Essentially Intentional Action

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1   Introduction

An act type is something that an agent can do: walk to the store, climb Mount Everest, trip over a wire. Act types are 'repeatables': many have walked to the store, climbed Everest, and tripped over a wire. Act types are not events. If you climb Everest, an event occurs—your climb to the top of Everest—but this event is not what you do. What you do is climb Everest.

Many act types can be done intentionally or non-intentionally. You can break a vase intentionally by throwing it out the window. You can break it non-intentionally while stretching your arms. Some act types cannot be done intentionally. If you commit involuntary manslaughter, you do so non-intentionally. Anscombe famously said that some act types can only be done intentionally. We defend Anscombe: some act types are essentially intentional.[1]

In §§2-3, we argue that, for any act type V, the act type Ving intentionally is essentially intentional: it is not possible to be non-intentionally Ving intentionally. And we show how this explains why various other act types—such as trying, thanking, and lying—are essentially intentional.

In §4, we turn to an important application. The claim that there are essentially intentional act types is a crucial premise in recent arguments against Anscombe's practical knowledge thesis: the thesis that if you are Ving intentionally, then you know that you are Ving.[2] Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that we should give up on essentially intentional act types to preserve the practical knowledge thesis. We disagree. Anscombe's view that there are essentially intentional act types is in far better standing than her practical knowledge thesis.

2   Anscombean Verbs

An act type V is essentially intentional if and only if, necessarily, if you are Ving, you are Ving intentionally. Anscombe offers a list of verbs that are supposed to stand for essentially intentional act types. Her list includes 'sell', 'hire', 'marry', and 'greet'. Many have expressed doubts about Anscombe's list. Setiya (2016) says: 'The cases do not convince. These are all things one can do unintentionally.' Beddor & Pavese also reject Anscombe's examples. Though they focus on 'greet', they claim that their arguments generalize to the other verbs on Anscombe's list—and indeed, to all verbs and verb phrases.

Say that a verb or verb phrase is *Anscombean* if and only if it stands for an essentially intentional act type. Suppose Setiya's and Beddor & Pavese's arguments convince us that the

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[1] Since Anscombe, some authors have defended the existence of essentially intentional act types. See, among others, Babakhanian (2024), Ford (2011), and Ludwig (2014, 2017).

[2] See Piñeros Glasscock (2020) and Beddor & Pavese (2021).

English verb 'greet' isn't Anscombean: 'greet' does not stand for an essentially intentional act type. Still, one might wonder: couldn't we just introduce a new verb 'greet$_{int}$' that stands for intentionally greeting? If we do, will we have invented an Anscombean verb? Will we have shown that there is an essentially intentional act type: the act type denoted by 'greet$_{int}$'? No. To greet$_{int}$ your friend is to do something intentionally: to greet your friend intentionally. But it does not follow that to greet$_{int}$ your friend is to greet$_{int}$ your friend intentionally.

It does not follow. But it still might be true that to greet$_{int}$ your friend is to greet$_{int}$ your friend intentionally. We think it is true. It is true because, for any V, 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, and intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. That is to say, 'intentionally' iterates: you are intentionally Ving if and only if you are intentionally intentionally Ving. Given the assumption that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional, the following are equivalent:

(1)   You are greeting$_{int}$ your friend.

(2)   You are intentionally greeting your friend.

(3)   You are intentionally: greeting your friend intentionally.

(4)   You are intentionally greeting$_{int}$ your friend.

We start, in §2.1, by briefly motivating the idea that, for any V, 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. (We offer a more sustained defense of this claim in §3.) In the remainder of §2, we show how this claim can explain why other verbs and verb phrases are Anscombean.

2.1   Intentionally Ving is Essentially Intentional

Here is an initial reason to think that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. It sounds very strange to assert that you are Ving intentionally, while denying that you are intentionally Ving intentionally. Consider:

(5)   #I was walking intentionally, but I wasn't intentionally walking intentionally.

(6)   #Sorry, I only meant to be walking. I had no idea I was walking intentionally!

Sentences (5) and (6) are utterly bizarre: we cannot make sense of them.[3] Contrast (5) and (6) with the following perfectly normal assertions.

