates, pure prophecies, etc.⁶

This places expressions of intention firmly in the arena of statements about the future. The task now becomes that of explaining the difference between expressions of intention and estimates, both of which are basically descriptions of something future.

In trying to change our thinking about expressions of intention, Anscombe focuses on different aspects of the traditional view. The most important is the traditional idea that expressions of intention *must* be essentially about present states of mind and not about the future. While a prediction of sunny weather for Saturday morning is criticised for being 'false', given that it rains all day Saturday, an expression of intention to put out the bins on Saturday cannot be criticised for being 'false' if the bins are never put out. It is not as if one can say 'He never put out the bins, so it was a 'false' expression of intention.' So according to traditional intuitions, the truth of an expression of intention doesn't seem to depend for its validity on future states of affairs the way predictions or estimates do. This is obviously because in expressing an intention I appear to say something like, 'My intention at present is to put out the bins.' Whether or not the bins get put out has no bearing on whether or not I actually 'had' the intention I said I had. It might have been that I didn't really want to put out the bins but said it anyway out of habit, even though I knew I might not get around to it. Or it may be that I *did* have that intention. In any case, it seems what actually happens afterward – whether or not the bins are put out – has no bearing on the 'truth' or 'falsity' of the expression of intention. The traditionalist interprets these observations as showing that the expression of intention is after all a description of an inner state of mind of the person

expressing the intention. If they were essentially about the future, as predictions are, then their truth or falsity would somehow depend on predicted outcomes – but the truth or falsity of an expression of intention does not seem to be related to future outcomes. Anscombe tackles this interpretation and tries to show that it is mistaken:

[It is possible to lie about an intention] and if I lie, what I say is a lie because of something present not future. I might even be lying in saying I was going to do something, though I afterwards did it. The answer to this is that a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind, and one's mind may be either an opinion, or a mind to make something the case. That a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind does not mean that it is a false report of the contents of one's mind, as when one lies in response to the query 'A penny for your thoughts'.⁷

Anscombe's answer to the 'philosopher' is that 'a lie is an utterance contrary to one's mind does not mean it a false report of the contents of one's mind'. The mistake, according to Anscombe, is to model the expression of intention on a statement of fact, as if it were based on 'inner' evidence gained by looking inward to see what the intention is. If I say I am going to put the bins out before lunch while I don't actually intend to do so, this does not mean that there are certain mental items absent from 'my mind' that I am pretending are there. In particular, it is not as if there must be a specific thought, somehow represented by the description 'I will put the bins out', at the time of utterance. There need be no such mental content – I might have simply said 'I'm going to put the bins out before lunch' and have had nothing 'going on in my head' so to speak, that I could actually report if queried. After all, there are usually only a few 'scanty items' to be observed 'in consciousness'. But even if there were something that I recall went on 'in my mind' at the time I expressed the intention, this does not of course mean that it was an observed mental object.

What Anscombe offers here is a re-interpretation of the observed facts. Outcomes don't affect the truth or falsity of expressions of intention the way they do predictions, but this is

not because expressions of intention are true or false descriptions of present mental states as opposed to descriptions of something future. To counter the view of 'mind' involved in this misinterpretation, Anscombe talks merely of a lying intention as being simply 'contrary to one's mind'. Being contrary to one's mind does not mean it is a misrepresentation of mental content.

The question now is: what alternative analysis is Anscombe offering of a lying intention, if it is not a misrepresentation of inner items? Obviously she eliminates the Cartesian 'inner' out of the picture. But then what can 'contrary to one's mind' mean if not involving a false report of mental content? Anscombe elaborates a little further on false expressions of intention with another example:

One might not have a 'mind' to do something, distinguishable from uttering the words. And then, as Quine once put it (at a philosophical meeting), one might do the thing 'to make an honest proposition' of what one had said. For if I don't do what I said, what I said was not true (though there might not be a question of my *truthfulness* in saying it.) But the reason why Quine's remark is a joke is that this falsehood does not necessarily impugn what I *said*. In some cases the facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words, rather than *vice versa*. This is sometimes so when I change my mind; but another case of it occurs when e.g. *I write something other than I think I am writing: as Theophrastus says (Magna moralia, 1189b 22)*, the mistake here is one of performance, not of judgement.⁸

Quine's example is of someone who says they are going to do something they actually have no intention of doing. However, they later do the thing in order to make the original expression of intention 'honest'. But although it appears honest in retrospect, given that the intended action was executed, the joke is that the expression was originally a lie, because the expressed intention didn't 'exist' as such, at the time of utterance. Anscombe mentions this anecdote in order to illustrate what she takes to be an important observation: sometimes the 'facts are, so to speak, impugned for not being in accordance with the words, rather than *vice*

versa. If I were to write something with my eyes closed and it turned out that there was no ink in the pen, then according to Anscombe the mistake is not in the judgement but in the performance. That is, I can still give a description of my action as 'I am writing': but just because it turns out that the facts don't match this does not mean that my expression of intention was 'false'. So for an expression of intention to be contrary to one's mind is more a matter of it not suiting your actual desires at the time of utterance. So, contrary to traditional intuitions, a lying expression of intention is not a false report of mental 'content'.

Apart from deflecting an 'inner intention' view of expressions of intention based on the above types of example, Anscombe examines other facets of the language game and its traditional misinterpretation. This involves bringing the meaning of 'prediction' and 'expression of intention' closer together – then expressions of intention can be seen to be 'about the future' rather than about present inner states of mind:

... when a doctor says to a patient in the presence of a nurse 'Nurse will take you to the operating theatre', this may function both as an expression of his intention (if it is in it that his decision as to what shall happen gets expressed) and as an order, as well as being information to the patient; and it is this latter in spite of being in no sense an estimate of the future founded on evidence . . . This example shews that the indicative (descriptive, informatory) character is not the distinctive mark of 'predictions' *as opposed to* 'expressions of intention', as we might at first sight have been tempted to think.⁹

This example is designed to deflate our tendency to radically distinguish between predictions and expressions of intention by showing that the same statement can function as both. Holding them rigidly apart will disincline us to accept anything like Wittgenstein's suggestion to make expressions of intention a type of 'prediction'. Only a relatively weak claim is sought for here – that in a certain light the two types of utterance can be seen to be quite similar.

The tendency to view the intention as something 'inner' that is signified by the expression of intention is also diagnosed:

A command is essentially a sign (or symbol), whereas an intention can exist without a symbol; hence we speak of commands, not of the expression of commanding; but of the *expression of intention*. This is another reason for the very natural idea that in order to understand the expression of intention, we ought to consider something internal, i.e. what it is an expression of. This consideration disinclines us to call it a prediction – i.e. a description of something future. Even though that is just what 'I'll do such-and-such' actually looks like, and even though 'I intend to go for a walk but shall not go for a walk' does sound in some way contradictory.¹⁰

An intention can 'exist' without its expression, whereas a command cannot. I might have a long standing intention to go to Paris and then one morning say 'I'm going to Paris today'. This does not mean that the intention is some thing that has been 'in the mind' for a year or so before it is expressed in words. Expressions of intention are not the outward signs of inner objects. It is this latter view (the view that expressions of intention are descriptions of *present* inner states of the mind) which disinclines us to call the expression a 'prediction' i.e. a description of something future. To emphasise the 'future oriented' nature of expressions of intention, further persuasion is offered: 'I intend to go for a walk but shall not go for a walk' sounds contradictory. The reason it sounds contradictory is because it is central to the meaning of expressions of intention that they describe something future. If 'I intend to go for a walk' were a representation of an inner state that just so happens to be linked to the future, then there need be no hint of a contradiction. For if the function of the expression of intention were to depict inner states then the statement only amounts to saying something like 'An item in my mind is linked to going for a walk but I shall not go for a walk'. One 'half' of the statement points out a mental state, the other a prediction, hence there is no

room for a contradiction. But that the statement *does* sound in some way contradictory seems to show that expressions of intention *should* be seen as types of prediction.

Anscombe's main claim is that expressions of intention are predictions not based on evidence: they are not 'inner directed' but 'future directed' and yet they are not estimates. The traditional account would see them as statements that are based on 'inner' evidence. Thus, if asked what I am thinking of doing, I might close my eyes and say, 'In a minute I'm going to go the attic to get the dinner set and then to the dining room', as if the expression of intention were a report on the contents of my mind. To provide a full alternative to this traditional view, Anscombe must account for expressions of intention being about the future and yet *not* based on evidence. This can seem mysterious from the traditional perspective – for once the 'inner content' grounding the description of intention is taken from the picture, how are the remaining 'statements about the future' made? They seem to be 'just uttered', without any basis.

In a sense, this is actually true of Anscombe's account. For as she later asks, regarding knowledge of 'an intention':

... where is [my intention] to be found? I mean: what is its vehicle? Is it formulated in words ...? ... And if the intention has no vehicle that is guaranteed, then what is there left for it to be but a combination in a vacuum? ... One looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting.¹¹

These remarks apply equally to the traditional notion of expressing an intention and underline the extent to which Anscombe wants to eliminate the 'intention as a mental object' from proceedings. There seems to be no way of understanding what kind of 'thing' an intention could be, what its 'vehicle' might be and the notion of trying to 'observe' it is thus hopeless. Traditionally, knowing one's expressed intention is 'theoretical' in so far as it

involves some sort of object monitoring, in the same way that outer objects are subject to theory and observation in science.

For Anscombe, in expressing an intention I am not, as is traditionally held, reporting on an observed state of consciousness, an experience. The expressed intention is not a feeling, state, process or set of images that is somehow mirrored in the words I utter. The validity of an expression of intention is thus a matter of felicity rather than truth or falsity. And although Anscombe does not explicitly say it, it is inevitable that expressions of intention be analysed ultimately as types of acts themselves; as forms of linguistic behaviour. Expressions of intention thus 'inform' not by reporting states of affairs but by indicating to the observer what the subject intends or is disposed to do.

However, Anscombe admits that her own claim that expressions of intention are descriptions of something future that are not grounded on evidence, does lead to mystery. It is for this reason that she decides to move on and accept that the analysis of expressions of intention cannot shed much light on intention:

People do in fact give accounts of the future events in which they are some sort of agents; they do not justify these accounts by producing reasons why they should be believed but, if at all, by a different sort of reason; and these accounts are very often correct. This sort of account is called an expression of intention. It just does occur in human language. If the concept of 'intention' is one's quarry, this enquiry has produced results which are indeed not false but rather mystifying. What is meant by 'reason' here is obviously a fruitful line of enquiry; but I prefer to consider this first in connexion with the notion of intentional action.¹²

The explanatory hole left when mental objects are excluded from the analysis of expressions of intention is to be filled by a different sort of explanation to that of explanation by evidence: explanation in terms of reasons for acting. However 'reason for acting' is something that Anscombe only thoroughly explores through the analysis of intentional

action. The reason for the switch to action is that its full analysis necessarily involves some reference to bodily movements. An examination of expressions of intention as linguistic utterances is limited compared to an inquiry into intentional action. For, as Anscombe says, the analysis of expressions of intention ends up with 'results which are indeed not false but rather mystifying'. The role of the 'inner' has been minimised so that obviously cannot be appealed to. But the criteria of bodily movement and situational factors cannot be considered either in considering just linguistic expression. Consequently we are left with the 'mysterious' conclusion that expression of intention 'just does occur in human language': they are 'just uttered'. Classifying these 'mysterious' utterances requires understanding their basis in 'reasons for acting'. But Anscombe makes the methodological move of analysing the latter through intentional action. Toward the end of *Intention*, Anscombe returns to expressions of intention and their relation to reasons for acting. By then the concept of 'reason for acting' has been analysed linguistically, as something that is marked by a certain form of the question 'Why?' – the one applied to intentional action.

II. ANSCOMBE'S DEMARCATION OF INTENTIONAL ACTION

1. The problem of distinguishing between 'intentional' and 'involuntary'.

Having tried to examine intention through one of its uses, 'expressions of intention', which did not yield a satisfactory result, Anscombe turns to 'intentional action'. It was argued that expressions of intention are not descriptions of intentions (as inner mental states). Similarly, with intentional action, the notion that the intention is something in the brain or the mind is excluded and a different methodological tack is taken:

. . . . how do we tell someone's intentions? or: what kind of true statements about people's intentions can we certainly make, and how do we know that they are true? Well, if you want to say at least some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or was doing. . . the

greater number of the things which you would say straight off a man did or was doing, will be things he intends . . . [It is traditionally thought that intentions are 'in the mind', so that] what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does, is the very last thing we need consider in our enquiry. Whereas I wish to say that it is the first.¹³

Obviously this shifts the focus away from inner states to the 'form of life' of the phrase and so concept 'intentional action', to use a Wittgensteinian term. I say form of life, because Anscombe is taking the very meaning of intentional action to operate and be fully satisfied through an analysis of the concept in its actual use. The criteria for its application are fixed not in terms of 'inner mental referents', but in terms of 'outer' physical and linguistic activity. We can normally say with reasonable certainty what a person is doing just by looking at the movements of their bodies in a given context:

All I am here concerned to do is note the fact: we can simply say 'Look at a man and say what he is doing' – i.e. say what would immediately come into your mind as a report to give someone who could not see him and who wanted to know what was to be seen in that place. In most cases you . . . will be reporting not merely what he is doing, but *an* intention of his – namely, to do [such-and-such] a thing.¹⁴

Effectively, the concept 'intention' is now, for the rest of *Intention*, to be examined *through* intentional action. It is through analysing the language of intentional action that we can learn the true meaning of intention.

Consequently, Anscombe's first major task in *Intention* is to *mark out* the language game for intentional action. This is similar to what a naturalistically inclined philosopher would do in trying to state the necessary and sufficient conditions of intentional action, as, say, a certain type of neural activity preceding bodily movements, or type of physical disposition or 'mental' state. However, Anscombe's methodology resists such routes, and confines her, in the spirit of the later Wittgenstein, to analysing the meaning of intentional

action through its linguistic use. This is the reason that her first step is to suggest that the basic indicator of intentional action in our language is a certain sense of the question 'Why?':

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.¹⁵

The 'certain sense of the question 'Why?'' Anscombe is hoping to isolate is that which gives a reason for acting. This is one of two central types of 'Why?'; the other being the 'Why?' that looks for causal explanation. Thus, for example, "Why did the car break down?" asks for a cause and 'Why did the driver start yelling?' looks for a reason. Anscombe's 'linguistic' distinction between reasons and causes (and hence between intentional actions and mere physical events) thus requires marking off the 'Why?' for intentional action explanation from the 'Why?' for causal explanation.

Appealing to this special sense of 'Why?' as the prime indicator of 'intentional action' has the advantage of being the only reliable way of 'generalising' about intentional action (for the purposes of 'demarcation') without yielding to the 'philosopher's' tendency to generalise. The 'philosophical' temptation to generalise might lead to suggestions such as 'Intentional actions are always caused by volitions', 'Intentional actions always involve intentions', 'Intentional actions always reduce to 'desires' and 'beliefs'. Anscombe rejects such generalisations throughout *Intention*. Using 'Why?' avoids the pitfalls of generalisation since it is not the name of a general class sharing such-and-such natural properties, but instead is a *precondition* of the use of the concept 'intentional action'. (Anscombe leaves the subtleties of her account of the application of 'Why?' until section 46, by which time she has shed much more light on her view of the nature of practical knowledge and intentional action).

The attempt to isolate 'intentional' proceeds by way of consideration of certain types of answers to 'Why?'. But rather than do this directly, Anscombe finds it convenient to do this indirectly, by isolating the answers that *exclude* this sense of 'Why?' first. That is, her aim is to mark off the range of answers that indicate the action is *involuntary*. Throughout this phase of *Intention* there seem to be at least five types of answers Anscombe recognises which indicate involuntary action:

- (a) Answers that indicate complete lack of awareness of the behaviour in question, e.g. "I was not aware I was doing that".
- (b) Answers that mention evidence, e.g. "The evidence reveals that my foot must have slipped on the greasy surface."
- (c) Answers that mention external causes, e.g. "Fred *pushed* me."
- (d) Answers that mention 'involuntary', e.g. "My hand's moving back from the fire was an involuntary act of recoil."
- (e) Answers that give what Anscombe calls internal or 'mental causes', e.g. "The *thought* that I would be killed made me shudder."

Answers of the kind found in '(d)' and '(e)' prove difficult to distinguish from answers indicating intentional action and are therefore subjected to extensive analysis. Answers of type '(a)' are taken to be more or less a given in the characterisation of intentional action: if the described bodily movement is something the agent was completely unaware of, then it is obviously outside the arena of 'intentional'. A lack of agent awareness is indicated similarly by answers of the type '(b)' and '(c)', answers that suggest the agent is treating the bodily movement more like a physical event he is ignorant of, rather than an intentional action. In this section I will examine how Anscombe treats the problem posed by cases of type '(d)': answers of the type 'It was involuntary', leaving the analysis of type '(e)' answers till the next section.

2. Anscombe's distinction between involuntary actions and intentional action.

The problem with applying 'It was involuntary' in order to exclude 'intentional' is that it begs the question. To use it to aid the marking off of intentional action would amount to asserting something like: 'Actions done for a reason are those excluded by those not done for a reason (i.e. involuntary actions)'. To avoid a merely circular characterisation of intentional action, Anscombe has to reformulate the answer, 'It was involuntary' using terms that do not depend for their meaning on 'involuntary', 'intentional', 'wanting' etc. Then the answer will stand independently of the concept 'intentional' so to speak, rendering its use legitimate in marking out 'intentional'. This is achieved by focusing on a specific type of involuntary action:

. . . . how can I introduce 'It was involuntary' as a form for rejecting the question 'Why?' in the special sense which I want to elucidate – when the whole purpose of the elucidation is to give an account of the concept 'intentional'? Obviously I cannot. There is however a class of the things that fall under the concept 'involuntary', which it is possible to introduce without begging any questions or assuming that we understand notions of the very type I am professing to investigate. [Examples such as 'The odd sort of jerk or jump that one's whole body sometimes gives when one is falling asleep] belongs to this class, which is a class of bodily movements in a purely physical description. Other examples are tics, reflex kicks from the knee, the lift of the arm from one's side after one has leaned heavily with it up against a wall.¹⁶

I will refer to this class of involuntary actions as 'Involuntary action_c' from here on, where the subscript 'c' refers to 'cause'. I choose this title because the involuntary actions of this class are, as Anscombe says, 'in a purely physical description' and are therefore subject to ordinary, 'physical' or physiological causes. This class includes quite simple bodily movements such as reflex movements or the twitching of a finger or eyelid, and their causes are the physical causes that a physiologist would investigate. An inquiry into the cause of a reflex kick from the knee might show that specific muscle and neurological activity are

responsible for causing the movement. In order to reformulate 'It was involuntary_c' without circular appeal to action concepts, Anscombe introduces some new terminology:

What is required is to describe this class without using any notions like 'intended' or 'willed' or 'voluntary' and 'involuntary'. This can be done as follows: we first point out a particular class of things which are true of a man: namely the class of things which he *knows without observation*. E.g. a man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation because nothing *shews* him the position of his limbs; it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is the sign that it is bent and not straight. Where we can speak of separately describable sensations, having which is in some sense our criterion for saying something, then we can speak of observing that thing; but that is generally not so when we know the position of our limbs.¹⁷

Intentional actions are, for Anscombe, marked by a special agent awareness that does not apply to mere physical events. While one becomes aware of a physiological movement like those in peristalsis through observation and experiment, this is not the case with intentional action or involuntary action_c. If I am lying with my eyes shut in bed and get a nervous shuddering of my limbs, I know that this is happening without having to open my eyes to look: I seem to have 'non-observational knowledge' of this type of involuntary action. (The same applies to intentional actions: if I am playing blind man's bluff it seems I do not have to take off my blind fold to find out what I am doing if someone asks).

As mentioned, Anscombe's task is effectively to reformulate 'It was involuntary' without using terms like 'involuntary', 'intentional', etc. This is why non-observational knowledge is introduced:

But the class of things known without observation is also of special interest in this part of our enquiry, because it makes it possible to describe the particular class of 'involuntary actions' which I have so far indicated just by giving a few examples: [tics, reflex kicks etc.] Bodily movements like the peristaltic movement of the gut are

involuntary; but these do not interest us, for a man does not know his body is making them except by observation, inference, etc. The involuntary that interests us is restricted to the class of things known without observation; as you would know even with your eyes shut that you had kicked when the doctor tapped your knee, but cannot identify a sensation by which you know it.¹⁸

Re-describing an involuntary action_c as ‘A bodily movement known without observation’ is a first step to re-casting it in non-question begging terms. But a further concept is required if it is to be distinguished from the other type of involuntary action considered by Anscombe; ‘higher level’ involuntary actions that are not subject merely to ‘ordinary’ or physiological causes (which will be discussed in the next section), but *mental causes*:

Now among the things known without observation must be included the causes of some movements. E.g. ‘Why did you jump back suddenly like that?’ ‘The leap and loud bark of that crocodile made me jump’. (I am not saying I did not observe the crocodile barking; but I did not observe that making me jump.) But in examples [of involuntary actions_c] the cause of motion is known *only* through observation.

This class of involuntary actions [involuntary actions_c], then, is the class of movements of the body, in a purely physical description, which are known without observation, and where there is no such thing as a *cause* known without observation. (Thus my jump backwards at the leap and bark of the crocodile does *not* belong to this subclass of involuntary actions.) This subclass can be described without our first having clarified the concept ‘involuntary’. To assign a movement to it will be to reject the question ‘Why?’¹⁹

The concepts of non-observational knowledge and mental causality enable Anscombe to capture the sense of ‘It was involuntary_c’ without using ‘involuntary’, ‘wanting’, ‘intentional’, ‘accidental’ or other terms that would render her analysis circular. ‘Involuntary action_c’ can now be safely referred to in a non-question begging way as, for example, ‘The class of bodily movements that are known without observation but whose cause is never

known without observation'. In *this* form, 'It was involuntary_c' can be used to negatively characterise 'intentional' without begging the question. I will call the other form of involuntary movements mentioned in the above quote, those subject to mental causality, as 'involuntary action_{mc}', where 'mc' refers to 'mental cause'. There are thus two main categories of involuntary action considered by Anscombe: those not subject to mental causality, involuntary action_c, and those subject to mental causality, involuntary action_{mc}. Jumping back from the open mouth of a crocodile is an example of an involuntary action_{mc} because the cause of the bodily movement (the crocodile's open mouth) is known without having to look for it: one knows 'straight off' what caused the jump. Knowing the crocodile was there obviously involves observation, but knowing that it was what caused the jump does not: there was no need to conduct tests to check if the open mouth was in fact the cause. In the case of involuntary actions_c, the cause is known only through observation, as in for example getting a shudder in the leg before sleeping. Here the cause is only known through physiological investigation: one would have to conduct an inquiry to say what the cause was. Involuntary actions_c are 'low level' movements of the body in the sense that they do not involve complicated psychological concepts such as 'desire', 'feeling' etc. But they are 'higher' than merely physical movements of the body such as the beating of the heart that aren't even subject to non-observational knowledge.

The answer 'It was involuntary' has now been successfully reformulated into a non-question begging form that avoids a merely circular characterisation of the form 'It is not intentional if it is involuntary'. This can now be stated as 'It is not intentional if it is in the class of bodily movements known without observation but whose cause is never known without observation.' It is worth exploring the nature of the two key concepts used in this manoeuvre (non-observational knowledge and mental causality) in more detail, as they are central to Anscombe's view of intention.

3. The nature of non-observational knowledge and mental causality.

Non-observational knowledge, as noted by Roderick Chisholm, is really a theory neutral or 'linguistic' characterisation of what is traditionally referred to as 'direct access.' A Cartesian may talk of having direct access to my intentions in the same way that I might have certain, direct knowledge of a hand that is held before my eyes, only the intention is 'in the mind' and not accessible to ordinary senses. A typical direct access account of knowledge of an intentional action might propose that the intention is a 'thing in the mind', that, as Anscombe remarks in section 45 of *Intention*, 'the real object of willing is just an idea, like William James' believed. To say we have non-observational knowledge of an action is not positively to characterise this knowledge as any particular type of knowledge: Anscombe merely says what knowledge of action *does not* involve. For obvious reasons, she avoids providing a theoretical explanation of such knowledge, as would traditionally be requested.

That Anscombe does not provide a model of, for example, 'internal perception' may make her account seem unsatisfactorily mysterious. How can we have knowledge of anything unless we use some knowledge acquiring apparatus – our eyes, or some 'inner sense'? How can Anscombe explain non-observational knowledge without positing theoretical entities i.e. sensations, that serve to inform about bodily movements? Anscombe's view appears more grounded however when one is reminded of her remarks on kinaesthetic knowledge. Nothing seems to *show* us the position of our limbs; there often *are* no internal impressions or sensations that could act as 'inner guides' to such knowledge. Anscombe's position approximates to Wittgenstein's account of kinaesthetic sensation in the *Investigations*:

"My kinaesthetic sensations advise me of the movement and position of my limbs."

I let my index finger make an easy pendulum movement of small amplitude. I either hardly feel it, or don't feel it at all. Perhaps a little in the tip of the finger, as a slight

tension. (Not at all in the joint.) And this sensation advises me of the movement? – for I can describe the movement exactly.

“But after all, you must feel it, otherwise you wouldn’t know (without looking) how your finger was moving.” But “knowing” only means: being able to describe it. – I may be able to tell the direction from which a sound comes only because it affects one ear more strongly than the other, but I don’t feel this in my ears; yet it has its effect: I *know* the direction from which the sound comes; for instance, I look in that direction.²⁰

We say that we know e.g. the direction a sound is coming from on the assumption that this must result from something we have recognised and detected – a sensation in the ear. However, often there is no such sensation that we could separately recognise. It is not as if I could suddenly have a sensation in a silent room and say ‘I’ve just had that sensation you get when you know the direction a sound is coming from’. The same seems to apply to my moving my finger. I can say exactly what the relatively detailed motion is, even with my eyes closed, yet there are apparently no detectable ‘separate’ sensations of this movement, except for faint twinges. Similarly, for Anscombe, in the case of knowing the position of one’s limbs, nothing seems to *show* their position: it is not as if one goes by a tingle in the knee which is the sign that it is bent and not straight:

... you would know even with your eyes shut that you had kicked when the doctor tapped you knee, but cannot identify a sensation by which you know it. If you speak of ‘that sensation which one has in reflex kicking, when one’s knee is tapped’, this is not like e.g. ‘the sensation of going down in a lift’. For though one might say ‘I thought I had given a reflex kick, when I hadn’t moved’ one would never say e.g. ‘Being told startling news gives one that sensation’: the sensation is not separable, as the sensation ‘like going down in a lift’ is.²¹

Although non-observational knowledge is not based on evidence, it is still knowledge because it allows for possible errors in judgement:

I say however that we *know* it and not merely *can say* [the position of one's limb], because there is a possibility of being right or wrong: there is point in speaking of knowledge only where a contrast exists between 'he *knows*' and 'he (merely) *thinks* he knows'.²²

It would not make sense for someone to say 'I think I have an itchy toe, although I might be wrong; it could be my knee.' Whereas 'if someone says that his leg is bent when it is straight, this may be surprising but is not particularly obscure.' Thus we cannot sensibly talk of knowing the location of a sensation but we can talk of knowing the position of a leg or a hand.

This kind of knowledge represents the dividing line between merely physiological movements of the body and movements that come under the general term 'action' (involuntary or intentional). Once the level of description rises beyond that of mere physical events into talk of at least involuntary action_c, the concept of non-observational knowledge begins to apply. I know without looking that my leg has kicked out while lying in bed, or that my finger is twitching, in the same way that I know my legs are crossed while sitting on a chair – without checking 'in my mind' for evidence in the form of sensations that this is the case. Of course, as is not surprising given Anscombe's Wittgensteinian leanings, this is not taken to be a strict generalisation. Psychological concepts exhibit heterogeneity. Sometimes I might tell the position of a limb by a 'separable' sensation, as when I have been leaning on my elbow too long and know by the sharp pain there that it is stuck in such-and-such a position. But in general there is no such sharp sensation at all, as demonstrated by Wittgenstein's example of moving a finger, and Anscombe's one of a reflex kick; we know the movements, but not by detecting a kinaesthetic sensation.

The concept of mental causality is also a special form of agent awareness: it is knowledge without observation of the mental events associated with bringing about an action (be it an intentional action or an involuntary action_{mc}):

A 'mental cause', of course need not be a mental event, i.e. a thought or feeling or image; it might be a knock on the door. But if it is not a mental event, it must be something perceived by the person affected – e.g. the knock on the door must be heard – so if in this sense anyone wishes to say it is always a mental event, I have no objection. A mental cause is what someone would describe if he were asked the specific question: what produced this action or thought or feeling on your part: what did you see or hear or feel, or what ideas or images cropped up in your mind, and led up to it?²³

It is important to note that Anscombe does not look upon a mental cause as 'what *causes*' a man's action, where 'what causes' them is perhaps "then thought of as an event that brings the effect [the bodily movement] about." Such a view of mental causality would perhaps see the causation here as involving "a kind of pushing in another medium" that "is of course completely obscure." Again, Anscombe is putting forth a theory neutral depiction of what, in a traditional account, would be the psychological causal antecedents – mental states – that give rise to a bodily movement. On such accounts, these mental states – beliefs, desires, wants, decisions, feelings, wishes, etc. – cause the bodily movement and might ultimately be construed as perhaps brain states or non-physical states of 'the mind'. In opposing such causal accounts, Anscombe's approach to mental causality is basically 'anti-Humean':

Note that this sort of causality or sense of 'causality' is so far from accommodating itself to Hume's explanations that people who believe that Hume pretty well dealt with the topic of causality would entirely leave it out of their calculations; if their attention were drawn to it they might insist that the word 'cause' was inappropriate or was quite

equivocal. Or conceivably they might try to give a Humean account of the matter as far as concerned an outside observer's recognition of the cause; but hardly the [subject's].²⁴

As 'causes' that are known without observation, Anscombe's mental causes aren't separate mental entities or properties that 'move' the body. In fact, for Anscombe, the meaning of 'cause' is linked to the fact that it occurs in our language in a *variety* of different ways, contrary to the 'philosophical' desire to acknowledge only one general type of causality. Anscombe mentions the heterogeneity of the word 'cause' in *The Causation of Action*:

. . . . a general enquiry into the nature of *a cause* is rather like a general enquiry into the nature of *a factor*. We may be reminded of Aristotle's four causes: he at least recognized some variety. But four is not enough. E.g. the door's weight [as a cause of making it shut] does not belong under any of Aristotle's four headings. We certainly need to remember often repeated warnings against using the expression "*the cause*." We shall prefer expressions of the form "*p because q*" and "*p because of x*." When the magnet pulled the door shut, the door shut because of the magnet, but possibly also because the wedge was removed and certainly also because of the way the hinges were seated.²⁵

This notion of an inquiry into 'a cause' being like an inquiry into 'a factor' is relevant to Anscombe's use of 'mental cause' because it stresses that Anscombe is not adhering to a rigid 'Humean' styled account of cause and effect. In "Will and Emotion" the same message is clear:

[With respect to actions (involuntary or intentional) caused by anger, it] would be interesting to discuss the causality – i.e. how many different types there are here. Lack of space prevents this. But at least the effect is of a quite different kind from the cause: the effect is a voluntary action taking place no doubt at a definite time; the cause, a state

which lacks a central core and the assignment of which to a definite time, though sometimes possible, is by no means necessary. There need be no answer to the question when one began to fear something, or when one stopped; though it may be certain that one did fear it at a certain given date, and that this had certain consequences, some of which can be called effects.²⁶

Clearly the causes mentioned here – anger and fear – are not causal in any Humean sense. They are not taken to require a fixed date or a ‘fixed core’, hence they deviate strongly from the normal conception of a cause as having necessary and sufficient conditions in terms of time and place. Furthermore the cause (factor) here, anger, is nothing like the effect it brings about, for example a bodily movement; there is no way of understanding anything like contiguity between cause and effect here.

Within the language game for action, the chief criterion of a mental cause is that it is “what someone would describe if he were asked the specific question: what produced this action or thought or feeling on your part: what did you see or hear or feel, or what ideas or images cropped up in your mind, and led up to it?” There are many things that could be mentioned in saying what led up to an action: the slamming of a door, a thought, a memory, an image, a loud noise. Thus they need not be ‘mental’ in so far as they can be events in the environment that led to an action, but they must be *perceived* by the agent – mental causes are by definition always *known* without observation. Obviously they cannot be unconscious states, for example, neurological states that cause bodily movements without the person being aware of them. They are what a person would report when asked ‘What made you move that way?’

Involuntary actions_c are subject to non-observational knowledge but their causes are not, making them distinct from intentional action (whose causes can be known without observation). But involuntary actions_{mc} share the credentials exhibited by intentional action – they are known without observation and also their causes are known without observation.

Hence Anscombe has thus far only ‘half’ distinguished ‘involuntary’ from ‘intentional’. The more difficult task of showing the difference between involuntary actions_{mc} and intentional actions is yet to be addressed.

4. Distinguishing between involuntary actions_{mc} and intentional actions by showing that mental causes aren’t reasons for acting.

The last in the line of answers listed above that exclude ‘reason for acting’ and ‘Why?’ were those that mentioned mental causes. When someone asks for a reason, the sense of their question ‘Why?’ is such that they are not seeking merely the mention of certain perceived past events that the agent suggests led up to the bodily movement. For example, if someone is asked ‘Why did you go up the ladder?’ the answer might be ‘Let me see, I was thinking about dinner, then I remembered I had to get some chicken for dinner, then I went up the ladder.’ This would not enlighten the inquirer as to what the reason for going up the ladder was. An acceptable reason might have been ‘To paint the top window.’ The reason puts the bodily movement in a certain light that connects up to motives, aims intentions etc., while the mental cause, in mentioning just a past mental event, will not. To give an intentional explanation of behaviour is to cite “precursors” of the behaviour (intentions, motives . . .) that *make sense* of the behaviour. But to give a non-intentional explanation of behaviour, is to produce an antecedent cause (e.g. a feeling) of the behaviour that *explains the occurrence* of the behaviour (but does not map it onto “the mind” (beliefs, desires, hopes etc.) of the agent. (This is not to say that intentional actions cannot be mentally caused, only that to give a reason is not to refer to a mental cause, for Anscombe). That mental causes exclude ‘Why?’ is seen in Anscombe’s remark in section 16:

Intentional actions, then are the ones to which the question ‘Why?’ is given application, in a special sense which is so far explained as follows: the question has not that sense if

the answer is evidence or states a cause including a mental cause; positively, the answer [states a reason for acting].²⁷

Traditionally speaking, it might be thought that reasons *are* mental causes. The difference between for example, gasping when a window slams, and sending for a taxi, is that the latter involves certain 'mental goings on' that the former lacks. Mental processes, however conceived (as brain states or mental states), such as intentions, wants, desires etc. are what characterise 'sending for a taxi' as intentional, according to a traditional approach. Thus if a person were asked why they were sending for a taxi, they might answer 'I am going to meet a friend at Merrion Square'. This expresses an intention and might be thought, from a theoretical or traditional viewpoint, to be describing a mental state; an experienced intention to go to Merrion Square. But, as is clear from the above quote, Anscombe wants to say that reasons for acting are *not* mental causes, that the 'Why?' for intentional action has not that sense if the answer mentions a mental cause.

Anscombe must therefore show that typical reason-answers, such as those stating an intention or a motive, do not mention mental causes. She first tries to show that intentions with which something is done, are not mental causes. In the 'contents' section this is stated as follows: 'Mental causes should be distinguished from . . . intentions with which the person acts.' Just how Anscombe makes out the distinction between mental causes and intentions with which a person acts is then explained in section 11:

Now one might think that when the question 'Why?' is answered by giving the intention with which a person acts – for example by mentioning something future – this is also a case of a mental cause. For couldn't it be recast in the form: 'Because I wanted . . . ' or 'Out of a desire that . . . '? If a feeling of desire to eat apples affects me and I get up and go to a cupboard where I think there are some, I might answer the question what led to this action by mentioning the desire as having made me . . . etc. But it is not in all cases

that 'I did so and so in order to . . . ' can be back up by 'I *felt* a desire that . . . ', I may e.g. simply hear a knock on the door and go downstairs to open it without experiencing any such desire. Or suppose I feel an upsurge of spite against someone and destroy a message he has received so that he shall miss an appointment. If I describe this by saying 'I wanted to make him miss that appointment', this does not necessarily mean that I had the thought 'If I do this, he will . . . ' and that affected me with a desire of bringing it about, which led up to my doing so. This may have happened, but need not.²⁸

A feeling of desire may make me spring up suddenly from my chair to go to the cupboard in order to get an apple. To explain my walking to the cupboard, I might give a reason mentioning my intention: 'I am going to the cupboard in order to get an apple'. But it seems this can be restated as 'I had the desire for an apple and the thought "There is an apple in the cupboard"'. This seems to suggest that intentions *are* mental causes – combinations of beliefs and desires.

However Anscombe's point is that, although say, 'trying to get' is obviously central to the analysis of intentional action, this should not be thought of in causal terms. It is not as if giving an intention in a reason for acting is to give a mental cause. Generally, mental causes and intentions should be kept separate in our understanding of intentional action, for very often we *cannot* say 'I *felt* a desire that . . . ' in backing up our action explanations. For example, if a carpenter were fitting a kitchen and were stopped at various times in his proceedings and asked the intention with which he had just done something, he would often be able to say straight off. But it would be no surprise if he could not think of any mental states or perceptions that preceded what he was doing and that led up to him doing so. He might lay a stack of planks on the floor without having felt any distinct desire to do so, he may hammer a nail into a window, put on his gloves, plug in a drill, all without having any distinct feelings of desire to do so, or wishes or decision-acts. Much of intentional action involves the execution of intention like this, without involving any awareness of preceding

mental causes. Hence, as far as Anscombe is concerned, we should strongly distinguish between mental causes and intentions.

But what about the intentional actions that do involve conscious beliefs and felt desires? In the case of going to the cupboard for an apple, the explanation in terms of mental causes 'I had the thought "There's an apple in the cupboard" and felt a strong desire to get it' *does* seem to capture the sense of 'Why?' required. That is, such a 'mental cause' explanation would seem to satisfy someone who wanted to know why I went to the cupboard. If a desire-belief pair does cause an intentional action, is it safe to say that Anscombe would allow that the intention *is* a mental cause? I think it would be a mistake to conclude this. After all, it must be remembered that for Anscombe: a) to state a mental cause is to *exclude* giving a reason for acting, and b) as quoted above, mental causes and intentions *should be distinguished* even though 'intentions with which' may be expressed as 'I wanted to'. It seems that when an intentional action is explained in terms of mental causes, the explanation is not giving a reason for acting in the sense that 'Why?' seeks. 'Why?' seeks a reason for acting: an expression of intention would satisfy this, but a report of a mental cause would not. For example, in the case of going to get an apple, if I said 'I felt a strong desire for an apple' in response to 'Why did you go to the cupboard?' this would not characterise the intention with which the action was executed. The inquirer would still not be fully satisfied as to the reason for acting. Typically they would ask a follow up question like 'Do you mean that you thought there was an apple in the cupboard and you approached the cupboard in order to get it?' Simply stating the mental cause would leave the reason for acting uncharacterised. This makes sense of Anscombe's remark that stating a mental cause rejects the sense of 'Why?'

Of course Anscombe *does* accept the necessity of talking about what is wanted and sought after in characterising intentional action. But the point seems to be that this is not to be construed in causal terms. Although 'Why?' can be recast in terms of mental causes (e.g. beliefs and desires), these mental causes do not 'give' the action its intentional character.

After all, as Anscombe mentions, often such mental causes do not occur at all, even though the intentional nature of the action is fully accounted for. Relevant here is a remark in section 36:

The wanting that interests us, however, is neither wishing . . . nor the feeling of desire. . . .The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*. . . .Thus there are two features present in wanting; movement towards a thing and knowledge (or at least opinion) that the thing is there.²⁹

A little later, in section 40, Anscombe adds that:

We have long been familiar with the difficulties surrounding a philosophical elucidation of judgement, propositions, and truth; but I believe that it has not been much noticed in modern philosophy that comparable problems exist in connexion with 'wanting' and 'good'. . . .

The cause of blindness to these problems seems to have been the epistemology characteristic of Locke, and also of Hume. Any sort of wanting would be an internal impression according to these philosophers.³⁰

The remarks shed light on Anscombe's claim that mention of a mental cause rejects the 'Why?' that looks for a reason for acting. 'Wanting' is traditionally taken to involve causally efficacious desires that precede the bodily movement in intentional action. But Anscombe prefers to talk of wanting in terms of 'trying to get'. This is consistent with the above observations that very often there *are* no mental causes involved in action; we just 'do what we do' and can give reasons for these actions, often stating an actual intention or motive, and yet there were no mental causes to report. (Of course, 'mental cause' as Anscombe uses it, is

never an 'internal impression', since it is known without observation, though it is distinct from 'reason for acting').

