

## Anscombe on Action and Practical Knowledge

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Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001) was one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. Her monograph *Intention* (1963) is a foundational work in analytic philosophy of action from which many now-standard ideas in the field derive (e.g. that there are important conceptual connections between something's being an action and its being done for a reason and between the explanation of action and practical reasoning, and that actions are intentional not simpliciter but *under descriptions*). Less influential, however, was one of *Intention*'s central contentions, that an understanding of what Anscombe calls *practical knowledge* must be central to a satisfactory philosophical account of intentional action. This idea was largely ignored by philosophical work on action in the twentieth century (though see Velleman 1989), but it has been a central focus of the twenty-first century resurgence of interest in Anscombe.<sup>1</sup> However, the “practical knowledge” that plays a central role in Anscombe's conception of intentional action is not “knowledge how” in the sense introduced by Ryle (1946, 1949). Whereas the latter—here, *know-how*—is a sort of standing general knowledge that is put into practice on different occasions of action, the former—here, *agential knowledge*—is rather the distinctive knowledge that an agent has of her particular intentional actions.<sup>2</sup>

Anscombe introduces agential knowledge in *Intention* through a negative characterization: what is distinctive about an agent's knowledge of her intentional actions is that it is *non-observational* (§8).<sup>3</sup> But at the culmination of her account (in §48), this is supplanted by a positive characterization of agential knowledge as *practical knowledge*, something that Anscombe thinks “modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood” (§32), and of which she adopts Aquinas's account: “Practical knowledge is ‘the cause of what it understands’, unlike ‘speculative’ knowledge, which ‘is derived from the objects known’” (§48, citing *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, Q3, art.5, obj.1). As skill and know-how are often held to be forms of practical knowledge, this raises the following questions: does agential knowledge, as Anscombe understands it, depend on skill/know-how (and if so, how)? And does an Anscombean account of agency incur any commitments about the nature of know-how?

In *Intention* (on which I'll focus), Anscombe says very little about skill, and her remarks about know-how are compressed and present interpretive challenges. Answering our questions is therefore not straightforward; doing so will first require sketching Anscombe's conception of agential knowledge and its place in her account of agency.

### **Agential knowledge as *non-observational***

Anscombe introduces agential knowledge in *Intention* in order to break out of a conceptual circle she encounters while undertaking one of the book's first main projects, that of "outlin[ing] the area of intentional actions" (§18). Anscombe is often cited as a source of the popular view that actions are intentional if performed for reasons. But this misinterprets her famous claim that "what distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not...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" (§5). First, Anscombe's claim leaves open the possibility (later endorsed, with important qualifications, in §§17–18), that an intentional action may be performed for no reason—i.e. that the question 'Why?' applies but has a negative answer.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Anscombe thinks attempts to distinguish actions from non-actions, or intentional actions from non-intentional actions, by appeal to the idea of "reasons for acting" will be perniciously circular: "Why is giving a start or gasp not an 'action', while sending for a taxi, or crossing the road, is one? The answer cannot be 'Because the answer to the question "why?" may give a *reason* in the latter cases', for the answer may 'give a reason' in the former cases too; and we cannot say 'Ah, but not a reason for *acting*'; we should be going round in circles" (§5).

In order to delimit the "area of intentional actions" (from those of mere events, involuntary bodily movements, involuntary actions, voluntary but unintentional actions, etc.)—and with it the relevant sense of the question 'Why?' (from other senses of that question) and reasons for acting (from reasons, or "reasons", of other kinds)—Anscombe proceeds negatively, identifying ways of responding to the question 'Why are you X-ing?' that neither answer it positively (by giving a reason for acting) nor answer it negatively ('No reason') but rather show that the question doesn't apply. If the question doesn't apply—if the agent to whom it is put sincerely refuses it application—then the action is not intentional under the description 'X-ing' (though it may be intentional under the description 'Y-ing'). Among the responses that refuse the application of Anscombe's 'Why?'-question, two are especially significant here. First, the question 'Why are you X-ing?' is refused application by the response 'I didn't know I was [X-ing]' (§6). For example, Jones, when asked why he is sawing Smith's plank, might sincerely reply 'I didn't know I was sawing Smith's plank', and this, Anscombe thinks, shows that what he was doing was not intentional under *that* description (though it would presumably have been intentional under such descriptions as 'sawing a plank', 'sawing *this* plank, etc.). Secondly, the question is refused application by 'I knew I was doing that, but only because I observed it' (§8). For instance, if you noticed that by walking back and forth in front of an automatic door you caused it to keep opening, you might respond in this way if asked why you kept opening the door. By contrast, it would be implausible to think you could have known *only* by observation that you were walking back and forth—and under that description your action was surely intentional.