(7)   I was walking intentionally, but I wasn't intentionally walking so slowly.

(8)   Sorry, I only meant to be walking. I had no idea I was walking so slowly.

If 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, we have a simple, compelling explanation of this contrast. (5) straightforwardly describes an impossibility. So does (6), on the plausible assumption that I cannot be Ving intentionally if I have no idea that I am Ving. Nothing is wrong with (7)

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[3]Grano (2017) makes a similar observation. He notices that sentences like (i) are invariably defective:

(i)   #John intends to break the window unintentionally.

and (8), on the other hand, for it of course does not follow from the fact that I am walking intentionally that I am intentionally walking slowly.[4]

If 'intentionally V' were not Anscombean, we would expect it to work more like 'V slowly'. We would expect to find, and to be able to describe, cases in which you are intentionally Ving, but you are not intentionally Ving intentionally. That is not what we find.

This provides some prima facie support for the hypothesis that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, that it stands for an essentially intentional act type. Why care about this?

One reason is that it can help explain why other verbs are Anscombean. To see how, consider 'deceive'. Many authors say that deceiving is essentially intentional. For example, Carson (2010) says: 'I take it to be self-contradictory to say that someone deceived another person unintentionally.' But now consider how Carson argues for this hypothesis:[5]

> Deception requires some sort of intention to cause others to have false beliefs. [...] In order to deceive you, I must intentionally mislead you, or intentionally cause you to have false beliefs.

To deceive someone, Carson says, is to do something intentionally: to intentionally cause them to have false beliefs. But as we have seen, it does not follow that to deceive is to deceive intentionally. That is, it does not follow unless 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. If 'intentionally V' is Anscombean, the inference is valid: if deceiving is intentionally causing to have false beliefs, and 'intentionally cause…' is Anscombean, then 'deceive' is Anscombean.

More generally, let 'V' be a verb or verb phrase that stands for the act type of intentionally Zing, for some act type Z. Then it follows that Ving is essentially intentional and 'V' is Anscombean. We think many verbs are like this, on at least some of their readings, including 'try', 'thank', and 'lie'. These verbs are Anscombean because, for some Z, they stand for the act type intentionally Zing. We begin with 'try'.

2.2   Trying

It is natural to think that trying is essentially intentional.[6] I can accidentally break a vase, but I cannot accidentally try to break a vase. I can accidentally poison the water, but I cannot accidentally try to poison the water. Holguín and Lederman (2024) observe that trying passes Anscombe's 'Why?' test for intentional action. According to Anscombe, you are Ving intentionally if the question 'Why are you Ving?', understood as a request for your reasons, 'has application'. To say that the question has application is to say, roughly, that you cannot truthfully reject the question by saying something like:

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[4]One might say that we don't need to say that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean to account for the infelicity of (5). There's an alternative explanation: it has repeated words. But (6) sounds just as bad to us, and 'intentionally' is not repeated in (6).

[5]See Carson (2010), pgs. 48-49.

[6]For defenses of the view that trying is essentially intentional, see Adams (1995), Ginet (1990), and Holguín and Lederman (2024), and McCann (1975).

(9)   I was Ving, but not intentionally.

(10)   I didn't mean to be Ving—it was just an accident.

(11)   I had no idea I was Ving!

What Holguín and Lederman observe is that the question 'Why are you trying to V?' always has application in this sense. To see this, suppose that I ask why you were trying to poison the water. I would be very surprised to hear any of the following in response.

(12)   ?I was trying to poison the water, but not intentionally trying.

(13)   ?I didn't mean to be trying to poison the water—it was just an accident.

(14)   ?I had no idea I was trying to poison the water.

The infelicity of (12), (13), and (14) suggests that 'try' is Anscombean—that it stands for an essentially intentional act type.

But things are not so straightforward. The word 'try' is context-sensitive: 'try to V' stands for different act types in different contexts. Sometimes our standards for trying are demanding, and 'try' is roughly synonymous with 'try with enough effort'. In other contexts, we use 'try' permissively, so that it is very easy to count as trying to do something.[7] If 'try to V' is context sensitive, standing for different act types in different contexts, then it may be that 'try to V' stands for an essentially intentional act type in some contexts, but not in others.