Having shown that answers mentioning intentions aren't stating mental causes, Anscombe further separates reasons and mental causes by showing the distinction between a *motive* and a mental cause (a motive might traditionally be considered to be a reason for acting that is also a cause):

. . . a very natural conception of 'motive' is that it is what *moves* (the very word suggests that) – glossed as 'what *causes*' a man's actions etc. And 'what causes' them is perhaps then thought of as an event that brings the effect about – though how it does – i.e. whether it should be thought of as a kind of pushing in another medium, or in some other way – is of course completely obscure.³¹

This is reinforced in section 12:

When a man says what his motive was, speaking popularly, . . . he is not giving a 'mental cause' in the sense that I have given to that phrase. . . though [a person] may say that his motive was this or that one straight off and without lying . . . yet a consideration of various things, which may include the mental causes, might possibly lead both him [and others to judge] . . . that his declaration of his own motive was false.

Motives may explain actions to us; but that is not to say that they 'determine', in the sense of causing actions. We do say: 'His love of truth caused him to . . .' and similar things, and no doubt such expressions help us to think that a motive must be what produces or brings about choice. But this means rather 'He did this in that he loved the truth'; it interprets his action.³²

Thus if someone asks a person why they gave someone sitting next to them half of their chocolate cake, the reason given might state a motive: 'I did it out of generosity'. This might be construed as a mental cause, as if the generosity were a feeling that generated the action. However Anscombe reminds us that we could naturally see a *distinction* between mental causes and motives in a case such as this if the person's motive were questioned. We could say 'Was it really generosity? What went on in your mind when you were about to offer the piece of cake?' The person might respond 'Well, I had the thought, "This cake is fattening and bad for my teeth and then I had a strong feeling of guilt."' The offer is caused by a desire to avoid guilt feelings, rather than being motivated by generosity. While a motive would show the action in a certain light, the mental causes state what made the person act, what led up to and issued in the action.

Mental causes are also to be distinguished from another kind of answer that could function as a reason for action: mention of a *backward looking motive*:

[What are referred to as] 'backward looking motives' are also distinguished from mental causes. Backward looking motives 'differ from, say, love or curiosity or despair in just this way: something that *has happened* . . . is given as the ground of an action . . . that is good or bad for the person . . . at whom it is aimed. . . . And if we wanted to explain e.g. revenge, we should say it was harming someone because he had done one some harmWhereas saying that someone does something out of, say, friendship cannot be explained in any such way. I will call revenge and gratitude and remorse and pity backward-looking motives, and contrast them with motive-in-general.³³

Both backward-looking motive and mental causality involve mention of something past. But they differ in that motives, being linked to intentions, wanting, aims and so on are connected with the notions of good and harm, and so are normative, whereas mental causes are not:

If an action has to be thought of by the agent as doing good or harm of some sort, and the thing in the past as good or bad, in order for the thing in the past to be the reason for the action, then this reason shews not a mental cause but a motive. This will come out in the agent's elaborations on his answer to the question 'Why?' . .

If you could e.g. show that either the action for which [a person] has revenged himself . . . was quite harmless or was beneficial, he ceases to offer a reason, except prefaced by 'I thought'. If it is a proposed revenge he either gives it up or changes his reason. No such discovery would affect an assertion of mental causality.³⁴

If someone says their reason for acting was revenge when their action benefits the recipient, their 'reason' is rejected. But this is not so with a mental cause. For example, one could not dispute the fact that the conscious thought 'Squirrels have bushy tails' occurred prior to looking for a natural history book. It could just as easily have been the thought 'Books with red covers are charming'. But with reasons 'the future state of affairs mentioned must be such that we can understand the agent's thinking it will or may be brought about by the action about which he is being questioned.' A reason for action must 'make sense of the action' so to speak. The same applies to a backward looking motive as opposed to a mental cause. A mental cause doesn't have to 'make sense of the action', while a backward looking motive, with its link to good and harm, does.

To sum up so far: I mentioned at the outset that Anscombe was trying to roughly outline 'the area of intentional action'. Her approach was to try, without begging the question, to say firstly which answers exclude the sense of 'Why?' associated with 'intentional'. The two answers that required the most analysis were 'It was involuntary' and answers that mention mental causes. 'It was involuntary' was restated in action-neutral terms, to avoid circularity, as 'It was an action I knew without observation but which I could know the cause without observation'. I called such actions involuntary actions, because they are 'primitive' involuntary actions that are subject to physiological causes rather than mental causes. In order to tackle the second type of answer, one mentioning a mental cause, Anscombe had to

show that reasons and mental causes are distinct. Mental causality was first introduced in terms of what she called a 'full-blown' involuntary action_{mc} (jumping back from seeing a face at the window), as opposed to a full-blown intentional action such as revenge, suggesting an opposition between 'mental cause' and 'reason'. But Anscombe's main strategy was to consider typical 'mental states' that would traditionally be taken to explain intentional actions and would function in reasons for action, such as intentions, motives, and backward looking motives. Anscombe deals with these individually, showing how each should be distinguished from mental causes. This effectively separates 'reason for acting' from 'mental cause', hence supporting her claim that 'Why?' in its special sense 'had not that sense if the answer is evidence or states a cause, including a mental cause.' Anscombe's remarks tend to capture the fact that intentional actions and the process of giving reasons for them, often, in practice, involve no reference or occurrence of mental causes. Thus Anscombe appears to have succeeded in marking off, in a non-circular way, the range of answers that explain involuntary actions i.e. those excluding the 'Why?' of intentional action.

So what is the range of answers indicating intentional action? What are the remaining *positive* answers? As to be expected they are the answers that place the bodily movement in a context of motives, aims, wants, goals, intentions and so on:

Intentional actions, then, are the ones to which the question 'Why?' is given application, in a special sense which is so far explained as follows: [the question has that sense when] the answer may (a) simply mention past history, (b) give an interpretation of the action, or (c) the answer is already characterised as a reason for acting, i.e. as an answer to the question 'Why?' in the requisite sense; and in case (a) it is an answer to that question if the ideas of good or harm are involved in its meaning as an answer; or again if further enquiry elicits that it is connected with 'interpretative' motive or intention *with which*.³⁵

These types of answers obviously leave no room for involuntary actions_c, which cannot be explained at all without observation or physiological inquiry (e.g. a reflex kick being explained by a neurological inquiry). Nor is there room for involuntary actions_{mc} as there is no room for mental cause explanations here. If the answer mentions something past, as in '(a)', then the ideas of good and harm must be 'involved in its meaning as an answer', which Anscombe has already shown does not occur in mental cause explanations of bodily movements. This completes Anscombe's non-circular demarcation of intentional action.

Although the distinction between mental causes, causes, and evidence on the one hand and reasons, motives and intentions on the other, shows roughly the division Anscombe makes between involuntary and intentional actions, it must be said that there are certain overlaps between these concepts that must be made clear if Anscombe's notion of intentional action is to be soundly understood. I am thinking here in particular of the fact that intentional action is subject to mental causality on the one hand while 'Why?' excludes mental causes on the other. Furthermore, for Anscombe, the distinction between mental causes and reasons often 'has no point.' It is for this reason that I want to briefly examine what Anscombe refers to as the 'phenomenology of intention'. What exactly is Anscombe's view of action as revealed through these opening sections and how does Anscombe see the relation between actions, reasons and mental causes in practice?

5. Anscombe's 'phenomenology of intention': the relation between actions, reasons and mental causes.

Getting straight the precise role that mental causality plays in Anscombe's view of intentional action is important. What is confusing are the following apparently opposing remarks:

'But intentional actions are not marked off just by being subject to mental causality.'³⁶

'Intentional actions, then, are the ones to which the question 'Why?' is given application, in a special sense which is so far explained as follows: the question has not that sense if the answer is evidence or states a cause, including a mental cause.'³⁷

These remarks seem to be in tension in so far as the first seems to say 'Intentional actions are mentally caused' and the second seems to say 'Intentional actions are not mentally caused'. If they turn out not to be contradictory, the remarks at least warrant a clear account of precisely how mental causality functions in Anscombe's picture of intentional action. Is Anscombe giving a non-Humean but nonetheless *causal* account of intentional action? That is, is Anscombe saying that intentional actions are always explicable in terms of mental causes? If this is the case then how can a mental cause effectively reject 'Why?' as stated in the second quote above?

As it turns out, these apparent tensions and confusions can be adequately explained. Any temptation to see such tensions and contradictions in Anscombe's account can, I think, be shown to follow from making a 'philosophical' assumption. This occurs if one is under the influence of entrenched 'philosophical' beliefs about intention. In this short section I will show the consistency of Anscombe's account and explain the precise relations between mental causality, intentional action and reasons.

Often a particular intentional action might look very similar, in terms of bodily movements, to an involuntary movement, for example naturally exhaling water vapour on a freezing day versus deliberately doing so to show someone that it really is cold ('Look, if I breathe out you can see my breath!') Both actions, one involuntary, the other intentional, look the same. So the difference is thought to be an 'extra' mental property attaching to the physical movements of the intentional action. In particular, three conventional 'philosophical' expectations result from believing the secret source of intention to lie in such

a natural 'extra' property: (a) intentional action has an 'essential nature', (b) that intentional action is a natural phenomenon to be explained by philosophical/psychological analysis and (c) the distinction between 'involuntary' and 'intentional' will be sharp and distinct (because the property will be either 'there' for intentional actions and 'absent' in the case of involuntary actions). Such 'theoretical' expectations are obviously anathema to a Wittgensteinian styled analysis such as Anscombe's. However, it seems to me, even if one is vigilant against them, they can play a subtle role in misinterpreting her opening account of the role mental causality plays in intentional action.

In conjunction with such 'philosophical' expectations, the first quote might be taken to suggest that if intentional actions are subject to mental causes, then mental causality characterises them: they are bodily movements 'caused in a certain way'. The second quote, that the sense of 'Why?' for intentional actions has not that sense 'if the answer is evidence or states a cause, including a mental cause', might lead to an opposing interpretation that is subject to the same 'theoretical' assumption: 'Intentional actions are those that are *not* subject to mental causes. Involuntary actions_{mc} are mentally caused, intentional actions are not.' Put crudely, traditional expectations about the 'defining' features of intentional action are based on rigid thinking: 'what is the nature of intentional action, its essence; what properties apply and do not apply to it?' A mindset such as this will make it difficult to see how, if at all, both quotes above are not contradictory; for either Anscombe is giving a causal theory of action (non-Humean), or she is not.

However, the fact is that Anscombe is not giving a theory at all: rather she is describing intentional action. What is found in describing intentional action is that mental causality *applies in some cases and not in others*. Mental causality and intentional action do not have a rigid relation. There are various examples where Anscombe shows that intentional actions *are* subject to mental causes. In *Will and Emotion*:

The states of emotion [e.g. anger], whether or not they are states of actual excitation, undoubtedly *cause* both voluntary and involuntary actions. . . . Examples: I upset the coffee – involuntarily – because I was so angry; I abandoned a proposed outing because I was angry – anger had taken away my inclination to make it; I wrote that letter because I was angry – i.e. anger inspired it.³⁸

In *The Causation of Action* there are similar examples:

Not that the existence in a man of a belief, a desire, an aim, an intention, may not be causes of various things that later come about. Indeed they may, and the effect of an intention may even be an action in execution of that intention! E.g. suppose I have a standing intention of never talking to the Press. Why, someone asks, did I refuse to see the representative of *Time* magazine? – and he is told of that long-standing resolution: “It makes her reject such approaches without thinking about the particular case.” This is ‘causal’ because it says “It makes here . . .”: it derives the action from a previous state.³⁹

And there are also cases to be found in *Intention*:

Now one might think that when the question ‘Why?’ is answered by giving the intention with which a person acts – for example by mentioning something future – this is also a case of a mental cause. For couldn’t it be recast in the form: ‘Because I wanted . . .’ or ‘Out of a desire that . . .’? If a feeling of desire to eat apples affects me and I get up and go to a cupboard where I think there are some, I might answer the question what led to this action by mentioning the desire as having made me . . .etc.⁴⁰

Thus Anscombe provides examples citing as causes of intentional actions desires, beliefs, emotions such as anger, and even intentions. Mental causality *does* apply to intentional

action if the desires, beliefs etc. are *also* on that occasion realized as occurrent mental states or episodes. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this, influenced by essentialist intuitions, that for Anscombe intentional actions is, by its very nature, always subject to mental causality. Anscombe specifically aims to avoid such generalisations. This is most clearly evident in *The Causation of Action*:

[A neurological/causal account] makes the assumption that the explanation of the coming about of actions by volition and intention is what thinkers of modern times call 'causal' explanation and that this is just *one* single sort of explanation. And similarly for reference to what someone believes, when this comes into explanation of his action. . . .

The mistake is to think that the relation of *being done intentionally*, is a causal relation between act and intention. We see this to be a mistake if we note that an intention does not have to be a distinct psychological state which exists either prior to or even contemporaneously with the intentional action whose intention it is. . . .

The teleology of conscious action is not to be explained as efficient causality by a condition, or state, of desire. Remembering that *that* was 'what I did ___ for,' does not have to involve remembering such a state. . . .

. . . it is one thing to say that a distinct and identifiable state of a human being, namely his having a certain intention, *may* cause various things to happen, even including the doing of what the intention was an intention to do; and quite another to say that *for* an action to be done in fulfilment of a certain intention (which existed *before* the action) is *eo ipso* for it to be caused by that prior intention.⁴¹

It is simply an observed fact that *some* intentional actions are mentally caused and others are not. This is a phenomenological observation, a description of intentional action. It is the theoretical attitude, with its tendency toward essentialism, that leads to the temptation to see intentional action as being *either* subject to mental causality or not. This attitude wants also to cast 'mental cause' as 'cause' and then assimilate intentional action to something like the

class of normal causal events (thus giving a 'causal thesis' proper) or to cast it as a unique 'uncaused' class (thus radically opposing a causal thesis). But such essentialism is misplaced. In fact, as Anscombe suggests, these concepts show heterogeneity. Sometimes intentional action is subject to mental causality and sometimes it is not, but *actual* mental causality is strictly irrelevant to its status as an *intentional* action.

The important result of this observation is that since intentional action is not always subject to mental causality, a *causal thesis* cannot be attributed to intentional action (i.e. a 'mental cause' thesis). More to the point, a 'belief-desire' model of intentional action, where desires are literally mental causes, is mistaken. For the 'teleology of conscious action is not to be explained as efficient causality by a condition, or state, of desire'. Although what a person wants is of course essential to an understanding of intentional action, 'wanting' is not to be reduced to mental causes. For Anscombe, this is a fact of what she refers to as the 'phenomenology of intention'.

Generally speaking, it is an important feature of Anscombe's view of intentional action that a reason for acting is not taken to be something that 'goes on in the mind' of the agent. Reasons don't explain the way causes do, be they 'normal' or mental causes. The explanation of intentional action is not a matter of beliefs and desires construed as mental causes. This is also seen in Anscombe's remark about her characterisation of the practical syllogism:

It has an absurd appearance when practical reasonings, and particularly when the particular units called practical syllogisms by modern commentators, are set out in full. . . . if Aristotle's account were supposed to describe actual mental processes, it would in general be quite absurd.⁴²

A 'unit', an individual practical syllogism, could be taken as a reason and an act, where the reason for acting is a belief and a desire (corresponding to the premises) and the act being

something done (corresponding to the 'conclusion'). Thus Anscombe wants to distance her view of 'reasons for acting' from 'mental processes'. This is a recurring theme throughout *Intention* and one that arises in different contexts. Through investigating expressions of intention, an expression of intention (which could function as a reported reason for acting) is seen not to be a description of 'something internal/psychological' that is expressed, but rather as a 'description of something future'. In her discussion of what is involved in individuating an intentional action, Anscombe confesses that her criterion of intention is in a sense a 'criterion by thoughts'. But this is not to say that stating the intention in providing a reason for acting is to report 'a thought', the intention as an inner process or real mental event. Rather the intention characterising a bodily movement as intentional is analysed in terms of an 'external answer' to a question 'Why?' that is subject to a 'sort of control of truthfulness'; as opposed to introspective verification. Anscombe wants in particular to avoid construing a report of a 'reason for acting' in terms of a report of a conscious experience, or in terms of a conscious thought or felt desire i.e. in terms of mental causality. For Anscombe, the 'reason' is not a statement of something the person has consciously experienced, or 'recognised going on in his mind' that leads up to and 'causes' the action by means of some sort of psychic push.

Keeping this in mind helps explain how an intentional action caused by a conscious desire (a mental cause) can be explained by mentioning the desire, but that the action *qua* 'intentional' is left untouched. Although a stated intention can be recast as 'I had the desire to *X*, with the belief *Y*', the reason and the stated mental causes (the belief and the desire) run parallel so to speak to the reason: mental cause and reasons are not reducible to one another. As Anscombe has said, the 'Why?' of intentional action had not that sense if the answer states a cause, including a mental cause.

The distinction between reasons and mental causes can also be seen from a slightly different point of view. As Anscombe uses it, 'reason' fits behaviour belying thought and deliberation, while 'mental cause' fits with bodily movements that suggest mere reactions to

conditions. For one is 'made' to do involuntary actions, while one executes intentional actions 'in order to' achieve some end. This is borne out in the initial contrast between jumping back from the sight (mental event) of a crocodile (a mentally causes involuntary action) and acting out of (the reason of) revenge (an intentional action that would likely not be mentally caused). The former is more like an instantaneous reaction (like the flame spurting when the match is struck), while the latter suggest forethought, planning, commitment etc. Reasons and mental causes are at opposite ends of the scale so to speak, the former applying to 'full blown' intentional actions, the latter more usually related with 'full blown' involuntary actions_{mc}.

But while reasons and mental causes are distinct, they are not sharply distinct. For as just mentioned, the criteria for an actions' being 'made to happen' and it being done 'in order to achieve some end' are not themselves clearly distinct:

Roughly speaking – if one were forced to go on with the distinction [between involuntary_{mc} and intentional action] – the more the action is described as a mere response, the more inclined one would be to the word 'cause'; while the more it is described as a response to something as *having a significance* that is dwelt on by the agent in his account, or as a response surrounded with thoughts and questions, the more inclined one would be to use the word 'reason'. But in very many cases the distinction would have no point.⁴³

An example of an action where the distinction between a mental cause and a reason has no point is 'having hung one's hat on a peg because one's host said 'Hang up your hat on that peg'. The action is response-like and yet 'Why?' applies to it. That is, it seems to be done for a reason, and yet it is also on this occasion something the person was 'made to do' by a mental cause, in this case the *hearing* of an order. Given that the action is response-like and

at the same time reason-like, it can be said to *be both* mentally caused and done for a reason; the distinction is obscured but not undermined.

Anscombe's 'phenomenology of intention' could be summed up with an example. Sometimes intentional actions are also subject to mental causes. If I were talking to someone and I *hear* the door creak shut in the breeze, I might suddenly run to prevent it from closing. Such an intentional action is both 'response-like' and reason-driven; it was mentally caused in so far as I was 'made' to do it but also done "for a good reason". If the question 'Why did you do that?' were asked, I might, in giving my reason, mention the mental causes: 'Well I heard the door creak, I had a thought of being shut out and a feeling of fear, and then I bolted toward the door'. However this is an intentional action and not an involuntary action_{mc} because the question 'Why?' and answering it by giving a *reason* would clearly apply to it. However 'Why?' would not be satisfied by merely mentioning these mental causes as brute causes (i.e. without exhibiting them as the core of my reason for action). Mention of mental causes only states antecedent psychological events that led up to the action. The action is mentally caused, but by itself this does not bear on a statement of the reason for acting. The sense in which the action was intentional rests on the provision of a *reason for acting* and so might be explained as 'I ran over in order to prevent myself from being locked out.' This gives a reason for acting; in this case it states the intention with which the action was executed. Of course many intentional actions do not involve mental causes. For example, I might have been talking to the same person while forming an intention to close the door in case the wind were to blow it shut. I excuse myself and calmly walk to the door with a door-jam in my hand which I put in place to hold the door open. If asked why I walked to the door, I would give a reason for acting: 'To put a jam in the door'. But if asked about the appearance in my stream of consciousness of expressions of beliefs, desires, feelings, images etc. I might easily reply 'There were no such events that I can recall, but I know why I did it all the same'. Although intentional actions are often not mentally caused, there is still a reason for acting, which is revealed in the appropriate response to the question 'Why?'

On the other hand, mental causes always apply to involuntary actions_{mc}. If I were in a room on my own at night and the door creaked I might jump up with a fright. This would be an involuntary action_{mc}. It is response-like; I was 'made' to jump back by the mental causes of *hearing* the creaking sound, and then perhaps *thinking* of a burglar. All cases of involuntary actions_{mc} are explained by reference to actual mental events in this sense, while obviously 'reasons for acting' have no place in such explanations.

Such examples show that there are effectively three types of cases to keep in mind when considering the role mental causality plays in intentional action for Anscombe. (a) Full blown cases of intentional action that are not mentally caused, for example placing the stop beneath the door to prevent it from closing in the breeze. (b) Cases where the intentional action is also mentally caused, such as running toward the door out of a strong *feeling* of desire caused by the sudden *realisation* that it might close in the wind. (c) Borderline cases where the distinction between a mental cause and a reason coincide so that the important distinction is obscured. The behavioural/linguistic contexts Anscombe appeals to in making distinctions between psychological concepts are sometimes insufficient for providing clear distinctions. This is revealed in Anscombe's suggestion that the more an action looks 'response-like', the more it is seen as involuntary. Some actions, such as being excited to march by hearing military music, cannot be clearly seen as 'deliberate' or alternatively as 'response-like', hence the distinction between reasons and mental causes is obscured. This reflects the heterogeneity of psychological concepts, as seen in the *Investigations*, and opposes essentialist tendencies to see intentional actions as clearly defined natural phenomena that are always subject to a specific causal history. That for Anscombe mental causality actually plays only an inessential and accidental role intentional actions is underlined by Anscombe's referral to it as being of 'very little' importance and 'not of importance in itself'.

6. The characterisation of intentional action and its role in *Intention*.

It might seem that these opening sections are unimportant to an understanding of *Intention* because all they do is provide a rather involved but necessary demarcation of intentional action prior to the real analysis in subsequent sections. However this would be a mistake, as the way Anscombe characterises intentional action is a useful insight into the general account she is to give in *Intention*. Perhaps the chief point of interest is that intentional action as such is seen to be subject neither to ordinary 'physical' causes nor to mental causes. This serves to automatically oppose Anscombe's account to causal theories of action, reductionism and mentalism.

Anscombe's anti-reductionism is in full view in *The Causation of Action*, where it is stated more explicitly than in *Intention*:

When we consider 'the causation of action' we need to decide which sort of enquiry we are engaged in. Is it the physiological investigation of voluntary movement? I.e. do we want to know how the human mechanism works when, at a signal, the hand pushes a pen, or perhaps a door shut? It is an enormously interesting enquiry. But that will not be our enquiry into the causation of action where our interests are in the following sort of question: What led to Jones' shutting the door then? We ascertain that he shut the door in order to have a private conversation with N. What history of action, i.e. dealings of Jones and N with each other and with other people, of beliefs and wishes and decisions, led up to this action of shutting the door?⁴⁴

Obviously these remarks aim at showing the physiological account can not shed light on the nature of intentional action by giving an account in terms of mental causes – only an account of action in terms of beliefs, wishes etc. can. But this point is even more relevant to full blown intentional actions. Shutting the door in order to have a private conversation is a reason for acting that cannot, argues Anscombe, be analysed in terms of brain states and

muscle movements. Thus Anscombe's early insistence that intentional action is not characterised in terms of types of cause shows an early opposition to typical reductionist theories.

If 'mentalism' is a position that wants to examine action in terms of mental states and processes then this is also excluded by Anscombe's anti-causalist approach. For the intentionality of intentional action is not to be understood in terms of occurrent states such as desires. Intentional actions are *characterised* only by a specific range of answers, namely *reasons*, to the question, 'Why?' and *not* by any reference to causes as such. Thus Anscombe's Wittgensteinian account resists behaviourist, dualist, and materialist theoretical approaches, which, whether reductionist or not, typically characterise by reference to causes.

Finally it is worth noting that the opening characterisation of action, with its opposition to any characterisations of action, is reflected in the central features of the subsequent account given in *Intention*. This is seen most clearly in Anscombe's analysis of the knowledge and execution of action. Knowledge of action, or 'practical knowledge' does not involve knowledge of causally efficacious psychological processes. Nor does it necessarily involve reports of mental causes, such as occurrent consciously expressed beliefs and desires. For often we can state the reason for acting even though there were *no mental causes* giving rise to the action. Consequently knowledge of action is given in terms of a schematic that captures an 'externalist' account of wanting: the practical syllogism, the conclusions of which are regarded as actions rather than deduced facts acknowledged by the agent. Nor are actions characterised as the result of volitions that cause bodily movements. Following Wittgenstein, Anscombe does not want to distinguish 'willing' from the 'doing' of the action, as if the former were a separate psychological process. Anscombe's total distance from a causal picture of intentional action again underlies this analysis of executed action. Although none of these facets of *Intention* can be discussed at length at present, it is significant that the opening process of characterising intentional action is very suggestive of the subsequent features of intentionality that Anscombe's analysis uncovers.

III. ANSCOMBE'S NON-CAUSAL DEMARCATION OF INTENTIONAL ACTION AND ITS PROBLEMS.

1. Introduction.

As we have seen, having failed to shed much light on intention through her inquiry into expressions of intention, Anscombe shifts her focus to the more promising area of intentional action. She examines various aspects of intentional action and knowledge of action throughout the remainder of the inquiry, but she begins by mapping the conceptual terrain associated with intentional action, embarking on a complex strategy whereby the concept of intentional action itself is delineated and characterised. At the end of this phase of her analysis (roughly §4-§16) she concludes that the explanation of intentional action in terms of reasons is not a form of causal explanation. In what follows, I will explain how Anscombe distinguishes intentional action from other kinds of action (involuntary actions) and how she arrives at the view that reason explanation is not a form of causal explanation. Finally, I will isolate and critically discuss Anscombe's arguments for this latter position.

2. Anscombe's Wittgensteinian approach to intentional action.

Anscombe's methodological approach to the field of intentional action is generally Wittgensteinian. I have already discussed Anscombe's relation to Wittgenstein and his philosophy, but it is worth noting certain specific Wittgensteinian aspects of her approach to action because they are so central to her analysis of action.

An orthodox approach may try to mark out the concept "intentional action" by treating it as a kind of phenomenon that can be somehow observed by looking "inward" into the mind or "outward" into physiology or bodily states. However, Anscombe adopts a more theory neutral stance and examines the *language* used to talk about action and the explanation of action. In particular, she avoids the assumption that intention is a mental phenomenon that goes on "behind" intentional action. She claims that "if you want to say at

least some true things about a man's intentions, you will have a strong chance of success if you mention what he actually did or was doing".⁴⁵ In other words, the very first thing Anscombe wants to consider is what "physically takes place, i.e., what a man actually does" as opposed to what is going on "in the mind". I view this as broadly Wittgensteinian because it favours the scrutiny of language and behaviour as opposed to private mental phenomena accessed by introspection.

Having put in brackets the realm of the private or inner in her analysis of intentional action, Anscombe is thus left with the task of making grammatical distinctions between the various terms we use in our talk about action, the central one being the distinction between intentional and involuntary actions. She focuses on questions and answers. Intentional actions are those that are explained by giving reasons in response to the question "Why did you do that?" As we shall see, Anscombe challenges the claim, defended by those supporting a causal view of intentional action, that when a person states a reason in response to this question they are giving a type of causal explanation.

3. The role of mental causation and non-observational knowledge.

Anscombe chooses as her basic task the problem of trying to provide a non-question-begging "definition" of two types of involuntary action, which I will characterise as involuntary action_{pc} (actions explained by physical causes) and involuntary action_{mc} (actions explained by mental or psychological causes). Her strategy is to provide "stand-alone" characterisations of these two forms of involuntary action, such that they can be isolated without the support of terms such as "involuntary", "impulsive", "accidental" and so on. In doing so, she will have effectively (negatively) defined intentional action as the class of actions that are *not* involuntary, something she will be able to say if she has established an independent notion of "involuntary". This may be a roundabout way of trying to distinguish between actions done for reasons and actions produced by causes, but Anscombe is faced with the difficult task of providing a rigorously non-circular account of the distinction. Having said this, Anscombe's main aim is clear: she wants to set two classes of actions

(intentional and involuntary) apart without using any concepts from either of those two classes to ground the distinction itself.

To do this, she introduces the concepts of knowledge without observation and mental causation. Because these relate to knowledge and causation respectively, their use to make out the distinction between involuntary and intentional action does not threaten to lead to circularity – they are “action-neutral” concepts, so to speak. Anscombe introduces non-observational knowledge as follows:

A man usually knows the position of his limbs without observation. It is without observation because nothing *shews* him the position of his limbs; it is not as if he were going by a tingle in his knee, which is the sign that it is bent and not straight. Where we can speak of separately describable sensations, having which is in some sense our criteria for saying something, then we can speak of observing that thing; but that is generally not so when we know the position of our limbs.⁴⁶

For Anscombe, we arrive at knowledge about the position of our limbs without the help of any recognisable signal of any kind. For example, I may know that my left foot is crossed over my right foot. However, although there may or may not be certain pressure sensations on the point of contact between my two feet, these sensations are not signals by which I know that my feet are crossed. This is because, usually, these sensations are not separable or recognisable over and above the context in which the limb-movements occur. As Anscombe notes, “If you speak of ‘that sensation which one has in reflex kicking, when one’s knee is tapped’, this is not like e.g. ‘the sensation of going down in a lift’”. We can imagine the sensation in the stomach associated with going down in a lift – this is a separable sensation, which, if it were artificially stimulated, could be recognised by the agent regardless of the context of its occurrence. Such a feeling would indicate that one was moving downward quickly; it would act as a sign by which one arrives at knowledge. However, one does not say “I know my bodily position because I have that feeling you get when one leg is slightly

bent and the other is completely straight". In relation to the non-observational knowledge of the position of our limbs Anscombe's view parallels the kind of remarks Wittgenstein makes about kinaesthetic sensation:

I let my index finger make an easy pendulum movement of small amplitude. I either hardly feel it, or don't feel it at all. Perhaps a little in the tip of the finger, as a slight tension. (Not at all in the joint). And this sensation advises me of the movement? – for I can describe the movement exactly.

"But after all, you must feel it, otherwise you wouldn't know (without looking) how your finger was moving." But "knowing" only means: being able to describe it.⁴⁷

For Anscombe, non-observational knowledge is a different kind of knowledge to the knowledge we arrive at in our daily activities in the world. Our knowledge of the world proceeds by observation – we find out things by using our senses. However, non-observational knowledge is a special kind of knowledge that does not involve looking or checking in any way. Empiricists, such as Hume, were inclined to conceive of this strange knowledge we have of ourselves along the same lines as the knowledge we have of the world. Thus, they supposed, along with Descartes, that the mind contains ideas and perceptions that could be observed by introspection. Anscombe eschews this appeal to the inner. She agrees that knowledge of our own minds is different to our knowledge of the world, but she rejects any framework that tries to understand it in terms of (inner) observation.

Non-observational knowledge is relevant to this part of Anscombe's analysis because it applies both to intentional and to certain involuntary actions. For example, if I were asked what I am doing I might respond, without observation, that I am going to the shops. I do not stop to check what I am doing: I know "straight off", so to speak. Similarly, I know without observation that my hand has recoiled from a hot stove without my intending it or that my eyelid is twitching involuntarily.

Mental causation is, for Anscombe, also a special kind of agent awareness that does not involve observation. Anscombe describes mental causation as follows:

A 'mental cause', of course need not be a mental event, i.e. a thought or feeling or image; it might be a knock on the door. But if it is not a mental event, it must be something perceived by the person affected – e.g. the knock on the door must be heard – so if in this sense anyone wishes to say it is always a mental event, I have no objection. A mental cause is what someone would describe if he were asked the specific question: what produced this action or thought or feeling on your part: what did you see or hear or feel, or what ideas or images cropped up in your mind, and led up to it?⁴⁸

The thing a person mentions in explaining what led up to or gave rise to their action (be it involuntary_{mc} or intentional action) may be *known without observation*. For example, I may know without observation that it was a barking dog that led to my jumping back in fright. Of course, I must observe the dog is before me by using my senses. However I do not make any observations or conduct any inquiries in order to arrive at the conclusion that the barking dog *caused* me to jump. I know that the barking dog caused me to jump “straight off” or without observation. Furthermore, for Anscombe, a mental cause is what a person mentions when explaining what led up to, produced or gave rise to an action. A mental cause can be either an internal or external event. I can say “A feeling of hope made me go for a walk this morning” or “The image of the sun setting led to my going home”. However, the thing mentioned, be it “inner” or “outer”, must be *perceived* by the agent – that is what brings it into the arena of agent awareness. In particular, a mental cause is qualifies it as the kind of thing the agent knows (without observation) what it was that led to his bodily movement. However, the key factor in mental causation is that the thing mentioned, whatever it may be, is known to be *a cause* without having to observe that this is so.

Anscombe emphasises that the use of the word cause here is not meant to suggest anything like a Humean cause – the kind of cause that is seen to exhibit a constant

conjunction with its effect and which may even be seen as that which transfers a kind of force into its effect. Again, as with non-observational knowledge, she accepts the intuition that there are psychological causes, but she rejects any attempts to characterise it along the lines of ordinary causation in the world. A mental cause and its effect are not to be seen as similar to cause-effect relations between e.g. a billiard balls giving rise to the motion of another after contact. For Anscombe, this notion of a mental cause giving rise to a bodily movement by “a kind of pushing in another medium” is completely obscure.⁴⁹

Anscombe makes some remarks that shed light on this aspect of mental causation in her paper “Will and Emotion”, where, in relation to a state of fear causing one to act, she states that “the effect is a voluntary action taking place no doubt at a definite time; the cause, a state which lacks a central core . . . is by no means necessary”.⁵⁰ As a mental cause, fear is a factor that we mention in explaining our actions sometimes. However, it is not like heat for example, which, when applied to water always makes the water evaporate such that one would be tempted to say that the causal connection between heat and evaporating water is necessary.

Like non-observational knowledge, mental causation also applies both to certain intentional actions and to certain involuntary actions. A feeling of fear might cause me to deliberately climb a tree or it might cause me to jump back involuntarily. I know without observation that in each case, say, the sudden appearance of a bear was what caused me to act or react this way. Thus, mental causation can apply to both intentional and involuntary action.

4. Reasons and causes: Anscombe’s distinction between intentional and involuntary action.

Anscombe uses mental causation and non-observational knowledge to mark off a certain class of involuntary actions from intentional actions. As mentioned above, I call this class involuntary actions_{pc} (where “pc” stands for physical cause) because it is the class of involuntary movements that are characterised in purely physical terms and which are

explained by physical causes. As an example of this type of involuntary action, Anscombe suggests the “odd sort of jerk or jump that one’s whole body sometimes gives when one is falling asleep”. This is an involuntary action that is known without observation because we can say straight off that it happened to us. However, the cause of this involuntary action is something that we cannot ascertain without consulting a book or by conducting certain experiments. In other words, we only know the cause of such an involuntary action by observation. Hence involuntary actions_{pc} are known without observation but their causes are not. However, *intentional* actions, which are also known without observation, *are* subject to mental causation. To use Anscombe’s example, I may know without observation that I am deliberately marching up and down but also know without observation that I am being caused or excited into doing this by the military music in the background. For Anscombe, it is just a fact that intentional actions can sometimes be explained by mental causes, even though mental-cause explanations do not capture their intentional nature. Anscombe has thus distinguished this class of involuntary actions (involuntary actions_{pc}) from intentional actions in a non-circular way. Adopting a purely phenomenological viewpoint, one can imagine oneself experiencing two types of bodily movements – one a nervous shudder in bed, the other turning to switch off the bedside lamp. The former is explained by physical causes, the latter by giving reasons. However, the movements themselves are the same kind of thing – bodily movements – and so there is not much in them to appeal to in order to distinguish between them. Nor can Anscombe simply apply “deliberate” or “purposeful” to one and “reactionary” or “unintentional” to another without going around in circles. However, the background psychological concepts of mental causation and non-observational knowledge can be used to make out the distinction because only non-observational knowledge applies to involuntary action_{pc} while *both* non-observational knowledge and mental causation apply to intentional action.

Anscombe then turns to make out the distinction between intentional action and involuntary action_{mc}. Involuntary actions_{mc} are involuntary actions the causes of which are known without observation. Anscombe gives as an example of involuntary action_{mc} jumping

back in fright from a face at the window. These are more sophisticated involuntary actions than the nervous shudder one gets before falling asleep (involuntary actions_{pc}) because they fall within the arena of mental causation: as with intentional actions, we explain these involuntary using psychological concepts. This means that Anscombe is now faced with a problem because the special concepts of mental causation and non-observational knowledge are not sufficient to make out this latest distinction. *Both* intentional action and involuntary actions_{mc} are subject to mental causation and non-observational knowledge. Anscombe must therefore come up with *further* criteria to mark off involuntary actions_{mc} from intentional actions. Her problem can be clarified by the use of an example. If I jump backward in order to follow the rules of a game I am executing an intentional action. However, if I jump backward because of a loud noise I am subject to an involuntary action_{mc} because I know the cause without observation and the action is not intentional. What we have to distinguish between then are two bodily movements that are both explained in terms of concepts such as beliefs, feelings, desires, etc. Anscombe has run out of special technical concepts here and so it would seem that her attempts to mark off “involuntary” from “intentional” must come to a halt. In order to get around this problem she uses several strategies, which can be briefly listed as follows. Firstly, she tries to show that two key types of reason – motive and intention – cannot be mental causes. Secondly, she attempts to make out the distinction by appeal to differences in the bodily movements themselves by noting that involuntary actions are more response-like than intentional actions. Thirdly, she proposes that the ideas of good and harm are linked to intentional action but not involuntary action. She does not elaborate much on the last of these, so I will briefly discuss the first two.

Anscombe appeals to motives and intentions at this stage in order to emphasise that, although mental causes apply to both of these types of bodily movements (intentional and involuntary_{mc}), only intentions and motives apply to intentional actions. In particular, intentions and motives are *distinct* from mental causes and so a difference does apply to the two types of bodily movements after all. Anscombe’s argument for the claim that intentions should be distinguished from mental causes is that mental-cause explanations for intentional

explanations are rarely requested and also that it is not in all cases that an actual mental cause is perceived in cases of intentional action anyway: when asked to explain a deliberate action in terms of mental causes one might “shrug or say ‘I don’t know that there was any definite history of the kind you mean’, or ‘It merely occurred to me . . .’”.⁵¹ Anscombe distinguishes motives from mental causes by noting that we may question someone’s motive behind an action by bringing to light certain mental causes associated with it. For example, a person may say that they helped a person out of kindness but reconsider this on recalling that they had a nasty thought about the person at the time of acting. For Anscombe, a motive puts an action in a certain light; it interprets an action, whereas a mental cause is what we say led up to an action or made it occur.

Finally, Anscombe further points out that “the more the action is described as a mere response, the more inclined one would be to use the word ‘cause’; while the more it is described as a response to something as *having a significance* that is dwelt on by the agent in his account, or as a response surrounded with thoughts and questions, the more inclined one would be to use the word ‘reason’”.⁵²

Although Anscombe does not recognise a clear-cut distinction between reasons and causes, she does strongly distinguish between them nonetheless. For Anscombe, to explain an action by giving a reason is not to explain it in terms of a cause. She stipulates that to state evidence is not to give a reason and, as I have shown above, she puts distance between mental causes and reasons too. Mental causes may apply to intentional actions but they are not the same as reason explanations. This position is summed up in her remark that an action is not intentional if the answer explaining it “is evidence or states a cause, including a mental cause”.⁵³ So Anscombe’s complex opening discussion arrives at the conclusion that intentional action is not to be explained causally; that reason explanation is not a form of causal explanation.

5. Problems with Anscombe's account and how she might respond to "causalist" criticisms.

To some extent, Anscombe's account here is unnecessarily elaborate. After a sophisticated inquiry into the conceptual distinctions between "intentional" and "involuntary", it quickly introduces the ideas of "good" and "harm" to characterise intentional action. One feels that Anscombe could have made this move earlier, thereby distinguishing intentional actions as "normative" in nature at the outset. A similar point applies to her attempt to make out the distinction in terms of what might be called degree of "responsiveness" – intentional actions are less response-like than involuntary actions. Arriving at this rather obvious and simple way of distinguishing between "involuntary" and "intentional" puts a question mark over the utility of the preceding convoluted attempts to distinguish intentional actions from involuntary actions_{pc} and involuntary actions_{mc}. Moreover, the fact that in the end mental causation and non-observational knowledge turn out to be insufficient to the task of marking off intentional actions as a special class suggests that this elaborate way of going about the task may have been unnecessary.