The claim that agents have non-observational knowledge of their intentional actions (that is, of their actions under those descriptions under which they are intentional) is often, and correctly, attributed to Anscombe. But it is frequently, yet incorrectly, held to be the kernel of her conception of agential knowledge—or worse still, to exhaust it. We have non-observational knowledge of more than our intentional actions: as well as mathematical and metaphysical (and other forms of *a priori*) knowledge, many hold that we have non-observational knowledge of our own minds. And Anscombe contends not only that we “usually know the position of [our] limbs without observation” (§8) but that some of the very things from which she aims to distinguish intentional actions—such as involuntary movements, e.g. the “odd sort of jerk or jump that one’s whole body sometimes gives when one is falling asleep” (§7), and involuntary actions, e.g. when “the leap and loud bark of the crocodile made me jump” (§8)—are known without observation, too. Anscombe holds that if someone is *X-ing intentionally*, she knows without observation not only that she is X-ing; she knows without observation *why* she is X-ing (as the subject of an involuntary movement known without observation does not), where this *answers* (positively or negatively) the question ‘Why?’ in its special sense rather than *refuses it application* (as ‘Because of the leap and loud bark of the crocodile’ or ‘Because I saw a face in the window’ refuse, by answering a different sense of, the question ‘Why did you jump?’, thereby revealing the jumping to be unintentional).<sup>5</sup> Anscombe indeed believes that agents have non-observational knowledge of what they are doing intentionally and why, but it’s important that this is a claim she arrives at in giving a negative specification of the “rough outline” of the “area of intentional actions”. The “class of things” that can be known without observation is a very heterogenous class indeed; to know simply that intentional actions fall within it is not to know much at all about what it is to be an intentional action, for it is not to know anything about *why* intentional actions fall in that class. The remainder of *Intention* develops a positive account of intentional action and agential knowledge, from which the claim that the latter is non-observational can be expected to *follow*.

### **The object of agential knowledge**

What exactly is agential knowledge knowledge of? Anscombe insists that it is what is done intentionally. If I’m painting the wall yellow intentionally, then I have agential knowledge that I’m painting the wall yellow. It is a mistake, Anscombe strikingly argues (§§29–30), to hold that the object of agential knowledge is merely what I intend to do, or what I’m trying to do—a fact about the agent’s mind, not a fact about the world in which she’s actively engaged—or that it is merely what I’m doing with my body in order to (e.g.) paint the wall yellow.<sup>6</sup>

Painting the wall yellow is not something I can do just like that. Executing this task involves doing many things in order to do it: for instance, putting down sheets on the floor, taping off the window frame, opening the can of paint, pouring the paint into a tray, rolling a roller in the tray, and then rolling the roller against the wall by moving my arm up and down. And

painting the wall yellow is unlikely to be something I can sensibly claim to be doing for no reason: I'm painting the room yellow as part of a larger redecorating effort, which I'm undertaking in order to make the house more attractive to prospective buyers. What I'm doing intentionally is something with a rich teleological (means-end) structure in it. Anscombe calls this "the A—D order" (§§23–26). If I am doing A in order to do B, B in order to do C, and C in order to do D, then I might answer the question 'Why are you doing A?' by saying that I'm doing it in order to do—or because I want or intend to do, or because I'm doing—B (or C, or D). Doing B is an end relative to doing A, but a means relative to doing C (and D). Thus, while reiterations of the reason-seeking sense of the question 'Why?' move us from A to D ('Why are you doing A?'—'Because I'm doing B'—'And why are you doing B?'—'Because...'), the corresponding means-seeking sense of the question 'How?' (§26) moves us in the opposite direction along the series ('How are you doing D?'—'By doing C'—'And how are you doing C?'—'By...').