Say that a verb or verb phrase 'V' is *partly Anscombean* if it stands for an essentially intentional act type in some contexts. Say that 'V' is *fully Anscombean* if it stands for an essentially intentional act type in all contexts. On the basis of (12), (13), and (14), we might be tempted to say that 'try' is fully Anscombean: for any context, if 'I'm trying to poison the water' expresses a truth in that context, so does 'I'm intentionally trying to poison the water'.

We think 'try' is not fully Anscombean. In some contexts, 'try to V' has what we call a *merely purposive* interpretation. You can count as trying to V in the merely purposive sense if you are acting in order to V, whether or not you are doing so intentionally. Consider David, a sleepwalker. One night, David gets up from bed and walks towards his sister's room. He pulls on the handle of the door, but the door is locked. You and I are watching from the other room. You ask me what David is doing, and I reply:

(15)   David is trying to open his sister's door again.

Or suppose David is asleep with his arms tied behind his back. He has an itch on his cheek. He starts to move his arm to scratch the itch, but his arms are tied, so he cannot extend his arm. You ask: 'Why did David flinch just now?' I reply:

(16)   He is trying to scratch an itch.

In both cases, David is trying to do something, but he is not intentionally trying, since he's asleep.

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[7]See Holguín & Lederman (2024) on the context sensitivity of 'try'. See also Grano (2011) and Sharvit (2003).

What you do when you're asleep may be done for a purpose, but it is not done intentionally.

Let 'try$_1$' stand for trying in the merely purposive sense: the sense in which David is trying to open the door, or trying to scratch an itch. What does 'try$_1$' mean? Plausibly, to try$_1$ to V is to Z in order to V, for some Z.[8] To say that David is trying$_1$ to open the door is to say that he is doing something—such as pulling the door handle—in order to open the door. To say that David is trying$_1$ to scratch an itch is to say that he is doing something—such as moving his arm towards the itch—in order to scratch his itch.

To try$_1$ to V is not to intentionally try$_1$ to V: 'try$_1$' is not Anscombean. But the infelicity of (12), (13), and (14) suggests that 'try' also has an Anscombean reading. Here's a way to bring out this Anscombean reading. Imagine that, one morning, David's sister asks him, 'Why are you trying to open my door every night? It's locked for a reason.' David replies:

(17)   I'm not *trying* to open your door every night—I have a sleepwalking problem!

Let 'try$_2$' stand for the stronger kind of trying David has in mind in (17). What might 'try$_2$' mean? We suggest that it means intentionally try$_1$: to be trying$_2$ to V is, roughly, to be intentionally Zing in order to V, for some Z. When he is sleepwalking, David is pulling the handle in order to open his sister's door, but he's not intentionally pulling the handle in order to open her door. He has no idea he is doing this. David is not intentionally trying$_1$ to open his sister's door.

If we're right that 'try$_2$' means intentionally try$_1$, then we can use the fact that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional to explain why 'try' has an Anscombean use: the use David has in mind in (17), and the use that is responsible for the oddness of (12), (13), and (14). If trying$_2$ to V is intentionally trying$_1$ to V, and intentionally Ving is essentially intentional for any V, then whenever you are trying$_2$ to V, you are intentionally trying$_2$ to V: trying$_2$ is essentially intentional.[9]

2.3   Speech Act Verbs

We think that something similar happens with some speech act verbs. Consider 'thank (someone)'. It is clear that 'thank' has at least one reading that is not Anscombean. Suppose I show my enemy a thank you sign in Japanese (a language that I cannot read). My enemy sees it, and (being a Japanese speaker) is pleased. I have thanked them. But I have not intentionally thanked them.

This shows that there's a use of 'thank' on which it means, roughly, that you have done

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[8] McCann (1975), Thompson (2008).