In response to this, one could say that Anscombe is to be commended for being analytically rigorous – she tries to make no assumptions (Cartesian or otherwise) at the outset and so is faced with the task of building up her model from first principles. That is, she has to begin by making non-circular conceptual distinctions in order to proceed with her analysis. And it would seem that she *does* arrive at a non-question begging distinction between intentional actions and involuntary actions_{pc}. Having said this, the causalist will still be inclined to object that she has by-passed the very point at issue because she restricts her account to making mere conceptual distinctions arrived at by observing what goes on at the level of conscious awareness. Specifically, one could object that Anscombe is guilty of a non sequitur here: she argues that reasons are not *mental* causes and proceeds to the conclusion that reasons are not causes *in general*. Moreover, one could object that Anscombe is not justified in claiming that reason explanation is not causal explanation because she has only

distinguished reasons from a specific class of causes (mental causes) rather than from causes in general.

It must be admitted that Anscombe does not really give specific arguments in defence of the view that reason explanation is not causal explanation. Rather, she offers more of a linguistic/phenomenological *description* of two types of bodily movements (intentional and involuntary) and observes that there are certain distinctions in the way we use concepts to explain them, such as mental causes (beliefs, thoughts, feelings, etc.), and reasons (motives, intentions, etc.). Having said this, she still wants to claim that reason explanation is not causal explanation. For Anscombe, an action is not intentional if it is explained in terms of a cause, be it mental or "physical". The basic problem with this approach, from the point of view of a causalist, is that it is *merely* descriptive and phenomenological. There is nothing in Anscombe's account, which is limited to what is consciously experienced in action, that precludes the possibility of an intentional action's being caused by a mental or physical state that lies below the threshold of awareness. Anscombe shows that there is a linguistic/experienced distinction between mental causes and reasons, but this is surely insufficient to justify the claim that intentional action is non-causal *in general*. The causalist can still insist that reason explanation is a form of causal explanation but that reasons are the types of causes that cannot be elucidated at the level of day-to-day awareness of our actions.

Daniel Dennett sums up this type of objection on behalf of the causalist nicely in *Content and Consciousness*, where he states that an analysis such as Anscombe's still leaves room for "*covert*, internal events serving as the conditions of ascription [for intentional action]" and that it "says nothing about the possibility in principle of producing a scientific reduction of intentional expressions to extensional expressions about internal states".⁵⁴ This type of objection basically suggests that Anscombe is guilty of a non sequitur: she makes certain (phenomenological) claims that distinguish mental causes from reasons but then goes on to say that in general reason explanation is not causal explanation. However, for Dennett, this overlooks the possibility that there might be another type of cause beside mental causes

triggering intentional actions. It would seem that it is still possible that, even if reasons and mental causes should be kept separate, a reason may still be some other kind of cause. Given that Anscombe's account is typically an "anti-causal" one, it is important to examine how she might respond to this objection.

To some extent, such objections to Anscombe's treatment here are premature because she has not yet fully accounted for the nature of intentional action. It is only toward the very end of *Intention* that she arrives at a full analysis of the concept, which is then presented in more fully anti-causalist terminology. However, the causalist will respond that this completed analysis is just a more developed version of the same type of account, one that is still guilty of an underlying non sequitur, one that moves from specific talk about mental causes and reasons to the claim that reasons are not causes in general.

However, a general theme running through *Intention* that is evident in these early sections and that does offer some opposition to the causalist on this issue relates to the way Anscombe generally characterises folk psychological concepts, including reasons, as being related in a "non-Humean" or non-causal way to their objects. Anscombe acknowledges that mental causality is very "far from accommodating itself to Hume's explanations", so much so that a traditionalist "might insist that the word 'cause' was inappropriate".⁵⁵ To explain an action in terms of mental causes (which apply to intentional actions as well as to involuntary actions) is not to explain it by reference to something that is regularly conjoined with and externally related to its object. For example, I may give someone money out of a long standing intention to help out friends that are short on cash (the intention, in this case, caused me to act this way). However, for Anscombe, this intention is not the kind of thing that can be individuated independently of the action it explains. A traditional view of causal relation would recognise two independent entities interacting, but in this example the intention seems to be internally or logically related to the action it explains. It would not make sense to ask "How exactly did the intention produced this act of generosity", where, to use Anscombe's phrase, one has in mind a kind of "pushing in another medium" from intention to bodily movement. As already mentioned, this point is also made in "The Causation of Action",

where Anscombe states, in relation to the mental cause of fear, that “the effect is a voluntary action taking place no doubt at a definite time [but that] the cause, a state which lacks a central core . . . though sometimes possible, is by no means necessary”.⁵⁶ Anscombe then states that there “need be no answer to the question when one began to fear something, or when one stopped; though it may be certain that one did fear it at a certain given date, and that this had certain consequences, some of which can be called effects”.⁵⁷ To cite a mental cause is to cite an explanatory *factor* rather than a fixed, independently identifiable state or event. Given that the traditional view of a causal relation requires that its relata be externally related, Anscombe’s account legislates against the causalist here. This type of point is further made later on in *Intention* in Anscombe’s remarks about “wanting”, where she distinguishes it from distinct mental states such as feelings, desires, hopes and wishes.⁵⁸

At this stage, a causalist could still reply here that, once again, Anscombe fails to show that there may not still be certain causes producing intentional actions below the level of conscious awareness. On Davidson’s model, for example, reasons, mental causes and other folk-psychological terms can enter into normative relations, but, as token physical states they nonetheless enter into causal relations. So the same pattern is repeated: Anscombe’s phenomenological description of intentional action does not seem to be able to rule out the possibility that there are causes “beyond” this arena that do indeed causally generate intentional actions.

Having said this, it would seem that Anscombe still has yet a final stronger argument to put to the causalist, which occurs in her pivotal section 19 of *Intention*. I will discuss this argument in more detail in the next chapter, but it is worth mentioning in the current context. A causal theorist, as presently discussed, holds that when a person explains their action by giving a reason, they are giving a type of causal explanation. The argument in section 19 tries to show that it is impossible to generate descriptions of the required causal antecedent to a given action that would enable one to sensibly say that it produced that specific action. For example, consider a person raising a glass to their lips. For Anscombe, no amount of scrutiny of the person at the moment they raise the glass – in isolation from the context of his/her

raising the glass – could lead us to a description that hooks up with the intentional-action-description “raising a glass”. Descriptions of that person’s muscles, brain states, or other neurological states will not be capable of generating the conceptual content required to arrive at a description that could function as an explanatory antecedent to “raising a glass”.

I think this kind of argument is related to a broader issue concerning the nature of mental states in general. Anscombe could be referred to as an externalist or contextualist about mental events, including intentional actions. As the argument in section in §19 indicates, the required content of the antecedent causal description will always be inadequate because it will not be “relevant to the wider context and further consequences” of the action.⁵⁹ She also stresses this in “The Causation of Action”, where she states that “we cannot ascribe a belief [about, say] a bank’s opening hours, to someone not living in a world of banks and clocks. Indeed we are implicitly looking *away* from the individual and into his world if we ascribe *any* belief to him. This we don’t have to do for the ascription of a brain state”.⁶⁰ For Anscombe then, the very *meaning* of a certain intentional action description is context-dependent. It will not be enough, as far as Anscombe is concerned, for a causal theorist to say that the context of the bodily movement could be relevant while this movement is nonetheless characterised as the action it is by an internal bodily or mental state. This would be acceptable if the meaning of the action description could be traced to a context-independent state. To put it another way: it would make sense to talk of the cause of a bodily movement in its context but not to talk of the cause of a bodily-movement-in-its-context, where the latter is all “one piece” so to speak.

So it seems that Anscombe offers more than a non sequitur based on observations about mental causation in her challenge to the view that reason explanation is a form of causal explanation. The argument in §19 does not merely make ordinary experience-observations about mental causes and reasons. It provides more of a direct attack on the causalist by questioning the very possibility of generating context-independent explanatory descriptions for specific intentional actions. In this way, the argument functions as a source of validation to Anscombe’s opening approach: if action descriptions are intrinsically context dependent

(if they *meaning* is context-related), then their full analysis must go through at the ordinary level that Anscombe has proceeded on. Having said this, her position does appear to reach beyond the specific debate about reasons and causes and into questions about the nature of content ascription and mental events, which the causalist may find disagreeable. In any case, the argument in §19 is important to her case in *Intention* and so I will provide a more detailed exposition of it in the next section.

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CHAPTER 3: THE ONTOLOGY OF ACTION

I. THE ANTI-REDUCTIONIST ARGUMENT IN SECTION 19.

1. The concept of a 'meaning bearer' for 'intentional'.

Section 19 of *Intention* offers an important argument for a kind of externalism for intentions. That is, it directly confronts traditional philosophy of mind that favours a causal or 'mentalist' view of intentions which take intentions to be states 'inside' the person's head. The traditional accounts reduce the meaning of intentional action descriptions to an account in terms of internal states. The intention is seen as something observed by introspection, and so some sort of an image, thought or feeling. This inner state would play a causal role in bringing about the bodily movement associated with the intentional action. It was seen that 'anti-mentalism' was an underlying feature of Anscombe's analysis of expressions of intention too. The expression of intention does not describe any 'thing', rather it is something like Austin's performative utterance: its meaning resides in the fact that it is a form of linguistic behaviour (akin to making a commitment) rather than its being a description of an inner state. The same applies to Anscombe's demarcation of 'intentional'. For that was seen to resist in particular a causal account whereby actions are singled out in terms of special types of causes, be they mental events or episodes or actual neurological states. Intentional action is instead marked by a special restricted sense of 'Why?' in our language. Both the analysis of expressions of intention and intentional action favoured a 'contextual' picture. For example, the validity of an expression of intention was viewed in terms of sincerity rather than truth or falsity. The circumstances of utterance, surrounding expressions of intention and action descriptions were taken to ground the meaning and truthfulness (sincerity) of the expression as opposed to some designated internal state the expression is supposed to describe. Seeking an answer to 'Why?' for intentional actions is effectively appeal to a language user's intuition about certain purpose-revealing contextual criteria for intentional action: circumstances, bodily movements, facial expressions, and

gestures all contribute to our being able to say 'straight off' what a person seems to be doing. This route rejects appeal to mental 'internals' of any sort.

Unlike previous sections, section 19 is directly concerned with attacking this notion of an internal 'extra' as Anscombe calls it, preceding and giving rise to intentional action. The point is to attack the view that intentions are internal causal states of any kind. The argument can't be easily summarised so, for the purposes of clarity, I will have to state it more or less in full:

We do not add anything attaching to the action at the time it is done by describing it as intentional. To call it intentional is to assign it to the class of intentional actions and so to indicate that we should consider the question 'Why?' relevant to it in the sense that I have described. . . .

That an action is not called 'intentional' in virtue of any extra feature which exists when it is performed, is clear from the following: Let us suppose that there is such a feature, and let us call it '*I*'. Now the intentional character of the action cannot be asserted without giving the description under which it is intentional, since the same action can be intentional under one description and unintentional under another. It is however something actually done that is intentional, if there is an intentional action at all. A man no doubt contracts certain muscles in picking up a hammer; but it would generally be false to call his contraction of muscles the intentional act that he performed. This does not mean that his contraction of muscles was unintentional. Let us call it 'preintentional'. Are we to say that [what is labelled by the symbol] *I*, which is supposed to be the feature in virtue of which what he does is an intentional action, is something which accompanies a preintentional action, or movement of his body? If so, then the preintentional movement + *I* guarantees that *an* intentional action is performed: but which one? Clearly our symbol '*I*' must be interpreted as a description, or as having an internal relation to a description, of an action. But nothing about the man considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles, and nothing in the contraction of the muscles, can possibly determine the content of that description.¹

'*T*' can stand for any internal mental event, such as a feeling or an experience – something that would typically be thought to count as an 'intention'. The orthodox picture of describing an intentional action is that when we see a person moving say her hand, and describe the movement as intentional, we take it that this 'intentional' quality of the movement is a natural property, an 'extra' that accompanies the ensuing movements themselves. For example, if I see someone holds out their hand and drops a ball over a cliff, I would describe this as an intentional action. The intention might be to see how high it bounces, or to get rid of it, or to merely enjoy the path of its flight to the rocks below. This would be different to a similar situation where a person was holding the ball over the cliff to tease the owner but it then slips accidentally from their hand. I would describe this situation as an involuntary action, something the person didn't mean to do. A traditional way of distinguishing these two actions, 'intentionally dropping' and 'accidentally dropping' is by appeal to the 'state of mind' of the person in each case. It is difficult to resist defending the view that, when the person deliberately dropped the ball over the cliff, they were experiencing a special 'intentional' state of mind. Perhaps they had a certain mental image of the ball falling, or a strong desire for it to be lost on the rocks below that was absent when it fell accidentally. Hence the internal 'extra' that Anscombe wants to attack. To appeal to an 'extra' is to assign intentional action to a natural class that could be understood by psychological investigation or by physiological or neurological inquiries. When someone moves their body with intent, the brain or mind could be examined, perhaps, to try and see what was happening 'in the mind' at the same time. Then some light could be shed on the nature of 'intentions', the psychological 'extras' behind intentional action. Anscombe aims to show that this picture of intentional action, with its appeal to mental 'extras', leads to absurdity and must be abandoned.

2 An argument against causal and reductionist theories of intentional action.

The argument in section 19 basically trades on there being an unbridgeable gap between two types of description: action descriptions on the one hand and certain types of

mental and physical descriptions on the other. Whenever I offer neurological descriptions or descriptions of psychological 'internals', I am not putting forward an action description. Thus, for example, to describe a person as 'Purchasing dollars' is a completely separate type of description to 'C-fibre 345 and 647 are firing', or 'Micro muscle movements in the right shoulder and hand are occurring'. The same applies to descriptions of psychological states. The description 'Purchasing dollars' is a different type of description to 'A mental image of exchange rates has just occurred in the person's mind', or 'The thought of a hot day in New York has just occurred'. Such extra elements, be they psychological, neurological or physiological, fail to 'hook up' with or are 'incommensurable' with action descriptions. The general point is that to look in these psychological and physical areas for the nature of action is to look in the wrong place, because the meaning of such-and-such an action description operates at the higher level of the language game. But this only roughly indicates the nature of the argument. The actual argument requires more explaining.

Anscombe begins by introducing the notion of an *action description*. The same bodily movement can be 'intentional under one description and unintentional under another'. If I throw a box of photographs into a bonfire, the action could conceivably be intentional under a number of descriptions: 'Destroying memories', 'Getting rid of rubbish', 'Vengefully hurting someone's feelings', 'Fuelling the fire' etc. But usually only one of the descriptions would correctly describe the intentional action I am performing. What decides the correct action description is the fact that 'to say that a man knows he is doing X, is to give a description of what he is doing *under which* he knows it.' Of course this special form of agent knowledge is not knowledge of a psychological process for Anscombe; it is non-observational knowledge, not knowledge of any observed thing. But the point is that intentional actions are intentional *under a description* that the agent can state if queried, a description which characterises the action *as* intentional. It would not make sense to say 'He's trying to fuel the fire but he doesn't know it', without appeal to some theory of unconscious action. It is the agent's knowledge of what he is doing that fixes the intentional action; knowledge revealed in the description he states when queried.

Having introduced the 'extra', '*T*', and the notion of action descriptions, Anscombe makes the following claim:

Clearly our symbol '*T*' must be interpreted as a description, or as having an internal relation to a description, of an action. But nothing about the man considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles, and nothing in the contraction of the muscles, can possibly determine the content of that description; which therefore may be *any* one, if we are considering what can be determined about the man by himself in the moment.²

To take an example of an action: I might climb a cliff in order to stay healthy. If a Cartesian or a physicalist is asked to say what I am doing on the cliff, they will have to be able to come up with the description 'Climbing to stay healthy'. But they can only do so by examination of their respective forms of '*T*', an extra feature. Since they are naturalistically inclined, they will consider the man 'by himself in the moment' – they are committed to examining a specific internal state or process of the person. The description under which the action is intentional is 'Climbing to stay healthy'. But a physiologist, for example, will be unable to generate this description because he will be limited to investigating certain micro-muscle movements (or pre-intentional movements as Anscombe calls them), chemical processes and even larger movements of muscles and bones. But no amount of this type of investigation will enable him to link his proposed '*T*', a muscle movement, say, to the description 'Climbing to stay healthy'. The same would apply to a neurological inquiry; neurological states cannot generate concepts like 'climbing'. Nor could any introspective investigation 'into the inner mind' achieve this action description. For all that would be found there would be reports of certain experiences, images, feelings, thoughts etc. A Cartesian might reply 'On the contrary, I could easily introspect the full description in the form of a thought, 'I am climbing to stay healthy', which I can observe and report'. Anscombe has repeatedly stressed that intentional actions are often executed in the absence of any occurrent thought such as "I am climbing to stay healthy", even though that is the description under which the action is

intentional. Introspection may reveal no thoughts at all, or thoughts completely unrelated to the reason for acting, such as 'These books are too tight' or I hope I remembered to bring my lunch'. Moreover, for Anscombe, the mental state or extra here, '*T*', would have to be an actual property of the human being considered in isolation from the surroundings and circumstances of that human being, in the same way that solidity is a property of wood for example; a natural property. Then the introspected thought 'Climbing to stay healthy', would have to be something the meaning of which has no reference to anything that is not to be found in 'the man by himself', to anything outside the person. But, for Anscombe, the concept 'climbing' can only be understood *by* reference to what is outside the person – the movements of the limbs on the rock, the cliff face, gestures of the person and so on. A remark from *Zettel* is relevant here:

What is voluntary is certain movements with their normal *surrounding* of intention, learning, trying, acting. Movements of which it makes sense to say that they are sometimes voluntary and sometimes involuntary are movements in a special surrounding.³

Similarly, Anscombe sees the meaning of 'intentional' to be a matter of the surroundings of the bodily movement. In *Philosophical Remarks* Vol. 2, Wittgenstein also makes a remark that would deter any Cartesian attempt to generate actions descriptions from a psychological '*T*':

. . . . it is obviously not a matter of having particular experiences while I utter the words. That is, it would be wrong to say: "In the process of uttering the word 'Bank' [in order to remind someone to go there] such and such a thing had to take place if it was really supposed to mean *that*."⁴

In using the term 'Bank', I do not do so via an internal guide, a unique type of experience that makes my intended utterance *that* utterance. In the present case, the meaning of 'climbing' could not be arrived at by introspecting 'mental states', that when the person says 'I am climbing' they know this by looking inward to an experience associated with the word 'climbing' that enables me to utter and mean that. The same applies to the action descriptions under which certain movements are called intentional. It is not as if they are associated with their bodily movements in virtue of some physical or psychological feature that could be scientifically investigated.

These thoughts are nicely grouped together in *The Causation of Action*, where Anscombe again considers the issue of whether or not intentional action descriptions can be reduced to physical or psychological theory descriptions. It is no use trying to reduce beliefs, desires or intentions to brains states:

It is no doubt a difficult and intractable problem, but it *is* mere naivete after all to think that [there are] . . . brain-states corresponding to beliefs and desires. . . . But let us suppose a way of producing one of these states artificially, i.e. outside the circumstance in which the causal conditions occur 'naturally.' And now, consider the inference that if such a state has been so produced the subject is then in a state of belief that, say, 'such-and-such a bank in -cester is open at 5.00 p.m. on Thursdays,' though neither -cester nor banks nor clocks nor days of the week ever came into his life before, nor did he ever hear of them.

Nor [can we appeal to] any other state of the person. Here we may be tempted to revert to the discarded position: [that a *mental* state rather than a physical state could act as the reductive ground for intentions]. . . . We take it that a state is supposed to be something holding of its subject here and now, or over a period of time at which it holds: in particular, without reference to the history of the thing whose state it is. . . . we cannot ascribe [for example] a belief . . . about the bank's opening hours, to someone not living in a world of banks and clocks. Indeed we are implicitly looking *away* from the individual and into his world if we ascribe *any* belief to him.⁵

This argument is very similar to that of section 19 in *Intention*. To say that intention could be ultimately reduced to certain states of a person is to reduce them to something in complete isolation from the context in which they are meaningful. If I say 'I intend to go to the Bank after lunch', it is inconceivable, argues Anscombe, that the concept of a belief about a bank could be generated by a neurological or psychological inquiry. For presumably then it could be 'made' to occur in someone's brain in a laboratory, even though they had never been in a bank etc. But there would be no guarantee that these rehearsed words would actually *mean* anything to the person into whose head we've inserted them. As a neurological, physical state, its identity conditions are completely satisfied by an examination of the person considered by themselves, as a body in isolation from its surroundings. But a belief, a desire or an action description cannot be understood apart from such surroundings. As Wittgenstein says in the *Investigations* in relation to intention, it is 'the whole history of the incident' that I am ashamed of in being ashamed of a past intention, for the intention lies '*also* in what I did'⁶ – my tone, the words, my stance, the setting, my movements, etc. Anscombe is elaborating on this when she argues that the content of an action description could not possibly be determined by any '*I*', for 'nothing about the man considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles' could determine a description such as for example 'Climbing the cliff face'.

Once this is accepted, there are absurd consequences that Anscombe wants to point out, calling for the abandonment of the traditional approach:

[If nothing about the man considered by himself at the time of acting can determine the content of the action description, then the description may] be *any one*, 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. What makes it *true* that the man's movement is one by which he performs such and such an action will have absolutely no bearing on the *I* that occurs,

unless we suppose a mechanism by which an *I* appropriate to the situation is able to occur because of the man's knowledge of the situation – he guesses e.g. that his muscular contractions will result in his grasping the hammer and so the right *I* occurs. But that cannot very well be, since a man may very likely not be so much as aware of his preintentional acts. Besides, we surely want *I* to have some effect on what happens. Does he then notice that *I* is followed often enough by its description's coming true, and so summon up *I*? But that turns the summoning up of *I* into an intentional action itself, for which we shall have to look for a second *I*. Thus 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.⁷

Having just defended the view that reference to *I* can't generate action descriptions, Anscombe argues that it must only be an 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.' A 'theoretical' approach has it that a preintentional movement + *I* guarantees an intentional action. *I* is the feature that is supposed to underlie the description under which it is called intentional, that makes it the action it is. But there is nothing about *I* that can actually do this, meaning that when an intentional action does occur, the *I* will merely 'tag along' so to speak along with the bodily movement. For example if the climber wants to get a little higher along the cliff face and 'climbs to a higher ledge', the *I* making it that action will only accidentally accompany it. It will be an internal state that has no significant relation to the wider context of the bodily movement in its surroundings. As a natural state, *I* is in a sense bland or neutral – it does not reach out to the real, external meaning-giving context in which the bodily movement occurs.

This means that 'what makes it *true* that the man's movement is one by which he performs . . . an action will have absolutely no bearing on the *I* that occurs', because what makes it true are these complex circumstances of movement. Suppose it was suggested that a strong feeling of a desire to grasp was the *I* that determined that an action be described as 'Grasping the hammer'. We have already seen that any *I*, be it a feeling or otherwise, can't

get 'connect up' to bodily movements *under which* such and such an action is the intentional action it is because there might, on most occasions, be *no* such occurrent conscious episode. It is a purely accidental accompaniment of the action. What makes it true that I am 'grasping the hammer' must therefore be something that exists independently of any desire, for example, my crouching down to grip it, the opening of my hand, my looking toward the hammer, my saying 'Here's the hammer', and so on. But this is totally unrelated to any separately individuated natural state inside my brain or 'mind'.

Anscombe remarks that the traditionalist would thus be forced to 'suppose a mechanism by which an *I* appropriate to the situation is able to occur because [I guess] e.g. that the muscular contractions result in [my] grasping the hammer and so the right *I* occurs.' If the special feature a traditional theorist is relying on to characterise an action has no active role to play in determining the description under which a bodily movement is called intentional, then some mechanism would have to be incorporated into the theory. Anscombe suggests that *I* might enter into proceedings on the back of the subject's knowledge of his muscle movements and the situation in which they occur. This remark is suggestive of a 'phenomenalist's eye view' of action, whereby a point of awareness observes what is happening to its body in certain circumstances and makes a prediction based on this data that, for example, a 'hammer grasping' movement is about to occur. This knowledge then somehow secures the necessary extra feature required to give the bodily movement its special 'intentional' nature. This is an obviously ridiculous scenario, but one which Anscombe is happy to depict since it seems a consequence of applying the rules for physical objects to the use of 'intention' in the first place, for suggesting *I* be the defining feature of an intentional action. But it is rejected anyway because in practice a person obviously does not have any awareness of his bodily movements. When I pick up a hammer I might be thinking about what I saw on television the night before rather than concentrating on my preintentional movements. We rarely, if ever, actually concentrate on our movements while going about doing the things we do in daily life.

Anscombe then considers one last alternative defence of the traditional view: 'Does he then notice that *I* is followed often enough by its description's coming true, and so summon up *I*?' If there is no 'natural' way for *I* to get a foothold, and no epistemic mechanism by which it enters into proceedings, then perhaps it is 'summoned up' by the agent. The idea of summoning up some mental state in order to guarantee that the bodily movement 'grasping the hammer' is identified as 'a hammer grasping action' is also absurd. It is difficult to see how it could be a natural consequence of any theory about action. But it does unfold from Anscombe's account of the traditional approach. For if this extra feature, *I*, cannot actively determine the appropriate action description, then some other drastic means of introducing it must be resorted to. Since *I* is a natural feature of the human considered in isolation from its surroundings, it does not in any way bear the mark of an action description. So the only remaining way Anscombe can imagine it playing an active role in determining the action as such-and-such an intentional action is if it is 'summoned up' by the agent. But the summoning up of an *I* would itself be an intentional action which would in turn need another *I* and so on *ad infinitum*. Hence the notion that there is a natural mental or physical feature in virtue of which an action is intentional seems highly implausible and must be set aside.

Anscombe's alternative has it that the 'only events to consider are intentional actions themselves, and to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it.' In other words we should not try to explain intentional action causally (or scientifically). Intentional action is not the kind of thing that can be theorised about in an attempt to see what it is and how it works. 'Intentional' is not a neurological or mysterious psychological property that can be perhaps one day explained by science. For it is a mistake to look for 'the fundamental description of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this'. When we think of 'intention' as a noun in conjunction with an Augustinian view of language, we tend to think its meaning must derive from some kind of psychological 'stuff' that the term designates. This tempts us to look into bodily movements in an attempt to try and find out what this special property is. But

Anscombe's constant reminder is that the meaning of 'intention', or any individual action description, cannot be reduced to such natural physical or mental properties. With such theoretical explanation excluded from the analysis of action, we can only meaningfully talk about bodily movements under descriptions. The bodily movement and the description are inseparable for intentional action – in giving action descriptions we can never consider the bodily movement in isolation from its circumstances. Once we talk about the bodily movement in isolation we are leaning toward physiological and neurological talk, which passes by intentional action. In considering bodily movements under a description, we remain at a level of description which necessarily incorporates their surroundings and circumstances; factors vital to the use of these terms in the language game and hence their meaning. For it is a mistake to say 'let us consider this action by itself, and let us try to find in the action, or in the man himself at the moment of acting, the characteristic which makes the action intentional.'⁸

3. Two accounts of how action descriptions are generated.

In this section, Anscombe presents one of her first direct arguments against the traditional approach to intention and action that is challenged in *Intention*. It follows her previous attempt to mark off intentional action as a class that is not subject to causal explanation, and as I interpret it, it is designed specifically as a challenge to the view that actions can be characterized as intentional by appeal to their causal histories.

The argument itself is quite dense, but it can generally be seen as an attempt to show that a broadly Wittgensteinian way of characterizing an action as intentional, which says that it is actually the doing itself and its context of occurrence and nothing more that forms the basis for the ascription of intentional content, is preferable to a "causal" way, where the latter appeals to the causes that led up to the bodily movement, as a means of identifying its intentional character. Anscombe's opening claim is that "the intentional character of the action cannot be asserted without giving the description under which it is intentional, since the same action can be intentional under one description and unintentional under another".

At the same time, she proposes that “it is however something that is actually done that is intentional, if there is an action at all”. So her focus is on bodily movements and the descriptions that we apply to them, and her specific goal is to show that when we offer a description of a doing – be it someone else’s or our own – this description should not be seen as getting “a grip” on this movement in virtue of its antecedent causes.

This latter traditional causal approach can be seen in Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*, where Hume stated that “when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper”.⁹ Here Hume is suggesting that deliberate actions are the kinds of doings that are produced by inner mental causes. On this view, the doings or “external” bodily movements are produced by antecedent movements in the mind. Such an account thus appeals to “extra” features at the time of occurrence of an observed bodily movement in order to characterise it as deliberate – in order to say the bodily movement was an intentional one it “adds” to it certain prior psychological causes. Similarly, William James proposed that specific acts are defined by “a mental conception made up of memory-images of [previous sensations of movement]”.¹⁰ Such a position also appeals to previously occurring mental episodes or states in order to pick out the current bodily movement as such-and-such an intentional action. Of course, this causal account may appeal to antecedent *physical* states too, as can be seen in Daniel Dennett’s suggestion that “an adequate physical basis [for intentional content may] be found among the internal states and events of the organism”.¹¹ What I am calling the causal approach to intentional action can thus be summed up as the view that intentional actions are bodily movements that are captured in terms of either physical or mental causes (although Anscombe’s anti-causal argument does not depend on whether the causal factors appeal to mental or physical elements, but the central element that a physicalist and mentalist conception of causation have in common). When Anscombe says that intentional actions are not called “intentional” in virtue of any “extra” feature that attaches to the doing at the time of its occurrence she means that the doing itself is not to be qualified by prior causal factors.

The alternative, Wittgensteinian, approach that Anscombe is defending in section 19 is the view that it is actually the doing itself and its context of occurrence and nothing more that forms the basis for the ascription of intentional content. Various remarks Wittgenstein made about the will reflect this general view:

“Willing, if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself. It cannot be allowed to stop anywhere short of the action.” If it is the action, then it is so in the ordinary sense of the word; so it is speaking, writing, walking, lifting a thing.¹²

In the sense in which I can ever bring anything about (such as stomach-ache through over eating), I can also bring about an act of willing. In this sense I bring about the act of willing to swim by jumping into the water.¹³

These remarks focus on the execution of intention, but they nonetheless show how Wittgenstein opposed the view that for bodily movements to be willed is for them to be brought about by antecedent psychological states or will-acts of the agent. Rather, a deliberate bodily movement is the act itself in its context of occurrence and not a bodily movement seen in the light of its causal precursors. Both Anscombe and the causalists observe the same proceedings – certain bodily movements that are described as intentional. However, the causalist goes beyond what is observed by interpreting it in terms of previous causes, be they mental or physical, where the latter are the “extras” Anscombe thinks should not be seen as grounding the ascription of intentional content.

The Wittgensteinian and causal approaches that Anscombe is dealing with here can be clarified by an example, say, of a person swinging an axe to chop a piece of wood. From Anscombe’s perspective the description “He is swinging an axe” is one that human beings ascribe in virtue of their noticing a certain form of events at the heart of which is a bodily movement. If the axe moved because of a gust of wind this form of description would not be used. “The wind knocked the axe over” *would* be a description that characterises the event in

terms of its antecedent causes. However, for Anscombe, the alternative form of description for human bodily movements involved in swinging an axe is of a different kind to that used for the movement of the axe by the wind. For Anscombe, it is an error to treat both forms of description in the same way. However the causalist, while he or she will accept that the same axe-swinging event in such-and-such a context is the subject, will still treat it as a description that is ultimately analysable in terms of antecedent causes, be they physical or mental in nature.

4. A defence of a Wittgenstein approach to action descriptions.

How does Anscombe proceed to strip away the causal extras in question to leave only the doing and its surrounding circumstances as the basis for the use of intentional descriptions? She depicts the human bodily movements involved in the action as certain muscle movements or “preintentional movements”.¹⁴ She then calls the extra (causal) feature *I* and proposes that, on the view she is criticising, the content of the intentional description will have to be generated somehow by combining the preintentional movements with *I*. In other words, on the causalist’s story, the description “He is swinging the axe” will have to be arrived at by adding certain extra mental or physical states to the preintentional movements involved in moving the axe.

Her core response to this scenario is that “nothing about the man, considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles, and nothing in the contraction of the muscles, can possibly determine the content of that description; which may therefore be *any* one, if we are merely considering what can be determined about the man by himself at the moment.”¹⁵ A causalist will want to say that, looking at a photograph of the man swinging the axe for example, “At this moment, C-fibre 6909” is bringing about the swinging of the axe” or “At this moment, his desire for warmth is bringing about the swinging of the axe”. What this causalist approach tends to do, according to Anscombe, is to isolate the man from the context of his activity – the axe, the log, and so on – in an attempt to pick out the specific thing that is causing this bodily movement and supposedly thereby making it a deliberate

one. Typically the causalist takes seriously the fact that there are likely to be two different brain states respectively for an “axe slipping” movement and an “axe swinging” movement and tries to say that it is this difference in brain states that makes the latter a description of an intentional action. However, Anscombe, while accepting this neurological difference, proposes that these neurological factors are irrelevant to describing the action *as* intentional. Put another way, her point is that the description “He is swinging the axe” is one that human beings can apply in virtue of what they observe the man doing and that the rules for the use of this form of language are limited to this particular setting. To then go beyond this frame of reference to look for what caused “the swinging of the axe” is an error. We can do this to look for what caused the *movement* of the axe be it by wind or muscle power, but not for what caused the swinging of the axe, where the latter notion gets its sense from the whole “scene” in which the bodily movement occurred.

So far, her argument may look like it is question-begging, but it could be reconstructed in the following form in order to show that she is not merely asserting but arguing for this position:

1. The action’s being intentional depends, among other things, on something external to the agent, viz. “context”.
2. Any candidate causes of the action appealed to by the causalist, be they mental or physical, are *not* external to the agent.
3. Any candidate causes are not what the action’s being intentional depends on.

(We may note that the first premise is a commitment that we may naturally call externalist, and that it is on the basis of this principle that the argument against causalism goes through.)

5. A reply from the causal theorist.

The causalist would be likely to reply that in principle we *can* generate the required content by consideration of, say, certain brain states. For example, as Dennett asks, “Could

there be a system of internal states or events, the extensional description of which could be upgraded into an Intentional description?"¹⁶ In other words, Dennett considers it possible that we can, ultimately, generate descriptions like "He is swinging the axe" from descriptions of certain physiological and/or neurological states. This is an appealing position – there does not seem to be anything in principle preventing scientists of the future from pinpointing certain neurological states and quickly arriving at the conclusion that, say, just before a person was shot he was swinging an axe. After all, it would seem that, as physical patterns that proceed or concurrently bring about doings, neurological states could function as inner blueprints for certain outer forms of behaviour. This would enable one to follow Dennett here, in an attempt to move from physical/neurological descriptions (Neural fibre 5601 is firing) to intentional descriptions (He is swinging the axe). Seen from this point of view, Anscombe's argument would appear to be question begging after all because it merely states, without justification, that nothing about the physical (or mental) state of the person can generate intentional descriptions.

It is difficult to evaluate this issue without getting immersed in the wide-ranging and complicated externalism/internalism dispute that has progressed since *Intention*. However, Anscombe does offer a defence of her position against one like Dennett's in "The Causation of Action":

Let us suppose a way of producing one of these brain states artificially, i.e. outside the circumstance in which the causal conditions occur 'naturally.' And now, consider the inference that if such a state has been so produced the subject is then in a state of belief that, say, 'such-and-such a bank in –cester is open at 5.00p.m. on Thursdays,' though neither –cester nor banks nor clocks nor days of the week ever came into his life before, nor did he ever hear of them . . . Indeed we are implicitly looking *away* from the individual and into his world if we ascribe *any* belief to him.¹⁷

This externalist argument, which is as close as Anscombe gets to defended a general commitment to externalism about the ascription of intentional content, can be applied to the above example of "He is swinging the axe". In ascribing the intention to swing the axe, for Anscombe, we are looking away from the individual and not into his brain, muscles, neurons or "mind". She suggests that if the causalist were right then we *could* produce the intention in the person even though the subject had never heard of axes or knew nothing of how to swing them. Presumably Anscombe thinks this seeming absurdity is permissible in the causalist's account because the latter appeals to a physical "arrangement" of neurons that could be re-produced artificially, regardless of the subject's prior experiences.

The causalist could insist, in response to Anscombe's argument, that this may sound absurd, but that it is plausible nonetheless. That is, the causalist could argue that although the subject would never have had experiences of axes or swinging them, he *would* have the intention to swing one if he were artificially stimulated in the right way. Furthermore, the intention to swing the axe may arguably be "accompanied" by the appropriate experiences so that the "whole" intention might be reproduced. The scientists would then be in a position to say that the subject, who is hooked up to certain wires and so on, actually intends to swing the axe.

Although this scenario does seem to have some plausibility, a final way of defending Anscombe against it could appeal to the fact that Anscombe's analysis is at least conducted in respect of the conditions in which our talk about actions arose. That is, her account resists the temptation to "go behind" linguistic usage and the conditions of intentional ascription by remaining within what might be called an "intersubjective" setting. Descriptions such as "swinging an axe" or "throwing a stone" could be said to have "emerged" in discourse under conditions that, as Anscombe says, look away from the individual and see bodily movements within their overall situation. From this point of view, one could argue in defence of Anscombe, it does at least appear wrong-headed to search for the causal conditions of "actions", where the latter are construed as the types of "things" that can be causally

produced. But still, all in all, what appears to be missing from Anscombe's argument is some general defence of externalism with regard to the ascription of intentional content.

II. THE 'CONCEPTUAL' NATURE OF 'INTENTIONAL'.

1. The argument for the 'conceptual' nature of 'intentional' in section 20.

Whereas section 1 remarked on our tendency to treat intention as an equivocal concept based on seeing a strong distinction between intentional action and intentions for the future, section 20 makes the assumption that this *is* the case but only in order to show that it leads to unacceptable conclusions. The aim is to show that intentional action *cannot* be a separate concept from intention such that they both have their own distinct meaning. They are both part of the one conceptual web or scheme.

It is helpful to contextualise section 20 in relation to Anscombe's broader aims regarding the treatment of intention. For section 20 is not straightforwardly concerned simply with reiterating what has been claimed in section 19, namely that 'intentional' is not a separate 'extra' property (though both sections are obviously two parts of one argument). While section 19 aimed to show that 'intentional' is not to be understood as a referring noun or the name of a property, section 20 tries to bring this line of thinking a step further. Not only is the meaning of 'intentional' not a matter of an 'extra' psychological property, but its meaning actually depends on surrounding concepts in the language game, i.e. on a sort of conceptual web. In other words, its meaningful application depends on a certain scheme of concepts, each of which is a different use of the one concept 'intention'. This amounts to saying that intentional action is internally related to *expression of intention for the future*, *intention 'with which'*, *intention simpliciter*, and so on: each are mutually dependent uses of the one conceptual web surrounding the idea of an intention. Anscombe seems committed here to a kind of 'meaning holism' about the language of intention. The individual use of 'intentional action' requires, for example, an understanding of how to use 'expression of

intention for the future'. It is not as if the meanings of these terms could be separated out according to separately identifiable states or processes that they are supposed to signify. It is similarly noteworthy that these 'holistically' related concepts of intention are to be understood through grasping their rules for use which are taken to be conventional and beyond the authority of any individual language user. It is not as if an individual language user could grasp the meaning of intention by looking into the privacy of his mind to see what the referents of these concepts are. If the nature of evaporation were the issue, then an individual could examine the processes involved and put forward a valid hypothesis based on observed instances. But the nature of intention is not a matter of making similar observations of the 'mind'. The meaning of this concept lies in socially evolved rules that have arisen through a history of communal activities. This aspect of Anscombe's account merges with its meaning holism: we are dealing with a system of mutually dependent concepts subject to conventional and so communitarian rules of use, not separate concepts designating observable objects, states, or processes that could account for their meaning.

As with the argument in section 19, the argument in 20 also presents the traditional picture clearly in order to show up its inherent deficiencies. Anscombe begins with the following question and proposal:

Would intentional actions still have the characteristic 'intentional', if there were no such thing as expression of intention for the future, or as further intention in acting? I.e. is 'intentional' a characteristic of the actions that have it, which is formally independent of those other occurrences of the concept of intention? To test this, I will make two rather curious suppositions: (a) Suppose that 'intention' only occurred as it occurs in 'intentional action', and (b) suppose that the only answer to the question 'Why are you X-ing?', granted that the question is not refused application, were 'I just am, that's all'.¹⁸

The aim is to show that if intentional *were* independent, it would fall short of our normal concept of it. To bring out the characteristics 'intentional' would have, if it were formally

independent of the other occurrences of the concept, it is imagined that the future-directed concept of intention is excluded from use. Thus, if asked, 'Why you are doing something', the answer can never state an aim. Again, this echoes Anscombe's earlier remarks in section 1 where it was mentioned that we usually think 'intentional' is a separate concept because it can occur without being related to the future, whereas intentions do seem to be always future directed.