Anscombe thus holds that the A—D order, the teleological structure of a complex tract of intentional activity that the question 'Why?' excavates, is the same order as that revealed by considering practical reasoning, in which an agent considers *how* she is going to get what she wants (a house attractive to prospective buyers, for instance). Anscombe's interest in practical reasoning is with this "order which is there whenever actions are done with intentions" and not with any "actual mental processes" that may or may not occur: she thinks "it would be very rare for a person to go through all the steps of a piece of practical reasoning" (§42; cf. Anscombe 1989). Though there will surely have been actual processes of deliberation at the stage of determining how to make the house attractive to buyers and how exactly to redecorate which rooms (etc.), there may not need to be any conscious deliberation about how to open the can of paint, or whether to put down sheets. Nevertheless, Anscombe thinks, the "order which is there"—the order of means and ends—will be *known* by the agent even as it extends beyond any actual mental processes of deliberation that there may have been. Thus the object of agential knowledge will include not simply what the agent is doing intentionally, but how and why she is doing it: she knows that she is doing B, that she is doing B by means of doing A, and that she is doing B because she is doing C.

Agential knowledge is knowledge "in intention", Anscombe says (§32)—i.e. it is not knowledge the vehicle of which is a mental state distinct from the intention involved in acting intentionally. But we intend to do things we are not yet doing. Though most discussions of agential knowledge focus on an agent's knowledge of what she is presently doing intentionally, Anscombe's view can be extended to an agent's knowledge of what she is *going to* do, but is not yet doing (Small 2012). This will be knowledge *in intention of* what is going to happen in material reality, not merely knowledge *of* intention (i.e. of a psychological fact): "If I say I am going for a walk, someone else may know that this is not going to happen. It would be absurd to say that *what* he knew was not going to happen was not the very same thing that I was

saying *was* going to happen” (§52). What an agent knows in intention is something that someone else can know “in belief” (through perception, inference, testimony, etc.): you can know what I know, namely that I’m painting the wall yellow, though we know this in different ways (perhaps you can see that this is what I’m doing); and you can know what I am going to do, but am not yet doing (e.g. giving a talk at a conference next summer), where this is for you, as it is for me, not simply knowledge of my present state of mind, but knowledge of what is going to happen in the world. For Anscombe, then, the object of agential knowledge is—at least<sup>7</sup>—present and prospective worldly happenings with a rich teleological structure, and not merely the present state of mind (or state of mind and bodily movements) of the agent. Locating practical reason *in* action, rather than in a mind that lies behind and causes action, is one of the distinctive features of an Anscombean approach to agency.<sup>8</sup>

### **Agential knowledge as *practical***

Anscombe’s discussion of agential knowledge culminates in her claim that “it is the agent’s knowledge of what he is doing that gives the description under which what is going on is the execution of an intention,” which knowledge is “practical knowledge.” This means more than that it is knowledge *of* practical matters; it is knowledge that is practical in *form* (cf. §33): it relates to its object in a different way from that in which theoretical knowledge relates to its. Theoretical knowledge is “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” (§32); by contrast, practical knowledge is, in Aquinas’s phrase, “the cause of what it understands” (§48).

These remarks have led to the accusation that Anscombe leaves agential knowledge “looking not just causally perverse but epistemically mysterious” (Velleman 1989: 103), and authors such as Velleman (1989) and Paul (2009) have offered alternative, deflationary accounts of it. In my view, the best way to understand Anscombe here is that an agent’s knowing (practically) what she is doing is *constitutive* of its being the case that she is doing it intentionally: agential knowledge is the *formal cause* of what it understands (Moran 2004). Intentional action is teleologically complex, but the source of that teleological complexity is the agent’s practical reasoning. And the very practical reasoning that grounds the status of the events that are transpiring as a teleologically-unified course of intentional activity thereby constitutes the agent’s knowledge of that order—her knowledge of what she is doing, and how and why she is doing it. Anscombe says that the claim that agential knowledge is practical knowledge—i.e. that it is the cause of what it understands—“means more than that [it] 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” (as someone who held that agential knowledge is an efficient cause of intentional action might maintain); “it means that without it what happens does not come under the description—execution of intentions—whose characteristics we have been investigating” (§48).<sup>9</sup> Agential knowledge is thus non-

observational *because* it is practical: what is going on is a case of intentional action, there to be observed, only because it is already known agentially.

### Does agential knowledge depend on know-how?

We can now consider whether agential knowledge (as Anscombe understands it) depends on know-how. This question may be asked in two registers:

- (a) Does intentional action (and thus the agential knowledge that is constitutive of it) depend *metaphysically* on knowing how?
- (b) Does agential knowledge depend *epistemically* on knowing how?