[9] Objection: we say that sometimes 'try' means try$_1$, which is not essentially intentional, and sometimes it means try$_2$, which is. But if 'try' has a non-Anscombean reading, shouldn't (12), (13), and (14) sometimes strike us as okay? (Thanks to [redacted] for this question.) Reply: we think that sentences like (12), (13), and (14) can sound okay. David, the recurrent sleepwalker, can say: 'I didn't mean to be trying to open your door—I was sleepwalking again!' or 'I had no idea I was trying to open your door!' The fact that speakers often don't access the non-Anscombean reading when they encounter such sentences out of context does not show that there is no such reading. Many context-sensitive words have readings that require more contextual clues than others.

something that conventionally expresses gratitude, such as holding up a thank you sign in Japanese. Let 'thank$_1$' stand for this act type of conventionally expressing gratitude.

There is also a stronger use of 'thank' on which I do not count as thanking my enemy just by holding up a sign. Upon learning what the sign says, I might exclaim:

(18)   Oh no, I wasn't *thanking* you! I thought the sign said something much ruder.

Let 'thank$_2$' stand for this stronger sense of thanking. What does 'thank$_2$' mean? Plausibly, 'thank$_2$' means intentionally thank$_1$. To thank$_2$ is to intentionally do something that conventionally expresses gratitude. It is no coincidence that we can paraphrase (18) with 'mean' or 'intend': 'I didn't mean to be thanking you! I thought the sign said something much ruder.' You are not thanking$_2$ your enemy because you are not intentionally thanking$_1$ her.

This is not the place to defend a full account of thanking or of 'thanking'. That would require saying much more about how speech acts work, and this is not a paper about speech acts. We will only observe that if something like what we've said is right, then 'thank' is partly Anscombean. If 'thank' sometimes means thank$_2$, and to thank$_2$ is to intentionally thank$_1$, then thank$_2$ is essentially intentional: whenever you are thanking$_2$ someone, you are intentionally thanking$_2$ them.

2.4 Lying

As a final example, consider 'lie'. Sometimes we use 'lie' in a way that counts any false claim as a lie. 'Where are the keys?' my partner asks. 'They're on the table' I reply. (That's where I saw them last.) A few minutes later I look down and see them in her purse. 'Oops! I lied—the keys are in your purse!', I exclaim. We are inclined to think that this is not a literal use of 'lie'. If a friend asks 'Why would you lie to your partner about her keys?', I would respond 'No, it wasn't really a lie at all. I just meant that I was mistaken about where her keys were.'

Setting aside this non-literal use, it seems plausible that 'lie' is fully Anscombean. I ask my friend why he lied to me about his dog's age. I would be surprised to hear that he wasn't lying on purpose, or that his lying was a sheer accident. How could it be a sheer accident? If he tells me that he didn't know his dog's age, then we aren't dealing with a literal use of 'lie'. If he tells me he blurted out the words unintentionally—perhaps because of a syndrome like Tourettes—then he wasn't lying in any sense. If he tells me that he blurted out the words without knowing what he was saying—maybe he's still learning English—then again he wasn't lying in any sense.

If lying is fully Anscombean, we can explain why by appealing to the fact that 'intentionally V' is fully Anscombean. Plausibly, to lie is to intentionally assert something false. Since 'intentionally assert something false' is fully Anscombean, it follows that 'lie' is too.

Not everyone agrees that to lie is to intentionally assert something false. Some philosophers say that you must also intend to deceive your audience.[10] But these philosophers can agree

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[10] See Lackey (2013). For objections, see Carson (2006) and Sorensen (2007).

with us that 'lie' is at least partly Anscombean. For them, to lie is (roughly) to try to deceive someone by asserting something false. Since 'try' is partly Anscombean, 'lie' is too.

3   Objections

We began §2 by showing that there is prima facie evidence that 'intentionally V' is Anscombean. To move beyond prima facie support, we should consider possible counterexamples and objections. We start with purported counterexamples in §3.1. Then, in §3.2 and §3.3, we present and respond to two objections.

3.1   Purported Counterexamples

We will consider three types of apparent counterexamples. They differ in what your intentions are with respect to intentionally Ving.

In an *against* case, you are Ving intentionally against your intentions. Your intention is not to V intentionally, but instead to V non-intentionally. Despite your intentions, you are Ving intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

In a *neutral* case, you are Ving intentionally with neutral intentions. You do not intend to V intentionally, nor do you intend to V non-intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

In a *for* case, you are Ving intentionally, and you intend to V intentionally, yet your intentional Ving is caused in a deviant way by your intention, rather than the one planned. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally.