'(a)' supposes that intentional action is the only concept of intention:

This supposition, we might say, carries a suggestion that 'intentional action' means as it were 'intentionous action'. That is to say, that an action's being intentional is rather like a facial expression's being sad. . . . Intention, on this interpretation of our supposition (a), has become a style-characteristic of observable human proceedings.¹⁹

The grounds for saying a facial expression is sad are basically its 'shape' and its context. Thus a down turned mouth and half-closed eyelids might indicate sadness, especially if the person is standing over a dead pet, for example, but such grounds are not enough to attribute anything like intentional action. Intentional action is more than a style characteristic of human proceedings. As Anscombe remarks, such intentional action would be merely 'intentionous action.' This artificial notion of 'intentionous action' (i.e. we know the action is intentional but not what the precise intention is) is reminiscent of a remark Anscombe makes in section 4 when considering the way we can often say 'straight off' what a person is doing just by looking:

Not that this [capacity to describe other people's actions intuitively] does not raise very interesting questions. See *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 59 (b): 'I see a picture: it shows a man leaning on a stick and going up a steep path. How come? Couldn't it look like that if he were sliding downhill in that position?'²⁰

'Intentional action', it seems to me, is limited to this kind of picture: we are aware of the man's acting purposely in a given context but that is *all* we are allowed to know – there are no obvious intentions for the future, no further aims. If we imagined the man going up the hill were a freeze frame in a silent film, then, when the film is set in motion again, we would be observing something like Anscombe's 'intentional action'. The man gives no account of his movements with references to further intentions, and likewise, we have no awareness of such further intentions – they have been artificially eliminated from the language game on supposition (*a*). Our understanding of his action is now limited to his bodily movements in specific circumstances. For just as a smile is a smile in virtue of the physical configuration of a face, so 'intentional action' becomes a matter of nothing more than the mere configuration of certain bodily movements in a context.

The reason that 'intentional action' is inadequate as an image or account of our usual concept of intentional action is that with the latter, but not the former, the same bodily movements can be intentional under one description and not under another. For example my action (i.e. intentional behaviour) could be correctly described as 'Standing at a bus stop' but not 'Standing on a ten euro note', even though I *am* standing on a ten euro note. My action is not intentional under the latter description. There are numerous other intentions that could equally well be attributed here, such as 'Building up the muscles in my legs', 'Testing my patience by waiting for a late bus', 'Assuming a civilian role while monitoring a local crime ring' etc. But this 'multi-describability' cannot occur with 'intentional action'. 'Intentional action' is like smiling, it shows on one's face, so to speak. It would not make sense to say it is smiling under one description and not under another. However the same physical/bodily movement can be *intentional* under one description and not under another. So recognising an action as an 'intentional action' is obviously not sufficient to generate the required variety of possible descriptions associated with intentional action proper. "The more" that is required is the context and background assumptions, by means of which we are able to divine the *further* intentions with which something is done. Thus we cannot say 'He is throwing the ball in order to show how to serve' or 'He is throwing the ball in order to warm up his

muscles', or 'He is throwing the ball with the aim of getting good at throwing', without knowing the context and background, without being able to say also "He's playing tennis" or "He's simply warming up" or "He's practising throwing accurately".

Supposition (b) also limits the use of intention to intentional action, but from a slightly different angle – by imagining that answers to 'Why?' cannot mention further intentions in acting. The only answer to 'Why?' is 'I just am, that's all'. But this situation would obviously allow nothing like a full-blown case of intentional action because 'Why?' could never really be answered in a way that explained the bodily movement *as* an intentional action; because it would make no use of context or especially, background assumptions:

. . . there would be no special sense of the question 'Why?' and no distinct concept of intentional action at all. That is to say it would no longer be possible to differentiate within the class of acts known without observation. . . . Thus on the present hypothesis there would be no distinction between such things as starts and gasps and, quite generally, *voluntary* actions.²¹

In other words, without clues (from context and background) to *the intention for the future*, intentional action becomes just another form of bodily movement that is not explained in terms of reasons for acting.

Anscombe's aim in defending a 'scheme of concepts' view of intention is summed up in her concluding remark that it 'is natural to think that the difference [between intentional and unintentional action] is one that we can see in the things themselves.' This reiterates the traditional theme she is directly opposing in sections 1, 19, 20 and 23, all of which confront the 'philosophical' mistake of taking 'intentional' to be a discoverable psychological property. If it were a psychological property then it would be identifiable independently of the other concepts of intention and so independently of context and background. For example, if this property were a specific type of neurological activity in a definite part of the brain, then 'intentional' could be specified in physical terms that would not require reference

to concepts like 'expression of intention for the future' or 'further intention in action.' The distinction between starts and gasps on the one hand, and intentional actions on the other, could then be made out in terms of the absence or presence of this special 'intentional'/neurological property. But perhaps the main concern of *Intention* is to show that this method of analysis is mistaken.

While the argument of section 20 attacks 'mentalist' accounts of intentional action (that take 'intentional' to be a mental property), it seems also to be a useful argument for directly attacking strong *behaviourist* accounts of intentional action. For 'intentional action' is action construed only in terms of the present behaviour of the person. To be tapping a pen on a desk is just to be tapping a pen on a desk, it cannot be pretending to play the drums, or relating a tune to someone. Anscombe stresses that further 'psychological' concepts are required to characterise action over and above mere behaviour, i.e. concepts such as 'intention for the future'. But of course her analysis of these extra 'mental' concepts such as intention for the future, are not construed as separate mental properties that a mind-body dualist would posit. They are necessary to characterise intentional action in so far as they lend a required level of meaning that goes beyond the merely physical or behavioural. But this 'level of meaning' operates only through language use, with the application of terms like 'intention with which' and 'expression of intention for the future' stripped of their referring roles in the language game but given meaning by seeing them in context, against a set of background assumptions and as part of a conceptual web.

A further interesting aspect of section 20 is that it seems to offer a much more forthright defence of the view that the meaning of 'intention' cannot be acquired through anything other than understanding the language game in which it plays a part. While in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein says that the language game is the 'primary thing', his investigation into the concept of intention mainly remarks on the role of context and circumstance in the concepts' application, as well as exposing the dangers of treating it as referring to real states. While also stresses in section 20 that the concept is applied through a whole *scheme* of concepts. In other words she shows that the meaning of 'intentional action'

is not *just* a matter of behavioural and contextual criteria – it requires a grasp of a whole set of inter-related uses of the concept. This seems a useful way of resisting any ‘behaviourist’ interpretation of Wittgenstein while at the same time stressing another dimension of giving the meaning of ‘intention’ in the language game, one not found in the *Investigations*. While stressing the role of criteria as opposed to inner states as the conditions of application of intention, as Wittgenstein does, Anscombe further insulates us from traditional error by showing its use to depend on an interrelated scheme of concepts. In effect she introduces the concept of a “conceptual scheme”. No member of this conceptual scheme can contain the meaning of intention by itself; intention can never be reduced to anything ‘lower’ than or “separate from” the scheme itself. Thus section 20 directly and explicitly defends the view that the conceptual scheme part of a language game for intention is bedrock. This is a much more developed defence than merely appealing to ‘outer’ criteria in rejecting a referential account of the meaning of intention. It is not merely an “outer” versus “inner” account, but a “web” versus “isolated item” account.

III. THE INDIVIDUATION OF ACTION.

1. A common sense account of act individuation

The question of what intentional action in general is has already been addressed: it is the class of bodily movements to which the reason-seeking question ‘Why?’ applies. However the question of what *an individual action* is has yet to be considered. Anscombe examines this problem of act individuation in sections 23-26. The problem is analysed in terms of a specific and by now quite famous example:

A man is pumping water into the cistern which supplies the drinking water of a house. Someone has found a way of systematically contaminating the source with a deadly cumulative poison whose effects are unnoticeable until they can no longer be cured. . . . The man’s arm is going up and down, up and down. . . . The moving arm is casting a

shadow on a rockery where at one place and from position it produces a curious effect as if a face were looking out of the rockery. Further, the pump makes a series of clicking noises, which are in fact beating out a noticeable rhythm.

. . . . are there four actions here, because we have found four distinct descriptions satisfying our conditions, namely moving his arm up and down, operating the pump, replenishing the water supply, and poisoning the inhabitants?²²

It is true to say of the man that he is poisoning the inhabitants and also true to say that he is replenishing the water supply. But does this mean that he does two things, or only one? How is the action to be individuated? It seems plausible to say that 'poisoning the inhabitants' and 'replenishing the water' is to do two things. But it sounds odd if we apply this reasoning to all the correct descriptions here, in which case there are *four* actions to consider.

After various considerations, Anscombe provides her answer in section 26:

The answer that we imagined to the question 'Why?' brings it out that the four descriptions from a series, A-B-C-D, in which each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one, though independent of the following one. . . if we say there are four actions, we shall find that the only *action* that B consists in here is A; and so on. Only more circumstances are required for A to be B than for A just to be A. And far more circumstances for A to be D, than for A to be B. But these circumstances *need* not include any particularly recent action of the man who is said to do A, B, C and D. In short, the only action of his that is in question is this one, A. For moving his arm up and down with this fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water supply; and, in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household.

So there is one action with four descriptions, each dependent on wider circumstances, and each related to the next as description of means to end; which means

that we can speak equally well of *four* corresponding intentions, or of *one* intention – the last term that we have brought in in the series.²³

So Anscombe's answer is that 'there is one action with four descriptions'. The point of the present discussion is to explain this remark.

Perhaps the most important point about this account of action individuation comes from *Under a Description* where Anscombe states that she is not putting forth a theory:

As Davidson has put it, all that he (or I) meant by speaking of many different descriptions of one action is, e.g., that the executioner of Charles I, having taken his head off, did not have to add any further performances, namely of killing and of executing, to make his act one of killing and executing. What we meant, in short, is something that isn't a philosophical thesis at all, and which no one denies. What is under dispute is whether to *speak of* many different actions – perhaps as many as there are (possible?) different descriptions, perhaps fewer than that – in the circumstances where I (and Davidson) speak of only one. For us the question "How many landings did the bird make?" has a straightforward sense; now suppose our answer is "Just two" – what we express in that way will (by others) have to be characterized differently, if landing on the twig and landing on the limed twig are *eo ipso* different landings. Or – in the case where I would call them the same landing – will others call them the same landing but not the same event or action? How many battles were fought at Waterloo in 1815? There seems to be not much doubt who is in the terminological difficulty here.²⁴

In saying that there is only one act with four descriptions, Anscombe is appealing to common sense, to what seems ordinarily and obviously to be the case. If, for example, I pull the lever of a crane which then opens its jaws and drops a log onto the roof of a house it would be correct to say that I intentionally pulled the lever, opened the crane jaws, dropped the log, smashed the roof, and destroyed the house. But all that it seems I actually *did* was pull the lever. Pulling the lever is the only apparent *action* of mine. In fact for Anscombe,

this issue isn't a theoretical issue at all, it is only one of deciding how to *speak* of actions. Should we speak of four actions or only one? It seems to deviate from the usual language game to speak of doing four things rather than one. In the case of the man pumping water we do say that he moved his arm up down while holding the pump, that he operated the pump, that he replenished the water supply, and poisoned the inhabitants but we do not say that he did four things. The only 'doing' here seems to be his act of moving his arm up and down. The intuition Anscombe is appealing to here is that action is closely connected to bodily movement, and in these examples there is only one bodily movement. The descriptions characterising the further aims do not require any further bodily movements. 'Swinging the racket', 'Hitting the tennis ball', 'Serving an ace', 'Winning the game' are all correct descriptions of an action, but the only *action* is my swinging the racket.

Anscombe's position is more clearly seen in the light of her remark that 'there is one action with four descriptions, each dependent on wider circumstances'. In the case of the man pumping 'moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstance, operating the pump; and, in the circumstances of the water supply running low, it *is* replenishing the house water supply' and so on. All the descriptions refer to the same thing – a bodily movement – only the background considerations differ. The only difference between them is that they characterise this same act of moving an arm up and down in the light of wider but differing circumstances. The *action* is the movement of the arm in relation to the pump handle but the other descriptions; 'pumping', 'replenishing', 'poisoning' characterise the very same action in relation to a different set of background circumstances and considerations. Thus 'poisoning the inhabitants' takes into account the water supply, its connection to the house, the inhabitants of the house and so on, while 'pumping' only considers the limited context of the pump handle itself moving up and down in conjunction with the flow of water through the pump. The various action descriptions do not pick out different acts, but only characterise the same act in different contexts. For Anscombe this account is a simple, common sense account that is free of the 'philosophical' difficulties arising from equating individual action descriptions with individual acts. This

appeal to common sense is not argued for in the way one would argue for a theory, but it is clear from these considerations that Anscombe is trying to show the conditions for ordinary use. Describing a person's action is never a matter of pointing to an act-property; rather it is to characterise a bodily movement in the light of certain circumstances.

2. The role of 'under a description' in act individuation.

Although Anscombe provides this common sense account, her main task in the discussion of act individuation is to expose traditional errors. The main source of error arises through a misunderstanding of the meaning of 'description' and 'action'. The picture theory of meaning has it that a description is a word-representation of a state of affairs; thus a description depicts facts. An action description is then taken to describe a natural event, state or property, the action. Such a view of action description leads to various ways of misinterpreting the remark that 'there is only one action and four descriptions'.

Perhaps the most general error here is the one that was the focus of section 19, that an action description designates a psychological property or state. Again, this error is addressed in *Under a Description*:

I have on occasion stared dumbly when asked: "If one action can have many descriptions, what is *the* action, which has all these descriptions?" The question seemed to be supposed to mean something, but I could not get hold of it. It ought to have struck me at once that here we were in "bare particular" country: *what* is the subject, which has all these predicates?²⁵

Section 19 attacked the general idea that an action is a natural property or "bare particular" of some kind that is designated by an action description. This was assumed in section 19 in a thought experiment, in order to show that it led to absurdities and must be abandoned. This error is even more tempting when it comes to action individuation. If one action is described in various different ways, then it seems natural to say that the descriptions all pick out the

same “bare particular”. In so far as they are all describing the same action, they must be describing the same ‘thing’. For how can there be four descriptions and no-thing described? It is not enough to simply re-assert the conclusion of section 19 here; that the descriptions *cannot* be describing a property because there is no such ‘extra’ feature in intentional action. For although this may be accepted, it might still seem odd that something can be described even though the descriptions don’t ‘pick out’ anything. A clear account of Anscombe’s view of act individuation thus requires an explanation of how she applies ‘description’.

The main error once again stems from the *Tractarian* view of meaning. An action description may seem like a picture of an action-state but this is a result of sticking to an overly rigid view of ‘description’ i.e. the one that is used for primarily for physical object descriptions. Anscombe’s alternative use is captured by the phrase ‘under a description’. To say that an action is intentional under a description is not to say that a description designates its ‘intentional’ property. This is clearly seen in *Under a Description*:

As some people have observed “under a description” is ‘*qua*’, or Aristotle’s ‘ η ’ in modern dress. Aristotle too observes that the phrase ‘ η . . .’ belongs to the predicate, not to the subject (*Prior Analytics*, I, Chapter 38). There aren’t such objects as an A *qua* B, though an A may, *qua* B, receive such-and-such a salary and, *qua* C, such-and-such a salary.²⁶

‘*Qua*’ does not designate the property of an object, rather it shows the object in a certain context and assuming certain background considerations. Hence it describes the object, but not by reference to any of its features. In the case of intentional action it is a *bodily movement* that is seen in the light of various circumstances. The bodily movements associated with pumping water in the context of the flow of water, the house, the inhabitants and the poison thus constitute an act of poisoning. To say the action or bodily movements linked to moving the pump handle are intentional under the description ‘poisoning the inhabitants’, is to show the event in the light of these extended circumstances. The

'intentionality' does not lie in the description's designating an 'intentional poisoning' property or mental state, for 'qua' is predicative not attributive – it does not attribute properties to the subject. To say that an action is intentional *qua* replenishing water or *qua* poisoning, is not to say that it exhibits the properties 'replenishing' and 'poisoning'. Similarly to say that a person's action is intentional *qua* 'serving' or *qua* 'winning the match' is to say that the person exhibits two different 'serving' and 'winning' properties at two different times.

Another temptation, one also stemming from an overly rigid view of 'description', is to take the subject of the various descriptions to be the bodily movement itself. As mentioned above, Anscombe remarks that the only action of the pumping man is A. For moving his arm up and down with his fingers around the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump and so on. But this makes it seem that the one action and four descriptions is actually the bodily movement described in four different ways. But the action is not to be identified simply with the bodily movement. Action descriptions depict an event in the light of certain circumstances; they show the bodily movement in a context. This explains Anscombe's important remark in *Under a Description*:

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 better to offer a choice, saying "Take whichever you prefer".²⁷

Description A has no priority over description D. Even though A mentions the bodily movement, it also, like D, depicts the movement in a certain context – it is not a representation of a bodily state or position, it itself is an (intentional) action. Generally, for Anscombe, in our awareness of other humans and their actions, and so in our talk, we never isolate or focus on a specific bodily movement as such. We always encounter humans as *agents* and so as performers of (intentional) *actions*. We never "see" them as bare "bodily

movers". So we only use "action talk" on them and never (except when doing philosophy) "bodily movement talk".

Anscombe's account of action description also strongly opposes *reductionism*. This is why Anscombe asks in section 23 not only, 'Is there one action with four descriptions or four actions?', but, 'is there any description which is *the* description of an intentional action, given that the intentional action occurs?' Again this has its origin in section 19, which ended with the statement that it is 'a mistake to look for *the* fundamental description of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this.' In proposing that the correct use of 'description' is captured by Aristotle's '*qua*', action descriptions do not pick out 'intentional' properties. But this amounts to saying that there is no such thing as *the* description of the intentional action. Action descriptions cannot be whittled down, so to speak, to a set of descriptions designating the 'ultimate' properties of the action, for they are not attributive. In so far as action descriptions do not designate particulars, such as bodily movements, molecular movements, intentional properties, psychological states and so on, there can be no 'ultimate description' of an action, to which all others reduce. An individual action is not something that could ever be teased out by an empirical or philosophical/scientific investigation. No description in the A-D means-end series has priority over the others. No description is *the* description to which all the others reduce. Even though the most basic action description, A, mentions the bodily movement, it does not go so far back as to just state the movement of the body, the arm, or even the muscle movements. To do so, would be to go beyond the descriptions under which the action is intentional.

In so far as action descriptions do not designate action properties, the pumping, replenishing, and poisoning are not identical descriptions in any sense that could be captured by Leibniz' Law. While moving the arm up and down *is* pumping and *is* replenishing and *is* poisoning, these descriptions are not the kind of identity propositions that would apply to a physical object (e.g. for an apple 'the green object on the table' *is* 'the 50g object on the table'). Again, Anscombe mentions this in *Under a Description*:

If I say e.g., "In this position moving the queen *is* delivering mate", I am not uttering an identity statement but characterizing a type of move as a mating move. If N did move so and someone says that his then act of moving the queen was his act of mating, this is a rather stilted way of talking; but the obvious thing for him to mean is that it was the mating move of the game. Once again, this is predicative; we should not be led by the definite article to speak (yet) of an identity proposition.²⁸

The 'is' of identity here serves to *characterise* the one action in two different ways rather than to identify two different properties of the one subject. This also relates to the argument in section 19. An action description does not designate a property. So for Anscombe four different action descriptions don't describe four different properties, all of which apply to the same subject. Again, individual actions are not reducible to specific descriptions: they are characterised equally by their various descriptions, each of which depicts the bodily movement in relation to an enlarging field of circumstances. Action descriptions form a means-end series. This series consists of an ordered set of intentions, A-D in the case of the man pumping poison. The intention *with which* A is done is B, *with which* B is done is C and so on. Thus the arm is moved up and down while gripping the pump in order to pump water. The water is pumped in order to replenish the water supply and so on. This is the result of Anscombe's investigation into action individuation. But the main thrust of her analysis is critical in so far as it tries to combat certain widespread 'philosophical' errors. Treating action descriptions as fact-pictures leads to attempts to reduce action descriptions to descriptions of physiological, neurological or molecular states, as if the action were something that could be represented by such descriptions.

3. Anscombe's basic position on the individuation of action.

In sections 23 to 26 Anscombe considers the issue of how to characterise an individual action. Thus far she has provided a characterisation of intentional action in general as that to

which the question “Why?” applies, and she has presented what I have discussed earlier as an argument against the view that intentional action is the kind of “thing” that is brought about by causes (the argument in section 19). Now, however, Anscombe is interested in trying to distinguish between one particular action and another. For example, I might step off the last step of a stairs and immediately turn a corner at the foot of the stairs. The question of how to distinguish precisely between these two actions (if, indeed they are two) – to give the conditions distinguishing one from the other – is the problem of the individuation of action. Or, to take a more relevant example, I might perform what appear to be two actions at once that could be described as “Putting coins into the machine” and “Paying for my ticket”. The problem of individuation of action considers how we are to distinguish between these two.

With regard to this last example, there are broadly two kinds of answers to the problem of how to individuate the actions in question. One kind of response holds that there are two individual actions corresponding to the two descriptions “Putting coins into the machine” and “Paying for my ticket”. The other kind of response proposes that there is only *one* action and two descriptions, where the descriptions are just two different ways of picking out the same “thing”. Generally speaking, Anscombe’s account is in agreement with this latter approach. Her example of the man pumping poison into a house is well known. In relation to this case she poses the problem of individuation of action as follows:

... are there four actions here, because we have found four distinct descriptions satisfying our conditions, namely moving his arm up and down, operating the pump, replenishing the water supply, and poisoning the inhabitants?²⁹

Then, a few sections later, she characterises this series of descriptions generally as forming a series A-B-C-D in which each description is introduced as dependent on the previous one. She draws the following conclusions:

... if we say there are four actions, we shall find that the only *action* that B consists in here is A; and so on. Only more circumstances are required for A to be B than for A just to be A. And far more circumstances for A to be D, than for A to be B. But these circumstances *need* not include any particular recent action of the man who is said to do A, B, C and D. In short, the only action of his that is in question is this one, A. For moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump *is*, in thee circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water supply; and, in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household.³⁰

Anscombe's reason for concluding that there is only one action to speak of seems to be that the only *movement* that occurs is the man's arm moving up and down. Within the whole scheme of an action, including its surrounding context, the focus is normally on a specific bodily movement. However, for Anscombe, this legislates against the view that there are *four* actions because, for each description, the man's movement is the same. Moreover, the descriptions themselves are distinct not in virtue of their designating different movements of the man, but in virtue of their picking out the same movement in the light of different circumstances corresponding to his further intentions in acting. Thus C takes into account the water and its supply to the house, but D extends further into the environment and includes the inhabitants of the house. However, the movement at the "centre" of these action descriptions remains the same. So for Anscombe there is one action and four descriptions.

4. Anscombe and Davidson on action identity.

The kind of account that Anscombe proposes thus bears this similarity to Donald Davidson's. In his essay "Actions, Reasons, and Causes" Davidson provides the following example:

I flip the switch, turn on the light, and illuminate the room. Unbeknownst to me I also alert a prowler to the fact that I am home. Here I do not do four things, but only one, of which four descriptions have been given.³¹

Furthermore, Anscombe herself recognises the similarity between her own view and that of Davidson:

As Davidson has put it, all that he (or I) meant by speaking of many different descriptions of one action is, e.g., that the executioner of Charles I, having taken his head off, did not have to add any further performances, namely of killing and executing, to make his act one of killing and executing.³²

So it is clear that Davidson and Anscombe are united in their opposition to the view that, in such cases, there are as many different actions as there are descriptions.

However, it is important to point out here that Anscombe's account is significantly different to Davidson's nonetheless. There is a general difference in their understanding of the ontology of action. Davidson allows that intentional actions can be characterised in terms of their causes but Anscombe denies this. Davidson's account extends into his anomalous monism, in which token mental states are identified with token physical states. Anscombe rejects this view, holding instead that there is a semantic gap between physical talk and mental talk. The specific difference in their accounts of individuation reflects these broader dissimilarities. Davidson's system allows for an *explanation* of the relation between an action description and the "thing" described. That is, he can provide a theoretical account of what the identical thing is under each of the four descriptions. This is because he allows that individual events can be individuated in terms of their causes. He states in his essay "The Individuation of Events" that events "are identical if and only if they have exactly the same causes and effects".³³ Thus, for Davidson, it would seem that an occurrent action can be singled out in terms of its causes and effects. Davidson *has* an account of what the individual action *is*. Ultimately, it is a physical event that can be located within the causal nexus.

Anscombe tends to distance her account from the problem of saying what the "same X" is that is being identified in the four descriptions. She indicates this in her paper "Under a

Description”, where she states that she “on occasion stared dumbly when asked: ‘If one action can have many descriptions, what is *the* action, which has all these descriptions?’”³⁴ In the same paper she also states that when she uses the term “under a description” she is not employing it in order to pick out a subject. She prefers to view this term as being the same as Aristotle’s *qua*: “There aren’t such objects as an A *qua* B, though an A may, *qua* B, receive such-and-such a salary”. A human being may be a lawyer, but to describe him/her as a lawyer is not to describe something else that is over and above the human being. Finally, her stance can be summed up by her claim that the “proper answer to “What is the action, which has all these descriptions?” is to give one of the descriptions [in the series A-D]”.³⁵ In other words, Anscombe is happy to simply state an action description when asked “What *is* the action?” So she is not providing a theoretical explanation of how action descriptions designate their “objects”. While Davidson does seem to be in a position to say what the action that has all the descriptions is – an event that can be singled out in the causal nexus – Anscombe actively resists the burden of explanation.

5. A problem for Anscombe’s account of ‘the same action’.

One could criticise Anscombe on this point. After all, if something is being described (an action) then surely some-*thing* must be the object of the descriptions in question. Otherwise, Anscombe’s account would seem to suffer from an ontological blind-spot, so to speak – action descriptions do occur, but not in virtue of anything described.

This is a problem for Anscombe that Julia Annas identifies in her 1976 paper “Davidson and Anscombe on ‘The Same Action’”. Annas suggests that Anscombe can get around the problem of making sense of “the same *what?*” question by simply providing another action description, because her account focuses on *means-end* cases. However she argues that the same problem arises nonetheless for Anscombe when isolated actions are considered outside the context of deliberate means-end behaviour: “In a case where it is claimed that we have the same action intentional under one description but not under another, there is no means-end chain involved, and so there is not the same way of making

sense of the 'same *what?*' question".³⁶ Annas maintains that we can happily respond to the question "What is the action that has the descriptions A-D?" by saying "it is a means to B" or "it is a means to C" or "it is a means to D". We can do this and avoid the problem of ever having to get down to the issue of what it is that is underlying the descriptions in question. However, in the case of pushing a table (the description under which the action is intentional) and making a ruck in the carpet (a description under which the action is unintentional), we cannot substitute one description for another without quickly arriving at the need for an account of what "it" is that is being described. So for Annas the onus is still on Anscombe to come up with some theoretical explanation of what the thing being described is. Even if Anscombe does adopt a quietist, anti-theoretical approach here, her opponents will still want some thesis about what is ultimately being individuated.

I think there are two basic ways that one could try to defend Anscombe against this criticism. Either one could try to show that there is some "thing" being described for Anscombe after all, only it is not explicitly pointed out in *Intention* or in her other essays. Or one could try to elaborate and expand on her quietism – that is, one could try to show that in fact there *is* no real burden of explanation on Anscombe owing to certain other significant aspects of her account of intentional action in general. In the remainder of this section I will briefly try to show how both avenues may be available to Anscombe.

A candidate "referent" or individuated thing for Anscombe's account is a *bodily movement under a description*. To say that an action description "refers" to a bodily movement under a description is not to say that a bodily movement is being described in the sense that a physical movement is being picked out and labelled. The "thing" being picked out is a relational property in that it is a bodily movement in a context. This is not the bodily movement picked out by Davidson, which *can* be adequately characterised in terms of its causal relations. Rather, it is a bodily movement seen in connection with the circumstances in which it was executed. However, this context in which the bodily movement is picked out will not take into consideration the physical states of the body and its causal relations with the environment. Action descriptions are *used* by human beings to pick out certain bodily

movements in specific circumstances – to describe pumping or replenishing supplies or poisoning. This way of looking at the “thing described” in Anscombe’s account also fits in well with the anti-causalism about intentional actions she defends. In Davidson’s account it makes sense to say that an intentional action can be caused, indeed he offers a causal account of what an intentional action is and this allows him to argue that an individual intentional action – a bodily movement – can be defined in terms of its place in the causal nexus. For Anscombe, however, it makes no sense to say that an intentional action can be defined in terms of its causes because a-bodily-movement-in-a-context can’t be caused as such. The latter refers to the whole scene, so to speak, and not just an isolated bodily movement distinct from but “in” a context or set of circumstances. So there is something that Anscombe could say is “designated” by action descriptions. But these are not separate bodily movements in a physical context, nor are they intrinsic, non-relational properties. They are bodily movements under a description, where the latter puts the bodily movement in the light of certain circumstances that are recognised by ordinary language users.

The other line of defence that may be available to Anscombe seeks to support her in her reluctance to offer any theoretical underpinning for her account of action description. Annas thinks that this is not an option for a defender of Anscombe. She suggests that, while Anscombe can avoid the onus of explanation by limiting her analysis to means-end cases, the problem still arises for Anscombe nonetheless. However, Annas does not consider other aspects of Anscombe’s analysis that may bear on this issue. I will close this section by briefly considering two such factors in her account that I think help show why her position may satisfactorily and legitimately do without an account of what the “same thing described” is: the role of “Why?” and her analysis of “intentional” as a form of description of events.

Anscombe states that “the description of something as a human action could not occur prior to the existence of the question ‘Why?’, simply as a kind of utterance by which we were *then* obscurely prompted to address the question”.³⁷ She is suggesting that intentional action cannot be seen as anything distinct that could be observed using the senses. We may observe a bodily movement with our senses, but to recognise a bodily-movement-in-a-

context as “poisoning the inhabitants” we have to be human beings: language using creatures that have come to be able make sense of such movements. We just so happen to be able to pick out certain patterns of events involving human bodily movements. Anscombe compares recognising an action with recognising a pattern of chalk marks on a board as a sentence. We observe certain chalk marks with our senses, but our senses play no part in helping us to *understand* that it is a sentence. Sentences have come with us as part of our linguistic heritage as language using creatures, as have intentional action descriptions. This perspective on action tends to provide background support for Anscombe’s view that action descriptions refer to bodily movements in a context – the ordinary context in which the use of “Why?” occurs rather than the physical or physiological context.

Anscombe’s claim that “intentional” has reference to a form of description of events also helps to make more sense of her failing to provide a theoretical account of what is designated by action descriptions. In section 47 she says that such descriptions may be called “vital” because they “go beyond physics”.³⁸ She states that a “dog’s curled tail might have something stuck in it, but that of itself would not make us speak of the dog as holding the object with its tail; but if he has taken between his teeth and kept there some moderate-sized object, he is holding it”. This perspective insists that intentional actions are not the kind of “thing” that can be analyzed physically. So an attempt to single out an individual action in terms of the physical conditions of its occurrence or by reference to a bodily movement seen as a physical event is excluded from consideration. For Anscombe, the bodily movement is seen in relation to a context, but this context consists of the circumstances that language users recognize rather than the physical nexus in which the bodily movement occurs. So attempts to individuate actions, for Anscombe, need make no theoretical inquiries as to the nature of what action descriptions supposedly pick out.

A critic may not agree with either of these two factors in Anscombe’s analysis. However, these aspects of her approach do bolster her treatment of the individuation of action because they emphasise that there is no place for description-independent actions in her overall account. Whether one agrees with them or not, they at least show that

Anscombe's non-theoretical approach to individuation is enmeshed in a broader framework that, if taken seriously, lessens the pressure to come up with the requested theoretical explanations.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF 'AN INTENTION'.

Anscombe's turn to the analysis of intentional action was born out of a disbelief in the benefits of exploring 'intention' by introspection, as if intentions were inner psychological accompaniments to action. The meaning of 'intention' is to be found through its use in the language game for intentional action. Sections 19 and 20 attempt to dismantle faith in 'intentional extras'; items designated by action descriptions. While these sections attack the traditional notion of an 'inner intention' in action, Anscombe also attempts to replace it with an alternative criterion of intention. If 'intentions' aren't mental 'extras' then what are they? Sections 22, 25, and 27 all emphasise that the 'presence' of an intention is to be construed in terms of 'outer' criteria. As with expressions of intention, statements of intention are subject to the criteria of *truthfulness* (or sincerity) rather than verification.

Again, Anscombe takes as her lead various remarks made by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein says in the *Investigations* p. 217 that the 'intention *with which* one acts does not 'accompany' the action any more than the thought 'accompanies' speech. Similarly in *The Philosophical Remarks* Vol. 1, 599, he writes that "I intend" is '*never* a description.' And in *Zettel*, 44, he remarks that 'Intention is neither an emotion, a mood, nor yet a sensation or image. It is not a state of consciousness. It does not have genuine duration.' It is in the light of thoughts such as these, which are systematically supported from sections 19-27, that Anscombe puts forward her account of what it is to 'have' an intention.

Earlier sections provided a linguistic criterion for intentional action. Section 22 also suggests a criterion for the intention with which something is done. The 'intention with which' an action is executed is one that the action is a means to achieving. For example, I descend the stairs *in order to* answer the door, having heard the doorbell ringing; I shut the window *in order to* block out the draft. In many cases, if asked about my intention, I will

mention something future, for 'if the a description of some future state of affairs makes sense just by itself as an answer to the question [Why?], then it is an expression of intention.' If someone asks me why I am rehearsing a speech I might answer 'Tomorrow is debating day'. Such an answer simply mentions something future and obviously characterises the intention with which I am now acting. But not all statements about the future will suffice to indicate my intention. If asked why I am rehearsing the speech I might reply: 'Next week Tim will be in Tasmania.' This answer mentions something future but fails to characterise the intention with which I am rehearsing the speech. Such answers require 'filling in' if they are to be of any help in characterising the intention with which I now act. Tim's being in Tasmania means I have to stand in for him at the debate in which case I must rehearse the speech in order to prepare for a debate. The intention with which an action is executed and the action itself must be related in a special way if they are to make sense together: this is a condition of the presence of an 'intention with which'.

Anscombe summarises this special relation with a 'general formula':

... we must have an idea how a state of affairs Q is a stage in proceedings in which the action P is an earlier stage, if we are to be able to say that we do P so that Q. All that is necessary to understand is that to say, in one form or another: 'But Q won't happen, even if you do P', or 'but it will happen whether you do P or not' is, in some way, to contradict the intention.³⁹

If I say I am doing P so that Q but I know that P cannot conceivably bring about Q, then Q is not an intention with which I do P. This criterion of intention avoids referring to private mental objects. To see whether or not they fit in with the beliefs, desires and activities of the person professing to have them, intentions are subject to tests of *rationality*:

A man's intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is - as he has absolute authority in saying *what* he dreamt. (If

what a man says he dreamed does not make sense, that doesn't mean that his saying he dreamed it does not make sense.)⁴⁰

A person *can say* what their intention is. This act of saying what the intention is isn't a description of an interior state. It does not involve looking inward to see what is present in the mind and then deciding whether or not to reveal it to an interrogator. In so far as a person can say what their intention is, it is subject to a criterion of truthfulness. As earlier sections have shown, the action, the intention, the act of will, or whatever mental accompaniment one might cite to explain intentional action is not a 'thing known' at all. Intentions are not objects that are distinct from the activities of the person. If they were, then contrary to the conclusions of section 20, intentions could, like physical states, be 'identified' apart from the other uses of intention. A stated intention is only meaningful to the extent that it coheres with related expressions of intention, belief, desire and other intentional attitudes and other intentional actions. Such restraints give some authority to the interrogator in saying what a person's intentions are. This is Anscombe's preferred view of what it means to say someone 'has' an intention. In so far as they *can say* what it is, it is subject to certain constraints of rationality and coherence and consistency.

In section 25, more reasons for rejecting the theory that intentions are 'inner' are suggested:

. . . the notion of the interior movement tends to have the most unfortunately absurd consequences. For after all we can *form* intentions; now if intention is an interior movement, it would appear that we can choose to have a certain intention and not another. . . . The idea that one can determine one's intentions by making . . . a little speech to oneself is obvious bosh.⁴¹

We talk of 'forming the intention to X'. If the intention were a mental component of some kind then 'forming' it would involve actively creating it, as one would a physical object. But

because one cannot use one's limbs and hands to form something in the mind, it is supposed instead that for intention a kind of psychic act is involved whereby one says 'I hereby *mean* to X'. This absurd result derives from viewing the word 'intention' as a name of an object. Thus 'forming an intention' is thought of as 'forming a (mental) object'.

Anscombe admits that in a way her proposed criterion for an intention is a 'criterion by thoughts':

... it may appear that I have supplied something just like the interior movement, which a man can make what he likes; but (perhaps out of an attachment to 'verificationism') preferred an external answer (actual or hypothetical) which a man can equally make what he likes – at least within the range of moderately plausible answers. Of course I must mean that the *truthful* answer is, or would be, one or the other.⁴²

Anscombe rejects the view that the intention is some thing the agent alone can see. But her own version might, at first sight, seem to leave her with a similar difficulty – the intention looks as if it is 'private' because the agent can still lie about his intention without any fear of detection: the intention still seems to be something only the agent can 'see', so to speak.

However there are still ways of telling whether or not a person has the intention they say they do, for 'there can be a certain amount of control of the truthfulness of the answer'. Checking the truthfulness involves much the same principle as mentioned above. The point is to see if the professed intention makes sense or fits with the agent's activities, reasons and expressions of intention, beliefs, etc. If I say I am going camping and leave the house with nothing but a briefcase, then an observer has reason to believe that is not really my intention because my present actions do not 'fit' it. I would be expected to be leaving the house with a tent, a backpack, some food, a map etc. My present action is expected to be a conceivable means to the achievement of my stated intention, of going camping.

However, after many questions and answers the observer may still not be able to make up his mind about whether or not I actually intend to go camping. The test of truthfulness for

thoughts and intentions has its limits. In the case of the man pumping poisoned water, there 'is a point at which only what the man himself says is a sign; and here there is room for much dispute and fine diagnosis of his genuineness.' Anscombe admits that a person's intention is to some extent 'undetectable' from an observer's point of view, but again not because it is a private object, rather because only the agent has "the complete story". This is reminiscent of an earlier remark that a lie's being an utterance contrary to one's mind "does not mean that it is a false report of the contents of one's mind, as when one lies in response to the query 'A penny for your thoughts'".⁴³ In giving a lying expression of intention I am not misrepresenting a private object. Although an interrogator may sometimes be unable to say what a person's intention is, this only shows that sometimes the criteria of truthfulness are insufficient. The danger here is to make the 'philosophical' mistake of using a 'concealed object' metaphor to explain this.

In section 27 Anscombe continues to focus on the 'intention' with the question 'Is there ever a place for the interior act of intention?' Characterising an intention in terms of 'outer' criteria tends to negate the role of a person's 'interior acts of intention'. But do the latter ever play a significant role in describing an action? This section concludes the phase of the monograph that has attacked the idea that an action description gets its meaning or 'life' by pointing to an internal mental state (sections 19-26 in particular). Once the notion of an inner intention-state has been systematically attacked, Anscombe still wants to ask one last question of 'inner intentions', to see if there is *ever* any role the concept could play in characterising an action description. The answer is that they do. This is shown with an example:

We can imagine an intention which is a purely interior matter nevertheless changing the whole character of things. A contemptuous thought might enter a man's mind so that he meant his polite and affectionate behaviour to someone on a particular occasion only ironically, without there being any outward sign of this . . . Let us suppose that the thought in his mind [while embracing] is 'you silly little twit!' Now here . . . it is not

enough that these words should occur to him. He has to mean them. This shews once more, that you cannot take any performance (even an interior performance) as itself an act of intention; for if you describe a performance, the fact that it has taken place is not a proof of intention; words for example may occur in somebody's mind without his meaning them. So intention is never a performance in the mind, though in some matters a performance in the mind which is seriously *meant* may make a difference to the correct account of the man's action – e.g. in embracing someone. But the matters in question are necessarily ones in which outward acts are 'significant' in some way.⁴⁴

This account repeats some of the conclusions made in earlier sections about the role of mental causality in intentional action. Section 11 concluded that intentions are never mental causes. Something similar is being stated here – an intention is never a performance in the mind such as a thought like 'you silly little twit!' That thought may pop into the mind just as one was about to embrace an acquaintance, accompanied by perhaps a momentary feeling of loathing. This may have had no precedent and might have disappeared as quickly as it arose, without any further resentful feelings – it may have no outward signs. The thought is thus something that 'cropped up' in the mind prior to the intentional action; and so can be a cause, in this case a mental cause. For it is something you would mention in describing what were the mental causes that led up to and issued in the intentional action (though often there are none, as was shown in the previous analysis of intentional action).

As a mere mental cause, the thought does not alter the action description. For the thought that you left the cooker on, or a feeling of being flushed might just as easily have occurred prior to or during the embrace and this would not have changed the fact that the action was a well meant act of affection. But if the momentary thought 'You silly little twit!' is seriously *meant* then the action is no longer an innocent embrace. Then the act of embracing is meant only ironically. So an interior act that is meant, an 'undetectable' thought, can change the whole quality of the action. In that sense it is part of the context or

scenario. But it is important to stress that the intention's 'invisibility' is simply a limitation of the criteria of truthfulness and not consequence of its privacy.