Two important passages in *Intention* seem to stand in tension, here:

(T1) the topic of an intention may be a matter on which there is knowledge *or opinion* based on observation, inference, hearsay, superstition or anything that knowledge or opinion ever are based on; or again matter on which an opinion is held without any foundation at all. When knowledge *or opinion* are present concerning what is the case, and what can happen—say Z—if one does certain things, say ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABC; and if the case is one of knowledge *or if the opinion is correct*, then doing or causing Z is an intentional action, and it is not by observation that one knows one is doing Z.... (§28: 50, my emphases)

(T2) Although the term ‘practical knowledge’ is most often used in connexion with specialised skills, there is no reason to think that this notion has application only in such contexts. ‘Intentional action’ *always presupposes what might be called ‘knowing one’s way about’* the matters described in the description under which an action can be called intentional, and *this knowledge is exercised in the action and is practical knowledge*. (§48: 89, my emphases)

In (T1), Anscombe says that in order to *intend* to do Z by means of doing ABC, an agent needn’t *know* that doing ABC is a way to do or effect Z (it is enough that she *believes* this—and the belief seemingly needn’t be justified), and that, though true belief that doing ABC is a way to do Z is necessary to *do Z intentionally*, knowledge of that fact is unnecessary (seemingly, true but unjustified belief would suffice). (T1), then, suggests that though intention and intentional action require *beliefs* about means, they do not depend on *know-how*. By contrast, (T2) says that intentional action *always* “presupposes... ‘knowing one’s way about’ the matters described in the description under which an action can be called intentional”: e.g., painting a wall yellow intentionally presupposes a certain measure of painting and decorating know-how. There is no suggestion here that correct opinion based on, e.g., superstition would suffice.

One reason to think (T2) represents Anscombe’s considered view is that it occurs in §48, where her accounts of agential knowledge and intentional action culminate. By contrast, (T1)

occurs in §28, before the introduction of the key idea of practical knowledge (§32) and the discussion of practical reasoning that Anscombe thinks an understanding of practical knowledge presupposes (§33). However, there is independent reason to prefer the view that *knowing* how to do A is a necessary condition of both doing A intentionally and one's having agential knowledge that one is doing A intentionally.<sup>10</sup>

Recall Anscombe's claims (i) that if an agent is intentionally painting the wall yellow, she knows that she is doing so, and (ii) that *what* she knows is that a worldly transaction between her and the wall is taking place in material reality: namely, the wall is being painted yellow by her. That the agent is painting the wall yellow is something that an observer might know by observation. However, this does not mean that the truth value of "She is painting the wall yellow" can be ascertained simply by attending to what's going on with the wall, perhaps over a period of time. To suppose this would be to suppose that "Knowledge must be something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts," which "are prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge" (§32)—i.e. to suppose that all knowledge is contemplative or speculative. "She is painting the wall yellow" may be true even though the agent is currently asleep, or at the paint store, or is painting the wall with white primer, or is painting the wall green by mistake. Nevertheless, agential knowledge, to be knowledge, must accord with the facts,<sup>11</sup> even if in determining whether the agent's claim amounts to *knowledge* we must do so by judging whether the facts are in accordance with the claim rather than judging whether the claim is in accordance with the facts: that is, we must interrogate the facts—establish *what is actually going on here*—in the light of the agent's claim to be painting the wall yellow, rather than assume that what is going on here can be understood independently of the agent's claim, which is then assessed for truth against that prior and independent take on what the facts about what's going on are. Thus, if the agent has agential knowledge that she is painting the wall yellow, then it is true that she is painting the wall yellow, where this means more than that she thinks that she is painting the wall yellow (or trying to do so etc.); it means that, among other things, the wall is becoming yellow—even though that's something that an observer might not be able to tell. So, what *is* required for the truth of "She is doing A intentionally"?

If an agent *is doing A* intentionally, then she has started doing A and she has not yet done A (on this occasion). Later, it *will* be true that she *was* doing A; it *may* be true that she *did* A. (That she is doing A does not entail that she will succeed.) But if she really is *doing A*—it's really A, and not something else, she's doing; and she's really *doing* it, and not just merely trying to do it or playing at doing it—then it must be no accident if she succeeds. If someone who was doing A didn't end up having done A, a special explanation is needed (e.g. something interfered, she changed her mind); no special explanation is needed if she ends up having done what she was doing (Rödl 2012: ch.6; Small 2012: §4). This suggests that to be doing A intentionally, the agent must not merely intend, but also know how, to do A.<sup>12</sup> For if she

intended to do A, but didn't know how to do A, it would surely be some accident if her activity culminated in her having successfully done A.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this metaphysical role, know-how plays an epistemic role here: what makes the agent's true belief that she is doing A a case of *knowledge* is that she is realizing her intention to do A through good practical reasoning, which involves know-how. Just as the agent's know-how is what makes it true that she is doing A intentionally (by making it no accident that she'll succeed), so it makes her belief that she is doing A non-accidentally true. The answers to our questions (a) and (b) above are thus both: Yes.<sup>14</sup>