(Note, our description of against cases and neutral cases assumes that if you are Ving Tly, and yet do not intend to V Tly, then you are not intentionally Ving Tly. This assumption follows from what Bratman calls the 'Simple View': the view that, necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you intend to V.[11])

Against Cases
Consider this case.

> *Killing Joe*
> You want to kill Joe (an evil dictator), but you'd prefer to do so unintentionally. You put a grenade in your backpack before meeting him, and take an amnesia pill to forget about the grenade. You predict you'll put the backpack near him. But the pill isn't effective. You intentionally put the backpack with the grenade next to Joe, killing him.

One might say that you are unintentionally killing Joe intentionally. You intended to kill him unintentionally. You failed. Therefore, you are now unintentionally killing Joe intentionally.

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[11]See Bratman (1984) for arguments against the Simple View. See Amaya (2018) for a defense of the Simple View.

We disagree. By the time you start killing Joe, you intend to kill him intentionally. If you did not intend to kill him intentionally, then you wouldn't be killing him intentionally. In general, when you have full control over whether you will V, and you don't intend to V, then you don't V. Of course, you would prefer to kill Joe unintentionally. But the pill has failed. Your options are to kill him intentionally or not kill him at all. You have decided to kill him intentionally. (What if you do not have full control over whether you are Ving? We return to issues of control in §3.3)

Neutral Cases

In a neutral case, you are Ving intentionally with neutral intentions. You do not intend to V intentionally. Nor do you intend to V non-intentionally. And so you are not intentionally Ving intentionally. Why think neutral cases are possible? We will consider two arguments.

The first argument appeals to a particular version of the Simple View on which intentionally Ving requires an occurrent intention to V—an intention that is, in Mele (2009)'s words, 'at work in producing relevant intentional actions.' What does it take to have an occurrent intention? One might accept this requirement: if I occurrently intend to V, then I am consciously thinking about Ving.

If intentionally Ving requires an occurrent intention to V, and occurrently intending to V requires consciously thinking about V, then neutral cases are possible, even common. Suppose I am intentionally Ving, yet I am not consciously thinking about whether I am Ving intentionally. By the conscious thinking requirement on occurrent intention, I do not have an occurrent intention to V intentionally. By the occurrent intention requirement on intentional action, I am not intentionally Ving intentionally.

But something here must be wrong: either the conscious thinking requirement on occurrent intention or the occurrent intention requirement on intentional action. If intentionally Ving requires an occurrent intention to V, which requires consciously thinking about Ving, then it follows that whenever you are intentionally Ving, you are consciously thinking about Ving. And that's wrong. Ballerinas can intentionally dance gracefully without consciously thinking about whether their dancing is graceful. Basketball players can intentionally shoot with their feet shoulder width apart without consciously thinking about their feet.

The second argument appeals to a conceptual requirement on intentional action: if you are intentionally Ving, you must have the concept *V*. Suppose that there could be an agent who is intentionally Ving, yet lacks the concept *V intentionally*. By the conceptual requirement, it follows that there is an agent who is Ving intentionally yet is not intentionally Ving intentionally.

We have two responses to this argument.

First, the conceptual requirement seems to be false. A toddler can intentionally steal my computer—she wants my attention—without having the concept *computer*. She can intentionally eat the legumes on the table—she loves peanuts—without having the concept

legume.[12]

Second, we aren't sure that there could be an agent who is Ving intentionally yet lacks the concept *V intentionally*.[13] Here is an argument that there could not be such an agent. It is plausible that, if you are Ving intentionally, you have some idea that you are Ving intentionally—not only that you are Ving.[14] It is also plausible that, if you have some idea that you are Ving intentionally, you have the concept *V intentionally*. From these two claims, it follows that if you are Ving intentionally, you have the concept *V intentionally*. (Some may deny that having some idea that you are Ving intentionally requires having the concept *V intentionally*. But nobody who accepts a conceptual requirement on intentional action will deny this.)

For Cases

In a for case, you are Ving intentionally and you intend to V intentionally. But you are not intentionally Ving intentionally, because your intentional Ving is caused by your intention to V in a deviant way, rather than the one planned.