Finally, it is worth noting that 'adding' meaning to the occurrent thought 'You silly little twit!' is not to add an extra experience. It is not as if a person in the same situation who had the thought without meaning it lacked a 'meaning-experience' when the thought occurred. Anscombe seems to allow here that an inner performance in the mind that is seriously meant is an 'act of intention'. This may look like she is falling into Cartesian ways. For if an observer has no way of saying whether or not the thought is there when it is 'there', then must not its existence be a matter of what is inner and private? But 'inner performance in the mind' is not like 'experience in mental space' and 'being meaningful' is not an extra type of experience either. Hence the concluding remark that in such cases 'outward acts are necessarily 'significant' in some way'. The 'necessity' of outward acts to the meaning of a given intention is something Anscombe has argued for most directly in section 20, where it was claimed that the meaning of intentional action was necessarily bound to that of intention for the future and 'intention with which'.

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CHAPTER 4: THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE OF ACTION

I. THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE OF ACTION: TRADITIONAL ACCOUNTS OF 'WILLING'.

1. Summary of the results of the preceding analysis of intentional action.

Section 28 signals the beginning of a new investigation into the nature of non-observational knowledge. Perhaps *the* basic feature of intentional action noted early on in *Intention* is that it is subject to this special kind of knowledge. But the primary conclusion of the discussions prior to section 28 is that the 'intention' is not a 'thing', a state, process, cause or experience. So to know one's intentional action or one's intention is not to know any 'thing'. A complete analysis of intentional action and intention thus requires a thorough examination of this result: that knowledge of action is not observational knowledge of any components, states, events, episodes or objects. This is the task of the remainder of *Intention*; to provide a detailed analysis of non-observational knowledge in practical action. Given that this is the start of a new direction in *Intention* I will firstly provide a short summary of the investigation to date, before entering into the analysis of practical knowledge.

Discussion prior to section 28 focused primarily on the meaning of 'intention in action' and 'expression of intention for the future'. The initial analysis of intentional action stressed that neither intentions nor motives are mental causes, and that a reason-seeking 'Why?' is rejected by mention of a mental cause, and finally that intentional action is open to non-observational knowledge. So right from the beginning there is a recognition of two central aspects of intentional action: (a) intention and intentional action do not involve a special inner 'intentional' component and (b) knowledge of action does not involve awareness of such a special component. The discussion up as far as section 28 focused on '(a)'. Thus expressions of intention are not reports of inner states of the mind that can be true

or false, because there are no such inner intentions. They are assimilated to types of 'predictions' or, rather, commitments; 'statements' about the future that are not based on evidence and which cannot therefore be said to be true or false. Rather they are expressions that are subject to a criterion of truthfulness, as sincerity and appropriateness..

The 'intention' itself was also examined. It is seen not to be an object that could be identified by observation. It is not an inner state observable by introspection, nor is it something that could be discerned and examined by neuroscience. In keeping with the remarks made in the analysis of intentional action, the intention is not a mental cause – it is not something in experience that could be reported by the person when asked what led up to and gave rise to the action. As with expressions of intention, the criterion for the 'presence' of intention is again a matter of the conditions of truthfulness (sincerity and appropriateness) rather than those of truth or falsity. To say that a person 'has' an intention is not to say that they have private awareness of something 'in' the mind. Outer criteria play a crucial role in talking of someone's 'having' an intention. Reports of intention are subject to certain criteria of rationality – they must make sense against the background of surrounding actions and expressions of intention.

To describe an action as intentional was seen not to involve reference to any special 'intentional' property either. Section 19 attacked the feasibility of this traditional thesis. Action descriptions do not represent action states or 'intentional' properties. Section 20 emphasised that the meaning of the various uses of intention is not a matter of reference to meaning artefacts as in the case of physical object descriptions, but instead involves an understanding of a scheme or web of concepts. Intentional action descriptions involve a certain context of application and set of background assumptions that involve not only observed behavioural circumstances and linguistic utterances as well as previous attitudes and actions, but also an understanding of further intention, expression of intention and 'intention with which'.

Continuing this attack on an intentional 'extra', it was seen that *an* individual action is not a particular 'intentional' object. An intentional action may be intentional under various

descriptions and any of these descriptions can characterise it equally well. There is no such thing as *the* or even the foundational description of an individual action because individual actions are not states, processes or properties that could be precisely located and defined. In the same way that the 'intention with which' and expressions of intention are subject to the outer criteria of truthfulness, individual action descriptions are ordinarily grounded in a widening field of circumstances and background assumptions that corresponds to a means-end series. These surrounding circumstance and assumptions are what characterise the action under its various descriptions. It is not as if an individual action were something 'inner' that could be located in isolation from the context of the bodily movement.

So the discussion up as far as section 28 focuses on a whole myriad of errors that can arise from a misunderstanding of intention. Applying the rules for physical objects to the use of intention and intentional action leads to mistakes about what individual actions are, what the 'definition' of intentional action is, what expressions of intention are, the meaning of action descriptions, the nature of intentions *simpliciter* and so on. These are all aspects of the traditional theory of action that exhibit a misunderstanding of the rules for the use of 'intention' and stem basically from the fundament error of assuming that 'intention' is the name of some state or property.

2. Knowledge of action and traditional theories of 'the will'.

The discussion of knowledge of action is taken up in section 28. Traditional theories recognise that we know our actions without having to make any empirical inquiries – knowledge of action is different from knowledge of facts about the world. But this is thought to be because what is known is not 'outer' but 'inner'. Knowledge of action is taken to be knowledge by observation, but it is different from scientific knowledge in that the object is private and known by direct access. Anscombe has argued against the traditional contention that intention is an inner state or property of the mind. So while she accepts that we do have a special knowledge of action, it cannot be analysed in terms of observation of inner objects.

Thus Anscombe's analysis of action faces a distinct problem that is characterised in section 29:

The difficulty however is this: What can [for example opening the window] be except making such-and-such movements with such-and-such a result? And in that case what can *knowing* one is opening the window be except knowing that that is taking place? Now if there are two *ways* of knowing here, one of which I call knowledge of one's intentional action and the other which I call knowledge by observation of what takes place, then must there not be two *objects* of knowledge? How can one speak of two different knowledges of *exactly* the same thing?¹

The problem in talking about knowledge without observation of one's intentional action is that to know something is happening requires that it *is* happening but when one's eyes are closed there seems to be no way of knowing this. So knowledge without observation doesn't seem to be knowledge at all. For example, if I were blindfolded and asked to arrange some coins in the shape of a square I might say that I am arranging coins in a square but an observer could easily say 'No you're not – that's a triangle'. So it seems I don't in fact know what I am doing after all. Knowledge without observation seems to allow one to 'know' what is false, in which case it is not knowledge at all. But Anscombe insists that there *is* an important sense in which I know my action without observation and that it shows important differences to empirical knowledge:

Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window'. I have called such a statement knowledge all along; and precisely because in such cases what I say is true – I do open the window; and that means that the window is getting opened by the movements of the body out of whose mouth those words come. But I don't say the words like this: 'Let me see, what is this body bringing about? Ah yes! the opening of

the window'. Or even like this' Let me see, what are my movements bringing about?

The opening of the window'.²

Anscombe returns to this fact again and again throughout *Intention*. It does sound strange to call something knowledge when it doesn't necessarily reflect the facts. Nonetheless we *do* want to say that it is a kind of knowledge. If, with eyes closed, I write my name on a sheet of paper I will get it right nine times out of ten. If someone asks me what I am doing I am utterly convinced that I know what I am doing even though I cannot see what is happening. In the same way that we do not have to look to see the position of our limbs, we do not have to check to see what is happening to our bodies when someone asks us what it is we are doing. Thus it would be absurd to actually check one's body in opening a window in order to investigate what is happening when someone asks about what you are doing.

Maintaining that one has special knowledge of action that doesn't require empirical investigation of one's bodily movements would not be that controversial if one allowed that the observations were directed inside, or that the awareness was of brain states or experiences of some kind. At least then the knowledge of action would have an object other than the bodily movement. But Anscombe cannot allow that there be such an extra object that is known in action. It has been the whole point of the analysis to date to exclude this traditional belief in 'real' intentions, whatever their shape or form may be. This means that Anscombe is committed to a type of knowledge that is literally not knowledge of any-thing. It is the aim of subsequent sections to flesh out and explore the nature of this type of knowledge. This is effectively a defence of her positive account of intentional action; to account for knowledge of action without reference to any known 'intentional' features completes the analysis. But before this discussion gets under way Anscombe digresses with two short but important discussions. The first of these, which I will now examine, is an analysis of the nature of an executed action; of willing and volition.

For Anscombe, the theory of knowledge of action gives rise to the theory of volition. If doing something involves knowledge of an internal property that cannot be understood

through the examination of bodily movements, then an executed intention supposedly involves non-observational awareness of a 'willed intention'. But Anscombe thinks this a 'mad account':

... for the only sense I can give to 'willing' is that in which I might stare at something and will it to move. People sometimes say that one can get one's arm to move by an act of will but not a matchbox; but if they mean 'Will a matchbox to move and it won't', the answer is 'If I will my arm to move that way, it won't', and if they mean 'I can move my arm but not the matchbox' the answer is that I can move the matchbox – nothing easier.³

This relates to remarks Wittgenstein made in the *Investigations*, §613. 'Willing' as Anscombe uses it here is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's notion of an 'immediate non-causal bringing about'. For willing something to move by staring at it seems to be much the same thing – a kind of direct summoning up of the desired event, as if the summoning up were not caused by anything else. It is as if willing on this account were a form of concentration on a body part that results in its directly rising. But Anscombe has repeatedly stated that intentional action is not characterised by any type of experience. We often raise an arm without having any preceding thoughts, feelings or intentions in doing so. We simply raise it. A description of an intentional action characterises a bodily movement *as such* and such an action in the context of certain related circumstances. All that actually occurs are 'doings': the notion of a separate form of mental focusing, 'willing', is an erroneous philosophical thesis. Such a thesis treats as plausible the claim that one can't will a matchbox to move. But, from Anscombe's position, this latter claim is simply nonsense. It is not as if willing an arm or a foot to move involved anything like trying to 'will' a matchbox to move. There is no such extra experience attaching to the bodily movement that characterises it as intentional 'from the inside': there is just the doing itself. Hence there is really no such thing as 'willing' an arm to move: there are only events where we do raise our arms. Similarly, the only sense

we can give to 'willing a matchbox to move' is an event where we just move it by taking hold of it.

Another 'false avenue of escape' from the problem of non-observational knowledge of action is 'to say that I really 'do' in the intentional sense whatever I think I am doing.' This remark refers to a prevalent aspect of the Jamesian account of willing. For example in the *Principles of Psychology* he writes of an idea (a 'motive' idea), being the thing which is right at the beginning of the causal chain in executing an intention:

One sees how the immediate point of application of the volitional effort lies exclusively within the mental world. The whole drama is a mental drama. The whole difficulty is a mental difficulty, a difficulty with an object of our thought . . . is an idea to which our will applies itself . . .⁴

This is later summed up in the following manner:

To sum it all up in a word, *the terminus of the psychological process in volition, the point to which the will is directly applied, is always an idea.*⁵

This remark obviously exemplifies the kind of view Anscombe attacked in the above discussion of willing a matchbox to move. It also illustrates the present 'avenue of escape' too. Clearly, James takes 'doing' to be a matter of what I think I am doing. For once the motive idea has occurred, what is brought about thereafter is something 'outside the mind', a matter for the 'executive ganglia'. And, more importantly, the act of will is equally valid, regardless of whether or not the intended result is brought about. Thus, for example, the occurrence of the motive idea of moving my hand is a complete will-act.

Anscombe notes that it is such a view that led the early Wittgenstein to conclude ironically that 'I am completely powerless:

E.g. if I think I am moving my toe, but it is not actually moving, then I am 'moving my toe' in a certain sense, and as for what *happens* of course I haven't any control over that except in an accidental sense. The essential thing is just what has going on in me, and if what happens coincides with what I 'do' in the sphere of intentions, that is just a grace of fate.⁶

This is also reminiscent of a remark made by Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* about the view that willing is merely an experience – 'It comes when it comes, and I cannot bring it about'.⁷ For example if I attend very closely to what is happening when I raise my little finger it seems as if I wait for a few seconds then, perhaps accompanied by a thought of raising the finger, it is raised. The will-act thus appears to be a kind of experience that 'comes when it comes'. If it comes when it comes, then there is no control over it, as if one were 'completely powerless' to bring it about.

Anscombe attacks this empiricist concept of willing directly by questioning the ontological status of this 'motive idea': what is its vehicle? Is it formulated in words? The conclusion is that it could only be a 'bombination in a vacuum'. Little critical detail is provided to support this claim in the present section. But this is not necessary since most of the previous sections have focused on ridiculing precisely this kind of internal 'intentional extra' that accompanies a bodily movement in intentional action. Section 19 in particular offered a direct attack against this empiricist-causal theory. The current strategy however is to bring 'willing' back to its ordinary use. 'Willing' to go to the park is just going to the park. 'Willing' to write is just writing. There is no 'extra' experience, no mysterious 'bringing about', causal or otherwise, that pre-dates the intentional bodily movement. Such a view is in keeping with the whole theme of previous investigations in *Intention*. The aim has been to emphasise that the application of 'intention' and 'intentional action' is not determined by real states that could be discovered by empirical or scientific investigation.

Section 30 is directly linked to the above discussion. Here the challenge of directly attacking the Jamesian 'motive idea' conception of willing is addressed:

... I will produce an example which shews that it is an error to try to push what is known by being the content of intention back and back; first to the bodily movement, then perhaps to the contraction of the muscles, then to the attempt to do the thing, which comes right at the beginning. The only descriptions that I clearly know of what I am doing may be of something that is at a distance from me.⁸

Anscombe wants to defend a similar argument here to the one in section 19. In section 19 the argument opposed a 'referential' view of action descriptions, whereby they mean what they do in virtue of an extra feature attaching to the bodily movement at the time of the contraction of the muscles. The argument in section 30 is similar, only it is specifically tailored to oppose the above Jamesian causal account of intentional action, where the initial cause of the bodily movement is taken to be a motive idea or 'the attempt to do the thing' that comes right at the beginning of the chain of causes. Again, as with section 19, this argument could be directed at any type of philosophical theory that introduces special components in offering its explanation of action. It is natural for example to view action as a matter for neurological analysis – the bodily movement can be traced back and back from the movements of the limbs to muscle movements, to spinal activity and then to the initial cause in the form of a neurological event.

However, for Anscombe the 'mechanics' of intentional action do not involve any such internal triggers that produce movements. As with the discussion of the individuation of action, where individual actions were seen *not* to be reducible to specific descriptions of internal states, the emphasis is again on trying to show that the meaning of a willed action is dependent on a behavioural context and background assumptions; executed intentions are always 'under a description'. The traditional account sees the act of will to be something independent of the further conditions in which the bodily movement takes place:

Someone might express the view I reject by saying: Consider the sentence 'I am pushing the boat out'. Here, the only part of the sentence which really expresses the known action *in* this intentional action is 'I am pushing'. The words 'the boat' express an opinion on an object which I take to be just in front of me; and that is verified by the senses, i.e. it is a matter of observation. The word 'out' expresses intention with which I am pushing because it expresses an opinion as to an effect of my pushing in these circumstances, which opinion is accompanied by a desire on my part. And this must be the model for analysing every description of an intentional action.⁹

This 'model for analysing every description of an intentional action' is the opposite of the thesis Anscombe has been defending throughout *Intention*. For Anscombe, 'I am pushing the boat out' is a description *under which* the action is intentional. The meaning of the description given to the bodily movement necessarily incorporates the things the body is interfering with. It is in the light of these circumstantial elements, plus some background assumptions, that the movement is characterised *as* the action it is. If the agent were asked what they were doing, they would reply that they were pushing the boat out – that is the description the agent knows without observation. But the 'philosophical' or empiricist thesis has it that 'I am pushing' is the known action and the rest is open to further discovery. 'I am pushing' merely describes the movement of the body in isolation from the context of the movement. Such a view slides back toward all the pitfalls Anscombe has been warning against. It suggests that part of the 'action' must therefore include an internal particular that can be identified independently of its surroundings, an internal will-act that gives shape and direction to the bodily movement, making it one of "pushing the boat out". It breaks the action down into phases of a causal process – the action occurs first in the mind, an intention and act of will, then in the body which then causally interacts with whatever object is known by observation to be before it, in this case the boat.

It is interesting that the 'intention with which' is given a causal role also, in the form of a desire-belief pair. The intention with which the pushing action is executed is to move the

object (i.e. the boat) 'out' away from the body. But this state of intention is reduced to an 'opinion as to an effect of my pushing in these circumstances' which is 'accompanied by a desire on my part'. Although Anscombe would obviously not deny that action is a 'sentient' affair, involving awareness and motivation, her position avoids reducing intention to beliefs and desires in this sense. As far back as section 11 it was clearly stated that 'the intention with which' is never a mental cause. The discussion of what Anscombe refers to as the 'phenomenology of intention' revealed that for Anscombe 'desire', as a mental cause, is not what characterises intentional action. For often there is no such felt desire in action and even if there were, it would not show the action in its 'intentional' light: for to mention a mental cause is to reject the relevant reason-seeking sense of 'Why?'. But the view Anscombe is rejecting has it that 'every description of an intentional action' must be analysed in this way, as if all intentional actions involved experienced beliefs + felt desires which, as mental causes, constituted the intention and so give rise to *as well* as causally explain the ensuing action.

Anscombe offers an 'example to refute such a view':

Can I deliberately lower my arm at the speed at which it would fall? I should find it difficult to make that the title under which I acted. But suppose [a physiologist] . . . fixes up a mechanism in which something in motion can be kept level if I hold a handle and execute a pumping movement with my arm and on the downward stroke lower it at the rate at which it would fall. Now my instruction is: Keep it level, and with a bit of practice I learn to do so. My account of what I am doing is that I am keeping the thing level; I don't consider the movement of my arm at all. I am able to give a much more exact account of what I am doing at a distance than of what my arm is doing. So my keeping the thing level is not at all something which I calculate as the effect of what I really and immediately am doing, and therefore directly know in my 'knowledge of my own action'. In general, as Aristotle says, one does not deliberate about an acquired skill; the description of what one is doing, which one completely understands, is at a distance from the details of one's movements, which one does not consider at all.¹⁰

This thought experiment derives from the *Investigations*, §626, where Wittgenstein addresses the issue of guiding kinaesthetic sensation in bodily movement and position: “When I touch this object with a stick I have the sensation of touching in the tip of the stick, not in the hand that holds it.” The concluding remark to that inquiry is “What are you now feeling in the fingers that hold the probe?” to which the reply is “I don’t know – I feel something hard and rough *over there*”. The point is that what is known in this action is not a feeling in the hands and fingers. As mentioned above, James had it that ‘the willing terminates in the motive idea’. This is part of a wider empiricist tradition. Hobbes took the known action to be what Anscombe would refer to as a mental cause: ‘Will . . . is the last Appetite in Deliberating’.¹¹ Locke stated that ‘volition or willing is an act of the mind directing its thought to the production of any action, and thereby exerting its power to produce it.’¹² For Anscombe however, an intentional action is always under a description and this description characterises the action in terms of what is ‘at a distance’ from the subject. It is in this respect that the previous remarks about trying to will a matchbox to move make no sense. For this makes it seem as if executing an intention is a matter of some internal focusing of the mind on its object, as if the known intention in acting were something at the back of a causal chain leading out to the movement of the object in the environment. But in fact the language game reveals only that our talk of willing such-and-such is limited to talk of doing in such-and-such circumstances. In serving a tennis ball I do not give the action description ‘Mentally focusing on my limbs and shoulders to move in order to contact the ball with the racket’. Rather, I might describe my action as ‘Serving for the match’. If I was pressed about my actions by an observant child, for example, it might be revealed that the most ‘basic’ action that I could be said to intend is the movement of my arm while holding the racket. But even this would be a bodily movement under a description rather than a description of just the movement of a part of my body, yet alone a description of some internal ‘will-act’. Most of our actions do seem to involve such ‘distant’ descriptions – walking down the stairs, reaching for a book on the top shelf, grabbing the pepper mill –

such everyday actions usually involve little or no awareness of our bodily movements. We execute our intentions often without there being any inner occurrences either, such as desires conceived as the causes of the movements of our limbs. To say that such mechanically related processes are involved in executing intentions is to deviate from the usual rules of use and to try to interpret and explain the language in terms of a philosophical theory. But, for Anscombe, such theories lead to absurdity and, as in this case, unsupported hypotheses about will-acts, causal chains, desires, and mental causes.

Anscombe's own formula for executed intention is 'I *do* what *happens*'. She admits that 'everyone who heard this formula found it extremely paradoxical and obscure'. This formula is an intuitive characterisation of what Anscombe takes to be true of executed intentions. What is known in executing an intention, for example 'opening the window', is known both observationally and non-observationally. But one problem with the formula is that it seems obvious that one can't confidently say 'I do what happens' because often what one 'does' turns out not to be the same as what 'happens':

Someone without eyes may go on writing with a pen that has no more ink in it; or may not realise he is going over the edge of the paper on to the table or overwriting lines already written.¹³

But this seems to lead Anscombe into a dilemma. If what is known in the action without observation, say 'Writing my name on a sheet of paper' is *not* what is happening (because the pen has run out of ink) then either (a) it is knowledge by introspection of something other than what is happening to pen and paper – knowledge of special inner occurrences or (b) it is not knowledge at all because it turned out to be false. Obviously Anscombe rejects '(a)' outright. But she is not in a position to then accept '(b)' because she insists that non-observational knowledge of what is done *is* knowledge:

In practice of course what I write will very likely not go on being very legible if I don't use my eyes; but isn't the role of all our observation-knowledge in knowing what we are doing like the role of the eyes in producing successful writing? That is to say, once given that we have knowledge or opinion about the matter in which we perform intentional actions, our observation is merely an aid, as the eyes are an aid in writing.¹⁴

One obstacle to accepting anything like Anscombe's position would be an unwitting acceptance of an 'inner-outer' model of knowing an executed intention. This would liken the acting agent with his eyes closed to someone in a room pulling levers and pressing knobs that lead to events beyond the door. Opening the eyes would then be like opening the door and going out to check what has happened. Prior to opening the door there was no knowledge of what was happening because this could not be observed. But there was knowledge of what was going on inside the room, behind the door. There the agent could look at his own movements and actions. These activities inside the room are analogous to the mental occurrences 'inside the mind' that go on separately from the happenings 'outside'. (Of course, imagining these activities behind the door is ironically to imagine actual intentional actions – bodily movements under a description: that seems to be as close as we can get to formulating inner mental occurrences). This mistaken scenario is exhaustive – there are only two possible types of knowledge. There is knowledge of what is going on 'inside' the mind or knowledge of what is going on 'outside' the mind. Both types of knowledge are observational and both yield their own separate facts. There is no room for a middle position of non-observational knowledge i.e. knowledge inferred from evidence in the form of states, causes, processes etc., be they inner or outer.

The temptation to simply disregard non-observational knowledge as no type of knowledge at all is something Anscombe thinks should be resisted. After all, it would be absurd to check hand movements to see if writing is occurring. And yet there are no inner signs that tell us that the handwriting is getting done. It is not as if there are kinaesthetic sensations in the finger that enable us to direct its movement, or feelings of pressure on the

skin from pressing on the pen. As Wittgenstein remarked in the *Investigations*, knowing without looking that my index finger is moving means only 'being able to describe it.' It is knowledge, but not knowledge derived from detecting previously noted sensations. The same ability applies to the position of limbs. I know that my hands are behind my head and that my legs are crossed at the ankles, even though my eyes are closed. But I don't know this by saying to myself 'Let's see. Is there that 'crossed-ankle feeling' or the sensation of having my hands resting on the back of my head?' For Anscombe, you could say it is by knowing the language game and so having the ability to correctly characterise the action that we know our intentional actions without observation. It is the expectation of theoretical explanation, of causal hypotheses and fact-based knowledge that accounts for the fact that 'I *do* what *happens*' sounds 'paradoxical and obscure'. But Anscombe takes this non-observational knowledge of action as crucial to an understanding of intentional action and so devotes the remainder of *Intention* to its elucidation.

II. A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE OF ACTION: THE EPISTEMIC PRIORITY OF DESIRE

1. Knowledge of action and knowledge of commands: a comparison.

The critique of traditional theories of volition arose from an attempt to understand non-observational knowledge of intentional action. Anscombe diagnosed volitional theories as misled attempts to explain the fact that we can know an action in two or more different ways. The conclusion was that being able to give a description of one's action without observing bodily movements was not due to our observing psychological causes as the empiricist maintains. But the apparent fact that there is knowledge of intentional action that does not involve observation still needs to be analysed. Having introduced the problem in section 28 and dealt with these 'false avenues of escape' in 29 and 30 (the accounts of 'volition'), Anscombe suggests two possible solutions in sections 31 and 32.

The proposal in 31 is not that important to the analysis of non-observational knowledge of action because it is found not to offer a solution. But it is interesting in that it sheds light on Anscombe's conception of intentional action. The aim is to try and account for non-observational knowledge in action by clarifying the fact that it appears not to be concerned with what is the case, neither with psychological nor non-psychological states of affairs. In writing something on a page I know what I am doing without appeal to facts, without 'observing' either guiding sensations or movements of the hand and arm. Anscombe's attempted solution involves examining the contradiction of a statement of intention:

. . . . let us ask: What is the contradictory of a description of one's own intentional action? Is it 'You aren't, in fact'? – E.g. 'You aren't replenishing the house water supply, because the water is running out of a hole in the pipe'? I suggest that it is not.¹⁵

Focusing on the contradiction of a statement of intention forces us to attend to the conditions of its 'truth' or 'falsity', thus giving us an insight into its meaning. It might seem natural to say that the contradiction of a statement of the man's pumping water into the house is 'No you are not – there is a hole in the pipe.' Here, the apparent contradiction lies in the fact that there being a hole in the pipe seems to falsify the statement that water is getting pumped into the house. But Anscombe has previously insisted that what is known in action is not anything that can be observed. I might be told by a training instructor to make certain arm and leg movements with my eyes closed. Once the movements have been made, I can say with great confidence the exact positions of my limbs if asked: 'My right knee is raised to hip height, my left arm is parallel to the floor' etc. And yet I seem to know this without being aware of any clues or evidence whatsoever. This is why Anscombe suggests that the above statement does *not* contradict the report of intentional action – the contradictory statement mentions an observed state of affairs, while making a statement about an intentional action does not appeal to states of affairs for its justification, as Anscombe has argued.

Anscombe illustrates her claim about the statement of intention by comparing it to the contradictory of a command. The example is an anecdote about a soldier who responds to a doctor's command to clench his teeth by taking them out and saying 'You clench them'. It is a complicated example and needs to be fully quoted:

Now the statement 'The water is running out of a pipe round the corner' stands in the same relation to the statement 'I'm replenishing the house water-supply' as does 'My teeth are false' to the order 'Clench your teeth'; and so the statement (on grounds of observation) 'You are not replenishing the house water-supply' stands in the same relation to the description of intentional action 'I am replenishing the house water-supply', as does the well-founded prediction 'This man isn't going to clench his teeth, since they are false' to the order 'Clench your teeth'. And just as the contradiction of the order: 'Clench your teeth' is *not* 'The man, as is clear from the following evidence, is not going to do any clenching of teeth, at least of the sort you mean', but 'Do not clench your teeth', so the contradiction of 'I'm replenishing the house water-supply' is not 'You aren't since there is a hole in the pipe', but 'Oh, no, you aren't' said by someone who thereupon sets out e.g. to make a hole in the pipe with a pick-axe. And similarly, if a person says 'I am going to bed at midnight' the contradiction of this is not: 'You won't, for you never keep such resolutions' but 'You won't, for I am going to stop you'.¹⁶

This example is convoluted but Anscombe's strategy seems clear. The command is not contradicted by stating contradictory facts, but a contrary command. Similarly, the expression of intention is contradicted by the facts but by a contrary expression of intention. This analysis respects the fact that expressions of intention aren't estimates that could be contradicted by statements of fact, as a weather prediction could be, for example. As was mentioned earlier, expressions of intention are seen to be something like Austin's performative speech acts and as such are not true or false. Hence 'contradiction' here is being used lightly. For opposing 'I am going to bed at midnight' is hardly *falsified* by 'You won't, for I am going to stop you.'

Anscombe formulated intention in action as 'I *do* what *happens*'. But this is not to say that doings are happenings, since obviously they are at opposite ends of the scale ('happenings' being more appropriate to involuntary actions like sneezes). 'Doings' are bodily movements under a description. So to contradict an action description is to state an opposing 'bodily movement under a description'. The picture for contrary action descriptions is more like two people opposing one another rather than one person's actions being rendered futile by inhibiting conditions. If intentional action were known by observation then action descriptions *would* be contradicted by contrary evidence. An action description known by observation would be an absurdity such as 'My body is now going to bed', contradicted by 'No its not, its going into the bathroom'. In such a case the facts would contradict the action description. That the action description is, as shown by comparison with commands, actually contradicted by an opposing action description, is Anscombe's way of trying to clarify non-observational knowledge in action.

But the 'parallelism ceases . . . just where we begin to speak of knowledge' because the 'order is not a piece of knowledge' while the action description is:

So the parallelism is interesting and illuminates the periphery of the problem, it fails at the centre and leaves that in the darkness that we have found ourselves in.¹⁷

As mentioned in section 2, commands and expressions of intention are similar in that they both concern 'what it would be good to make happen with a view to an objective'. This is due to the fact that both involve intention. But although it is a 'prediction' as Anscombe defines it, a command is not an expression of intention but is instead 'a description of an action cast in a special form'. Although a command is usually given with some intention or other, it is not a piece of knowledge in the way that an action description is. So something of the nature of intention in action and its relation to observed facts is revealed by this analysis but nothing interesting emerges about the nature of non-observational knowledge.

2. Knowledge of action characterised: the priority of desire in acting.

Section 32 is important since it puts the rest of the investigation into non-observational knowledge of action on the right footing and *does* constitute a satisfactory basis for the its elucidation. Anscombe illustrates the proposed solution to the problem of knowledge of action with an example:

Let us consider a man going round a town with a shopping list in his hand. Now it is clear that the relation of this list to the things he actually buys is one and the same whether his wife gave him the list or it is his own list; and that there is a different relation when a list is made by a detective following him about. If he made the list itself, it was an expression of intention; if his wife gave it to him, it has the role of an order. What then is the identical relation to what happens, in the order and the intention, which is not shared by the record? It is precisely this: if the list and the things that the man actually buys do not agree, and if this and this alone constitutes a *mistake*, then the mistake is not in the list but in the man's performance (if his wife were to say: 'Look, it says butter and you have bought margarine', he would hardly reply: 'What a mistake! we must put that right' and alter the word on the list to 'margarine'); whereas if the detective's record and what the man actually buys do not agree, then the mistake is in the record.¹⁸

This example is similar to the one of opening the window. In that case the opening of the window seemed to be known in two different ways. One way involved observation of the bodily movements in the opening of the window, the other knowledge of the opening of the window without the use of the eyes – non-observational knowledge. Anscombe's conviction then was that the knowledge without observation was still knowledge even though it might be 'knowledge' of what is not the case because what is actually occurring might not be the opening of the window – a shutter might have been accidentally opened instead, for example. Such an example seems vulnerable to a sceptical argument directed at the 'non-observational knowledge'. The sceptic could reply that this 'non-observational knowledge'

of action is beginning to look very like directly accessed information in Cartesian 'mental space'. For if it is not knowledge of anything that is going on in the world that could be observed with the eyes, then it seems it must be knowledge of a private object in the mind. The only alternative to holding this drastic thesis would be to say that there is really no such thing as non-observational knowledge of action. How can it be knowledge if it is compatible with getting the facts wrong? However, the above example seems to lend Anscombe's position more support. Rather than just appealing to the intuition that we do have knowledge of action other than by observation of inner or outer states, this example suggests that we talk as if there were such knowledge too – the language game seems to imply a commitment to it. Rather than just focusing on the fact that there are two ways of knowing the one action, one as a voluntary act, the other as a mere bodily event, this example shows further that the concept of error is used in two different ways depending on whether we are talking about knowledge of events or knowledge of action.

Whereas in previous examples the two different types of knowledge were considered from the point of view of the subject (such as knowledge of limb position), in this example the knowledge by observation is attributed to an onlooker, the detective. This produces a greater sense of contrast between the two types of knowledge. While the shopper knows the action in two different ways, the detective only knows it by observation. Whether the shopping list represents the wife's command or the husband's expression of intention, failure to pick out the items according to it amounts to an *error of performance*. This is because both the command and the expression of intention involve intention. This is not a theory, but a remark on what we actually say in practice. Thus Anscombe is appealing to what is true of the language game, rather than putting forward a hypothesis. After all, no hypothesis or theoretical explanation could be provided for knowledge of 'no-thing' i.e. the action known without observation of anything. But a correct description of our language use reveals that we do use 'mistake' in more than one straightforward way: 'Look, it says butter and you have bought margarine' – the reply would hardly be 'What a mistake! we must put that right' said while altering the word on the list to 'margarine'.

The detective is observing *events* or happenings and writing them down. If he records what he sees incorrectly, then the error results from a wrong observation and it is his judgement that it is in error in so far as it fails to match up to the state of affairs in the world. It is a 'mis-recording' of observed events and its error is in the detective's 'thought' because it fails accurately to represent the observation. If the detective thinks 'Beans, he's putting beans in his basket' and it is really a tin of peas, then the error lies in the detective's judgement. But 'mistake' is used differently when we talk about it in relation to the subject's own knowledge or awareness of what is occurring – his non-observational knowledge of his shopping activities. If the shopper is asked 'What are you doing right now?' he will not have to check his body or look around to see where he is, or make inferences as to the best explanation of what is happening to him. Rather he says immediately 'Picking out butter'. If it is then pointed out to him that he has put margarine in the shopping basket he will say something like 'Oh, I meant to get butter!' But the mistake is nothing like the kind of mistake that the detective made. The detective's mistake is a mistake in observation and his failure is a failure of judgement. The shopper mistook 'Picking out margarine' for 'Picking out butter'. He did not say 'I could have sworn I was observing my hand grabbing the butter and dropping it into this basket but what it actually grabbed was the margarine!' The mistake therefore does not seem to be a mistake in judgement or observation. Put another way, the 'thought' component is prior to the event in intentional action – 'Picking out butter' is the action description the agent would give if asked what he was doing, regardless of what is happening in the world. But with the detective's judgement the *state of affairs* is 'prior' and the detective's thought comes afterward in an attempt to mirror the facts with accurate observation. Our language reveals this. We just *do* use 'mistake' in this way when we talk of actions and we just *do* say straight off and without checking or observing what it is we are involved in doing.

Given that nothing like an empiricist or introspection account will do, as seen in sections 29 and 30, there is no explanatory route available to account for this feature of knowledge of intentional action. There are no motive ideas, and usually no mental causes, no

feelings of innervation, nor 'inner' processes that could explain how we know what we are doing without observing our bodies. And the knowledge is obviously not empirical observational knowledge. So Anscombe suggests we talk of a new type of knowledge altogether:

Can it be that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. Knowledge must be something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts. The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge. And this is the explanation of the utter darkness in which we found ourselves. For if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there must be two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting.¹⁹

In suggesting a new type of knowledge, Anscombe resists the tendency to generalise about knowledge – to suppose there is only *one* type of knowledge. This traditional 'theoretical' paradigm for knowledge recognises facts, evidence and observation. When applied to action and intention it leads to a theoretical account of the 'inner'. The intention and act of will become the observed states or objects of knowledge. Anscombe accepts that we do know our actions 'directly'. However, in refusing to analyse it in a traditional 'observational' way, the notion of a different type of non-theoretical knowledge is introduced.

Generally, knowledge could be classified according to the following types, some of which capture Anscombe's stance on knowledge of action and intention:

Knowing *of*:

- (i) "I was acquainted with Harold Brown."

Knowing *that*:

- (i) Knowledge by observation – e.g. “I know there’s a cat on the mat”.
- (ii) Knowledge of facts – e.g. “I know Dublin is the capital of Ireland”.

Knowing *how*:

- (i) Knowing how to do something – e.g. “I know how to boil an egg”.
- (ii) Knowing how to correctly characterise something – e.g. “I know that this is called a ‘spindle’.

Knowing *why*:

- (i) Giving the reason for an action – e.g. “I know you did it out of jealousy”.
- (ii) Giving the cause of an event – e.g. “It caught fire because she lit a match”.

Anscombe’s position eschews knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by observation for action. In knowing our actions we are not acquainted with inner objects, nor do we observe intention ‘in the mind’. But we do know *how* to characterise our actions as coming under such and such a description and similarly, we can give reasons for our actions in the absence of any occurrent mental states.

Nonetheless, we find it very difficult to even think of knowledge beyond the ‘theoretical’ paradigm in which thought must correspond to the facts. Knowledge, it seems, must be knowledge *of* something noted, observed or recognised – it must involve an eye, even if it is an odd ‘inner’ eye. If we can know what our bodies are doing without using our eyes then there must be a special mode of observation operating in its place. This seems very mysterious if we adhere to the theoretical analogues. It seems as if Anscombe is saying that knowledge of action involves something like standing behind a screen in a dark room and listing off all the things behind it to the bewilderment of surprised onlookers. On such a reading, practical knowledge becomes a form of clairvoyance. The clairvoyant eye can somehow tell what the bodily movements while the eyes are closed. This seems an appropriate parallel to the earlier notion that willing involves a kind of telekinetic mental power. You can ‘see’ the body with your eyes closed by clairvoyance and move it by telekinesis. Such are the outlandish conclusions drawn from trying to force a theoretical framework on what is for Anscombe just a plain fact of action as revealed through the use of

language. In fact Anscombe could be said to be simply providing an accurate *description* of action and its language as opposed to the interpretation given to it by philosophers. In this respect practical knowledge is the result simply of an accurate 'phenomenology of action' as Anscombe refers to it. Such an accurate description of action reveals that there are no experiences, causes or inner observables involved. We know our actions but not in the same way that we know facts and there are no grounds for explaining this capacity in theoretical terms. The introduction of practical knowledge is a significant step forward in Anscombe's analysis of the knowledge of action. She is now set to subject it to detailed analysis by switching to an examination of Aristotle's practical syllogism.

III. A PROBLEM WITH ANSCOMBE'S ACCOUNT OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. 'Direction of fit' revisited: a problem with practical knowledge.

We have seen that Anscombe has introduced practical knowledge as a way of solving the problem of there being two ways of knowing intentional action. Anscombe suggested that in the case of, for example, opening a window a person can know that this is happening either by observing their own bodily movements or by saying "straight off" what they are doing without using their senses :

Say I go over to the window and open it. Someone who hears me moving calls out: What are you doing making that noise? I reply 'Opening the window'. I have called such a statement knowledge all along. . . . This difficulty however is this: What can opening the window be except making such-and-such movements with such-and-such a result? And in that case what can *knowing* one is opening the window be except knowing that that is taking place? Now if there are two *ways* of knowing here, one of which I call knowledge of one's intentional action and the other of which I call knowledge by observation of what takes place, then must there not be two objects of knowledge?²⁰

I can open the window with my eyes shut and yet still say with confidence that that is what I am doing. If I had a momentary memory loss and forgot what it was that I was doing I may look at my hands gripping the window and conclude that that was what I was doing. So it makes sense to say that I can know my action in *two* ways: both observationally and non-observationally. This produces a problem for Anscombe. We would usually be inclined to say that if there are two ways of knowing something then there must be two things known. For example, I might observe my hand in a mirror and arrive at the knowledge that it is moving by looking at its reflection, or alternatively I could arrive at the same knowledge by looking at it directly. I seem to be able to arrive at knowledge about my hand in two ways.

But in such a case we naturally say that this is because there are two objects known or that two “things” are being observed – my hand and its reflection. Similarly, if I can know an intentional action in two ways then the immediate suggestion is that there are two things known.

However, Anscombe argues that this is an unacceptable line of reasoning when it comes to knowledge of intentional action: what is known in two ways is “*exactly* the same thing” For “what can *knowing* one is opening the window be except knowing that that is taking place?”²¹ In other words, Anscombe rejects the idea that there *are* two objects known in the case of opening a window intentionally. This move ties in with her argument in section 19, where she claimed that in describing an action as intentional we are not referring to some “extra” element beyond the bodily movement under a description. I may know an action in two ways but this does not mean that there are two objects known. Of course, one traditional response to this problem would be to say that there *are* two objects known: the bodily movement and the action or the intention seen from the “inside”. On this view I can observe my bodily movements using my sense and I can observe the “inner” movements using introspection. However, Anscombe insists that there is only one thing known here – that I am opening the window.

The specific problem for Anscombe now however, is how there *can* be two knowledges of exactly the same thing. To take my own example above, it is as if we must now explain how it is that I can know that my hand is moving in two ways but *without* the help of the reflection as an object of knowledge. As Anscombe says, “this is difficult” and it is what has led some to re-introduce an extra object nonetheless: “this question has led some people to say that what one knows as intentional action is only the intention . . . and that the rest is known by observation to be the *result*, which was also willed in the intention”.²² But Anscombe, having rejected this route, is still left with the problem of explaining the nature of this other mode of knowledge, this non-observational mode of knowing that the window is getting opened. How can I know that my hand is moving in *two* ways if I am not somehow accessing two objects of knowledge?