### **Anscombean commitments regarding know-how**

What implications (if any) does an Anscombean conception of agency have for the theory of know-how? In (T1), Anscombe says that "when knowledge or opinion are present concerning what is the case, and what can happen—say Z—if one does certain things, say ABC, then it is possible to have the intention of doing Z in doing ABC." It is clear from this passage, and from her discussion of the A—D order more generally, that Anscombe thinks one can know how to do something by virtue of knowing that one can do it by doing something else. She clearly does not think, as Ryle is sometimes said to, that knowing how to V is wholly disjoint from knowing that p. But there are those—intellectualists—who say that all know-how is knowing that p (see **CHAPTERS XXX**). Should an Anscombean conception of agency incline one to accept or reject intellectualism, or is it neutral?

The following passage, which seems to identify know-how with a *practical capacity*, might suggest that Anscombe is an anti-intellectualist:

(T3) A man has practical knowledge who knows how to do things; but that is an insufficient description, for he *might* be said to know how to do things if he could give a lecture on it, though he was helpless when confronted with the task of doing them. When we ordinarily speak of practical knowledge we have in mind a certain sort of *general capacity* in a particular field; but if we hear of a capacity, it is reasonable to ask what constitutes an exercise of it. ... In the case of practical knowledge the exercise of the capacity is nothing but the doing or supervising of the operations of which a man has practical knowledge; but this is not *just* the coming about of certain effects, like my recitation of the alphabet or of bits of it, for what he effects is formally characterised as subject to our question 'Why?' whose application displays the A—D order which we discovered. (§48: 88, second emphasis mine)

However, though some intellectualists (e.g. Snowdon 2004) deny that know-how consists in practical capacities, others (e.g. Pavese 2015) hold that the propositional knowledge they take know-how to consist in entails the possession of practical capacities. Moreover, Anscombe's view is incompatible with one prominent form of anti-intellectualism, that of Hubert Dreyfus:



Anscombe insists that exercises of know-how are intentional actions (denied by Dreyfus 2001), and that an agent exercising know-how knows that she's doing what she's doing (denied by Dreyfus 2007).

There is, however, some reason to think that an Anscombean conception of action and agential knowledge fits best with a “bifurcationist” view of know-how on which propositional knowledge that doing A is a way to do B and an intelligent practical capacity to do A are both forms of know-how, each with “its own usefulness and its own purport” (Wiggins 2012: 123). Though many seem to think that “practical knowledge in Anscombe’s sense” just *is* the knowledge agents have of their intentional actions, (T2) and (T3) both say that know-how is *also* practical knowledge: agential knowledge and know-how are, we might say, species of practical knowledge. As noted above, Anscombe insists that “‘practical knowledge’ can only be understood if we first understand ‘practical reasoning’” (§33). And reflection on the structure of practical reasoning ought to lead us to conclude that though much know-how can take the form ‘Doing B is a way to do C’ (or similar), not all of it can. My knowledge that doing B is a way to do C can figure in *genuine* practical reasoning—i.e. not theoretical reasoning about practical matters, or the “idle” practical reasoning of the classroom example (§33)—only if it is knowledge I can put into practice. If my know-how to do C consists in knowing *that doing B is a way to do C*, then my know-how to do C is practicable only if I have practicable know-how to do B. If I do, then I have derivatively practicable knowledge how to do C. The practicability of my knowledge how to do B might be derivative, too: I might know that doing A is a way to do B. But the structure of practical reasoning (together with the conception, from the previous section, of intentional action as dependent on know-how) demands that there be know-how that is practicable non-derivatively.