Here is a classic case of deviantly caused, and thus non-intentional Ving: Davidson's mountain climber. Climbing down a mountain, the climber intends to drop down from a ledge. His intention unnerves him, and he starts to sweat. His grip on the ledge loosens, and he drops down accidentally. The climber intends to drop down from the ledge, his intention causes him to drop down from the ledge, and yet he does not drop down intentionally because the causation is deviant.

Can we find a structurally similar example of deviant intentional Ving? We're not convinced that we can. In general, if we want to construct a case of deviant Ving, here's what we do. We start with an example of non-intentional Ving. Then we find a case in which that non-intentional Ving is caused by the agent's intention to V. For example, we start with Davidson's climber, who loses his grip on the ledge, and accidentally drops down. We then find a case in which his accidental dropping down is deviantly caused by his intention to drop down. But while we know what it is to accidentally drop down, we don't yet know what it would be to accidentally V intentionally. To come up with a case of deviantly caused intentional Ving, we would need to already have an example of non-intentional intentional Ving.

3.2   Objection: Intention ad Infinitum

Recall the 'Simple View' of intentional action: the view that if I am intentionally Ving, then I intend to V. What happens if we accept the Simple View? It may seem that it commits us to

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[12] See Holguín & Lederman (2024) for arguments against a similar objection to their claim that 'try' entails 'try to try'.

[13] Levy (2024) argues on the basis of empirical work in developmental psychology that the concept of acting intentionally is a very basic, ubiquitous concept, possessed even by infants.

[14] We accept the very weak cognitive requirement on intentional action that if you are Ving intentionally, then you have some idea that you are Ving. (This requirement does not entail that if you are Ving intentionally, you believe that you are Ving intentionally.) We also appeal to this very weak cognitive requirement in §2.1 and §2.2.

the claim that whenever you are intentionally Ving, you have infinitely many intentions. (If you are intentionally Ving, then you intend to V, you intend to intentionally V, and so forth.) Some will worry about this: how did I fit so many intentions inside my finite head?

We have two responses.

First, our view does not obviously entail that you have infinitely many intentions, even given the Simple View. We say that necessarily, you intentionally intentionally V if and only if you intentionally V. But something stronger is plausible: that these are identical—to intentionally intentionally V is to intentionally V. (It follows that to intentionally intentionally intentionally V is to intentionally V, and so forth.) If this is right, then there are only two things you intend to do: to V and to intentionally V.

Second, there is nothing unusual about having infinitely many intentions. I intend to draw a straight line that is more than two inches long. Then I also intend to draw a line that is more than one inch long, to draw a line that is more than one half an inch long, and so forth.

3.3   Objection: Control

A final objection concerns control constraints on intentional action. Some will worry that our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional is in tension with a control constraint: that you are Ving intentionally only if your Ving is under your control.[15]

Some control constraints are formulated in terms of propositional knowledge. Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that your Ving is under your control only if you know you are Ving. We are not concerned to accommodate such views: we reject the practical knowledge thesis (§4).

Other control constraints are modal. Here is a particularly simple modal constraint.

> *Nearby Robustness*
> If S is Ving intentionally, then S is Ving in all nearby worlds where she is trying to V.

Nearby Robustness is in tension with our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. Intentionally Ving requires that there are no nearby worlds where I am trying to V and yet I am not Ving. But intentionally Ving intentionally requires more: that there are no nearby worlds in which there are nearby worlds where I am trying to V and yet I am not Ving. So intentionally Ving is not essentially intentional: I can be Ving intentionally without intentionally Ving intentionally.

We have two responses: one less conciliatory, one more conciliatory.