In answering this question, Anscombe aims to avoid the solution that says there is a mysterious, introspective form of knowing:

For if there are two knowledges – one by observation, the other in intention – then it looks as if there must be two objects of knowledge; but if one says the objects are the same, one looks hopelessly for the different *mode of contemplative knowledge* in acting, as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of acting.²³

Anscombe's specific aim is to avoid the solution that says there is a mysterious, introspective means of knowing an action, a "different mode of contemplative knowledge". Implicit in such a mysterious mode of knowledge is the view that there are other things known in action – as a contemplative mode of knowing it is derived from the facts and the facts in question, which are not facts about the body, are likely to be facts about the "mind". However at this stage, having rejected any appeal to extra objects of knowledge for intentional action, Anscombe is really concerned to simply avoid introducing a different mysterious form of observational knowledge to accompany ordinary observational knowledge of one's body in action. In short, she aims to provide an account of non-observational knowledge of action that does not involve checking or observing facts of any kind – a different *mode* of knowing altogether.

Anscombe's response constitutes one of the lasting achievements of *Intention*. She introduces the notion of what has come to be known as the *direction of fit* between an agent's knowledge and the world. In the case of factual belief the belief itself must "fit" the world: it is justified insofar as it accurately reflects the state of affairs it is about. However for Anscombe, the primary cognitive element in action – desire – is not said to be validated insofar as it maps correctly onto the world. Rather, it is the other way around. We try to satisfy our desires by getting the world to "fit" them. Thus, for example, wanting to grow an oak tree involves buying seed, sewing it, watering it and so on: it involves bringing about a

state of affairs in line with desire. So Anscombe proposed that knowledge of intentional action, which involves desire, exhibits a reversed direction of fit to speculative or theoretical knowledge.

Anscombe's appeal to the "direction of fit" does appear to provide Anscombe with a meaningful way of contrasting knowledge of intentional action with knowledge of the world. Her solution at least achieves its aim of accounting for how we can have two ways of knowing the same intentional action without postulating that there are two modes of *contemplative* knowledge: practical knowledge has a reversed direction of fit to that of contemplative knowledge. Belief, which must accord to the facts, is justified if it fits the world. Desire, which must accord with an agent's aim, is "justified" if the world fits it.

However, there is a difficulty with this account of knowledge of intentional action that Anscombe herself acknowledges. Since practical knowledge is not knowledge "in accordance with the facts" it would seem that one can have practical knowledge of what is *not* the case:

[T]he following example will very likely have occurred to the reader: 'Known without observation' may very well be a justifiable formula for knowledge of the position and movements of one's limbs, but you have spoken of all intentional action as falling under this concept. Now it may be e.g. that one paints a wall yellow, meaning to do so. But is it reasonable to say that one 'knows without observation' that one is painting a wall yellow?²⁴

Anscombe comes back to this issue repeatedly in *Intention*. If I am blindfolded when painting the wall yellow and someone asks me what I am doing I will say "Painting the wall yellow". However, they may have changed the paint without my knowing so that I am actually painting the wall blue. For Anscombe, the action itself is characterised by the description the agent gives to it. If the agent says "I am painting the wall yellow" then that is what he is *doing*, but this seems wrong because the wall is actually being painted blue. Thus,

there is a serious tension in her account: it may seem plausible to say that what a person intends to do is what they are doing, but if what they say they are doing is not actually getting done then we would be inclined to say that their description of their action is incorrect.

In response to this problem, Anscombe appeals to the notion of direction of fit again. In particular, she insists that if there is a mistake here it is in the performance and not in the judgment. So, although my bodily movements do not result in yellow paint being applied to the wall, my assertion that that is what I am doing still holds. Thus, she claims that, “to use Theophrastus’ expression again, the mistake is not one of judgment but of performance. That is, we do *not* say: What you *said* was a mistake, because it was supposed to describe what you did and did not describe it, but: What you *did* was a mistake, because it was not in accordance with what you said. . . . there is a discrepancy between the language and that of which the language is a description. But the discrepancy does not impute a fault to the language – but to the event.”²⁵ Anscombe’s analysis captures something that seems to be true of action in everyday life here. A person could ask me what I am doing at any given moment and I could usually say “straight off” without having to check my bodily movements: “Paying for a taxi”, “buttering bread”, “going upstairs” and so on. If I were blindfolded in all these cases I would presumably give the same report: that is what I am *doing*. Nonetheless, an observer, noting my mistakes, would be inclined to say I am not doing these things.

2. A dilemma for Anscombe’s account of practical knowledge.

Against Anscombe, one line of criticism flatly rejects the view that the description “painting the wall yellow” by the person painting the wall blue is an accurate description of the action. Instead it is suggested that the best that can be said here is that the person is *trying* to paint the wall yellow but that he is failing to do so. On this reading, Anscombe’s account can avoid mystery by changing the description “painting the wall yellow” to “trying to paint the wall yellow”, thereby allowing that the person can state their intended action in a way that is compatible with possible error in performance. Introducing the notion of trying here

seems plausible. We usually apply “trying” in situations where there is a reasonable possibility of failure to execute an intention. Thus it would seem appropriate to describe the blindfolded painter as someone who is trying to paint the wall yellow. After all, Anscombe’s account appears to leave no room for distinguishing between what a person says they are doing and what they are trying to do in face of possible failure to execute their intention.

Furthermore, as suggested by L. D. Houlgate, Anscombe’s account faces another problem in that “the distinction [between mistake in judgment and mistake in performance], left unanalyzed, may be extremely misleading in that the reader may believe that the notion of mistake in performance excludes error of judgment”.²⁶ He suggests instead that “on the contrary we cannot even speak of ‘mistake’ unless we can pick out some occurrence of judgmental error”.²⁷

The problems facing Anscombe’s account of practical knowledge could be characterised in the form of a dilemma. On the one hand, she wants to avoid saying that knowledge of intentional action is arrived at by observation of the body, or at least, that avoids being reduced to speculative knowledge. As she notes, “I don’t say the words like this: ‘Let me see, what is this body bringing about? Ah yes! the opening of the window’. Or even like this ‘Let me see, what are my movements bringing about? The opening of the window’”.²⁸ This way of talking does sound very artificial and it fails to capture the privileged status the agent has in giving reports of his intentional actions. On the other hand, Anscombe’s suggestion that my intentional action is the action I say it is regardless of what is actually happening seems unsatisfactory too. It appears to dissociate the agent’s intention from what is actually occurring to the extent that it becomes the “bombination in a vacuum”.²⁹ Anscombe has being attacking. The action seems to be disconnected from the environment to such an extent that it exists “purely within the sphere of the mind”.³⁰ On a strong reading, her account appears to accept that a person’s action is getting done regardless of what is happening in the world. Consequently, it seems that her position is in danger of individuating actions in terms of mental states or experiences after all.

Commentators have picked up on the threat for Anscombe here. Timothy Cleveland suggests that the “distinction [between practical and speculative knowledge] is certainly meaningful, but *identifying* practical knowledge with knowledge of *the action* without observation only makes one think misleadingly of one’s body in acting as ‘*the material one is working on*’. . . . This talk clearly conjures up the Cartesian ‘ghost in the machine.’³¹ Similarly, Richard Moran states that “Anscombe needs the difference between ‘what I do’ and ‘what happens’ in order that ‘practical knowledge’, which is said to be non-observational, not devolve into a kind of speculative knowledge of events, or a “very queer and special kind of seeing eye in the middle of acting”.³² And Rosalind Hursthouse notes that it might appear that “in making knowledge non-speculative Anscombe has rendered it miraculous”.³³ Indeed, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that I could know that I am painting the wall yellow without being able to see what it is that I am doing, without restricting intention to the mental realm, without reintroducing psychological observables that can be detected “inside”. What Anscombe needs to achieve then, is a description of knowledge of intentional action that is not derived from the objects known (i.e. is not speculative) and yet that can resist alternative accounts that insist in reintroducing the “extra” things known such as tryings that she has resisted. So one must ask “What exactly does Anscombe’s account achieve and has it got the resources available to resist a return to the view that there are after all ‘two things known’?”

3. Practical knowledge as a broad formula.

Initially one could defend Anscombe against the reintroduction of mental elements such as tryings by insisting that we can really only talk of trying in certain cases where, for example, effort is required. Thus, it would be absurd to say “I tried to walk out the door and I tried to open the gate and I tried to turn left”. However, one could still respond here by saying that in the case of e.g. painting the wall yellow, where the agent is blindfolded, there was a possibility of error and that it *would* be very natural to describe the person as trying to

paint the wall yellow, even though Anscombe would want to say that a correct description of their action *is* “painting the wall yellow”.

Perhaps the best way for Anscombe to respond to this dilemma is to emphasise the broader aspects of her account of practical knowledge. She urges us to overcome a generally “observational” approach to knowledge of action. In defence of her approach one could say that the critic is drawn to analyse the problem by seeking some “observational” mode of seeing and that the “mystery” they attribute to her treatment of examples such as that of painting the wall yellow arise specifically out of this traditional expectation. In other words, the real achievement of her account may perhaps be found by resisting a framework that views knowledge in observational/non-observational terms and that looks more to her claim that practical knowledge is, for example, the “cause of what it understands”:

[W]here (a) the description of an event is of a type to be formally the description of an executed intention [and] (b) the event is actually the execution of an executed intention (by our criteria) then the account given by Aquinas of the nature of practical knowledge holds: Practical knowledge is ‘the cause of what it understands’, unlike ‘speculative’ knowledge, which ‘is derived from the objects known.’³⁴

Anscombe pits this formula against analyses that view knowledge of action in terms of psychological “extras”. In emphasising that an action is the cause of what it understands, Anscombe is effectively saying that it is impossible to characterise an individual action at all without reference to the description the agent gives to it.

Moreover, as we have seen, the general account of the individuation of an action provided by Anscombe precludes singling out actions in terms of psychological antecedents to bodily movements such as tryings. In this sense, the example of painting the wall yellow is one that is perhaps unfair to Anscombe. For the action to be said to occur in this case requires that the result must be achieved. As an alternative example one could ask me what I was doing last May and I might reply “Building a house”. The house may never have

actually been built because the project failed and yet the description I give of my action is correct. The point here is that on such an example it seems more appropriate to say that what I was *actually doing* was building a house, even though the building of the house did not occur in the world, that is, even though the intended result did not come about. Anscombe's account seems better able to analyse such cases. As Anscombe states, the view that she is opposing holds that "what one knows in action is only the intention . . . and that the rest is known by observation to be the *result*, which was also willed in the intention".³⁵ But in the example of building the house it is less easy to split one's knowledge of the action up into "intention known in action" and "intended result" because the building of the house did not come about.

Although the actual *result* of an action may be stipulated as necessary for being the action it is, it *need* not be so stipulated, in which case the identity of the action need not depend on the result. This would be in accord with Anscombe's view that individuation does not depend on the individuation of the event but on how it is described.

If such an account were properly developed it would have to show how Anscombe hopes to avoid the objection that practical knowledge can be of that which is not the case by showing that the result is not part of what I'm actually doing, as in the case of building a house. Of course this project would not be an easy one because it would involve distinguishing e.g. "Painting the wall yellow" from "Painting the wall a colour one desires, namely yellow". But it must be admitted that developing such an account would be a difficult task because once one excludes the result of the action the notion of a trying automatically suggests itself.

In fact, an opponent of Anscombe could insist that introducing "trying" to the case of building a house is exactly the right route to take. Thus I *tried* to build a house but failed to do so. On such a reading, what I know is that I was trying to build a house. The "mistake" in performance of the house's not coming about disqualifies the description "Building a house". Although the application of "trying" here does seem very natural, Anscombe might still argue that usually there is nothing in my experience that would license the use of "try"

here. What *I* was doing was building a house. If I had a broken leg and a broken arm I would definitely describe my behaviour as “trying to build a house” but as it was I had no grounds to describe my action as such. This line of reasoning tries to resist the view that there *is* any mental “extra” thing known in intentional action, regardless of whether it is characterised as “inner” or not. That is, Anscombe may suggest that the action is what it is *in virtue* of the description the agent gives it and that in many cases that description does not involve the use of “try”.

This tends to bring us back to the difficulties Anscombe faced earlier against the causalist. She may want to claim that “intentional” cannot be characterised in terms of mental causes because there is nothing in our experience that would lead us to that conclusion. The causalist can reply that there may nonetheless be causal factors grounding the action that are not available to ordinary awareness. Similarly, a critic may say that what is known in an action *is* an act of trying, only that these are pro-attitudes that are not explicitly available to ordinary conscious experience.

In the end, what might be said in support of Anscombe’s achievement in her analysis of practical knowledge is that it provides a persuasively systematic and comprehensive alternative framework in which to analyze knowledge of intentional action without recourse to mental or physical “extras” of any kind. For Anscombe, if there are insufficient means in experience to ground the ascription of mental or physical terms then a radically “non-observational” perspective might seem to be a more appropriate option: a stance from which knowledge of intentional action is not characterisable in terms of different “things” known, but instead in terms of a different “direction” of justification. Anscombe adds weight to this way of looking at knowledge of action in her suggestions that “many of our descriptions of events effected by human beings are *formally* descriptions of executed intentions”³⁶ and that without practical knowledge “what happens does not come under the description – execution of intentions – whose characteristics we have been investigating”.³⁷ Similarly, the even broader aspects of her analysis may be said to add further authenticity to her account. In particular, her suggestion that “the description of something as a human action could not

occur prior to the existence of the question 'Why?', simply as a kind of utterance by which we were *then* obscurely prompted to address the question" tries to articulate the conditions under which the application of our concepts for intentional action arose. On this view, "intentional" has reference to a *form* of description of events", which fits well with the claim that practical knowledge does not pick out anything separate from certain bodily movements under descriptions the agents gives to them.

References

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CHAPTER 5: ANSCOMBE ON PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRACTICAL SYLLOGISM

I. AN 'EXTERNALIST' ACCOUNT OF WANTING.

1. The role of desire in the syllogism.

The result of section 32 was that it discovered a new aspect of the difference between knowledge of action and empirical knowledge. In putting items into his shopping basket the shopper was acting intentionally, but unlike the detective's observational knowledge of proceedings, the shopper's knowledge of what he was doing was erroneous when the bodily movement failed to 'match' his action description rather than the other way around. If someone asked what he was doing he would say, without having to observe anything, that he was picking up item X. But if he actually grabbed item Y, this failure to execute the intention seems to lie with the action rather than with the description he gives to it, as if 'what is known' is intact regardless of what goes on in the physical world. The cognitive factor in action seems to be prior to the bodily movement – we just do give it priority. What is unique about knowledge of action seems to lie in this 'upside down' cognitive role – knowledge of the world gives priority to the facts; theoretical propositions must look to the facts to discover whether or not they are true or false. But in action the facts are subservient to the non-observationally known description the agent gives to his action: the bodily movements must then match the description in order to be 'true' or 'false'.

This observation points to a solution to the problem presented in section 29, the difficulty of accounting for two 'knowledges' of 'opening the window' without recourse to inner objects or will-acts. The shopping man knows by observation that his hand is gripping such-and-such an item but in nearly every case he could also say what is being picked up and put in the basket with his eyes closed. This knowledge can now be characterised without talk of inner volitions because it is seen to exhibit this peculiar quality of reversed direction of fit:

Anscombe suggests that perhaps it is a *different kind* of knowledge altogether, one that doesn't 'observe' objects.

The syllogism is methodologically convenient for Anscombe because it is neutral regarding the 'inner' and the 'outer', illustrating the cognitive 'goings on' associated with action in terms of language. Thus, for example, if a cat is seen stalking a bird, the practical knowledge it has can be expressed in schematic form as 'It perceives a bird and desires to catch it'. This way of approaching knowledge of action is methodologically consistent with the investigation into the ontology of intention in previous sections of *Intention*. There, it was held that we can often simply look at a person and say what it is they are doing 'straight off' and without questioning them, such that we need not 'look into the mind' when inquiring about intention.

But in general, Anscombe turns to the syllogism in order to expose traditional errors in thinking about the nature of 'practical' knowledge. In so far as practical knowledge involves a different direction of fit to theoretical knowledge it is a different *kind* of knowledge. Practical knowledge is not 'knowledge' in the traditional sense. When a creature acts in accordance with its wants and desires, its behaviour is 'normative'; the cognitive dimension of his or her activity is such that the world must be made to 'match' those wants and desires. Consequently, the practical syllogism is not to be seen as a form of proof reasoning, which concludes with new knowledge in the traditional sense; it is not a *demonstration*:

... [The syllogism] is commonly supposed to be ordinary reasoning ... By 'ordinary reasoning' I mean the only reasoning ordinarily considered in philosophy: reasoning towards the truth of a proposition, which is supposedly shewn to be true by the premises. ... Everyone takes the practical syllogism to be a proof – granted the premises – of a conclusion.¹

But this form does not properly apply to the practical syllogism, according to Anscombe. The action is the 'conclusion' whose 'point is shown by the premises, which are now, so to speak, on active service.'² Crucially, the first premise of the practical syllogism is something

wanted. It is this feature of practical reasoning that makes it completely different to ordinary theoretical or 'proof' reasoning and is also the basis of the fact that practical knowledge seems to exhibit a different 'direction of fit' to empirical knowledge. Without the element of 'wanting', no action would follow from practical reasoning. I could rehearse a syllogism in a given situation, say about buying a jumper that would suit me very well, without actually doing anything to get it, given that I don't have any desire to do so. According to Anscombe, trying to generate actions from syllogisms without including this key element of desiring or wanting can only lead to the supposition of 'insane' first premises. Thus, if a person sees some dry food the conclusion 'I will eat this dry food' could only be generated by supposing as a first premise 'Every human being needs to eat all the dry food he ever sees'.³ To guarantee an action in a proof syllogism, the first premise must apply to all situations, rendering the premise ridiculous. Thus, for Anscombe, failure to recognise the role desire plays in practical reasoning thus leaves the traditional 'philosophical' account of the syllogism in a bad way – either an action does not follow (because there is no desire to act) or an action does follow (but only from an 'insane' first premise).

2. Attacking belief-desire internalism.

The danger now however is that 'wanting' will be misconstrued, perhaps out of a preference for empiricism, to be merely an internal state of desire. So sections 36-39 are effectively a critique of an internalist account of 'wanting'. Various misconceptions converge here. If the concepts of 'wanting' are considered to be a kind of internal state or experience, this will lead to a mechanistic, causal account of perception in acting. But for Anscombe the wanting associated with intentional action is not a matter of mere beliefs and desires. Even if it were, beliefs are not 'inner', nor are they 'states'. Of course they can be experienced and causal but only as reported mental causes, which aren't observed processes but things known non-observationally that are often taken to lead up to action. Similar misconceptions were noted in the *Investigations* in relation to willing. Various 'causal' candidates were noted there too, as the antecedents of intentional action, such as 'trying',

'deciding', 'wishing' and so on: "Willing, if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself. It cannot be allowed to stop anywhere short of the action."⁴ Although Wittgenstein does not identify willing with bare bodily movements, he here notes that willing is not to be thought of a kind of 'cause in the head' of voluntary movement. Anscombe's position about practical knowledge is similar to this and mirrors her previous Wittgensteinian analysis of 'willing'. The first two premises of the syllogism are properly interpreted as amounting to the 'want' of the creature in its pursuit of the desired object. But 'wanting' cannot be broken down into phases of a causal chain leading perhaps from photon emissions in objects to the eyes, to the nerves and brain. Nor can these physiological/brain occurrences be simultaneously witnessed 'from the inside' as psychological states. In particular 'desire' as a real mental state is not the instigator of intentional action.

Defending 'wanting' against an internalist/causalist reading involves firstly showing that it does not involve a kind of internal state of blind yearning; one that can occur in a person regardless of the kind of object it is connected to and regardless of whether the person actually does anything to acquire the object. In other words, it is not a feeling of desire or an idle wish. To assert this would be to return to a 'theoretical' version of the syllogism, one where the premises are no longer 'on active service'. But the 'wanting' of intentional action does not involve such disconnected causal states in the person's mind or brain:

It is a familiar doctrine that people can want anything; that is, that in 'A wants X' 'X' ranges over all describable objects or states of affairs. . . . Perhaps the familiar doctrine I have mentioned can be made correct by being restricted to wishing. The most primitive expression of wishing is e.g. 'Ah, if only . . .!' – if only . . . the sun would blow up, or I could hold the moon in the palm of my hand. . .'

'Wanting' may of course be applied to the prick of desire at the thought or sight of an object, even though a man then does nothing towards getting the object. [but] the more the thing is envisaged as a likelihood [the more it is like] hope.

The wanting that interests us, however is neither wishing nor hoping nor the feeling of desire, and cannot be said to exist in a man who does nothing towards getting what he wants.⁵

The philosophical misinterpretation of 'wanting' has it that it is an internal state that occurs in the person and whose identity conditions can be given independently of any external factors i.e. the object of wanting. Bringing the concept back to its ordinary use involves assembling a couple of reminders. 'Wanting' is neither 'desiring' nor 'wishing' nor 'hoping'. Showing the grammar of these latter concepts is enough to dissociate them from 'wanting'. The mere feeling of desire was not enough to demarcate intentional action since answers stating mental causes exclude the 'Why?' of 'intentional'. 'Why?', on the other hand, is capable of marking off intentional action in so far as it shows the order in the chaos of bodily movements in various causal relations to the environment. Similarly 'the prick of desire' is not 'wanting' because it is unrelated to actually doing anything – the object is not conceived of as a wanted object in a way that is connected up with intentional action. 'Wishing' and 'hoping' have completely different conditions of application too. One could never intend to hold the moon in one's hand. To talk that way would be to play the language game wrong, so to speak. That language game is only suited to wishing. Such 'wishing' or 'hoping' does not occur in intentional action. In opening a book in order to read I do not hope or wish it to open. Nor may I even have a specific felt desire for it to be open. I might just come into the room, sit down at the chair and open the book without so much as a thought. Looking to these mental causes will not uncover the nature of intentional action.

The conditions for the use and meaning of 'wanting' are rather given in terms of 'external' criteria:

The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*; which of course can only be ascribed to creatures endowed with sensation. Thus it is not mere movement or stretching out towards something, but this on the part of a creature that can be said to know the thing.

On the other hand knowledge itself cannot be described independently of volition; the ascription of sensible knowledge and of volition go together. . . . A modern Psammetichus, influenced by epistemologists, might have a child cared for by people whose instructions were to make no sign to the child in *dealing* with it, but frequently to utter the names of the objects and properties which they judged to be within its perceptual fields, with a view to finding out which were the very first things or properties that humans learned to name. But e.g. the identification served by colour-names is in fact not primarily that of colours, but of objects by means of colours; and thus, too, the prime mark of colour-discrimination is doing things with objects – fetching them, carrying them, placing them – according to their colours. Thus the possession of sensible discrimination and that of volition are inseparable; one cannot describe a creature as having the power of sensation without also describing it as doing things in accordance with perceived sensible differences.⁶

This quote shows the extent to which Anscombe is excluding desires and other mental causes from the demarcation of wanting. The very conditions of use for ‘wanting’ exclude them; the proper meaning of ‘wanting’, like ‘intentional’ cannot be understood by appeal to separate mental states ‘in’ the person. To say ‘P is endowed with sensation’ is to say that it is the kind of thing or creature that *tries to get*. It would literally make no sense to ascribe ‘wanting’ to something that one could not try to get. On the other hand, trying to get cannot be characterised as a mere physical process as would be seen in the amoeba for example. The creature must know the object in order for it to be seen as trying to get. But ‘know’ here ‘cannot be described independently of volition’. To say that an infant knows how to discriminate certain colours is not to say that it has learned to corroborate certain mental pictures of the colours with the coloured object. This is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s remark in the first section of the *Investigations*, whereby a person uses the word ‘red’ by matching it with a sample from a colour index. If something like this were going on in the infants head then it could ‘be described independently of volition’ as an inner process. But ‘the prime

mark of colour-discrimination' is being able to do things with objects – fetching, carrying, and placing them.

The same applies to wanting. The mark of wanting is *trying to get*. Applying the concept to a dog trying to get meat thus presupposes certain activities 'that reach beyond what the animal is now doing'. If the meat is on the other side of the door the dog will try to get it by 'scratching violently round the edges of the door and snuffling along the bottom of it and so on.' Such are the conditions for the application of 'wanting'. To say that the dog believes there is meat there and desires it is not to posit two mental states that explain the activity 'from the inside out'. Nor is it as if a human being trying to get something feels a prick of desire in conjunction with a perception of the object and thereby concludes what to do: practical knowledge doesn't involve recognition of internal states that indicate to the agent a course of action. 'Wanting' involves two features: 'some kind of action or movement which (the agent at least supposes) is of use towards something, and the idea of the thing.' Thus we have *ipso facto* attributed a 'want of insulin' to Fred if we see him rummaging through the drawer where he keeps his insulin before taking out a syringe: these movements in their normal setting show 'the primitive sign of wanting', i.e. *trying to get*. Of course this does not mean that Anscombe is giving a behaviourist account of the meaning of 'wanting'. The want is not being identified with bodily movements or dispositions to do such-and-such under certain conditions. Rather the use of the concept, its source of meaning, is naturally limited to these conditions of application – 'doings' in their natural setting. It would be a 'philosophical' error to deviate from these rules of use by looking for the equivalent of the primitive sign of wanting elsewhere e.g. in 'experience' or the brain. As Anscombe remarked above, the capacity to distinguish colours cannot be attributed to a creature that cannot do things with coloured objects. Similarly, it makes no sense to say a person wants X, i.e. knows or is aware of and desires X, without him exhibiting the capacities that would be involved in trying to get X.

With this criterion of wanting in place, Anscombe further elaborates it in two ways: firstly by showing that the 'presence' of a want is conditioned by a test for truthfulness rather

than by any 'internal' identity conditions for mental states and secondly by introducing the notion of a *desirability characterisation* in the first premise of the syllogism. Tests for the truthfulness of a want are similar to those for the intention for the future considered earlier:

But is not anything wantable, or at least any perhaps attainable thing? It will be instructive to anyone who thinks this to approach someone and say: 'I want a saucer of mud' or 'I want a twig of mountain ash'. He is likely to be asked what for; to which let him reply that he does not want it *for* anything, he just wants it. It is likely that the other will then perceive that a philosophical example is all that is in question, and will pursue the matter no further; but supposing that he did not realise this, and yet did not dismiss our man as a dull babbling loon, would he not try to find out in what aspect the objects desired is desirable?⁷

Anscombe returns to the question 'Is not anything wantable?' often in this part of the discussion because it is an implication of the traditional account of wanting that is not easily removed. It stems from the view that a desire is either a blind want or an internal state. A creature that feels a blind desire for object X could supposedly just as easily feel it for Y – the relation between the desire and the object would be external, whereas Anscombe stresses that it is internal. The same applies to a causal theory of perception in wanting. A 'brain state of desire' could presumably be causally related to any object that happened to be in the agent's environment, including a saucer of mud or a twig of mountain ash. In so far as the relation between desire and object is external, it does not matter what the object is. But for Anscombe this way of talking could only belong to a 'philosophical' example, or a 'babbling loon'. Reining in this traditional idea involves showing that what a person wants *is* subject to certain conditions that must be justified in the wider context of the person's further aims and actions.

The suggestion that the relation between desire and object is internal is consolidated with the introduction of a *desirability characterisation*. The desirability characterisation is

the premise of a syllogism that can no longer be subjected to the question ‘What do you want that for?’ because the want is characterised in such a way that it is self-evidently desirable, such that further questions would be pointless:

‘(1) Any farmer with a farm like mine could do with a cow of such-and-such qualities
(2) e.g. a Jersey.’ Now here there is no room for a *further* question “What do you want ‘what you could do with’ for?” That is to say, the premise now given has characterised the thing wanted as desirable.⁸

The desirability characterisation is really the ‘linguistic’ counterpart of ‘desire’. It is not committed to internal states of desire. It is notable that the object of desire must be characterised as such by the agent, hence it cannot be reduced to a mental or physical state:

To say ‘I *merely* want this’ without any characterisation is to deprive the word of sense; if [the person] insists on ‘having’ the thing, we want to know what ‘having’ amounts to.⁹

Knowing what ‘having’ amounts to involves being given a satisfactory explanation of what is desirable about the desired object. But the agent is the authority on the desirability of the object since the object is valuable only *under a description*. The object of wanting is thus ‘agent-relative’ and cannot be characterised ‘externally’ as merely a physical object in a causal relation to a ‘mental’ or neurological state of the agent.

3. Anscombe’s defence of an ‘externalist’ account of wanting.

Sections 40-42 continue this line of investigation but specifically emphasise externalism for ‘wanting’ and internal relations between wanting and the object of wanting:

The conceptual connexion between ‘wanting’ (in the sense which we have isolated, for of course we are not speaking of the ‘I want’ of a child who screams for something) and

'good' can be compared to the conceptual connexion between 'judgement' and 'truth'. Truth is the object of judgement, and good the object of wanting; it does not follow from this either that everything judged must be true, or that everything wanted must be good. .

. the notion of 'good' that has to be introduced in an account of wanting is not that of what is really good but of what the agent conceives to be good; what the agent wants would have to be characterisable by him, . . . Whereas when we are explaining truth as a predicate of judgements, propositions, or thoughts, we have to speak of a relation to what is really so, not just of what seems so to the judging mind.¹⁰

Again the point here is to show that the relation between wanting and its object is not external. For example it is not a causal relation, the components of which can be characterised independently of one another. The relation cannot be characterised as one between a physical object and the human body, nor can it be seen as a causal relation between inner psychological components and physical objects.

Anscombe blames traditional misconceptions about the relation between 'wanting' and 'good' on the empiricist tradition:

The cause of blindness to these problems seems to have been the epistemology characteristic of Locke, and also of Hume. Any sort of wanting would be an internal impression according to those philosophers.

[In relation to 'pleasure', for example, they] were saying that something which they thought of as like a particular tickle or itch was quite obviously the point of doing anything whatsoever.¹¹

Like the cry of the baby that wants something, 'pleasure', as an internal impression, becomes a state without content so to speak, a 'blind' element that only explains doing and wanting

mechanistically. This is why Anscombe's analysis of practical reasoning would 'in general be quite absurd' if it 'were supposed to describe actual mental processes.'

It is helpful to conclude this section of *Intention* with a brief summary. The initial reason for investigating the practical syllogism was in an attempt to explain the fact that there are seemingly 'two knowledges' of the same action, such as opening a window – one by observation and the other without observation. This then led to the suggestion that the reversal of the direction of fit exhibited by knowledge of intentional action indicated that there is such a thing as practical "knowledge", a totally different kind of knowledge to factual knowledge. The point of exploring the syllogism was to illustrate this form of knowledge with its reversed direction of fit. This reversal was seen to be due of course to the fact that desire plays a central role in the 'cognitive' dimension of intentional action. Desire functions so as to get the world to correspond to its dictates whereas factual beliefs must match the world in order to be correct. Thus the first task was to re-interpret the syllogism so as to show that 'wanting' played a necessary role in the first premise. In its demonstrative form, the syllogism fails to illustrate actual action, showing instead mere premises and conclusions about what one ought to do.

Putting the 'want' back into the syllogism is the first step in illustrating the reversal of 'direction of fit' exhibited by agent-knowledge of intentional action. But another danger immediately arose – that of taking the want to be an internal impression of desire. This would be to revert to an unacceptable explanation of the 'two-knowledges' problem - the explanation that involves 'a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of acting'.

The proper characterisation of 'wanting' and hence practical knowledge is one marked by *trying to get* desired objects rather than by inner states of desire. Moreover 'wanting' cannot be reduced to 'contentless' pricks or feelings of desire, wishes, hopes or any other kind of internal impression or psychological cause. The concept can only be applied to behaviour-in-a-context and the relation between the want and the thing wanted is internal. The posited internal relation prevents a reductive characterisation of 'want' to inner desires

or even brain states because it effectively means that the want cannot be identified independently of the thing wanted, the object under a description given to it by the agent. So Anscombe interprets the practical syllogism to show the cognitive 'goings on' in intentional action and the result of her analysis is an illustration of the cited reversal of epistemic priority without appeal to special inner mental components. It is in this sense that Anscombe is a Humean about motivation – desire, with its reversed direction of fit, is central to an account of knowledge of intentional action. But the desire is construed externally as a want and is not something that can be broken up into psychological states of belief and desire. Not only would this be phenomenologically inaccurate (as was seen in earlier sections about the role of mental causes in characterising 'reason for acting'), but it would represent a misuse of the concept of 'want', the conditions for the application of which demand activities indicative of trying.

Moreover, the anti-internalist account of 'wanting' helps properly characterise the "reversed direction of fit" aspect of knowledge of action. It emphasises the normative/prescriptive nature of acting according to desires and beliefs. Acting according to beliefs and desires is normative in that the point is to get the world to fit those beliefs and desires rather than vice versa.

Also, for Anscombe, this analysis of the syllogism has the consequence that actions can meaningfully be called 'true' or 'false'. An action is true when its cognitive content (a want) and the state of affairs it relates to 'match up'. Hence the conclusion in "Thought and Action in Aristotle":

The notion of *truth or falsehood in action* would quite generally be countered by the objection that "true" and "false" are senseless predicates as applied to what is done. If I am right there is philosophy to the contrary in Aristotle. And if, as I should maintain, the idea of the *description under which* what is done is integral to the notion of an action, then these predicates apply to actions strictly and properly, and not merely by an extension and in a way that ought to be explained away.¹²

There is 'philosophy to the contrary' in Aristotle because he, like Anscombe, recognises that the starting point in action is the thing wanted. An action is thus 'true' if it succeeds in acquiring the thing wanted i.e. if the desired state of affairs turns out to 'match' it:

It is practical truth when the judgements involved in the formation of the 'choice' leading to the action are all true; but the practical truth is not the truth of those *judgements*. For it is clearly that 'truth in agreement with right desire' ἀληθεια ὁμολογως ἔχουσα τη ὀρεξειτη ὀρθη (II39a 30), which is spoken of as the good working (εὖ), of the work (εργον), of practical intelligence. That is brought about – i.e. made true – by action (since the description of what he does is made true by his doing it), provided that a man forms and executes a good 'choice'.¹³

When the concept of an action under a description is added to the practical 'truth' or 'falsity' of desire in action, the reversed direction of fit for knowledge of intentional action amounts to the 'match' or 'mismatch' between an *action description* and the intended state of affairs. Thus for Anscombe, 'true' and 'false' rightly apply to actions, albeit in virtue of a reversed direction of fit. The analysis of the syllogism puts Anscombe in a position to confidently talk of 'practical knowledge' and to integrate it into her previous remarks about the ontology of intentional action, something she does in the closing sections of *Intention*, which I will examine next.

II. PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE NATURE OF ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Practical knowledge as the 'cause of what it understands.'

In its commitment to the view that the meaning of our talk about actions lies in the use of the concepts and not in any designated special meaning bodies, *Intention* has attacked the traditional approach to action at every joint. Expressions of intention aren't descriptions of inner states, 'intentional action' is not a form of movement that involves a special property; a neurological state, a 'mental' state, a Platonic form, an experience, a quality of consciousness or any other special feature that a philosopher might try to describe. The execution of intention does not involve a volition, an inner act of will that triggers the bodily movement and which can be traced back and back through the limb-movements, to the nervous system and brain and then perhaps to the mental act of willing itself. Actions don't begin with 'motive ideas'. The object of a willed action is always 'at a distance from the person'. There is no such thing as *the* description of an individual action. Individual actions can't be reduced to specific descriptions the way a specific physical object in principle can. If an individual action were a brain state or a unique psychological property then perhaps it could be, but the meaning of 'Cleaning' or 'Hitting' or 'Robbing' or 'Saying' cannot be captured through a search for specific referents with such-and-such identity conditions. Similarly, knowing what I am doing does not involve introspective awareness of an 'intention'. The test for the 'presence' of an intention is given in terms of the *truthfulness* of a person's expressions of intention, statements of present intentions, aims and so on, in their contexts of utterance. Nor is it phenomenologically accurate to say that intentional action is always a matter of 'belief' and 'desire' or even mental causality in general. Sometimes actions do not involve such experienced 'causes'.

Similarly, according to Anscombe, practical knowledge is nothing like 'theoretical' knowledge, as might traditionally have been thought. A correct account of the use of "practical knowledge" emphasises its *difference* to normal, observational, theoretical knowledge. Practical knowledge and the practical syllogism are prescriptive in the sense that

they seek to get the world to fit with the wants of the agent. In this sense 'wanting' is construed in terms of 'trying to get'; such that the 'normative' aspects of acting according to desires are clearly seen. Desires and beliefs in acting are not taken to be inner episodes that could be analysed in isolation from the meaning-giving context of circumstances in which the bodily movements associated with intentional action occur.

The closing sections represent a synthesis and development of these results into a rich illustration of a formula provided by Thomas Aquinas: "practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands." This illustration derives partly from some concluding remarks Anscombe makes about what might be called the 'autonomous' or 'conventional' nature of action description:

But who says that what is going on is the building of a house, or writing 'I am a fool' on the blackboard? We all do, of course, but why do we? We notice many changes and movements in the world without giving any comparable account of them. The tree waves in the wind; the movements of its leaves are just as minute as the movements of my hand when I write on a blackboard, but we have no description of a picked-out set of movements or a picked-out appearance of the tree remotely resembling 'She wrote "I am a fool" on the blackboard'.

Of course we have special interest in human actions: but *what* is it that we have a special interest here? It is not that we have a special interest in the movement of these molecules – namely, the ones in a human being; or even the movements of certain bodies – namely human ones. The description of what we are interested in is a type of description that would not exist if our question 'Why?' did not. It is not that certain things, namely movements of humans, are for some undiscovered reason subject to the question 'Why?' So too, it is not just that certain appearances of chalk, on blackboard are subject to the question 'What does it say?' It is of a word or sentence that we ask 'What does it say?'; and the description of something as a word or a sentence at all could not occur prior to the fact that words or sentences have meaning. So the description of something as a human action could not occur prior to the existence of the question 'Why?', simply as a

kind of utterance by which we were *then* obscurely prompted to address the question. This was why I did not attempt in §19 to say *why* certain things should be subject to this question.¹⁴

Action descriptions do not describe states of the person, as has been extensively argued, but, as the ‘externalist’ account of ‘wanting’ underlined, their application does involve certain picked out sets of movements; bodily movements in certain conditions. But this phenomenon of asking ‘Why did you do that?’ is unlike the curiosity we have about things we come across in the physical world. For example, a child might lift up a rock by the beach and say ‘Oh look! What is *that*?’ and receive the answer ‘A crab’. But in so far as intentional actions aren’t ‘things’, we do not ‘discover’ them in this way and then become curious about them. A different kind of curiosity occurs for intentional action, in keeping with the fact that a different kind of explanation is required (an explanation in terms of reasons). We could never say for example, “Look at this – what is it? An *action*? What’s ‘an action’?”. Looking through binoculars at a jockey in a race, for example, who periodically counts to four on the fingers of his left hand would prompt us to ask: “Why is he doing that?” But the action, unlike the crab beneath the rock, is already ‘recognised’ as an action, and the type of explanation is a reason explanation rather than a causal or naturalistic one. The “realm” in which intentional explanation is applied is not the realm of physical objects, and the ‘Why?’ for intentional actions is not a ‘causal’ one that seeks to alleviate curiosity about physical processes and properties.

2. The ‘autonomy’ of action description.

Another way of putting this is to say that the picked-out patterns relating to the application of action descriptions are *immanently* meaningful. The meaning of the pattern of chalk on the blackboard is immanent in the sense that its meaning is ‘in’ the pattern itself and is not obtained by appeal to something beyond or behind it. The picked out pattern of human

movements is thus subjected to 'Why?' in the same way that the sentence on the blackboard is subjected to 'What does it say?' The immanent meaning of a proposition was likened to a genre-picture in the *Investigations* as opposed to the 'portrait' analogy of the *Tractatus*'s picture theory of meaning:

If we compare a proposition to a picture, we must think whether we are comparing it to a portrait . . . or to a genre-picture. . . .

When I look at a genre-picture, it 'tells' me something, even though I don't believe (imagine) for a moment that the people I see in it really exist, or that there have really been people in that situation. But suppose I ask: "*What* does it tell me, then?"

I should like to say "What the picture tells me is itself." That is, its telling me something consists in its own structure, in *its* own lines and contours.¹⁵

The point here is that a proposition is not to be seen as something that is meaningful in virtue of representing reality, such that its meaningfulness lies in its degree of isomorphism with the facts. A portrait is similarly judged on its ability to accurately depict its subject. But the meaning of a genre picture is 'in' its own lines and contours. Anscombe seems to have the same thing in mind when she mentions the way in which 'words or sentences have meaning.' The marks on the blackboard are not such that 'What does it say?' could occur prior to our recognising it as a sentence in the first place – the meaning is 'in' the lines and contours of the chalk marks. Similarly with the 'picked-out' bodily movements associated with intentional action – these patterns are intrinsically meaningful to us so 'Why?' operates at this level and does not seek causal explanation. More importantly, if the meaning of a picked-out set of movements is 'in' the pattern itself, it is not 'in' anything else. So action descriptions don't apply to any 'extra' thing in or beyond the bodily movement. In this sense we cannot step 'outside' the relation between an action and its description. Thus our concepts for talk of actions cannot be justified by appeal to a higher standard of meaning,

such as causal explanation. The only *explanation* we can give of our action concepts is the way in which they are used.