Call this *basic know-how*. On the face of it, basic know-how to do A cannot be propositional knowledge of the form “\_\_\_ is a way to do A.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, to be consistent with an Anscombean conception of agency, an account of basic know-how must make it clear that its exercises (“basic actions”) are genuinely cases of intentional action and that they are agentially (and thus non-observationally) known. This is no mean task: basic know-how is surely ability-entailing, but the sub-intentional or sub-personal abilities and dispositions that figure in familiar accounts of basic action are such that their manifestations can be known—by an Anscombean’s lights—only observationally (Lavin 2013; Small 2019). By contrast, if the abilities entailed by basic know-how are *intelligent* abilities, it is unclear that the propositional knowledge that the intellectualist thinks basic know-how consists in has any role to play in the explanation of intentional action (as the Anscombean understands it). For this reason, it seems that the bifurcationist view fits most naturally with the Anscombean conception of agency.

However, it must be admitted that Anscombe has no developed account of skill or know-how, and there are important questions that an Anscombean must answer in this area. Just what

sort of a capacity is (involved in) basic know-how? How can we account for agential knowledge of the exercise of basic know-how, given that it will likely be a complex movement the elements of which do not exhibit the “order” of means and ends that is “there whenever actions are done with intentions” (§42)—or at least don’t exhibit that order in virtue of practical reasoning? These issues deserve further thought (though see Small 2019), as do the relationships between practical knowledge, know-how, agential knowledge—and any other species of practical knowledge there might be.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Falvey (2000); Moran (2004); Setiya (2008); Paul (2009); Haddock (2011); Rödl (2011); Thompson (2011); Small (2012); McDowell (2013); Schwenkler (2015).

<sup>2</sup> This knowledge is knowledge of action *in progress* and/or *in prospect*; it may thus be unacceptable, ontologically, to characterize it as knowledge of *particular* actions (see Thompson 2008: ch.8).

<sup>3</sup> References in this form are to the numbered sections of *Intention* (Anscombe 1963).

<sup>4</sup> "The question is not refused application because the answer to it says that there is *no* reason, any more than the question how much money I have in my pocket is refused application by the answer 'None'" (§17)—contrast the answer 'I don't have any pockets'.

<sup>5</sup> At least, on the most natural interpretation of the scenarios these examples bring to mind.

<sup>6</sup> An equally bad mistake, Anscombe thinks, is to hold that the object of agential knowledge is what is done intentionally, but that what I ("really") do intentionally is either whatever I think I am, or intend to be, doing, or what I'm doing with my body in order to bring about further effects.

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<sup>7</sup> Might there be agential knowledge of what I *have done* intentionally, in addition to knowledge of what I am doing and am going to do intentionally? Setiya (2017) argues that Anscombe thought so; Haase (2018) argues that she didn't, but should have.

<sup>8</sup> Anscombe dismisses the claim that the 'because' in 'She X-d because \_\_\_\_' (where '\_\_\_\_' gives a reason for acting) is "an ordinary *because* where the *because* clause gives a psychological state" as "lack[ing] acumen" (1989: 110); see also Anscombe (1983). Despite her criticisms of causal theories of action, one should be cautious labeling Anscombe an anti-causalist: she was as critical of modern conceptions of causation as she was of the theories of action that gave it a central role (see e.g. Anscombe 1963: §5; 1971).

<sup>9</sup> The claim that agential knowledge is necessary for intentional action (under the relevant descriptions) is called into question by Davidson's example of the carbon-copier who is trying to make ten carbon copies at once (and, unbeknownst to him, succeeding) despite doubting that he is achieving his aim. For responses, see Thompson (2011); Small (2012: §5).

<sup>10</sup> The following argument is developed in more detail in Small (2012).

<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, Anscombe at one point seems to say that she could have agential knowledge that she is writing 'I am a fool' on a blackboard even though she is not in fact doing so (§45). This seems to be a mis-step; see Moran (2004), Haddock (2011) and McDowell (2013) for discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Many hold that it is possible, though perhaps irrational, to intend to do what one doesn't know how to do. The present considerations suggest an argument that one cannot genuinely intend (though one can aspire, hope, or want) to do what one knows not how to do. See Small (2012: §§3–4).

<sup>13</sup> This is clearest when the agent has either no idea how to do A or a false conception of how to do A; but even if she has and acts on a true belief, falling short of knowledge, concerning how to do A, her success in action will inherit the luckiness that qualifies the truth of her belief. Like knowledge, intentional action is widely regarded as incompatible with luck. See e.g. Mele and Moser (1994).

<sup>14</sup> Setiya (2012) defends a similar position.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Anscombe's discussion of bodily skill in the physiologist's experiment (§30).