The less conciliatory response is that there are counterexamples to Nearby Robustness. Suppose I'm writing my name with a pen. Conditions are normal: the pen works, my hand is steady, and so on. But the pen has barely enough ink. If it had slightly less, I would not be

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[15]See, among others, Beddor & Pavese (2021), Bishop (1987, 1989), Frankfurt (1978), Kelley (forthcoming), Mele & Moser (1994), and Wu (2016).

writing my name. Nearby Robustness seems to say that I am not intentionally writing my name. But surely I am.[16]

We will not press this problem further, but instead turn to our conciliatory response. Some modal control constraints, such as Nearby Robustness, conflict with our claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional. But not all do. Compare: while some reliability constraints on knowledge conflict with the claim that knowing entails knowing that you know, others do not. For example, Goodman & Salow (2018) say that you know a proposition p only if p is true in all worlds at least as normal as the actual world.[17] This reliability constraint on knowledge is compatible with the claim that knowing entails knowing that you know. In a similar spirit, we might endorse the following.[18]

> *Normal Robustness*
> If S is Ving intentionally in w, then S is Ving in all worlds at least as normal as w where S is trying to V.

Normal Robustness is compatible with the claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional because 'at least as normal as' is transitive. You are intentionally Ving only if there are no worlds at least as normal as the actual world where you are trying to V and not Ving. You are intentionally Ving intentionally only if there are no worlds where you are trying to V and not Ving that are at least as normal as some world that is at least as normal as the actual world. But any world that is at least as normal as some world that is at least as normal as the actual world is itself at least as normal as the actual world. And so, according to Normal Robustness, intentionally Ving intentionally does not require more modal robustness than Ving intentionally.

To be clear, we do not endorse Normal Robustness. Like Nearby Robustness, it faces apparent counterexamples, such as the case of the nearly inkless pen. Our point is just that the claim that intentionally Ving is essentially intentional is consistent with there being modal control constraints on intentional action.

4   Practical Knowledge

As we said in the Introduction, the claim that there are essentially intentional act types is a premise in recent arguments against Anscombe's practical knowledge thesis. Beddor & Pavese (2021) say that we should give up on essentially intentional act types and keep the practical knowledge thesis. We disagree. As we have seen, Anscombe's view that there are essentially intentional act types is intrinsically plausible, and it is far more plausible than her practical knowledge thesis.

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[16] For similar examples, see Carter & Shepherd (2022), Shepherd & Carter (2023), and Holguín & Lederman (2024).

[17] For other normal conditions approaches, see Goodman & Salow (2023), Greco (2014), and Stalnaker (2006, 2009, 2015).

[18] For a modal control constraint in terms of normality, see Valaris (2022).

4.1 The Argument from Anti-Luminosity

Piñeros Glasscock has recently shown that one version of the practical knowledge thesis is inconsistent with certain plausible, and widely accepted, Williamsonian theses about knowledge. We present his argument in a simplified form.

Say that a proposition p is luminous for a subject S if and only if whenever p is true, S knows that p is true. It is natural to think that certain special propositions—such as propositions about our own phenomenal experiences—are luminous. If I am in pain or feel cold, then surely I can always tell that this is so by carefully attending to how I am feeling.

But Williamson (2000) gives a powerful argument—his anti-luminosity argument—that there are no (non-trivial) luminous propositions.[19]

Briefly, here's how the argument works. Knowledge requires a margin for error: if you know p, then p must be true in all worlds that are very similar to your world. These very similar worlds are meant to be so similar that you cannot tell the difference between them and your own. If this margin for error principle is true, then, as Williamson shows, there are no non-trivial luminous propositions. Why? If p is non-trivial, then there's a world w_1 where p is true that is very similar to a world w_2 ... that is very similar to a world w_n where p is false. Now suppose, for reductio, that p is luminous. Then, since p is true in w_1, you know p is true in w_1. By the margin for error principle, p is true in w_2. By another application of luminosity, it follows that you know p in w_2, and so by another application of the margin for error principle, p is true in w_3. By iterating this argument many times, we reach the conclusion that p is true in w_n. But by hypothesis, p is false in w_n.[20]

Now, here is the version of the practical knowledge thesis Piñeros Glasscock targets.

Practical Knowledge
Necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, you know that you are Ving intentionally.

Practical Knowledge says that the proposition that you are Ving intentionally is luminous for you. Anti-Luminosity says there are no luminous propositions. So Practical Knowledge is inconsistent with Anti-Luminosity.

In response to this argument, Beddor & Pavese reject Practical Knowledge in favor of the following weaker thesis, which we call 'Weak Practical Knowledge'.[21]

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[19] A non-trivial proposition is a proposition that is sometimes true and sometimes false.