In describing actions we employ action concepts. But to apply a concept is not to match an inner thought or 'sense' to an outer state via language. As Wittgenstein states in the *Investigations* p. 230, '[Let one] imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him . . .'. Concepts are not to be seen as internal impressions but rather words that we use to pick out certain patterns of experience according to our interest:

Why do we say that the movement of the pump handle up and down is part of the process whereby those people cease to move about? It is part of a causal chain which ends with that household's getting poisoned. . . . only because *it* interests us would we even consider [it in the midst of] an infinity of other crossroads besides the death of these people. As Wittgenstein says 'Concepts lead us to make investigations, are the expression of our interest, and direct our interest.'¹⁶

An action concept then, such as 'digging' picks out a certain pattern of events according to our interest. Concept formation is not to be seen as the occurrence of a 'sense' or thought in the mind that designates a state of the world and which can be applied in language. The action concepts we have are thus to an extent dependent on our form of life. Hence the remark in *Zettel* 387 that if a society in which pain was shameful 'an education quite different from ours might also be a foundation for quite different concepts. For here life would run on differently. – What interests us would not interest *them*.'

So Anscombe has arrived at a point where action concepts are seen to be autonomous – the formation of action concepts is not something to be broken down by a psychology of perception, no more than the 'Why?' of intentional action could be analysed by science either. The resulting view of intentional action is the direct opposite of one held by the empiricist tradition. Actions are not seen to start from the inside in the form of a volition;

actions aren't types of natural phenomena accompanying bodily movements. In particular, an intentional action is not something marked out by an observable cause or by evidence. Action descriptions apply concepts that express our interest in certain picked out patterns of events. Thus one of Anscombe's concluding theses is that there 'are many descriptions of happenings which are directly dependent on our possessing the *form* of description of intentional action.' Descriptions of things that go on in the world such as 'climbing a tree', 'building a bridge', 'playing chess', 'swimming', all employ the concepts of human action and these concepts involve a certain *form of description* of events. The form of action description involves features that are different to mere descriptions of natural states such as rock types or the reflection of light. It explains movement in terms of sensation and appetite; the chief elements involved in 'trying to get'. Such wanting is accounted for in terms of reasons for acting and not causes. We explain intentional action movements using a special form of 'because' and 'in order to'. The action concepts do not apply to causal mechanisms, natural properties or states. They express our interest in certain picked-out sets of movements that are intrinsically meaningful to us. So we could never 'come across' an action in the way we could come across a new type of enzyme and similarly the 'Why?' of intentional action is thus different to the 'Why?' of scientific explanation:

[Action descriptions] go beyond physics: one might call them vital descriptions. A dog's curled tail might have something stuck in it, but that of itself would not make us speak of the dog as holding the object with its tail; but if he has taken between his teeth and kept there some moderate-sized object, he is holding it.¹⁷

It is easy to overlook the fact that action descriptions such as telephoning, crouching, greeting, intruding, offending, dropping and so on, are dependent on a form of description and to slip into thinking that the 'intentional' is applied in virtue of some 'extra' feature. Sometimes actions fail to get executed so we assume that something must have 'gone on' in the mind anyway, an intention. We try to explain the difference between someone's dropping

something unintentionally and someone dropping it on purpose by saying that the latter must have had a 'psychological extra' involved; for the bodily movements in both actions are very alike. If 'we concentrate on small sections of action' we tend to think of action-execution mechanistically, in terms of causal processes that begin with inner intentions or volitions. These are the misinterpretations of intention that Anscombe has been fighting against throughout *Intention*.

Anscombe concludes her investigation into intentional action by contrasting her view with the traditional causal/empiricist theory by aligning it with the account given by Aquinas:

Practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands', unlike 'speculative' knowledge, which 'is derived from the objects known'. This 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 ways 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.¹⁸

Anscombe's aim in likening her account to that of Aquinas is to underline how practical knowledge is a genuine form of knowledge that is different to demonstrative knowledge and that the 'causation' involved in intentional action is also genuine, even though it does not involve mental or physical causation. The 'causation' here is not 'real' causation such that it could be said to bring about or 'push' a body into movement. It is not as if the desire was really 'there' in the agent's mind or brain and then subsequently triggered the bodily movement. The 'causation' Anscombe is talking about here only makes sense from a 'normative point of view' so to speak. It is not that the agent must have the 'idea of doing such and such' (for that was repeatedly seen to often be absent in intentional action). Rather, practical knowledge is dependent on an intentional form of description that *Intention* has been analysing.

We can see the way Anscombe views 'cause' in 'cause of what it understands' in her comparison of Aquinas and Hume in *Three Philosophers*:

Now for Aquinas, will essentially consists, not in a peculiar quality of experience [which, for Hume was an internal impression], but precisely in the peculiar sort of causality expressed by 'knowingly give rise to'. A voluntary act takes place as the fulfilment of a tendency that arises from the agent's consideration of the goal of the tendency. . . .

In a way, voluntary causality is causality *par excellence*. The tendencies of natural agents like stones are not accompanied by, let alone their proceeding from, any apprehension by the agent of the goal of the tendency; in animals such apprehension is indeed inchoate, but they do not apprehend their actions as means to goal. An agent is master (*Dominus*) of its own action in so far as the tendency to action proceeds from an apprehension both of the goal and of the action as a possible means to the goal. Aquinas holds that non-voluntary causality and tendency is always derivative and subordinate to the voluntary; he illustrates the nature of this subordination by the arrow that flies according to its own way of moving to a goal determined by the archer, and by the adze that cuts wood naturally and shapes a bed because the carpenter so wields it.¹⁹

'Knowingly giving rise to' is practical knowledge which is causality '*par excellence*'. It is contrasted with empirical knowledge of internal states or Hume's internal impressions. For Anscombe there are no internal intentions and so knowledge of action is non-observational. But it is more than just non-observational: it is contrasted with the traditional model of theoretical knowledge in virtue of its having a reversed order of 'fit' – the mistake is in the performance rather than the description. So practical knowledge is a 'real' species of causality in its own right, according to Anscombe. This is not mental causality of course. For 'Why?' is rejected by answers mentioning mental causes such as thoughts, feelings of desire, wishes etc. Practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands in so far as an action description occurs prior to the executed action and characterises the action *as* the action it is.

As Aquinas remarks in *Disputations*, 'The practical mind causes things, and therefore is their measure. But the theoretical mind is receptive; it is, as it were, modulated and measured by things.'²⁰ Thus, for example, "knowingly giving rise to" the action of buying water, because I was thirsty and needed a drink is pre-"knowing" the correct description of the bodily movements of crossing the road and going to the shop, because I "authored" the bodily movements as a means to getting water. But it is a strange sense of knowing like saying "I know what I said because I said it'.

In a sense, Anscombe's previous investigations in *Intention* lead up to this characterisation of practical knowledge as the "cause" of what it understands. All prior investigations into individual actions; willing, intention for the future, intentional action in general, and so on, aimed at reversing the traditional tendency to analyse the meaning of intention in terms of some 'extra', be it a brain state, impression, experience, or private state of consciousness. The result is that intention has been turned 'inside out' so to speak. The mark of wanting is trying to get; intentional action descriptions apply to movements under a description and do not 'describe' anything, the application of action concepts is autonomous, and individual intentional actions are dependent on a form of description. In fact, argues Anscombe, 'a great many of our descriptions of events are *formally* descriptions of executed intentions'; a purely 'conceptual' matter as opposed to one involving the observation and isolation of real states.²¹ The resulting perspective on the use of intentional action concepts is thus clear and perspicuous and free of any puzzling metaphysical hindrances. This facilitates the analysis of practical knowledge because there is *no longer any foothold* for the concepts of inner cause, private impressions and experiences, or brain states that could justify a theoretical model of knowledge of action. Once these 'philosophical' features have been completely eliminated from sight so to speak, there is simply no room for a form of knowledge that is 'derived from the objects known'; speculative knowledge can have no place in such a scheme. If someone describes their action as 'snipping a rose stem' and we have no 'explanatory access' to their neurological firings, muscle states, or mental images, then this knowledge, if it is to be knowledge at all, is seen to be none other than the 'cause of

what it understands'. It is seen to be a genuine form of causality and yet causality that does not involve anything like physical cause-effect chains; 'causality' from 'a normative perspective'.

It is only from this perspective that the apparent mysteries and confusions surrounding the concept of practical knowledge can be dealt with. One might protest 'There can be no such thing as knowledge of what cannot be observed, nor knowledge of anything that is not derived from objects'. But as Anscombe remarked at the start of section 33: 'The notion of 'practical knowledge' can only be understood if we first understand 'practical reasoning'. Anscombe's 'externalist' re-interpretation of the practical syllogism, along with her previous attacks on the concept of an 'intentional extra', finalise the required perspicuous representation of the correct use of intention. This provides the required 'component-free' perspective from which to appreciate the possibility of practical knowledge as the cause of what it understands. Hence the archer determines what he's firing at (even if his shot is wayward) and the carpenter determines what it is he has made (even if his job is unsatisfactory). But 'determines' here is not to be taken lightly, as something that could be phased out in favour of a reductionist's description of proceedings. Nor can practical knowledge be rejected as a form of knowledge at all. For 'the rare exception is for a man's performance in its more immediate descriptions not to be what he supposes.'²² Although our action descriptions are not in accord with what actually gets performed, this is not to say we have not got knowledge of our action but rather that we sometimes get it wrong, which seems to be a condition of any type of knowledge. Furthermore, 'it is the agent's knowledge of what he is doing that gives the descriptions under which what is going on is the execution of an intention'.²³ The agent's knowledge; practical knowledge, is the very conceptual ground upon which such-and-such an action *is* the action it is.

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CHAPTER 6: THE LEGACY OF *INTENTION*: PERSPECTIVES AND INFLUENCES

1. Between Eliminativism and Cartesianism.

Having now closely examined *Intention* and other works by Anscombe on the philosophy of action it is possible to consider her philosophy of action critically. Anscombe's ontology of action seems a good place to start since her main opposition is to traditional 'entity' views of intention.

One danger that her account faces is that of being caught between eliminativism on the one hand and a form of Cartesianism on the other. This may seem surprising since Anscombe aims above seem to want to give preference to a more 'ordinary' approach to the meaning of action concepts, as opposed to the more 'philosophical' or "metaphorical" accounts that are traditionally given. But there *is* a strong sense in which her account can seem 'merely' linguistic and I think this is reflected in the onslaught of causal theories of action that have followed *Intention*. The response has been to see the value in *Intention* in its mapping out of the conceptual terrain for action but to reject its anti-causalism. Consequently many of Anscombe's ideas have been put to use in more materialistic or causal accounts, such as those given by Davidson and Dennett – attempts to 'bridge the gap' between action talk and physical talk.

One reason for taking her account to be eliminativist is seen in her account of knowledge of action. To know an action is not to know any 'thing'. Non-observational knowledge of action requires neither awareness of the body or awareness of the 'mind' or at least items in 'the mind'. Anscombe achieves this avoidance of 'mental stuff talk' by characterising knowledge of action according to a unique aspect of justification about action descriptions; that they involve what I have referred to as a reversal of 'direction of fit'. This avoids accounting for what is traditionally referred to as 'direct access' in terms of observed inner states. What is usually taken to be the process of knowing one's own action in an attempt to

get a desired good seems to become nothing more than a human being *trying to get* what is wanted in relation in the context of certain circumstances and certain background assumptions. Anscombe would say that her account of the syllogism does not apply to mere organisms 'stretching out' toward something or other, but creatures that can be said to *know* what it is they want – creatures endowed with not only knowledge and belief but also sensation and appetite. But again, it is difficult to see how 'knowing' what is sought and wanted could be anything like the usual version involving what might be called genuine mental awareness. Rather, Anscombe seems to lean toward mere ascription of mental concepts to observed bodies in certain conditions. Something like this is seen in her account of what it is to have 'an intention'. Traditionally this is taken to mean one is in a certain disposition to act, or that the intention is a cause that can explain their ensuing action. But Anscombe seems to limit the meaning of 'intention' to nothing more than the conditions of its ascription. This is reflected in her account of the conditions of 'verification' for the 'presence' of an intention:

All that is necessary to understand is that to say, in one form or another: 'But Q won't happen, even if you do P', or 'but it will happen whether you do P or not' is, in some way, to contradict the intention.¹

In order to avoid saying that the intention is something that can be specified neurologically, or even by looking inside one's own head, Anscombe seems to rid the concept of its normal 'life' so to speak. Not only is this 'life' thought to reside in some form of psychological state, but at least a *causally efficacious* state; one that can explain what made the person act the way they did in a way that hooks up with 'genuine' causal explanation.

Having said this, Anscombe does not fall back into a completely 'third person view'. Her account seems to provide a strong role for the first person perspective since her characterisation of knowledge of action and hence her account of what it is to 'know' an intention give priority to the agent's desires and action descriptions as opposed to

neurological states or physical dispositions of the body. Having said this, given that a subject that “knows” her intentions never actually *knows* anything, never observes or notes any ‘thing’ in action, it would seem that this account of first person awareness is quite ‘empty’ of meaning, especially from the point of view of a causalist or one more inclined to genuine psychological explanation in terms of causally efficacious mental states or properties. The notion of an action description provided by the agent is thus seen to be little more than the type of thing captured in the above quoted formula: an utterance that can be subjected to further questions by an inquirer in order to test its ‘rational context’ for its ‘presence’, where ‘the thing present’ (the intention) might as well be nothing.

One way Anscombe could oppose such criticisms is to say that it *just is* a fact of experience that often nothing is observed in action, so that there is no point in criticising her account by saying that it fails to do justice to the ‘reality’ of mental states such as beliefs, desires, wishes and so on: we know our actions without observation. Furthermore, it might be said in defence of Anscombe here, that intentional concepts are definitely ‘real’, not only in the sense that we use them in the language game, but that from the ‘intentional picture of the world’ they are a valid conceptual kind. Anscombe’s defence of the claim that ‘intentional’ is a form of description, and her sustained attack on Cartesian or ‘physical/mental extra’ views of intentional concepts also emphasises how intentional concepts have an intrinsic currency that is not answerable to any kind of naturalism.

But it might be further objected that the concept of non-observational knowledge is problematic for Anscombe too. It is designed to avoid the pitfalls of empiricism – mention of ‘inner’ states of experience that bring about bodily movements. Anscombe compares it to the way we know the position of our limbs without relying on kinaesthetic sensation. We do not check where our feet are by sensing the appropriate ‘foot position feeling’ in the way we would know that, for example, we have an injured finger by the intense pain in it. But the problem for Anscombe is that, although it might rule out ‘knowing by inner sensation’, the concept of non-observational knowledge does not seem definitely to rule out the possibility that knowledge of action is not in some other sense *inferential* knowledge. For example,

'inferential' could be applied to subliminal neurological messages associated with certain bodily movements, or perhaps we *deduce* the position of our limbs by making certain calculations – I am sitting in a chair so my feet are bound to be on the floor. Similarly, a case could be made for holding that mental causes *do* always bring about actions. Although Anscombe says that a strong feeling of desire is rarely present to explain one's action, it might be the case that a much fainter feeling of desire *always* accompanies intentional action. Thus my wanting to pick up a pen may not be readily explicable in terms of an irresistible desire to do so, but if this may have been because the desire to do so was at a low level of awareness. So there seem to be fairly good grounds for rejecting Anscombe's claim that usually nothing is observed or inferred in our knowledge of action.

In eschewing physicalist and causalist accounts of action, Anscombe has to account for our use of action concepts using these psychological concepts, such as mental causality and non-observational knowledge. This seems to put her account in danger then of swinging in the opposite direction, away from eliminativism toward a form of Cartesianism. While it would be silly to try and say that Anscombe is a Cartesian, given that *Intention* so obviously attacks Cartesian approaches, there are grounds for concluding that what she says can only amount to a form of Cartesianism. This is evident in her analysis of error in action. For Anscombe, a mistake in action is an error in performance rather than in judgement. Thus if I decide to tie my laces with my eyes closed and end up tying them the wrong way, the mistake is in the performance, for Anscombe. This amounts to saying that I *knew* what it was I was doing before I did it, even though what I did turned out to be contrary to the my action description. Consequently it seems that describing my action and describing what actually happened (what I actually 'did') are different. But if it is not 'knowledge of what happened' i.e. a bodily movement, then surely, the traditionalist would argue, it is knowledge of something that was 'sensed' inside.

In fact, such a critic might point out that Anscombe does seem at times to veer toward this kind of talk about 'inner' intentions. Thus in talking about the role of 'inner intentions' in action she remarks that:

... intention is never a performance in the mind, though in some matters a performance in the mind which is seriously *meant* may make a difference to the correct account of the man's action – e.g. in embracing someone. But the matters in question are necessarily ones in which outward acts are 'significant' in some way.²

This last remark, the critic might say, is not a very confident assertion about the role of outward acts in providing an understanding of a person's action. And the claim that 'a performance in the mind which is seriously *meant*' seems to play into the hands of the Cartesian. But again, in defence of Anscombe, she does not deny the reality of mental events, such as thoughts, feelings, memories and so on. Thus the occurrence of a thought while 'affectionately' embracing someone such as 'This person is awful' alters the action description, even though there are no outward signs of hostility. The absence of the appropriate 'performance in the mind' (such as 'I like this person'), precludes the act from being described as genuinely affectionate. But 'performance in the mind' need not mean 'occurrence in mental space'. We *can say* what our occurrent thoughts or intentions are, Anscombe might argue, but we don't *know* what they are, in the sense of 'recognising' them by introspection.

Anscombe would flatly reject being labelled either a Cartesian or an Eliminativist. For Anscombe the nature of intention and our understanding of the knowledge of intention can only be understood from the vantage point of a certain account of *meaning*. 'Intentional' doesn't mean what it does in virtue of any object or state or special form of consciousness. And it is most likely that Anscombe would assert that an overly 'referential' view of language along with a desire for theoretical explanation and generalisation is what blinds one to the actual meaning of our action language. And it must be admitted that Anscombe's account of practical knowledge as the cause of what it understands *can* be intelligibly accounted for without recourse to 'inner' items when it is seen in the light of the wider perspective she adopts – the 'form of life' perspective. Thus while the usual 'anti-causal'

arguments against a causal view of action refer to the fact that reasons are normative and are subject to logical rather than 'physical' relations, Anscombe's account goes much further than this by trying to alter our perception of the way action concepts mean. This is why her account of practical knowledge as the cause of what it understands can make sense without appeal to inner items – there is simply 'no room' for such things once a certain position on the nature and meaning of action concepts is adopted.

2. The role of the syllogism and the autonomy of action description.

Anscombe claims that it is necessary to explore the practical syllogism in order to understand the nature of practical knowledge, that is, of our "knowledge" of our actions. But the concluding formula is that practical knowledge is the 'cause of what it understands'. It is not clear why the practical syllogism has to be invoked in order to understand this formula, especially since Aquinas obviously held the concept without the need of any elaborate analysis of the syllogism. For Aquinas, knowledge of action is the cause of certain things simply in virtue of the fact that for example, the arrow arrives at its destination because there was a human description of that aim 'behind it' so to speak. So it might seem that Anscombe's lengthy excursion into the syllogism is unnecessary.

I think this criticism misses the role Anscombe wants her interpretation of the syllogism to play. Her aim is to reverse a certain *kind of thinking* that surrounds our usual concept of knowledge of action. This of course is the approach that views all knowledge as 'theoretical knowledge'; knowledge as the relation between judgement and fact. It would be difficult to provide a plausible analysis of 'Practical knowledge is the cause of what it understands' without it being quickly thought to imply some form of Cartesianism if a lot of 'filling in' were not provided to make the formula intelligible. So the role of the syllogism for Anscombe is therapeutic – it aims to alter our understanding of the meaning of 'knowledge of action' thereby excising the problematic 'inner-component' view. Opposing an 'inner belief-desire' view and replacing it with an 'externalist' account of wanting helps to alter our view of intentional action and to see the genuine significance of the 'reversal' involved in the

justification of normative over descriptive perspectives. Practical knowledge is the 'cause of what it understands'; and this form of 'causality' is 'real', especially when the tendency to think in terms of 'inner' intentions and desires, and 'observational knowledge' has been removed.

Having said this, there is a further problem with the role of the syllogism in *Intention*: it tends to focus only on means-end action. The syllogism considers practical activities that involve several actions all related as means to ends in the pursuit of a certain end point; a desired goal. Thus, while it is effective in clarifying the order of reasons in tasks such as building a house or preparing a meal, it passes by 'one off' examples that are done for no particular reasons and also cases where one fails to execute an intention. Thus 'missing limb' cases are not touched on by the analysis of the syllogism. (Indeed it sounds very strange to say that a person who has no arm is *raising his arm* – an apparent consequence of Anscombe's contention that what is known is the action, regardless of mistakes in performance). If I were to throw a stone into a lake without any particular reason, then this type of action would not be accounted for in terms of a means-end order of reasons. While we would have non-observational knowledge of such an action, according to Anscombe, this cannot be analysed as 'the cause of what it understands' because we have not got practical knowledge of it. But such examples seem more amenable to a causal analysis than, since, in the absence of any reason for acting they might better be explained as arising from certain mental causes such as 'whims' or 'urges'. But again, in Anscombe's defence, she *does* focus deliberately on what is true of intentional action in general. In our everyday activities there usually are no mental causes behind our intentional actions. Most of our actions, however disorganised or offhand usually *do* involve a means-end order, even simple actions like pulling a fork from a drawer or opening a book. Furthermore, isolated actions like throwing a stone into a lake 'for no particular reason' still conform to the form of description Anscombe has elucidated, since the reason-seeking 'Why?' still applies to them.

However, it might still be argued that the concluding thesis of *Intention*, that 'intentional' has reference to a form of description of events, is not really argued for by

Anscombe. She tends to rely more on the critical sections that aimed to show that *in the absence* of any 'extra' element for 'intentional', we should more or less yield to the conclusion that its meaning is purely a matter of the application of a certain conceptual form that is directed by our interests and assumptions. One argument is that, if we limit ourselves to 'small sections of movement' we will be likely to think that 'intentional' is an extra. Presumably this is because we then miss that the application of intention is apparently dependent on a wider context of bodily movements against a background rather than just the body itself. But this does not show, the critic might argue, that the application of 'intentional' is not a matter of picking out certain mechanisms, or causal patterns, such as neurological and muscle states. Similarly, Anscombe argues that we tend 'not to notice' that 'intentional' has reference to a form of description of events because 'it is perfectly possible for some of these descriptions to be of what is done unintentionally.'³ The reasoning here is that we tend to think actions done unintentionally, such as offending someone by accidentally stepping in front of them, are unintentional because they *lack* the mental property 'intentional'. But again, the critic might say, this does not actually work as an argument. A causalist would still be inclined to take it that a certain causal role is 'absent' in the case of accidentally offending someone that is 'there' when the act of offence is intentional. This is suggestive of a general problem for a strategy such as Anscombe's – that, given the 'linguistic' nature of her position, it is difficult to justify by appeal to the kind of arguments the causalist could produce, but instead depends on a form of persuasion deriving from polemic and reiteration of the intuitive plausibility of the 'linguistic' alternative.

Anscombe, however, might reply that her remarks *are* effective. Focusing on small sections of movement does encourage a 'mechanistic' viewpoint. But when whole actions are considered, such as crossing the road or travelling to London, their meaning is not so easily seen in terms of states or mechanisms, volitions or 'inner' intentions. The context and sequence of movement takes on a definite importance to the extent that there seem to be grounds for speaking of a different *type* of description to physical or mechanistic description altogether.

Similarly, offending someone by accidentally stepping on their toe, for example, is not a 'toe stepping movement minus the inner intention', where the intention is something 'in the head'. Anscombe's claim that such descriptions of involuntary actions are dependent on the form of description for intentional action seems sound, especially in the light of her impressive attack on causalist and empiricist accounts of action throughout *Intention*. It is also interesting that 'offending someone' seems to depend on the person offended, to an extent. Thus eating food with one's fingers might offend a dinner host from one culture and not another. Here the description of the guest's action 'offending the host' seems to be obviously dependent on circumstances that go beyond the agent's action. It is difficult to see such an action as something going on in the mind or brain of the guest when the action description seems so evidently to depend on 'external' factors, such as the cultural beliefs of the host, in this case.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF *INTENTION*.

1. Anscombe and Dennett.

Insight into *Intention* is deepened beyond a straightforward interpretation by showing the way in which it has influenced subsequent philosophy of action since it was first published in 1957. The best way to observe the influence of Anscombe's philosophy of action is to see the obvious 'presence' it has in the schemes developed by the major modern action theorists. In the present discussion I will show how it has influenced programs put forward by Daniel Dennett and Donald Davidson. Both of these philosophers have distinct philosophies of action and they show very strong similarities to the kind of account put forward in *Intention*. Furthermore, both Davidson and Dennett have actually stated in various places that their theories of action were largely influenced by *Intention*. Both theories of action share with Anscombe the presupposition that there seem to be two kinds of concepts – those for action descriptions and those for physical descriptions. This is an obvious trait of the account given by Anscombe: for action descriptions 'go beyond physics', are 'vital', and involve their own 'form of description'. Also, both philosophies of action to

be discussed here recognise this 'conceptual dualism' to the extent that their action theories are developed in response to the explanatory gap it represents.

Of the few works that most influenced his early thinking, Dennett remarks that 'Anscombe's *Intention*' was one of them. This is clearly evident in the book he says 'remains the foundation of everything [he has] done since then'; *Content and Consciousness*, first published in 1969.⁴ There he describes his program as one that tries to find a middle ground between two extreme reactions to what he calls the 'Intentionalist thesis of irreducibility' (the thesis that intentional phenomena are irreducible to physical phenomena).⁵ One reaction is to do away with intentional phenomena completely, in favour of a behavioural account of action and mind, under the assumption that 'Intentional idioms cannot be made to fit into the going framework of science'.⁶ For Dennett, this strategy fails because, for example, in describing an animals food-finding behaviour there 'is no room for 'know' or 'believe' or 'hunt for' in the officially circumscribed language of behaviourism'.⁷ The alternative is 'an Intentional science of behaviour' that would characterise 'the events of its domain in fully Intentional terms' and its programme 'would be to relate actions, beliefs, desires, intentions, rather than the supposedly 'pure' events of the behaviourists'.⁸ Dennett sees Anscombe as being one of the philosophers who falls toward this 'phenomenological' extreme in putting forward a conceptual 'science' of intention. The hallmark of this approach, and a central feature of *Intention*, as far as Dennett is concerned, is that they explain action in 'non-Humean' terms:

So the 'because' of Intentional explanations steadfastly resists treatment as a causal 'because'; we must explain A's intentional action X by saying A did X *because* he intended to do X, and this intention cannot be given the independent characterization it needs to be a proper cause.⁹

The notion of an 'independent characterisation' of 'the intention' was seen to play a central role in Anscombe's account. One of the theses it repeatedly proposed was that intentional

action could not be explained in terms of psychological antecedents, particularly empirically observable 'inner' states of mind or brain. A person's intention to go to the park pond down the road on Saturday morning cannot be characterised as a separate state 'in' the person for Anscombe. The meaning of that intention is dependent on there being just that park, on that road, with that pond and so on: the situation of the person 'having' that intention is necessary to its characterisation. Similarly the explanation of an action cannot be given in terms of a separate 'internal' cause. This was seen in sections 19 and 20 of *Intention*, where it was argued that an 'intentional' cannot even be meaningfully used without a further understanding of 'intention *with which*', 'expression of intention', 'intention for the future' and so on: 'intention' operates in a 'scheme' of concepts.

Dennett takes it that Anscombe's program tries to analyse intention even though it cannot be reduced to a physical analysis. But the major drawback of this approach for Dennett is that it means that our psychological concepts can never be really *explained* in any satisfactory way:

. . . Animal behaviour is generally appropriate to the environmental circumstances in which it occurs, and it is this ability to match behaviour to environment that the behaviourist tries to analyse by finding sequences of events that can be subsumed under general causal laws.

For intentional explanation on the other hand, the fact that one event (as Intentionally characterized) is followed in an appropriate way by another is not even contingent, and hence not subject to explanation. The intention to raise one's arm would not *be* the intention to raise one's arm if it were not followed, barring interference, with raising one's arm, so the question of why one follows the other is superfluous.¹⁰

This aspect of Anscombe's account is most clearly seen in her claim that an intentional action is the individual action that it is in virtue of the description given to it by the agent. Painting a white 'X' on a window pane *is* making it more visible – and not an act of decoration or vandalism – because making the window pane more visible is what I wanted to

achieve. The only hope of arriving at a scientifically respectable *law* explaining this event would involve focusing on the bodily movements in relation to the physical situation. But this would fail to characterise the *action*; it would miss intentions, beliefs, desires etc. So for Dennett an 'Intentional science' cannot produce any scientifically respectable explanations of intention.

Dennett rejects both of these ways of approaching intention and action. Thus he sides with Anscombe in her rejection of a behaviourist analysis of intention. But he also rejects Anscombe's program because it is an attempt to understand intention without any attempt to further ground it in physical science. The middle path he takes emerges from a 'loophole':

The weak place in the argument is the open-endedness of the arguments that no extensional reduction of Intentional sentences is possible. The arguments all hinged on the lack of theoretically reliable *overt* behavioural clues for the ascription of Intentional expressions, but this leaves room for *covert*, internal events serving as the conditions of ascription. . . .

The task of avoiding the dilemma of Intentionality is the task of getting from motion and matter to content and purpose – and back.¹¹

Dennett thus introduces his well known account of the various 'stances' – the 'intentional', the 'design' and the 'physical' stances to illustrate how this can be achieved. Dennett, like Anscombe, rejects talk of 'real' desires or inner intentions. To say that a person is cycling a bicycle is not to say that they have certain beliefs and desires 'in' their minds. Thus the use of 'belief', 'desire', 'intention' is really a matter of ascribing these concepts to other people for the purpose of explaining their behaviour. Dennett thus puts forward what he describes as a 'functionalist' account of content.¹² Anscombe holds something similar to this: belief and desire ascription is not a matter of labelling designated physical or mental entities. Rather, the 'life' or meaning of these concepts is found in the conditions of their application – 'intentional' is applied to certain 'picked out patterns of events' that are of interest to us.

However Anscombe would not go on to say that beliefs and desires can be ascribed to other 'functioning' systems such as hearts and blood cells. For Anscombe, our intentional concepts are incommensurable with natural or physical concepts. For (i) Only humans have concerns, interests, etc., regarding the future and (ii) Only humans have "language games" that can generate "conceptual kinds" that encompass "viewing behaviour in the light of goals and against a background assumptions of rationality etc."

Dennett *does* want to talk of beliefs and desires as applying to physiological systems, hence his 'design stance': 'any attributions of function necessarily invoke optimality or rationality assumptions, the attributions of intentionality that depend on them are *interpretations* of phenomena'.¹³ This is the central point of divergence between Dennett and Anscombe. While both accept that there is a gap between action language and physical language, Anscombe thinks the gap cannot be bridged while Dennett thinks it can. (As Anscombe remarks in *The Causation of Action*: 'No way of filling [the gap] up, whether with brain-states or (the fanciful) supposed correlates of expressions of Cartesian *cogitationes*, will fill it up with intentions, beliefs, wants, aims, volitions, or desires').¹⁴ Given that the use of psychological concepts used to explain action is merely a matter of ascription-in-functional-explanation for Dennett, there is no difference in kind between the three levels of explanation. Hence the transition from 'intentional' to 'design' to 'physical' explanation; from 'action' functionality, to 'physiological' functionality, to 'physical' functionality.

Although they differ crucially on the problem of the 'gap' between action concepts and physical concepts, there are many illuminating similarities between Dennett and Anscombe's accounts that show the extent to which Dennett was influenced by *Intention*. Their attitude toward the ontology of action is basically very similar – both prefer a theory neutral stance. In characterising intentional action, Anscombe remarks that 'there are many descriptions of happenings which are directly dependent on our possessing the *form* of description of intentional actions' and that 'intentional' has reference to a *form* of description of events.'¹⁵ In avoiding 'inner' or 'outer' mental or physical characterisations of 'intentional', Anscombe

recognises descriptions of 'happenings' and events that are distinguished in terms of their respective 'forms'. Dennett describes his own perspective in similar terms:

. . . I'll provide [a slogan for my 'ontological' perspective]: "Once you've explained everything that happens, you've explained everything." Now is this behaviorism? No. If it were, then all physiologists, meteorologists, geologists, chemists, and physicists would be behaviorists, too, for they take it for granted that once they have explained all that happens regarding their phenomena, the job is finished. This view could with more justice be called phenomenology! The original use of the term "phenomenology" was to mark the cataloguing of everything that happened regarding some phenomenon, such as a disease, or a type of weather, or some other salient source of puzzlement in nature, as a useful preamble to attempting to explain the catalogued phenomena. . .

So my heterophenomenology is nothing more nor less than old-fashioned phenomenology applied to people (primarily) instead of tuberculosis or hurricanes: it provides a theory-neutral, objective catalogue of what happens – the phenomena to be explained. . . . What alternative is there? There is only one that I can see: the view that there are subjective phenomena beyond the reach of *any* heterophenomenology.¹⁶

Obviously neither Dennett nor Anscombe are phenomenologists in any traditional sense. But it is clear that in their shared opposition to realism about 'mental' phenomena that they prefer to talk of happenings and events. In the same way that Anscombe aimed to provide an accurate description of the use of intention and intentional action, Dennett tends to seek a 'theory-neutral, objective catalogue of what happens.' Of course, although both share opposition to real Cartesian styled internal states, Anscombe does not deny the reality of internal phenomenal states such as thoughts and feelings. She *denies* they are the referents of our intentional terms. Intentional terms form part of a different "language game", where the criteria for applying such terms is not purely descriptive at all but interpretative of bodily movements in the light of interests, context, assumptions and so on.

Dennett's more recent focus on 'real patterns' is also in part owing to *Intention*. It is a testament to the depth, insight and modernity of *Intention* that this feature of Dennett's program has its roots in that work. As was seen in chapter 4, Anscombe expanded on Wittgenstein's assertion that concepts (including action concepts) express and direct out interest. It was in this sense that the reason-seeking 'Why?' found its application – not as the 'Why?' of empirical inquiry, but one the application of which presupposes the recognition of action 'patterns' in the flow of events. In the same way that the meaning of a genre-picture or pencil marks forming a sentence is 'immanent' or 'in' the lines themselves, actions are similarly noticed picked out patterns of events to which the reason-seeking 'Why?' applies. Such a perspective precludes attempts to view language as a mediator between systems of inner signs and outer states, such that the whole 'process' of action description could be accessed by an independent observer, a scientist for example. For Anscombe, the application of action concepts is 'autonomous'. Dennett notes how this aspect of *Intention* occurs in his account in the *Intentional Stance*:

I claim that the intentional stance provides a vantage point for discerning similarly useful patterns. These patterns are objective – they are *there* to be detected – but from our point of view they are not *out there* entirely independent of us, since they are patterns composed partly of our own "subjective" reactions to what is out there; they are the patterns made to order for our narcissistic concerns (Atkins 1986). It is easy for us, constituted as we are, to perceive the patterns that are visible from the intentional stance – and only from that stance.¹⁷

In a footnote relating to this section, Dennet remarks:

'Anscombe spoke darkly of "an order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions" (1957, p. 80) but did not say *where* in the world this order was to be discerned. In the brain? In behavior? For years I could not make sense of this, but now I see what she may have intended and why she was so coy in her descriptions (and

location) of the order. It is as hard to say where the intentional order is as it is to say where the intentional patterns are in the Life world. If you “look at” the world in the right way, the patterns are obvious. If you look at (or describe) the world in any other way, they are, in general, invisible.¹⁸

Saying that the patterns are ‘made to order for our narcissistic concerns’ is similar to saying how ‘Why?’ is the expression of our interest in certain recognised ‘action patterns’ of events: concepts direct and express our interest. Similarly, that the patterns’ ‘existence’ seems to depend on ‘looking at’ the world in the right way parallels Anscombe’s remark that ‘the description of something as a human action could not occur prior to the existence of the question ‘Why?’, simply as a kind of utterance by which we were *then* obscurely prompted to address the question’.¹⁹ The patterns aren’t ‘fixed’ states of the world that could be discovered, examined and *then* subjected to curious attempts at explanation. Intentional actions are not things that are discovered in the way that galaxies or new species of fish are.

Dennett also shares many of Anscombe’s basic views on the specifics of intentional action, following her demarcation of ‘intentional’ in *Content and Consciousness*: “The class of intentional actions has now been characterized as the class of motions under particular descriptions of which the actor has practical knowledge and for which he is prepared to offer reasons.”²⁰ Dennett accepts this general formula for intentional action but as mentioned above, the general direction he takes is much different to Anscombe’s. Anscombe’s account represents an overly ‘Intentionalist’ stance as far as Dennett is concerned because it fails to confront the problem of trying to bridge the gap between explanation of action and physical explanation. Perhaps one of the underlying reasons for the difference between Anscombe and Dennett lies in a difference in methodological starting points. Although Dennett is similar to Anscombe in that he adopts a common sense perspective on events, he is more committed to the ‘scientific starting point’ than Anscombe seems to be:

So from the outset I worked from the ‘third-person’ point of view’ of science, and took my task to be building – or rather sketching the outlines of – a physical structure that could be seen to accomplish the puzzling legerdemain of the mind.²¹

This is obviously different to Anscombe’s decision to focus on ‘the sort of things you would say in a law court if you were a witness and were asked what a man was doing when you saw him’; that is, to investigate ‘what a man actually does’ rather than to look ‘into the sphere of the mind’.²² Dennett seems to have been leaning toward giving priority to physical explanation all along, whereas Anscombe, perhaps being more concerned with the language of intention as used in its natural setting, seems to accept that her analysis can go through at that level, without it having to then measure up to science. In general Anscombe is always a type of *externalist*, but one that transcends mere behaviour and context (or behaviourism) to take in *convention* (the background assumptions). Dennett, on the other hand, when he gets down to the “physical stance” is an *internalist*.

Anscombe’s account represents a series of ‘blocks’ to getting from the intentional stance to the physical stance via the design stance as far as Dennett is concerned. If Anscombe were right and the ‘gap’ could not be filled with anything from physiological to neurological explanations, then Dennett’s attempt to give our psychological descriptions a scientific underlay effectively fails. Thus there are a number of points of disagreement between the two accounts. Perhaps the most obvious one is that the concept of a ‘stance’ could not operate in Anscombe’s program. Anscombe would reject talk of cells, engines and other systems exhibiting design as having propositional attitudes. This is not a problem for Dennett because he thinks that there is no difference in principle between ascribing a desire to a human being and to say a washing machine. Both ‘do’ things in order to achieve certain results – to apply beliefs and desires to either is to take up the intentional stance. As the functional operations of a system get more detailed, such as the workings of the nucleus of a cell, we can slip into talking of its behaviour in terms of design without thereby negating the observations made from the intentional stance. This process continues until physical

explanations are arrived at from the physical stance. For Dennett then, concepts apply literally to patterns of events and there is nothing over and above those events grounding their application. It might seem Anscombe's account should also have room for such transition between levels of description. After all, Anscombe held that ascribing action concepts is a matter of certain 'picked out patterns of events': what difference is there between one set of picked out events (an act of waving for help) and another (the movements of a clock hand)? It might seem that the difference lies in the fact that the human *really* has beliefs and desires while the clock does not. But no sense of the 'reality' of beliefs and desires can be obtained here, by appeal perhaps to some psychological 'stuff' in Anscombe's account, be it 'mental' or 'physical'. So in what sense does Anscombe's account represent a block to Dennett's desired transition via the design stance?

I take it that Anscombe would block Dennett's attempted transitions between levels of description because, as mentioned above, she takes it that there is 'no way of filling up' the gap between talk of intentions, beliefs and desires on the one hand and purely physical descriptions on the other. The primary reason for this would seem to be the various factors surrounding the fact that Anscombe prioritises agent-*knowledge*:

The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*; which of course can only be ascribed to creatures endowed with sensation. Thus it is not mere movement or stretching towards something, but this on the part of a creature that can be said to know the thing. . . .