[20] Williamson's argument has not convinced everyone. For objections, see Berker (2008), Stalnaker (2015), and Wong (2008). For a defense of Williamson, see Srinivasan (2013).

[21] As Tomlinson (2024) shows, Anscombe herself seems to endorse Practical Knowledge. On Anscombe's view, when I am Ving intentionally, I know that I am Ving in order to Z, or I am Ving because p, or I am Ving for its own sake, or I am Ving for no particular reason. But all of these straightforwardly entail that you are Ving intentionally, on Anscombe's view. Tomlinson also discusses essentially intentional action. She says: 'All intentional actions, when we consider the forms of description that render them intentional, are essentially intentional.' See Ford (2011) for a similar claim.

Weak Practical Knowledge

Necessarily, if you are Ving intentionally, then you know that you are Ving.

Weak Practical Knowledge does not say that the proposition that you are Ving intentionally is luminous for you, since it doesn't say that whenever you are Ving intentionally, you know you are Ving intentionally. Weak Practical Knowledge is consistent with Anti-Luminosity.

But it's not consistent with Anti-Luminosity together with the claim that there are essentially intentional act types, as Beddor & Pavese observe.[22] To see why, suppose V is an essentially intentional act type. Then:

(a)   Necessarily, if S is Ving, S is Ving intentionally.

By Weak Practical Knowledge:

(b)   Necessarily, if S is Ving intentionally, then S knows that she is Ving.

It follows from (a) and (b) that:

(c)   Necessarily, if S is Ving, S knows that she is Ving.

(c) says that the proposition that S is Ving is luminous for S.

4.2   Rejecting Weak Practical Knowledge

Given Anti-Luminosity, we have two options: reject Weak Practical Knowledge, or deny that there are essentially intentional act types. We reject Weak Practical Knowledge.

It is well known that Weak Practical Knowledge suffers from counterexamples. Here's one that we find especially compelling. My house is out of water. I go outside, in the middle of the pitch-black night, to replenish the water supply by operating the pump. I believe the pump is working—my landlord told me it is. I know how to replenish the water supply—I've done it before. And the pump is working—I'm replenishing the water supply.

Then I am intentionally replenishing the water. But do I know that I am replenishing the water? Not necessarily. I think that I am replenishing the water, since I think the pump is working. But suppose it turns out that I don't know that the pump is working. Maybe I don't know because my landlord often lies. Or maybe I don't know because I'm surrounded by broken pumps. In any case, if I don't know the pump is working, I don't know that I am replenishing the water.[23]

Friends of Weak Practical Knowledge often point out that the principle is stated in the present progressive ('is Ving').[24] It is easier to know that I am replenishing the water than that I have replenished the water or that I will replenish the water: the fact that I am replenishing

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[22] Beddor & Pavese (2021). Piñeros Glasscock (forthcoming) also argues from Weak Practical Knowledge to Practical Knowledge without appealing to essentially intentional act types.

[23] This kind of example is due to Schwenkler (2015). Similar cases can be found in Shephard & Carter (forthcoming) and Holguín and Lederman (2024).

[24] See Falvey (2000), Thompson (2011).

the water doesn't entail that I have replenished the water or that I ever will. (Compare: the fact that I am crossing the street does not entail that I have crossed the street or that I ever will. A bus may hit me before I make it across.)

Appealing to the progressive may help with some apparent counterexamples to Weak Practical Knowledge. But it does not help with the pump example. If I don't know the pump is working, I don't know that I am replenishing the water. For I am replenishing the water only if I can start to replenish the water. And I don't know that I can start if I don't know the pump is working.[25]

Those who defend Weak Practical Knowledge must bite the bullet and deny that I am intentionally replenishing the water. Is it worth it to bite the bullet? No, because Weak Practical Knowledge is still in trouble: that is the lesson of the anti-luminosity argument. Defenders of Weak Practical Knowledge must also either defend the luminosity of intentional action, or deny the existence of essentially intentional act types. That cost is too high: the arguments for anti-luminosity and essentially intentional act types are powerful. The only remaining option is to deny Weak Practical Knowledge.

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[25]See Szabó (2007) for defense of the claim that I am Ving only if I can start to V.

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