The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*: in saying this, we describe the movement of an animal in terms that reach beyond what the animal is now doing. [For example a dog snuffles and scratches in trying to get meat]. Thus there are two features present in wanting; movement towards the thing and knowledge (or at least opinion) that the thing is there. When we consider human action, though it is a great deal more complicated, the same features are present when what is wanted is something that already exists: such as a particular Jersey cow, which is presumed to be on sale in the Hereford market, or a particular woman desired in marriage.²³

Obviously Anscombe can't explain this knowledge as knowledge of a Cartesian mental state or an observed entity like a brain state, or a 'motive idea'. The knowledge of what a creature wants is not knowledge of a kind of 'stuff' that operates over and above or 'in' the bodily movements it makes in trying to acquire its object. But this does not automatically put the characterisation of the described intentional action on a footing with Dennett's account. For Dennett seems unable (nor does he wish) to distinguish between for example 'mere movement or stretching toward something' and 'trying to get an acknowledged good'. Thus a camera can 'try to get' a picture by opening its shutter, moving its lens etc. and a person can 'try to get' the same image by sketching it. Anscombe would surely not accept this way of talking – but how *does* she 'make irreducible' action descriptions then, in a way that resists translation into 'design stance' descriptions?

The answer is that the description the agent gives to his action is what distinguishes the action *as* the action it is. So to go beyond this description is to lose sight of the action altogether. The agent's description is epistemically 'prior' to the bodily movement, such that the action is characterised according to that prior description. This is one way then in which the level of description for actions is 'cut off' to one side of the 'gap' for Anscombe, such that they cannot be easily translated into 'design stance' descriptions. Furthermore, for Anscombe, unlike Dennett, action descriptions do not refer in any singular way but are generated by certain conditions (interests, context, background conditions and so on). Also, action descriptions are "intentional" (and so not purely descriptions in the extensional sense).

It is also a feature of Dennett's account that macro/action descriptions are ultimately micro/neurological descriptions. But for Anscombe these descriptions could never be the same. For as was directly argued in section 19 of *Intention*, there is nothing about the person considered by himself at the time of acting in isolation from his surroundings that could determine an action description. That is, no amount of physiological observation could ever lead to an understanding of what such-and-such an action is. While both Dennett and Anscombe are opposed to 'internal causal extra's' being the object of action descriptions,

Anscombe avoids attempts to descend into talk of neurological function, even if this is only in terms of 'functional pattern'. An examination of muscle or neural micro patterns could not yield the desired action description for Anscombe. But this is not so for Dennett, whose account allows for movement between 'pattern levels'. This difference between the two accounts is seen in the way Dennett treats an example given by Anscombe in section 27 of *Intention*:

Let us suppose that the thought in [a person's mind] is 'you silly little twit!' [while embracing someone]. Now here too, it is not enough that these words should occur to him. He has to mean them. . . [Thus] in some matters a performance in the mind which is seriously *meant* may make a difference to the correct account of the man's action – e.g. in embracing someone. But the matters in question are necessarily ones in which outward acts are 'significant' in some way.²⁴

The point of the example is to show that sometimes in the absence of 'outer criteria' a thought can totally change the interpretation of an intentional action. Still 'outward acts are significant' in some way because for Anscombe *meaning* 'You silly little twit!' is not a matter of 'meaning experiences' or brain activities or other internal processes. But Dennett easily moves into talking of the 'internal performance' from the 'micro' perspective of the design stance:

There is an internal difference, quite clearly, between just saying 'you silly little twit!' and meaning it, but this difference is not itself a performance. The difference must depend on what the function is on the part of the brain that produces this message in awareness. If the message is produced in the course of the brain's maintaining a particular antagonistic state, if the production of this message is caused by some neural activity that, say, brings into play stored information on the shortcomings of the 'silly little twit', then the 'thought is meant'. . . The neural mechanism that produces the message 'you silly little twit', . . . can have, virtually no other effect on behaviour or

neural state than the production of the words. The activity involved does not influence or mesh with any other activity.²⁵

Dennett allows that the internal performance can be characterised at a sub-level of description in terms of brain states. But he avoids identifying the inner performance with a property 'in' the brain by talking of neural patterns that are contextualised in terms of wider neurological functional patterns such that the pattern for 'You silly little twit!' is caused by other neural activity associated with relevant 'stored information' about the twit in question. But for Anscombe, this brain state is just another physical pattern that has nothing to do with the thought and thus is unrelated to the characterisation of the action. This is seen in her remarks about brain patterns in "The Causation of Action." If a 'belief about banks' *could* be characterised in terms of neural patterns, then an artificially produced neurological pattern (produced outside the causal conditions that occur 'naturally') would supposedly produce in the person the required 'a belief about banks'. Then the inference would be:

... that if such a state has been so produced the subject is then in a state of belief that, say, 'such-and-such a bank in -cester is open at 5.00 p.m. on Thursdays,' though neither -cester nor banks nor clocks nor days of the week ever came into his life before, nor did he ever hear of them. The absurdity of the inference brings it out that even on the initial supposition – which there is no evidence for anyway – the brain-state is not a sufficient condition for the belief.²⁶

Anscombe is committed to the view that the meaning of action descriptions must remain 'higher up' than those produced from the design stance – to imagine a person actually having the belief about banks purely on the basis of isolated, artificially induced neurological states is absurd. I think this opposition between Dennett and Anscombe could come down to differences in the underlying accounts of linguistic meaning. For example, Anscombe takes it that attributing the capacity to an infant to use colour words is marked by an ability to do

things with coloured objects. The child can use words like 'red' and 'purple' when its dealings with red and purple objects involves activities such as 'fetching them, carrying them, placing them –according to their colours'.²⁷ Similarly with beliefs about banks, the person must be thought to have had actual dealings with them in order to 'have' a belief about them. In other words the 'language game' is the primary source of linguistic meaning for Anscombe, while this would not seem to be so with Dennett who, perhaps out of scientific leanings, allows that psychological descriptions can be replaced by descriptions of 'sub-patterns'.

It is also important for Dennett, unlike Anscombe, to hold that reasons can be causes. If an explanation of an action is given in terms of reasons it will have to be possible to recast this description in terms of 'sub-level' pattern descriptions for Dennett. But these 'sub-level' patterns will be observed from the design stance where more purely functional descriptions are given in causal terms or in terms of mechanism: "Thus not only is it the case that when I do something for a reason, what I do is caused, but what makes a reason my *real* reason for doing something is that the events of information processing which cause what I do have among them an event with the content of my real reason".²⁸ This means that Dennett is led to oppose Anscombe's supposition that intentional actions aren't caused:

[In the case of intentional actions] would it not be better to say that I have inferential knowledge that at least certain *sorts* of causes were absent? That is, [in intentionally knocking over the coffee] I know I did not feel anyone bump my arm, I know that I am not an epileptic, and I know moreover that I just had the malicious thought: 'Let's make a mess of Smith's carpet.'²⁹

To give a reason in response to 'Why?' for Anscombe is not to give a cause. But Dennett wants to make room for intentional actions being explained by causes because this allows for 'transition' between 'intentional' and 'design' levels of pattern description. This transition is blocked for Anscombe because the meaning of 'intentional' is 'conceptual' and the relation

between an action and its description is not external (and not causal) but internal – an intention cannot be separately individuated as if it were a ‘detachable’ precursor of a bodily movement.

Overall then, Dennett’s system is seen to be an attempt to take some of the results of *Intention* and develop them in a way that is consistent with a preference for ‘physical science and the third-person point of view’.³⁰ Dennett wants above all to bridge the gap, to get from psychological descriptions to physical descriptions. He shares many presuppositions with Anscombe and avoids trying to relate action descriptions to physical or mental properties of any kind. This is achieved by limiting the analysis, like Anscombe, to ‘picked out patterns of events’. Unlike Anscombe however, Dennett extends the notion of a pattern from bodily movements in a context (intentional actions) to the sub-patterns of systems exhibiting mere physiological design. In a sense, this puts the onus on Anscombe to say why her ‘action patterns’ are any different to micro physical patterns; to justify her claim that the ‘gap’ cannot be filled between psychological and physical descriptions. It seems that Anscombe’s account could never construe intentional action descriptions in purely functional or causal terms since this would omit what is crucial to their status *as* actions – the special type of agent awareness associated with them as opposed to other events. For Anscombe, actions are events subject to practical knowledge, those exhibiting a reversal of ‘fit’. A mere sub-system could never involve this form of awareness. Furthermore the meaning of an action description is revealed through its use for Anscombe, and the use of the concept operates in the form of life rather than at the sub-levels of functional design. But regardless of the various differences and similarities between the two accounts, it is evident that *Intention* and Anscombe’s account of action in general has largely influenced one of the major modern theories of our folk-psychological concepts.

Although I have said here that Anscombe has influenced Dennett, one could question how this can be possible in light of the fact that Anscombe is so opposed to any causal accounts of intentional action. It would seem that either Anscombe’s rejection of any causal account of intentional action is not crucial to her theory of action, in which case it

may survive in a modified form in Dennett's account, *or* Anscombe's rejection of any causal account of intentional action *is* crucial to her theory of action, in which case it is difficult to see how Anscombe could have influenced them.

The answer to this problem is that Anscombe's account does not survive as it is in *Intention* in Dennett's account but that *Intention* still counts as influence on his theory nonetheless. In what follows, I will show how Anscombe's anti-causalism is essential to her account and how it differs from Dennett's causal thesis. I will then go on to consider whether Anscombe's approach is inadequate in light of Dennett's attempt to substantially revise it.

Anscombe's anti-causalism is essential to her overall account of intentional action. As a reminder, we can see her strong anti-causalism in various remarks she makes in *Intention*. She sets up her analysis early on in *Intention* in anti-causalist terms when she characterises intentional action as that which is subject to a special sense of "Why?" that is not answered by stating evidence or "a cause, including a mental cause".³¹ Thus, for Anscombe, intentional action cannot be explained as intentional by providing, for example, certain facts about a person's physiological or neurological states prior to or during an action. This would be to provide a causal explanation of their *physical* movements, but it would not explain their action as intentional. However for Anscombe, moving into the realm of psychological concepts for intentional explanation will not necessarily provide the resources for intentional explanation either. We may explain an action in terms of desires, thoughts, or feelings and other types of *mental* causes but for Anscombe this will not capture the intentional nature of the action in question. So if I am walking across the room to open the fridge this action *as* "intentional" cannot be captured, for Anscombe, by describing what is going on in my brain while I am acting. Nor can an investigation into my muscles capture what it is that I am intentionally doing. However, if a person were to ask me "Why are you doing that?" and I said that a feeling of hunger gripped me this would not adequately depict the action as intentional because it would be explaining it by mentioning something that went on in my mind that led up to it, but would not put the action in an intentional context, so to speak. In order to do this I would have to give a reason for acting and for Anscombe

reasons are neither causes nor mental causes. As part of our folk psychological vocabulary, “intentional” is not a concept that can be analysed causally. Mental-cause explanations may be given at the same time as a reason-explanation and yet it is only the latter that captures its intentional nature. I might say “I recall a feeling of hunger coming over me just before I got up from the chair to walk over to the fridge” and yet, when pressed, I could also say that I went to the fridge in order to get some food so that I would not have an empty stomach for an important meeting. Anscombe’s anti-causalism about intentional action is strong – legitimate mental-cause explanations may be given in conjunction with reason-explanations and yet they completely pass by the intentional aspect of the action in question.

This perspective is introduced without argument in the early stages of *Intention*. However, Anscombe strengthens this anti-causalism even further soon after this by presenting what she took to be a general *argument* against any form of causalism for intentional action. As we have seen, her argument in section 19 concluded that it will “be a mistake to look for *the* fundamental description of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this.”³² Rather, she states, the “only events to consider are intentional actions themselves, and to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it”.³³ So for Anscombe, what legislates against attempts to characterise intentional actions causally is that their individuation is fundamentally linked to the descriptions we give to them. “Walking over to the fridge” describes a human movement in a unique way that passes by other kinds of mental and especially physical forms of description. She argued for this conclusion by challenging the causalist to generate the required action description from considerations of the bodily movement in isolation from the context in which this description is usually applied. She suggested that “nothing about [a person] considered by himself in the moment of contracting his muscles, and nothing in the contraction of the muscles, can possibly determine the content of [a] description” such as “Walking over to the fridge”. The use of descriptions like these for intentional actions cannot

be analysed by appeal to such causal or physical factors and so the whole causal approach must be abandoned.

We can further see the importance and extent of Anscombe's anti-causalism when we consider what she later says in her positive account of the concept "intentional". She states that "there are many descriptions of happenings which are directly dependent on our possessing the *form* of description of intentional actions" and that "the term 'intentional' has reference to a *form* of description of events [the nature of which] is displayed by the results of our inquiries into the question 'Why?'"³⁴ It is noticeable that Anscombe does not characterise "intentional" in terms of observable "extras" accompanying or preceding an intentional description, such as neurological or physiological states. The description "Walking over to the fridge" does not get its meaning by designating any special states or processes. Instead, it is dependent on possessing the ability to apply a certain *form* of description of events, one that appeals to "in order to" or a certain sense of "because". In providing descriptions of intentional movements, human beings are describing events using a special vocabulary, but the application of this form of description cannot be explained by appeal to any "extras" such as "the firing of neural fibre 678b" or "the movement of acetylcholine esterase over such-and-such a synaptic gap".

Finally, the significance of Anscombe's general anti-causalism is reflected in her account of knowledge of action. Her suggestion that knowledge of action is non-observational and *practical* (in her special sense) stands in radical opposition to any account seeking to formulate what is known in action to be something over and above the description given to the action by the agent. Thus, she states in her account of "willing" that "it is an error to try to push what is known by being the content of intention back and back; first to the bodily movement, then perhaps to the contraction of the muscles, then to the attempt to do the thing, which comes right at the beginning. The only description that I clearly know of what I am doing may be of something that is at a distance from me".³⁵ What is known in action, for Anscombe, is not any "extra" mental element that somehow sets the causal sequence leading up to an intentional movement in operation. My knowing that I am walking

over to the fridge is not a conclusion I arrive at by observing myself doing what I am doing from “the inside” – by noting that a certain mental event or act of will has come about in my “mind” that subsequently leads up to my arms and legs moving. Anscombe’s own example is “I am pushing the boat out”. She argues that it is wrong to conclude that “the only part of the sentence which really expresses the known action *in* this intentional action is ‘I am pushing’ [where] the word ‘out’ expresses the intention with which I am pushing because it expresses an opinion as to an effect of my pushing in these circumstances . . . which opinion is accompanied by a desire on my part”.³⁶ The point here is that in explaining our knowledge of action we should not look to mental elements that are taken to play a causal role in bringing about the bodily movement that is described as intentional, as if the thing known in action were something that lay right at the beginning of the causal chain in question. Moreover, since “the only description that I clearly know of what I am doing may be of something that is at a distance from me”, what I actually know is a bodily movement in a certain context – something that the anti-causal argument of section 19 tried to prove.

Finally, this anti-causal aspect of Anscombe’s account of knowledge of action is seen in her central formulation of practical knowledge as involving a different direction of fit to theoretical knowledge. What Anscombe effectively provides by introducing this notion of direction of fit is a framework for characterising knowledge of action that does not require reference to observable causal extras in action. If the orthodox model for knowledge were applied to knowledge of action then the search for “the thing known in action” would be reintroduced. By singling out actions in terms of their unique mode of “justification” – whereby desires are satisfied by getting the world to fit them – Anscombe further insulates her account of action and intention from the causal approach she is attacking.

There is no doubt that Dennett opposes Anscombe’s anti-causalism. In fact, his account represents a reversal of many of the key anti-causal moves that Anscombe makes in *Intention*. The heart of his resistance to Anscombe’s anti-causal analysis lies with the basic way he responds to her view that concepts like intention and intentional cannot be picked out by appeal to physical terms. Thus he states early on in *Content and Consciousness* that

Anscombe's "Intentionality thesis" gives a "sharp set of teeth" to "the old, ill-envisaged dogma that the mind cannot be caged in physical theory".³⁷ In particular, he argues that the weak place in an approach such as Anscombe's is "the open-endedness of the arguments that no extensional reduction of Intentional sentences is possible". In other words, Dennett automatically rejects the central component of Anscombe's non-causal thesis – that intentional (action) descriptions cannot be reduced to equivalent extensional descriptions. For Dennett, it is possible in principle to find e.g. neurological descriptions that correspond to descriptions such as "I am pushing the boat out" or "I am walking to the fridge". Specifically, he proposes that an approach such as Anscombe's hinges on "the lack of theoretically reliable *overt* behavioural clues for the ascription of Intentional expressions, but [that] this leaves room for *covert*, internal events serving as the conditions of ascription".³⁸ This is the fundamental point of departure for Dennett from Anscombe's treatment of intention and intentional action. In fact Dennett provides a somewhat systematic dismantling of Anscombe's sophisticated analysis of the various aspects of "intention" and "intentional", reversing each element of her account to arrive in the end at a well worked out causal theory.

This opposition between Dennett and Anscombe on the issue of causation in action can be seen clearly in his comments on Anscombe's remarks about expressions of intention. Anscombe argued in *Intention* that expressions of intention are not reports of inner states of mind and that in uttering an expression of intention we are not thereby stating facts about what is observed in the mind. Hence her remark that expressing a lying intention "does not mean that it is a false report of the contents of one's mind, as when one lies in response to the query 'A penny for your thoughts'".³⁹ So Anscombe does not seek to explain how we can know our intentions – there is no burden of explanation here because there is no process going on that needs to be explained. Dennett picks up on this aspect of her account but asserts that if "we are unsatisfied – as I think we must be – with an early end to explanation here, namely that introspective reports just are infallible, we must abandon the personal level and ask a different question: how can introspective utterances be so related to certain internal conditions that they can be viewed as error-free indications of these internal conditions?"

That is, Dennett directly rejects Anscombe's claim that expressions of intention do not represent internal signs. While he agrees with Anscombe that a return to mysterious inner entities is no way to proceed, he nonetheless insists that expressions of intention *are* representative of inner states that play a causal role in bringing about intentional actions.

More significantly, Dennett's "causal" response to Anscombe's model rejects her reading of practical knowledge. Not only is he unhappy with Anscombe's proposal that we can only claim that we "can say" what our intentions are (as opposed to explaining this knowledge), he rejects her assertion that our knowledge of action is non-observational. Anscombe claimed that I have non-observational knowledge of for example, the mental cause of a crocodile's bark making me jump backwards in fright. The force of this point is that we do not arrive at knowledge of our mental causes by sensing or detecting any intermediate clues – we literally have knowledge without observation of mental causes. Dennett contends that Anscombe is wrong here; that our knowledge is actually *inferred* in a special sense. He states that "I know I did not think to myself, just before the crocodile barked, 'I think I'll just jump back for the fun of it', and I know I am not afflicted with some malady that makes me jump every now and then. So I *conclude* (consciously or subconsciously) that it was the sight of the barking, leaping crocodile that made me jump. . . . But I do not have non-inferential or immediate knowledge of the cause of my jump".⁴⁰ So Dennett thinks that we do actually perform a kind of inference in order to arrive at the knowledge that the action was mentally caused by the crocodile. So Dennett's claim that "knowledge of causes and reasons is inferential" and that my knowledge of reasons and causes has a "mediated evidential status"⁴¹ flies directly against Anscombe's central proposal that our capacity to explain intentional action in terms of reasons is something that cannot be analysed by appeal to the model of theoretical knowledge. A similar difference on this issue can be seen in Dennett's reading of Anscombe's remark that having a sudden thought such as "You silly little twit!" changes what a person's action means even though there are no overt behavioural clues that could indicate the hidden (perhaps sarcastic) nature of an act of greeting someone. Dennett is happy to suggest that "the difference [the thought "You silly

little twit!” makes] must depend on what the function is of the part of the brain that produces this message in awareness”.⁴² He argues that “if the production of this message is caused by some neural activity that, say, brings into play stored information on the shortcomings of the ‘silly little twit’, then the ‘thought is meant’”.⁴³ Thus, there is a constant tendency in Dennett’s treatment to appeal to inner neurological elements in order to ground the application of concepts such as practical knowledge, intention, and intentional action.

Dennett also presents a reversed causal reading of Anscombe’s account of willing. As we saw, Anscombe rejects the account of willing that sees it in terms of “inner” causes. Dennett accepts this, but he nonetheless holds that this phenomenon *can* be explained causally by appeal to neurological states:

The view of neural activity so far developed provides a plausible if sketchy explanation of this phenomenon. Roughly, in order for the brain to initiate the activity of getting up, its input must be such that it outweighs, say, the pleasure of just lying in bed, the influence of stored information to the effect that getting out of bed is unpleasant, the input to the effect that the body is still tired, and so forth.⁴⁴

So Dennett takes very seriously the causal/neurological background to our awareness of intentional actions, whereas Anscombe actively denies the significance of such factors to the analysis of our intentional talk.

Dennett thus responds to Anscombe’s anti-causalism with a persistent attempt to hook up our use of intentional concepts to our neurological concepts. The core difference between Anscombe’s anti-causalist and Dennett’s causalist account is that Anscombe’s analysis “breaks off” at the level of conscious experience and only considers the conditions for the ascription of intentional content at this level. Consequently, she arrives at a strong form of anti-causalism. Dennett however, while accepting that we cannot go beyond what is given in experience by appealing to mysterious inner entities, argues that we should dig deeper for causal explanation by bringing in more respectable inner items – neurological states. This is

the general difference between Anscombe and Dennett and it lies at the centre of the opposite direction Dennett takes from Anscombe's non-causalist account:

The task [at hand] is the task of somehow getting from motion and matter to content and purpose – and back. If it could be established that there were conceptually trustworthy formulations roughly of the form 'physical state S has the significance (or means, or has the content) that *p*' one would be well on the way to a solution to the problem.⁴⁵

Thus, there is a tension in my suggestion that Anscombe has influenced Dennett here: if, as I have been maintaining, Anscombe's account is thoroughly anti-causalist, then how can it have influenced Dennett's obviously causalist alternative account? I think the answer lies in this last point – Dennett took from Anscombe's *Intention* a certain conceptual analysis of intentional action which held that there is an unbridgeable gap between intentional talk and causal talk. Anscombe, in characterising intentional action in non-causal terms and in arguing throughout *Intention* against any appeal to extra causal elements in describing willing, wanting, knowing one's intention, and so on, moved the analysis of action in such a direction that left no room for the *explanation* of our folk psychological concepts. Her view is in keeping with the quietism of the later Wittgenstein because it is more concerned with describing language games and elucidating the meaning of our psychological terms than it is with providing any kind of causal explanation of them. However, Dennett, rejecting this conclusion, tends to dismantle much of the work that Anscombe has done. The influence of *Intention* on Dennett then lies in its presenting to him a form of analysis of folk psychological terms that he finds radically unsatisfactory. It is through his dealings with Anscombe's analysis that he carves out his own. As we have seen, he methodically addresses the main joints of the framework Anscombe developed and replaced her anti-causalist proposals with causalist interpretations of, for example, "having an intention", "knowing on intention", "expressing an intention", "willing an intention", and so on.

So the influence of *Intention* on Dennett's program is primarily negative – it presents a certain framework which Dennett responds to by thoroughly recasting it in causalist terms. It is thus a question as to why Anscombe did not recognise the apparent shortcomings of her program: why would Dennett (and, as we shall see, Davidson too) respond to her framework by reversing its direction and reinterpreting it in causalist terms?

As already noted, one prominent move Anscombe made early on in *Intention* was to distinguish between reasons and mental causes, then going on to construe intentional action in generally non-causal terms. However, it was seen that the causalist could claim that Anscombe is guilty of a *non-sequitur* here, because she proceeds from claims about causation at the level of ordinary awareness – mental causation – to rule causation out of intentional explanation completely. That is, she appears to argue that because mental causation cannot capture the nature of “intentional” no form of causation can do so. As has been made clear, Dennett flatly rejects this argument and proceeds to appeal to neurological causes to ground the ascription of intentional content.

Perhaps the best support Anscombe provides, in light of the inadequacy of this *non-sequitur*, is her argument from section 19. Anscombe may have taken this argument to be a strong one against the causalist. After all, *if* one cannot generate the required neurological/physiological descriptions from a consideration of the person in isolation of the context of their movements at the time of acting, then it would seem that the gap Dennett is trying to close *cannot* be closed. Dennett rejects this move by Anscombe, insisting that one can arrive at neurological descriptions for distinct actions. However, one might ask, in defence of Anscombe, how exactly the two forms of description – “intentional” and “neurological” *can* hook up. This problem is rather like the old problem of interactionism for Descartes' account of the relation between mind and body: there seems to be no way to conceive of how non-spatial mental substance could get a “grip” on physical substance. Similarly, one could question the causalist approach by asking how a description such as “P is kicking the ball” *could* have any meaningful connection with “P's neural fibre C-654 is

firing”, other than the fact that both the action and the neural firing may “occur” simultaneously.

This leads onto a broader issue about the identity conditions for mental states such as intentional actions, beliefs, desires and so on. Unlike Dennett, Anscombe maintains that nothing “inside” the person can actually form the basis for the meaning of certain psychological concepts. It is for this reason that she takes the inquiry into intentional concepts to be a completely *different* kind of inquiry to the analysis of physical concepts. Hence her claim that action descriptions “go beyond physics” and are “vital”.⁴⁶ She argues that the “mistake is to think that the relation *being done intentionally*, is a causal relation between act and intention.⁴⁷ Similarly, she states that when “we consider ‘the causation of action’ we need to decide which sort of enquiry we are engaged in. Is it the physiological investigation of voluntary movement? I. e. do we want to know how the human mechanism works when, at a signal, the hand pushes the pen, or perhaps the door shut? . . . [T]hat will not be our inquiry”.⁴⁸

Dennett, on the other hand, maintains that since the outset he “worked from the ‘third-person point of view’ of science, and took [his] task to be building – or rather sketching the outlines of – a physical structure that could be seen to accomplish the puzzling legerdemain of the mind”.⁴⁹ So it is obvious that there are large meta-issues involved in such a dispute between Dennett and Anscombe on this issue. While the causalists may have a point that Anscombe’s early move in *Intention* is a *non-sequitur*, Anscombe could be seen to have at least placed some burden of explanation on them to come up with an accurate explanation of the way both the physical and the intentional modes of description are supposed to “hook up”. Having said this, Anscombe’s approach could be said to be unsatisfactory in that it shirks any responsibility for providing a proper *explanation* of this highly important field of concepts.

In closing, it is worthwhile considering whether Anscombe has had any *positive* impact on Dennett’s philosophy. I think that insofar Dennett formed his account as a response to

Anscombe's his system certainly bears some of its characteristics. I am thinking here mainly of his emphasis on what he calls the "intentional stance":

"I claim that the intentional stance provides a vantage point for discerning similarly useful patterns. These patterns are objective – they are *there* to be detected – but from our point of view they are not *out there* entirely independent of us, since they are patterns composed partly of our own "subjective" reactions to what is out there; they are the patterns made to order for our narcissistic concerns (Atkins 1986). It is easy for us, constituted as we are, to perceive the patterns that are visible from the intentional stance – and only from that stance".⁵⁰

This shows how Dennett's system incorporates the kind of conclusions Anscombe arrived at. Anscombe stated that intentional actions are "movements with a normal role in the sensitive, and therefore appetitive, life of animals . . . a great many of our descriptions of events affected by human beings are *formally* descriptions of executed intention".⁵¹ Both Anscombe and Dennett look upon the human capacity to utter intentional action descriptions as involving an ability to pick out certain patterns of events. Furthermore, both see this capacity to be "wired in" to our interests and concerns. For Anscombe, "Why?" is an expression of our interest that is tied in to our ability to pick out certain patterns of events. Dennett encapsulates this aspect of Anscombe's account as an "intentional stance". However, while Anscombe contends that this "stance" must remain insulated from the physical stance, Dennett tries to properly relate it to the physical stance, ultimately linking intentional descriptions in neurological descriptions.

Thus, the problem posed by the difference between Anscombe and Dennett on the issue of causation of action need not prove particularly problematic for my claim that Anscombe had a considerable impact on the kind of theory Dennett presented. Dennett took Anscombe's analysis and brought it in a different (causalist) direction. So Anscombe's analysis of intentional action does not hold in his account. However, Dennett's theory may

not have turned out the way it did unless he had studied *Intention* as thoroughly as he did. Furthermore, there are still some signs of Anscombe's account active in Dennett's, particularly the acknowledgement of their being two "modes" of description – intentional and physical – and his attempt to further articulate this in terms of the "intentional" and "physical" stances. In short, we could say that Anscombe influenced Dennett by providing him with the means to develop a causal account of action and folk psychology that maintained many of the key structural elements of Anscombe's pioneering analysis. Although they arrived at conflicting conclusions, their systems bear significant similarities. In the next section I will show how Davidson also took Anscombe's framework and moved in the opposite "causal" direction. Davidson also tried to explain how the two forms of description – intentional and physical – could be made to hook up. Although he too insisted that intentional explanation was a form of causal explanation, we will see how his approach was also to some extent influenced by *Intention* in a similar way to Dennett's. To sum up then, we could say that *Intention* was highly influential not because it inspired many lasting "linguistic" accounts of our intentional concepts. On the contrary, following Davidson's investigations, it ultimately led to a wave of theorising that went in the opposite, "causal" direction. However, this is not to say that *Intention* had no impact. As I have argued here, it was instrumental in bringing about the types of (causal) accounts presented by Dennett and Davidson, who worked largely within the framework *Intention* made available to them.

2. Anscombe and Davidson.

Donald Davidson's account is similarly influenced by Anscombe's *Intention*. Again, the aim of Davidson's program is the same as Dennett's – to deal with the 'gap' between 'psychological' and 'physical' talk, but the result is quite different. In a sense, Davidson takes from Anscombe basically the same thing Dennett did. While Dennett recognised that *Intention* focused on happenings, or patterns of events as opposed to ontological 'extras', much of Davidson's thinking on action was triggered by Anscombe's notion of action 'under a description'. This is similar to Dennett because the concept of an action 'under a

description' amounts to talking of bodily movements in such-and-such circumstances. Thus both Dennett and Davidson recognise a shift to talk about events, bodily movements and utterances as opposed to traditional 'inner' mental states.

In his *Essays on Action and Events*, Davidson remarks that *Intention* is a writing he 'admired', given that it too tried to make sense of statements like 'Action *a* is intentional under description *d*'.⁵² It is this element of an action under a description that lies at the bottom of Anscombe's influence on Davidson's philosophy of action:

... I read Anscombe's *Intention* and Hampshire's *Thought and Action*; this led me back to Wittgenstein and to some of those in his thrall. ...

Anscombe had claimed that if a man poisons the water supply by pouring the contents of a bucket into a reservoir with the intention of killing the inhabitants of a town, then he performs just one action, though "under different descriptions" ("He poured the contents of the pail into a reservoir", "He poisoned the water", etc.). I thought this was right. But what was the entity described in different ways? An action, of course; but where were the definite descriptions which picked it out? It was only after I had seen how to introduce events into the logical form of sentences that I realized that sentences like "He poisoned the water" don't contain a definite description of an action. Events are in this particular case introduced through existential quantification. ... This analysis explicitly introduces an ontology of events, it shows how various characterisations of events can be enumerated, and how the transitive and intransitive uses of certain verbs are related (thus "x poisoned y" becomes "x did something that caused y to be poisoned").⁵³

This shows how Davidson's attempts to make full sense of Anscombe's analysis of an action 'under a description' leads him to construe actions as events. This then forms the basis for his claim that actions are causally related, in so far as relations between events are causal. So the influence of *Intention* on the development of Davidson's program is unquestionably significant. There are also other similarities to Anscombe's approach to action. Like

Anscombe's, his analysis of propositional attitudes, partly no doubt owing to the above mentioned influences, resisted an 'inner quality' approach:

[There is] no good reason to suppose that having a propositional attitude requires an entity which the mind entertains or grasps. Having an attitude is just being in a certain state; it is a modification of a person. There need not be any 'object' in or before the mind for the person to be thinking, doubting, intending or calculating. . . There are no such things as weights or temperatures; "This box weighs 9 pounds" relates the box to a number on the pound scale, but the number is an abstract object unknown to the box.⁵⁴

Viewing propositional attitudes as a 'modification of a person' is in keeping with the approach that avoids theory-loaded presuppositions about the 'designations' of psychological concepts and so on, and so favours instead theory neutral talk of events, movements and utterances. This is similar to Dennett's methodological maxim 'Once you've explained everything that happens, you've explained everything.'⁵⁵

Another similarity between Anscombe and Davidson involved their understandings of the application of action concepts. In so far as Davidson was putting forward a causal account of action in his *Essays on Action and Events*, he was aware of the philosophical opposition from 'Wittgensteinian' treatments of action and so respected their intuitions that talk about actions could not be reduced to physical talk. Relevant here is the fact that, for Anscombe, action descriptions are 'autonomous' or 'conventional'. In so far as the meaning of a pattern of events (bodily movements in a context) is immanent, 'Why?' is not 'empirical' – it does not try to understand properties or processes. This meant that the application of action concepts could not be understood from the 'outside', as if action concepts formed a closed system of signs that could be scientifically examined. Davidson's account of 'radical translation' involves a very similar view of action concept application:

. . . . There is no further court of appeal, no impersonal objective standard against which to measure our own best judgements of the rational . . .

It makes no sense to speak of comparing, or coming to agree on, ultimate common standards of rationality, since it is our own standards in each case to which we must turn in interpreting others. This should not be thought of as a failure of objectivity, but rather as the point at which 'questions come to an end'. . . How we measure physical quantities is decided intersubjectively. We cannot in the same way go behind our own ultimate norms of rationality in interpreting others.⁵⁶

This account given by Davidson of the autonomy of action descriptions could stand as a good account of the reasons why Anscombe's 'Why?' could not be explained in *Intention* until she had elucidated the notion of practical knowledge and intentional action. In so far as an action is not an internal property or an 'external' neurological state for Anscombe, our inquiries into actions and our capacity to describe actions is not something that can be 'explained' from an 'impersonal objective standard'.

This relates to a similar feature of Davidson's system that is found to some extent in *Intention*: the 'holism of the mental' as Davidson calls it. Although Anscombe does not use the term, it is clear that she recognises that the concepts associated with intention form an inter-related scheme, such that 'an' intention could not be seen to be the separable causal antecedent of a bodily movement. Hence her argument in section 20 that 'intentional' necessarily depends for its meaning on the use of 'expression of intention for the future' and 'intention with which'. Likewise, Davidson acknowledges that 'mental events . . . cannot exist in isolation. Individual beliefs, intentions, doubts and desires owe their identities in part to their position in a large network of further attitudes'.⁵⁷ Thus, like Dennett, Davidson also recognises the 'gap' portrayed in *Intention* between psychological and physical talk. Anscombe mentioned how the movements of intentional actions are not movements of 'molecules' or even human bodies. Similarly for Davidson, action descriptions 'resist capture in the nomological net of physical theory'.⁵⁸

Both Davidson and Anscombe are also alike in another aspect, namely in regard to their accounts of act individuation: although an action can be intentional under various descriptions, an action is really only ever a single movement or event. The various intended results of a certain action of moving a pump handle for example, such as poisoning the water supply and killing the inhabitants of the house, are not actions themselves – there is only one action under various descriptions. For Davidson, our ‘primitive actions, the ones we do not do by doing something else, mere movements of the body – these are all the actions there are. We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature.’⁵⁹ Although Anscombe would not describe an individual action as ultimately a mere movement of the body (since actions are always ‘at a distance’ from the agent), she does share this picture of act individuation with Davidson: “As Davidson has put it, all that he (or I) meant by speaking of many different descriptions of the one action is, e.g. that the executioner of Charles I, having taken his head off, did not have to add any further performances.”⁶⁰

However, even though there are these similarities, Davidson’s account of action is of course different to Anscombe’s. Like Dennett, Davidson aims to find a way of bridging the gap between action concepts and physical concepts. He tries to find a way of combining the intuitions in works like *Intention* with the common sense belief that reasons are causes, hence connecting action talk with causal talk. Anscombe takes it that intentional actions are those done for a reason and that this is marked out by ‘Why?’ Davidson also takes the mark of intentional action to be that it is subject to reason explanation. But reasons for Davidson are belief-desire pairs construed as the causes of actions. Thus his paper “Actions, Reasons, and Causes” opens with the claim that he wants ‘to defend the ancient – and commonsense – position that rationalization [i.e. giving reason explanations of actions] is a species of causal explanation’. He then adds that the defence ‘requires some redeployment, but it does not seem necessary to abandon the position, as has been urged by many recent writers.’⁶¹ For Davidson, redeployment of the ancient and commonsense causal account of action involves rendering it compatible with the then new anti-causalist position springing mainly from the Wittgensteinians. Thus, in the case of giving desire-belief explanations of actions, Davidson

claims that the belief and desire as the causes of the action are what characterises the action. This means that at least the account of action given in *Essays on Actions and Events* gravitates toward the 'causal' account of Aristotle's syllogism that Anscombe argued against in *Intention*.

Davidson's anomalous monism is at the heart of his earlier attempts to accept a dualism of concepts while at the same time being a materialistic monist: the acceptance of token-token identity over type-type identity allows him to bridge the gap while remaining faithful to Anscombe's Wittgensteinian convictions that action concepts are wholly distinct from physical concepts. In the same way that Anscombe depicted the application of action descriptions to be autonomous (not subject to a set of rules that could be contained or explained from 'the outside'), Davidson accepts this too. But he tries to simultaneously satisfy his 'commonsense' conviction that action explanation is causal explanation by making action-talk the same as physical causal talk:

Mental events are, in my view, physical (which is not, of course, to say that they are not mental). This thesis follows from certain premises, all of which I think are true:

1. All mental events are physical events. . . .
2. If two events are related as cause and effect, there is a strict law under which they may be subsumed. . . .
3. There are no strict psychophysical laws.⁶²

The result is that a reduction of psychological laws to physical laws is ruled out along with reduction of mental-type predicates to physical predicates. Although his view is causal and he does accept token-token identity theory, he is closer to Anscombe than Dennett in that he recognises a gap between action concepts and physical concepts that precludes any meaningful connection between mental and physical type terms.

Davidson's program also endorses the holism of psychological concepts. As relations between events, reasons (beliefs and desires) and the actions they explain are causally related, but their psychological descriptions are still logically related. Thus Davidson can accept, along with Anscombe, that the concept 'intentional' would be meaningless without the concept of intention for the future or 'intention with which', without having to accept that the meaning of 'intentional' is limited to the relations between concepts. For a token action description is a token physical event and as an event is involved in physical, causal relations. For Davidson, truly causal explanation only occurs at the deterministic physical level. While we say "She *did* that because she *believed* so and so", the belief does not literally cause the movement. Thus Davidson, like Anscombe, does not want to say that there are mental processes causing bodily movements: while there are token-token identities between mental and physical events, there are no type-type identities. So it is not as if beliefs and desires are types of mental event that bring about bodily movements. Thus, even though Davidson is opposed to Anscombe, in that he endorses a common sense or traditional 'causal' view of action, his account is actually quite close to Anscombe's.

The same applies to Anscombe's 'externalist' account of wanting. In avoiding an 'inner cause' view of 'trying to get', Anscombe effectively rendered the relation between a reason and its action *intensional*. As Anscombe remarks:

Bonum est multiplex: good is multiform, and all that is required for our concept of 'wanting' is that a man should see what he wants under the aspect of some good. . . [That] *some* desirability characterisation is required does not have the least tendency to shew that *any* is endowed with some kind of necessity in relation to wanting.⁶³

The thing wanted in action is not something that can be analysed using physical concepts. A piece of metal eight inches long weighing a hundred grams with one sharp edge may be something I want, but not *as* such, rather I want it as a 'knife' to cut my food with. And that is not all I may want it for – I may want it as a 'screwdriver' or a 'lever' or a 'weapon'. For

Anscombe, ‘an object is not what what is aimed at *is*; the description *under which* it is aimed at is that under which it is *called* the object.’⁶⁴ Similarly, for Davidson, the relation between a reason and an action may be intensional, given that it is described in action-terms. But it can also be described as a physical relation between events, given the token-token identity involved, thus ensuring that it can be depicted causally. In general Davidson’s anomalous monism is quite close to Anscombe’s account in *Intention* in so far as it generates “intentional descriptions” in a normative way (assuming rationality and coherence) *and* that normative talk can never be reduced to non-normative scientific descriptions.

So this brief description of Davidson’s account of action clearly shows the influence of *Intention*. Both Dennett and Davidson have directly adopted some of the key concepts from Anscombe’s philosophy of action. Both schemes share a basic awareness of the conceptual dualism that *Intention* suggested and both developed systems to try and cope with the ‘gap’ that this implied between folk psychological vocabulary and physical vocabulary. Unlike Anscombe, both Dennett and Davidson seem to lean strongly toward what Dennett refers to as the ‘physical sciences and the third-person point of view’ which leaves them unsatisfied with the thought that our psychological concepts remain completely insulated from physical theory. Both theories reflect and oppose Anscombe’s treatment of action concepts in different ways. Dennett notices the role of bodily movements ‘under a description’ and the autonomy of action description suggested in *Intention*. But he departs from Anscombe in his rendering action descriptions nothing more than functional patterns that can ultimately be reduced to exactly similar though more minute physical state patterns. Davidson also adopts the notion of an action ‘under a description’, but applies it in such a way that his account turns out to be much more Anscombean than Dennett’s, even if it directly opposes *Intention* in so far as it is committed to the common sense view that reasons are causes. Given the extent of the influence of these two philosophical systems, it is safe to say that *Intention* exerts a perhaps hitherto unnoticed degree of sway in framing the modern debate about action and the status of folk psychology.

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